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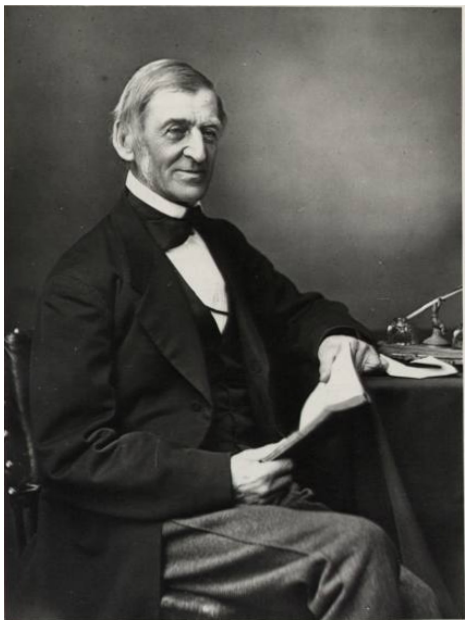

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1857)

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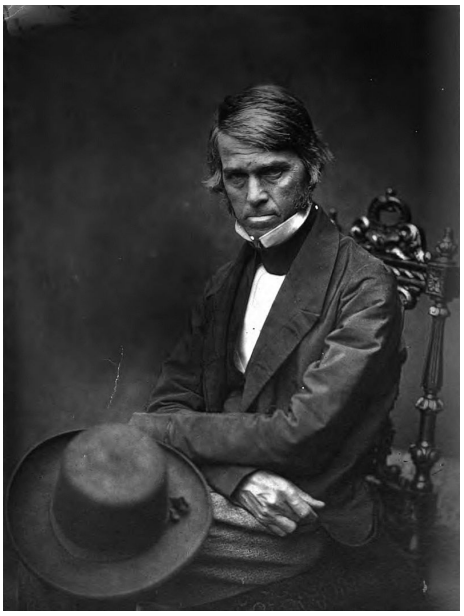

Thomas Carlyle (1854)

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Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle on Slavery: Transatlantic Dissentions and Philosophical Connections

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Introduction

In his 1841 essay on "Friendship", Ralph Waldo Emerson defined a "friend" as "a sort of paradox in nature" (348). Perhaps emulating that paradoxical essence, Emerson's essay was pervaded with constant contradictions: while reiterating his belief in the "absolute insulation of man" (353), Emerson simultaneously depicted "friends" as those who "recognize the deep identity which beneath these disparities unites them" ("Friendship" 350). Relating back to the Platonic myth of recognition, by which one's soul recognizes what it had previously seen and forgotten, Emerson defined a friend as that "Other" in which one is able to perceive oneself. As Johannes Voelz argued in *Transcendental Resistance,* "for Emerson, friendship … is a relationship from which we want to extract identity. Friendship is a relationship from which we seek recognition" (137). Indeed, Emerson was mostly concerned with what he called "high friendship" ("Friendship" 350) - an abstract ideality, which inevitably creates "a tension between potentiality and actuality" (Voelz 136). Acting as a compromise between isolation and symbiosis, epistolary friendship occupied a great part of Emerson's definition: in his letter-shaped essay, the author indeed described a "letter" as that "spiritual gift worthy of him to give, and of me to receive" ("Friendship" 351).

When *Essays: First Series* was published in 1841, Emerson had been corresponding with Thomas Carlyle for seven years already: the two had met in Edinburgh in 1833, on Emerson's first European tour (1832-1833). Their epistolary friendship had begun immediately after their encounter and lasted until 1873. For Emerson, Carlyle had become that "beautiful enemy" ("Friendship" 351) with whom he would exchange letters for over five decades. For Carlyle, his American correspondent was the interlocutor he respected the most. After Emerson's friend Charles Elliot Norton published their letters in a posthumous collection, Emerson and Carlyle's exchange became available to read for admirers and

scholars. Raising quite a momentum among its contemporaries, the *Correspondence* was indeed positively welcomed as a breach into the philosophers' lives: as indicated in a review of the same year, published in *The Atlantic Monthly,* "the special charm of the correspondence lies … in its being human rather than literary" (560). Commented upon by Henry James and Edgar Allan Poe, Emerson and Carlyle's relationship raised, however, less and less critical interest throughout the twentieth century. Whereas Emerson came to be progressively considered as American literature's canonical author, Carlyle's conservatism as well as his racist remarks spoiled the writer's reputation. Overshadowed by Emerson's modern approach to matters of race and class, Carlyle became known as bigot and was therefore less appreciated by modern critics, who hardly understood his friendship with Emerson.

Whereas Emerson's fellowship with Henry David Thoreau - his Transcendentalist friend and disciple – was abundantly described by critics, his relationship with Thomas Carlyle was never exhaustively explained. The critical interrogation of how Carlyle, a British conservative, had become one of Emerson's closest friends is still partly unsolved. In 1978, Marc Harris handled that contradiction by referring to their relationship as a "debate": in *Their Long Debate,* he thus defined their friendship as a transatlantic, epistolary debate of ideas. A few years later, Harris' approach was compounded by Len Gougeon's. Adding a new dimension to previous criticism, Gougeon chose to examine Emerson and Carlyle's relationship through the prism of race and politics. In "Emerson, Carlyle and the Civil War", he concluded that, despite major dissentions, the two friends "were able to maintain a long and cordial relationship largely by ignoring or avoiding areas of disagreement and by refraining from publicly criticizing one another's political views" (Gougeon 403). Drawing on past criticism, Thomas Constantinesco more recently contributed to the critical discussion on Emerson and Carlyle's "discordant" friendship as he examined the financial dimension of

their correspondence. He indeed observed that, writing before the Copyright Act of 1891, most of the authors' initial exchanges revolved around Emerson's efforts to safeguard Carlyle's financial interests among U.S. editors and bankers.

The common leitmotif pervading all these analyses - precisely the "paradoxical" nature of their friendship - will be the core element of my work. I will indeed base my understanding of their relationship on the axiom that a friend is a "sort of paradox in nature", thus interpreting Emerson and Carlyle's personal dissentions as the reflection of dissentions of their time. Focusing on the abolition of slavery in the United States, I will therefore consider the socio-historical changes that agitated America throughout the first half of the nineteenth century as a prism to examine the "convergences" and "divergences" of the authors' philosophical thinking. I will indeed analyze Emerson and Carlyle's exchange in correlation to their personal stances on the question of slavery - which challenged both authors in a problematic way. On the one hand, abolitionism revealed the inadequacy of Emerson's transcendentalist ideals to political and social issues. On the other, Carlyle's curt stance on the matter continues to reassert the inadaptability of his theories to modern audiences. The abolition of slavery also majorly put their relationship to test: it is indeed during the American Civil War that Emerson and Carlyle's friendship faced its major crisis. However, the two authors quickly overcame tensions and, as Bret E. Kinser concluded, "[p]rivate cattiness and intellectual disputes aside, there was no other intellectual on either side of the Atlantic whom Carlyle respected more; the same can be said of Emerson about Carlyle" (*Shaping* 42).

While examining Emerson and Carlyle's respective stances on questions of labor, democracy, and war, my purpose will be to debunk the general tendency to perceive the two authors as intellectual polar opposites. Examining how slavery became throughout the years the point of convergence of the authors' philosophical dissentions, I will demonstrate the

sincerity of their friendship when faced with major transatlantic dissentions. Relying on literary secondary criticism, historical accounts, and a selection of primary sources, my understanding of Emerson and Carlyle's *Correspondence* will be based on a series of close-reading analyses of some of their foundational texts, all written between 1844 and 1865. In chapter one, I will focus on Emerson's and Carlyle's reaction to the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies: outlining the predominance of the economic factor in both approaches, I will insist on the importance of labor in their respective defense or attack of slavery. I will then scrutinize the authors' approaches to government and democracy in chapter two: showcasing the influence of Romantic ideals on their thinking I will demonstrate that both authors believed in the necessity of a ruling elite. Eventually, in chapter three, I will analyze how the Civil War undermined their relationship and made it the mirror of the transatlantic tensions of their time.

Chapter One -

On Slavery and Labor: Racist Characterizations and Economic Justifications

Initially reluctant to take a clear political stand on the question, Ralph Waldo Emerson openly joined the abolitionist cause for the first time in 1844 in an address on the "Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies": as Len Gougeon remarked, "Emerson's 1 August address was a milestone" ("Militant" 623). British abolition of slavery came with great surprise to its contemporaries as well as to latter-day historians, who still wonder why did the European country with the most successful slave trade become the center of the strongest abolitionist movement? To answer that question, it is important to realize that the 1807 abolition of slave-trade and the following emancipation of West Indian slaves in 1834, were not mere acts of Parliament but were the outcomes of an increasingly strong social movement; British Parliament only took up the cause of slave trade because it was obliged to by public pressure. It is thus relevant to consider the public rhetoric that surrounded abolitionism, looking at its supporters as well as its opponents on both sides of the Atlantic. Praising Britain's decision to abolish slavery, Emerson used his address to condemn the immorality of the so-called "Institution" and defined its abolition in the Southern States as a matter of moral necessity. Contrary to Emerson, Thomas Carlyle received the news of emancipation with great disappointment. Convinced of black people's natural idleness, Carlyle defended slavery as a necessary system and advocated its expansion to the rest of the British Empire in his 1849 "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question". A comparative study of Emerson and Carlyle's reactions to British emancipation will help reveal the transatlantic consonances and dissentions surrounding the question of abolition, in the years preceding the American Civil War.

I/ Dialectic of Words and Action

In “Emancipation in the British West Indies”, Emerson welcomed emancipation as the concretization of ethical rhetoric: he celebrated the fact that words had now been compounded by action on “a day which gave the immense fortification of a fact, of gross history, to ethical abstractions” (1). For him, the abolition of slavery finally complemented abolitionists’ abstract morality with the practical materiality of a ruling: he therefore rejoiced over the achievement of “practical ethics” (14), which he defined as the final communion of “the material and the moral nature” (Emerson, “West Indies” 2). Abolishing slavery is indeed presented as a way of obeying a higher moral law, or as Emerson wrote, “the dictates of humanity” - “When we consider what remains to be done for this interest in this country, the dictates of humanity make us tender of such as are not yet persuaded” (“West Indies” 1). For him, fighting against slavery was a way of conforming to one’s inherent, moral nature. In Kantian terms, Emerson saw it as part of a “categorical imperative” to act morally: the opposition to human bondage is therefore presented as inherent in one’s own body, for “blood is moral: the blood is anti-slavery: it runs cold in the veins: the stomach rises in disgust, and curses slavery” (Emerson, “West Indies” 3). Moreover, Emerson stated that individual moral imperatives should also be enacted on a collective scale: the body politic should be aiming at that “sentiment of Right, once very low and indistinct, but ever more articulate, because it is the voice of the universe” (“West Indies” 17). The civility of the United States depended upon the abolition of the country’s biggest sin, for “the civility of no race can be perfect whilst another race is degraded” (Emerson, “West Indies” 17). Furthermore, Emerson praised British figures such as Granville Sharpe who had accepted no compromise - “Granville Sharpe, as a matter of conscience … felt constrained to record his protest against the limitation, declaring that slavery was as much as a crime against the Divine law as the slave-trade” (“West Indies” 4). Expressions such as “matter of conscience”

and “Divine law” show that abolition was not a matter of political altercations: elevating the public scene with a moral sense seemed “indispensable” in Emerson’s eyes, “The civility of the world has reached that pitch that their more moral genius is becoming indispensable” (“West Indies” 17). In a letter written to his Carlyle in December 1862, Emerson had emphasized once again the prevalence of morality in national matters - “The war is our sole & doleful instructer. All the bright young men go into it, to be misused & sacrificed hitherto by incapable leaders. One lesson they all learn, -to hate slavery, *teterrima causa.* But the issue does not yet appear. We must get ourselves morally right. Nobody can help us” (*Correspondence* 536). In line with Emerson’s idea of progress, abolishing slavery was part of that trajectory by which humanity was defined, and in which Emerson believed: “The history of mankind interests us only as it exhibits a steady gain of truth and right” (“West Indies” 2). Slavery had to be abolished precisely because it went against progress – “Slavery is no scholar, no improver” (Emerson, “West Indies” 10).

Whereas Emerson celebrated abolitionism as the material application of abstract moral imperatives, Thomas Carlyle indicted the hypocrisy of anti-slavery rhetoric. In his “Occasional Discourse”, he strongly condemned the ontological emptiness of abolitionist speeches - “Sunk in deep froth-oceans of ‘Benevolence,’ ‘Fraternity,’ ‘Emancipation-Principle,’ ‘Christian Philanthropy,’” “rosepink Sentimentalism” (671). If it weren’t for their epistolary friendship, one would think that it is Emerson that Carlyle had in mind while writing these words, “no longer as windy sentimentalists that merely have speeches to deliver and despatches to write” (“Occasional Discourse” 672). However bigot Carlyle may have seemed, Brent E. Kinser devoted his article “Fearful Symmetry” to defend the author by acknowledging that even if he “may have been simply an unconverted bigot or a masochistic satirist, … it is also true that in 1867 the dance of hypocrisy and bigotry in Anglo-American national discourse twirled merrily along. Democracy was expanded in yet another reform, but

not for women" (160). Carlyle's questioning of the British Parliament was justified when he wondered why, if it were moral outrage that was leading Britain's abolition of slavery, did they not invade Cuba or Brazil to stop the same injustice: "The political and economical impossibility of these ventures was an open secret. … If moral outrage was at stake on the question of universal emancipation, then Britain should and in fact would act to stop it" (Kinser, "Fearful Symmetry" 159).

II/ "Blackness" According to Carlyle: Slaves' Laziness and Laissez-faire Madness

In "Occasional Discourse", Carlyle's derogatory depiction of West Indian slaves is conveyed through a particularly violent language, which revolted most of the author's contemporaries when the text was published: as Kinser remarks, the "public reception of 'An Occasional Discourse,' … was met with a veritable fire-storm of rejection" ("Fearful Symmetry" 141). Carlyle's tone is indeed deeply patronizing, and his characterization of black people, referred to as "[o]ur beautiful Black darlings", "sweet blighted lilies" ("Occasional Discourse" 671), is strongly racist. Throughout the text, the attention is constantly brought on black people's idleness, which somehow served to attribute them the responsibility of their own enslavement - "while the sugar-crops rot round them uncut" (671), "[t]he idle black man in the West Indies" ("Occasional Discourse" 674). According to Carlyle, slaves had no merit nor did they deserve any recognition: "And now observe, my friends, it was not Black Quashee or those he represents that made those West India Islands what they are" ("Occasional Discourse" 674). West Indian slaves are thus portrayed as opportunistic, idle figures: the ignorant, unaware "fortunate Black man" is described as merrier than "the less fortunate White man" ("Occasional Discourse" 672). Yet the extremeness of Carlyle's language forces us to wonder: "Is it satire, insanity, or something else?" (Kinser, "Fearful Symmetry" 156). As Kinser pinpointed, "[t]he one apparent point of

consensus in any review of the literature surrounding the essay/pamphlet leads to an overwhelming question: Why return to such a noxious declaration of Victorian racialism?" ("Fearful Symmetry" 140). It is true that, from the very beginning, Carlyle establishes a distance between his statements and himself through a frame narrative: the text indeed "begins with the creation of narrative distance between Carlyle and his text" (Kinser, "Fearful Symmetry" 143). "Occasional Discourse", published anonymously, was indeed initially attributed to the fictional "Dr. Phelim M'Quirk" (Carlyle 670). If one were to side with Kinser's reading of the "Discourse" as strongly satirical and ironic, Carlyle's vocabulary would suddenly become easier to handle and less monstrous to accept - "If one imagines an unreliably mocking voice, on the other hand, then M'Quirk's lecture becomes high satirical comedy, ridiculous and dark with an element of truth that shocks as it informs" (Kinser, "Fearful Symmetry 144). In his article "Carlyle's *Frederick the Great* and the 'sham-kings' of the American South", David Sorensen seemed to agree with Kinser that "the critical assault against him had frequently mistaken his rhetorical smoke for the actual fire of his convictions" (92). However, Carlyle's belief in the inferiority of black people is present in other of his other texts, proving his racism to be more of a personal belief than a satirical tool. In his 1867 article "Shooting Niagara: And After?", Carlyle described black people as follows:

> One always rather likes the Nigger; evidently a poor blackhead with good dispositions, with affections, attachments, … -he is the only Savage of all the coloured races that doesn't die out on sight of the White Man; but can actually live beside him, and work and increase and be merry. The Almighty Maker has appointed him to be a Servant. (321)

Degrading and patronizing expressions such as "a poor blackhead with good dispositions",

"only Savage" leave no possible doubt on Carlyle's racism.

In a letter addressed to Emerson, in April 1849, Carlyle wrote: "For they will all have to learn that man does need government, and that an able-embodied starving beggar is and remains (whatever Exeter Hall may say to it) a *Slave* destitute of a *Master*" (*Correspondence 453*). In Carlyle's mind, slavery appeared as a necessity for society - as suggested by the use of stative verbs such as "need", "is", "remains". Carlyle's defense of slavery was based on the pretense "existence of an ideal hierarchy and on a divine relationship between master and servant" (Kinser, "Fearful Symmetry" 152). As he would repeat in 1850, Carlyle believed that a naturally-mandated chain of beings had established that the "Noble [should be] in the high place, the Ignoble in the low; that is, in all times and in all countries, the Almighty Maker's Law" (Carlyle, "Present Time" 22). According to him, white people should be Masters and black people should be Slaves - "decidedly you will have to be servants to those that are born wiser than you, that are born lords of you- servants to the whites" (Carlyle, "Occasional Discourse" 676). For Carlyle, racial inferiority indeed manifested itself as idleness: "our Black West Indies and our White Ireland, … these two extremes of lazy refusal to work" (Carlyle, "Present Time" 27). First acknowledging that the "character of Carlyle's language when he discusses race deserves no defense," (*Shaping* 20) Bret E. Kinser remarked that "knowing the divine importance of work within Carlyle's vision of repairing the social ills of the world, it is important to acknowledge that the mordant side of his rhetoric is most visible in discussions of race or class where, according to his knowledge, the performance of work has been stopped, voluntarily or otherwise" (*Shaping* 20). Although extremely racist, Carlyle's vision of West Indian emancipation was not limited to an insulting account of its population: Carlyle's racist theory is based on an economic argument. Convinced that "West Indian slaves are emancipated, and it appears refuse to work" (Carlyle, "Present time" 25), Carlyle proclaimed their racial inferiority in the name of work ethic.

Presenting slavery as the only solution to idleness, he considers emancipation as a failure: "Emancipation … had failed because the freed slaves had not become members of the social fabric – they had refused to work" (Kinser, *Shaping* 21). In contrast with slaves' idleness, the Anglo-Saxon race is, on the other hand, celebrated by Carlyle as being born to rule: "Who it may be that has a right to raise pumpkins and other produce on those Islands, perhaps none can, except temporarily, decide", "Up to this time it is the Saxon British mainly; they hitherto have cultivated with some manfulness" ("Occasional Discourse" 674). Based on the conviction that black people are "savages", Carlyle saw slavery as one of his "favorite solutions to the problem of labor, a return to feudal relationships … whereby slaves would be, like the serfs, attached permanently to land, so when the land exchanged hands, the slaves would remain with it" (Kinser, "Fearful Symmetry" 151). His praise of the slave system derived from the belief that the permanence inherent in the slave/master relationship is far better than the instability of a working contract in a liberal context: as Kinser rightfully pinpoints in his article, "What Carlyle repeatedly claimed to be precious in slavery was the fact of its permanence, not its injustice (152). Carlyle's defense of slavery was therefore mostly based on socio-economic factors : for him, "the only possible way to reconcile the problems or labor and of the general social malaise of humanity" (Kinser, "Fearful Symmetry" 152), Carlyle maintained and reiterated that viewpoint until 1867, when he asserted that "Servantship, like all solid contracts between men (like wedlock itself, which was *once* nomadic enough, temporary enough!), must become a contract of permanency, not easy to dissolve, but difficult extremely" ("Shooting Niagara" 322). Strongly opposed to laissez-faire economics, Carlyle thus thought that slavery could provide a better, long-term stability which liberalism failed to offer. Less stubbornly racist than one ought to think, Carlyle's defense of slavery appears to have been in the name of social and economic balance, more than for purely pseudo-scientific, racist reasons.

III/ Emerson's Plea(s): Civic Freedom and Economic Liberty

Contrary to his friend's insistence on idleness, Emerson repeatedly emphasized slaves' "good order, decorum and gratitude" (8) in his address on West Indian emancipation - "The negroes were called together by the missionaries and by the planters, and the news [of emancipation] explained to them. … they met everywhere at their churches and chapels, and at midnight, when the clock struck twelve, on their knees, the silent, weeping assembly became men" ("West Indies" 6). Emerson's depiction strongly contrasts with Carlyle's portrayal of black people as "savages"; references to "churches and chapels", as well as the assertion "became men", puts black people on the side of civilization and on a parallel position to whites. Emerson recognized black people as citizens, whom he defined as "the most helpless citizen in her [Britain's] world-wide realm" (11); he included them into the world of civilization, "[t]here are many styles of civilization, and not only one" ("West Indies" 9). Emerson's acceptance of black people as part of civilization was revolutionary yet needs to be carefully analyzed: in fact, Emerson's decision was not based on the non-racist conviction that black and white people are equal, but originated in his "theory of progress". Ten years after West Indies' emancipation, "Emerson decided that the freed blacks in the West Indies had indeed improved themselves, which convinced him that the ameliorative principle applied to all races" (Harris 155). It is their capacity to ameliorate which brought him to recognize blacks as civilized, not a deep conviction in racial equality. Emerson's attitude towards black people was generally that of an apologetic yet patronizing speaker, who praises the ones he knows have been victims of injustice - "These men, our benefactors, as they are producers of corn and wine, of coffee, of tobacco, of cotton, of sugar, of rum and brandy; gentle and joyous themselves and producers of comfort and luxury for the civilized

world, -there seated in the finest climates of the globe, children of the sun" ("West Indies" 2). Generalizations such as the anonymous-sounding plural "these men", compounded with the periphrasis "children of the sun", denies these men their singularities and presents them as a whole. The fact that slaves are only described through their workforce suggests that slavery dehumanized them – as shown by the words "producers" and by the enumeration of agricultural products from the colonies "corn and wine, of coffee, of tobacco, of cotton, of sugar, of rum and brandy". However, abolition is defined by Emerson as the act of returning to black people the humanity and dignity that have been stolen from them: "The First of August marks the entrance of a new element into modern politics, namely, the civilization of the negro. A man is added to the human family" ("West Indies" 15). As Len Gougeon pinpoints, Emerson "is arguably the first white American intellectual to call for use of federal force in the defense of African Americans' civil rights" (624).

Nevertheless, Emerson believed that slaves should be active participants of their own emancipation. For Emerson, the improvement of their condition was indeed based on their capacity to become "the anti-slave": "the arrival in the world of such men as Toussaint, and the Haytian heroes, or of the leaders of their race in Barbados and Jamaica … the might and the right are here: here is the anti-slave: here is man: and if you have man, black or white is an insignificance" ("West Indies" 16). By praising men such as "Toussaint", Emerson also simultaneously referred to heroes such as Frederick Douglass - who was in the crowd as Emerson delivered his speech. Douglass "was both a model of and inspired by that avatar of resistance as Emerson conceived of and presented him", notes Gougeon ("Militant" 623). Emerson certainly felt that his addresses could change some minds but the majority of the action resided, according to him, in the hands of African Americans: as Len Gougeon explains, "the responsibility slaves bear for achieving their freedom far outweighs anything that an abolitionist might do for them" ("Militant" 625). For Emerson, it is thanks to a few

exceptional individuals, the anti-slaves, that the revolution would occur. “Several years before Charles Darwin and Herbert Spenser, Emerson envisioned a world dominated by a principle somewhat akin to ‘survival of the fittest’”, as Gougeon observed “‘fitness’ was not merely biological but focused as well on character and personal integrity” (“Militant” 626).

Thus, whereas Carlyle based his justification of slavery on the pretense inferiority of black people, Emerson countered that argument – shared by many of Carlyle’s contemporaries – by welcoming black people in the world of the Civilized. Emerson overturned the foundational racist argument on which slavery resides, by which one is “allowed” to enslave for a slave is not a person: “If the black man is feeble and not important to the existing races, not on a parity with the best race, the black man must serve, and be exterminated” (“West Indies” 16). Yet Emerson proved that if black man were recognized as “man”, then slavery was an obvious barbarity: “But if the black man carries in his bosom an indispensable element of a new and coming civilization, for the sake of that element, no wrong, nor strength nor circumstance can hurt him” (“West Indies” 16). The rhetoric of master and slave, defined as natural hierarchy by Carlyle, was therefore ironized by Emerson. Instead of a divine hierarchy of beings, Emerson recounted a completely haphazard choice of “boxes”:

> the Great Spirit, in the beginning, offered the black man, whom he loved better than the buckra, or white, his choice of two boxes, a big and a little one. The black man was greedy, and chose the largest. ‘The buckra box was full up with pen, paper and whip, and the negro box with hoe and bill; and hoe and bill for negro to this day.” (“Emancipation” 2)

Emerson powerfully overthrew pro-slavery arguments as he reversed the master/slave relationship - “It was shown to the planters that they, as well as negroes, were slaves”

("Emancipation" 10). Masters become slaves in a world in which the "oppression of the slave recoiled on them" (10): Emerson's rhetorical ability was extremely successful as his tone became (sarcastically) empathetic towards slave-owners, "Many planters have said, since the emancipation, that, before that day, they were the greatest slaves on the estates" ("West Indies" 10). Emerson went as far as describing emancipation as masters' revolution, "It was the masters revolting from their mastery" ("Emancipation" 13).

Throughout his address, Emerson strategically included slave-owners as part of his audience for he quickly understood the strategic power of offering them "the practical advantages likely to accrue to such commercial interests from the abolition of slavery" (Rowe 28). Convinced that free labor would benefit the economy, Emerson resorted to the economic argument as a way of rallying everyone to his cause. As John Carlos Rowe remarked, "Far from meeting the lofty demands of Emerson's transcendentalist ethics, his argument … embraces thoroughly practical solutions that are in the best interests of the expanding, commercial, capitalist, and Northern interests he had hitherto claimed to criticize so profoundly" (29). While condemning trade for its immoral consequences, Emerson however "acknowledges that the British and Americans share a commercial character that must be considered by abolitionists" (Rowe 28) However, Emerson never seemed to resolve the ambiguity between the commercial nature of men and the immoral nature of trade. On the one hand, Emerson was highly critical towards white men in power: he emphasized their lack of morality, and pointed out "the existence, beside the covetousness, of a bitterer element, the love of power, the voluptuousness of holding a human being in his absolute control" ("West Indies" 7). This led to passages of self-criticism in which it is the whole Western civilization that Emerson accused: "Ours is full of barbarities. There are many faculties in man, each of which takes its turn of activity, … and each age thinks its own the perfection of reason" ("West Indies" 9). Emerson's criticism towards American politics was moreover paralleled

by a praise of British liberals, for it is on a transatlantic comparison that Emerson based his argument: “America is not civil” (17), he wrote, while singing the praises of “All the great geniuses of the British senate, Fox, Pitt, Burke, Greenville, Sheridan, Grey, Canning, ranged themselves on its side” (“West Indies” 14). Emerson insisted on the British origins of the United States in numerous occurrences - “as we are the expansion of that people” (9), “Whilst I have read of England, I have thought of New England” (“Emancipation” 13). Emerson’s praise of Britain, and his desire for America to imitate England’s decisions is quite surprising considering America’s violent rejection of its European roots that motivated the War of Independence. Yet Emerson saw no borders when it came to the Saxon race, which he depicted as dominating the world and about which he concluded, “The genius of the Saxon race, friendly to liberty; the enterprise, the very muscular vigor of this nation, are inconsistent with slavery” (“Emancipation” 17). On the other hand, Emerson did not only rejoice over that civic freedom brought on by emancipation, yet he also welcomed it for bringing economic liberty, i.e. the freedom to work - Labor. As Sofia Forster observe, “Antebellum free labor abolitionists celebrated the capitalist economic system for conferring on the laborer intrinsic moral and extrinsic economic improvement. Emerson shares this fundamentally liberal embrace of the capitalist marketplace, but he values it for a somewhat different reason” (36). Indeed, Emerson’s positive understanding of labor consisted in the belief that labor could educate “the individual in creative self-development rather than stern self-discipline” (Forster 40). Having inherited what William Ellery Channing defined as “self-culture”, Emerson was convinced that capitalism and labor enables “self-development”, i.e. the “expansion of the self’s innate faculties and capacities” (Forster 36). “Despite Emerson’s famous disparagements of Unitarianism, transcendentalism is deeply indebted to Unitarian doctrines, and perhaps most significantly to the idea of self-culture” (44), and, as Forster explained in “Peculiar Faculty and Peculiar Institution”, “[t]his construction of labor [as positive], as

motivated by desire rather than necessity and as producing power in the form of education rather than self-discipline, …was published the year after Channing's *Slavery* and the year before the labor speeches" (Forster 48). What Emerson called "self-development" consisted in the communion of headwork and handwork achieved through labor: by accomplishing a task, the individual puts his physical skills at the service of his mental ones. Thus, posing "handwork and headwork as providing equal conditions of possibility for self-development" (Forster 53), Emerson elevated labor. Yet, in "Emerson's model, legal freedom is the condition of possibility for the individual's [right] of choice in occupation" (Forster 61) and capitalism is presented as the condition of this kind of self-development. It is capitalism's division of labor, and thus the possibility to choose one's occupation, that allows the individual to put his best skills into action and thus realize a perfect headwork-handwork balance. According to these views, one understands why the "abolitionist platform, primarily during the 1850s and early 1860s, … derided the pseudo-feudal slave economy of the South for disabling the economic health of the nation, but also the economic well-being of individual slaves and slave-owners" (Forster 38). As Emerson said with regards to the Emancipation in the British West Indies, "I think I must not hesitate to satisfy that man that also his cream and vanilla are safer and cheaper by placing the negro nation on a fair footing than by robbing them" ("West Indies" 2): "Emphasizing the profits that will accrue not only to former slaves but also to their owners from the shift to capitalism's system of wages, Emerson's rhetoric seems fully in line with the so-called free labor doctrine" (Forster 38). Emerson's pragmatic rejoicing over Emancipation's economic benefits seems to support the argument suggested by some "that Emersonianism, despite Emerson's vigorous criticism of industrialism and materialism in his own time, nevertheless provides a splendid intellectual rationale for Jacksonian democracy and thus emergent industrial capitalism" (Rowe 22). Countering a primarily aesthetic and ethic understanding of Emerson's thinking, Rowe

indeed argued that, in some regards, Emerson's stance would be "an explicit instance of an 'aesthetic ideology' working to support the very social forces it overtly criticizes" (22-23).

Despite holding opposite views on the question of the abolition of slavery, Carlyle and Emerson both recognized the importance of the economic factor with regards to slavery. On the one hand, Carlyle's critique of liberalism's instability brought him to defend slavery for its more reassuring "work-relations". On the other hand, Emerson's plea for civic freedom was doubled by a plea for economic liberty: convinced that labor was beneficial to the individual, Emerson advocated the economic advantages of free labor while simultaneously attacking slavery's immorality. In the early stages of his abolitionist path, Emerson's indictment against slavery was strongly intertwined with his patriotic sentiment: in his eyes, the stain of slavery polluted the moral nature of Puritan America. As he wrote, "the Union is already at an end when the first citizen of Massachusetts is thus outraged" ("West Indies" 12). Although Emerson's condemnation of slavery would always be in the name of a Higher law, the thinker did not always identify it in the idea of State: as Lawrence Buell remarked, "Emerson's activist turn in the 1850s thrust him at first down a decidedly antinationalist, anticapitalist path, toward a schismatic regionalism that divided Yankeedom itself into a hegemony of venial compromisers versus embattled true-believing latter-day Puritans standing for the higher law" (273).

Chapter Two

On Democracy and Government: Ruling Elites and Moral Diptychs

Regarded as one of the dark days of American history, 1850's "Fugitive Slave Law" brought noxious changes to the lives of African-Americans. Establishing that fugitive slaves should be returned to their masters, the "Fugitive Slave Law" reenacted what had already been formulated in 1793. Through a series of rulings, "the Compromise of 1850" aimed at maintaining a political balance between slave-states and the Northern part of the country. It is then that Ralph Waldo Emerson, deeply disappointed by the Compromise, came to the realization that the "popular assumption that all men loved freedom, and believed in the Christian religion, was found hollow American brag" ("Concord" 137). The 1850s were also a period of profound disillusionment for Thomas Carlyle. Faced with the consequences of emancipation in the British West Indies, Carlyle reiterated his distaste for democratic institutions by reasserting his skepticism about the abolition of slavery. Exasperated by British people's fascination with American democracy, he also beseeched them to "Cease to brag me of America, and its model institutions and constitutions" ("The Present Time" 20). The political events that shook the United States in 1850 thus brought both philosophers to reflect upon the notion of "democracy". For Carlyle, this led to a reinstatement of his earlier conviction that democracy was a system doomed to failure. For Emerson, the political events of 1850 engendered a strong distrust of political institutions and forced him into a more active role in politics. Even though their critiques rested on very different arguments, Emerson's and Carlyle's respective thinking were less different than one ought to imagine as both inferred the necessity of a ruling elite**:** as Marc Harris remarks, although Emerson and Carlyle "stood on opposite sides in these matters, the philosophical premises underlying their attitudes are not far apart" (150). Their views on democracy obviously pre-determined their

stance on the question of slavery: therefore, a comparative study of Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850) and Emerson's 1851 "Address to the Citizens of Concord" will help us determine their stance on questions of democracy and self-government. We will thus consider these two texts through the prism of Carlyle and Emerson's transatlantic friendship, examining the similarities and divergences of their positions.

I – Carlyle Against Democracy: Elite-Ruling and American Misruling

In the late 1840s, Europe was plunged into a climate of democratic revolutions, today remembered as the "Spring of Nations". Indeed, in 1848, a wave of rebellions spread over Europe causing, among others, the French "February Revolution" and Mazzini's rebellions in Italy. It is in this climate of democratic upheavals that Carlyle found himself as he was writing his *Latter-Day Pamphlets.* As Brent E. Kinser pointed out, "[t]hroughout the course of the eight monthly installments of *Latter-Day Pamphlets,* Carlyle incessantly attacked democracy" (*Shaping* 18). In a letter to Emerson written in June 1852, Carlyle himself referred to his work as "those furious *Pamphlets" (Correspondence* 484). Deeply shaken by the socio-political changes of his times, the Scottish thinker described himself in "The Present Time" as "*I*, the poor knowing person of this epoch" (13). What emerges in fact from Carlyle's *Pamphlets* is the anxiety of a man who witnessed a change of which he disapproved. In his writings, the author's tone is that of a man who is deeply preoccupied, because wary of society's future. As his choice of vocabulary indicates, Carlyle was personally alarmed by what was going on around him - "we are advancing closer and closer to the very Problem itself" (9), "Alas, it is sad enough that Anarchy is here" ("Present Time" 12). Expressions such as "closer and closer" as well as the interjection "Alas" reflect the author's preoccupation with Europe's future. Carlyle's disenchantment was caused by his

awareness of the inevitability of such social changes: as he wrote in "The Present Time", "universal *Democracy,* whatever we may think of it, has declared itself as an inevitable fact of the days in which we live" (8). While Carlyle knew that the Western world was evolving towards democracy, he felt a discrepancy between himself and "Reality": "Democracy is the grand, alarming, imminent and indisputable Reality" ("Present Time" 9). As Emerson wrote in a letter to his friend in August 1850, "I inferred so much from the sturdy tone of these wonderful 'Pamphlets,' all which I have duly read as they arrived" (461); according to him, Carlyle had initiated a "crusade against the Times" (*Correspondence* 461). Carlyle's anxiety about the rise of democratic systems of government essentially originated in his extreme mistrust of masses. The author perceived democracy as a persistent state of anarchic chaos - "If help or direction is not given; if the thing called Government merely drift and tumble to and fro, no-wither, on the popular vortexes, … popular indignation will infallibly accumulate upon it" ("The Present Time" 37). Indeed, Harris remarks that "as he aged, Carlyle became more and more convinced that society's wish for order could be achieved and maintained only through the beneficent rule of a dictator" (118).

As David Sorensen demonstrated in "Carlyle's *Frederick the Great* and the 'Sham-Kings' of the American South", Carlyle's fascination for strong leaders was strongly tied to his understanding of latter-day politics: as Kinser also observed, "Frederick William, for Carlyle, cruel and despotic though he may have been, represented an important example of leadership in an era marked by chaos" (*Shaping* 30). In fact, "he hoped that by reviving the memory of leaders from the past … he could teach hero worshippers of the present how to look for the right contemporary leaders" (Harris 126). In line with his interest in autocratic figures, Carlyle wrote a brief historical account of the life of a former dictator of Paraguay, Dr. Francia. In the narration, Carlyle justified the necessity of dictators by asserting the incapability of certain societies to rule themselves - "The Gaucho population, it must be

owned, is yet not fit for constitutional liberty. They are rude people; led a drowsy life, of ease and sluttish abundance" ("Dr. Francia" 288). The use of stative verbs to describe the Gauchos implies an unchangeable state of natural inferiority, therefore highlighting a need for dictatorship: the adjective "rude" refers to a lack of "civility" on behalf of this people whereas "drowsy" insinuates their lack of intellect. Thus, Carlyle's theory of political power relies on the fundamentally racist belief that the "naturally-inferior" should be governed by those who are superior to them: as he wrote in "The Present Time", Carlyle was convinced that "the few Wise will have, by one method or another, to take command of the innumerable Foolish" (34). More precisely, Carlyle understood the unsuitability of some for self-government as a consequence of their "laziness",

> The people of that profuse climate live in a careless abundance, troubling themselves about few things…. Riding through the town of Santa Fe, with Parish Robertson, at three in the afternoon, you will find the entire population just risen from its siesta; slipshod, half-buttoned; sitting in front verandas open to the street, eating pumpkins with voracity,- sunk to the ears in pumpkins; imbibing the grateful saccharine juices, in a free-and-easy way." ("Dr. Francia" 287)

Carlyle's insistence on the idea of laziness shows his crude aversion for Gauchos' idleness - constantly reiterated through expressions such as "profuse climate", "careless abundance", "risen from its siesta", "half-buttoned", "free-and-easy-way". Even though these terms all refer to the idea of abundance, these expressions are far from pointing to something positive: "abundance" is here to be understood as synonymous with "overload" and "negligence". What's more, Carlyle's final insistence on "pumpkins" – "eating pumpkins", "sunk to the ears in pumpkins" – cannot but recall his characterization of West Indian populations in "The Present Time",

> —And you Quashee, my pumpkin,— (not a bad fellow either, this poor Quashee, when tolerably guided!)— idle Quashee, I say you must get the Devil sent away from your elbow, my poor dark friend! In this world there will be no existence for you otherwise. No, not as the brother of your folly will I live beside you. Please to withdraw out of my way, if I am not to contradict your folly, and amend it, and put it in the stocks if it will not amend." (67)

The motif of "pumpkins" - which had also been used to described slave populations in his "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question" - seems to have become, throughout the years, a Carlylean symbol for laziness. It also shows that Carlyle's vision of democracy has always been at the heart of his stance on slavery: according to him, "lazy" societies – such as slave societies - should be controlled and governed by a strong leader.

While highlighting the benefits of dictatorship, Carlyle articulated his rejection of democracy in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* through a critique of American politics. It is, among others, the rise of the U.S. abolitionist movement that led Carlyle to strongly criticize American politics. In 1850, the Scottish author was well-aware that it was on the question of slavery that the country would face its major crisis as he foresightedly wrote, "America too will have to strain its energies, in quite other fashion than this; to crack its sinews, and all-but break its heart, as the rest of us have had to do, in thousand fold wrestle with the Pythons and mud-demons, before it can become a habitation for the gods" ("Present Time" 20-21). On the eve of the Compromise of 1850, Carlyle knew "as many British commentators that America would be unable to avoid civil war" (Kinser, *Shaping* 17). As Kinser remarks, "[i]t did not take much of a prophet to recognize trouble on the American horizon, and Carlyle was well informed about both domestic and international events" (*Shaping* 17). On the one hand, Carlyle was able to recognize the qualities of the American nation - "America is a great, and

in many respects a blessed and hopeful phenomenon. Sure enough, these hardy millions of Anglo-Saxon men prove themselves worthy of their genealogy; … doing, in their day and generation, a creditable and cheering feat under the sun" ("Present Time" 19). Yet he deemed it unacceptable that Britain would want to follow the American example, for "as to a Model Republic, or a model anything, the wise among themselves know too well that there is nothing to be said" ("Present Time" 19). In his *Pamphlets*, Carlyle thus oscillated between asserting that he "can find no model in history for a successful future democracy" (Kinser, *Shaping* 15) and praising the American Republic: "[o]f the various French Republics that have been tried, or that are still on trial,- of these also it is not needful to say any word. But there is one modern instance of Democracy nearly perfect, the Republic of the United States, which has actually subsisted for threescore years or more" ("Present Time" 19). As Kinser suggests, one should distance oneself from Carlyle's tone in order to grasp the author's sarcasm: "Carlyle was being sarcastic because he had simply had his fill of reading about how wonderful the Americans were and, more important, that their institutions were an apt model for the future of the British polity" (Kinser, *Shaping* 15). Carlyle did not criticize the U.S. out of gratuitous antipathy, yet he "refuse[d] to believe that democracy, the foundation of the Americans' secular ideology, [could] be inculcated into the British psyche on similar terms" (*Shaping* 16). Kinser convincingly concludes that "Carlyle's wish to hear no more about the superiorities of American governance did not mean he had grown to hate the Americans" (*Shaping* 15); hence, his correspondence with the major representative of American nineteenth century thinking - Ralph Waldo Emerson – was never a series of written indictments but epitomized a real, and honest transatlantic friendship.

II - Emerson's Moral Elitism

If Carlyle's rejection of democracy was based on the belief that society should be governed by an elite, "for Emerson it was … 'the will of the wise man,' who of course was wise precisely in that he understood the higher sources of wisdom and power" (Harris 151). As numerous critics pointed out, there was indeed a certain elitism, "a certain authoritarian tendency" (Harris 151) in Emerson's thinking. However, whereas Carlylean elitism derived from an arbitrary natural hierarchy, Emerson's "chain of beings" was determined by virtue and morality. The Transcendentalist thinker believed in what one could call "moral authority", or the right of the moral leader to seize power if things had become immoral. In his 1841 essay on "Self-Reliance", Emerson had expressed an almost Carlylean distrust for the masses: for him, society was "a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs" (55). According to Emerson, virtue was a rare quality among the masses and that is the reason why the "world has been instructed by its kings, who have so magnetized the eyes of nations" ("Self-Reliance" 61). Most virtuous among men, kings are depicted as those who "pay for benefits not with money but with honor, and represent the law in his person, was the hieroglyphic by which they obscurely signified their consciousness of their own right and comeliness, the right of every man" ("Self-Reliance", Emerson 62). The masses, conceived as a "mob", were perceived as derogatory and noxious to the individual by Emerson, who suggested that man needs to be alone - "now we are a mob. … We must go alone. I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preaching" ("Self-Reliance", Emerson 65). In "Webster" (1831), a poem dedicated to Massachusetts' senator Daniel Webster, Emerson therefore described a prototype of moral leadership,

LET Webster's lofty face

Ever on thousands shine,

A beacon set that Freedom's race

Might gather omens from that radiant sign.

Written in alternate rhymes *abab*, these four lines form Daniel Webster's eulogy. The idea of light – more particularly, the words "shine", "beacon" and "radiant" – highlight Webster's morality and his subsequent closeness to the divine. Webster's virtue is explicitly asserted through the adjective "lofty", used to describe his "face", and capitalized words such as "Freedom" insist on Webster's conformity to a higher, moral law. However, when Daniel Webster declared his support for the Compromise of 1850, he irremediably let Emerson down, who was instantly repelled by the passing of the bill. As Daniel Robert Koch remarks, "Emerson was deeply disturbed by the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Law, which was included to placate Southerners in exchange for the entry of California into the Union as a Free State" (183). In July 1851, Emerson wrote to Carlyle, saying that "the abomination of our Fugitive Slave-Bill drove me to some writing and speech-making, without hope of effect, but to clear my own skirts" (*Correspondence* 470). As indicated by the verb "drove", Emerson's repulsion at the pro-slavery turn of Massachusetts' politics was now forcing him to enter once again the public scene of abolitionist politics. In his "Address to the Citizens of Concord", held on May 3, 1851, Emerson therefore urged his audience to adopt a similar attitude to his, hence to publicly reject the recent ruling - "The last year has forced us all into politics" (Emerson, "Concord" 135).

Whereas he had been portrayed by Emerson as an example of moral leadership in 1831, Daniel Webster permanently disappointed him in in the 1850s. Emerson thus went back on his eulogy and wrote the couplet "1854", in which he highlighted Webster's now corrupted soul,

WHY did all manly gifts in Webster fail?

He wrote on Nature's grandest brow, For Sale.

In 1851, in his "Address to the Citizens of Concord", Emerson had already "passionately denounce[d] Daniel Webster" (Rowe 29), about whom he had written that a "man of greedy and unscrupulous selfishness may maintain morals when they are in fashion: but he will not stick" (Emerson, "Concord" 137). Denouncing the immoral disposition of the Senator, Emerson stated that "[c]'est donc par une inclination naturelle à la servilité que Webster serait devenu l'esclave des sudistes, se ravalant de lui-même au rang de bête de somme"[1] (Constantinesco, "Amérique Fugitive" 7). Throughout his speech, Emerson indeed insisted on his revulsion at Webster's political turnaround, opening his address with an emphasis on the physiological effects engendered by the Compromise: "I have a new experience. I wake in the morning with a painful sensation, which I carry about all day" ("Concord" 135). The word "experience", compounded by the noun "sensation", indeed emphasizes the physical dimension of Emerson's reaction: the bill went against his own *nature,* hurting his body and soul. As Constantinesco importantly remarked, "la dénonciation de la bestialité de Webster et des sudistes permet d'abord à Emerson de leur opposer la profonde humanité de la loi de la nature, cet édit suprême … en vertu duquel toute loi immorale doit nécessairement être déclarée nulle et non avenue"[2] ("Amérique Fugitive" 8-9). The reference to the natural cycle of life "I wake the morning" recalls the endless procession of days and nights, while the idea

[1] "It is because of a natural inclination to subservience that Webster became a slave to the Southern states, for he had lowered himself to the role of beast of burden"

[2] "Emerson's indictment of both Webster and the Southern States' brutality allows him, more importantly, to contrast their barbarity with the profound humanity of the law of nature - this divine edict according to which all immoral rulings must be opposed"

of regeneration - referred to through the adjective "new" – stands for the constant renewal of nature: the immorality of the bill goes against the natural morality of human nature, thus bringing "a painful sensation". These sensations are caused by a certain "infamy in the air" - air which has been polluted by "the odious remembrance of that ignominy which has fallen on Massachusetts, which robs the landscape of beauty, and takes the sunshine out every hour" (Emerson, "Concord" 135). Webster's decision to adopt the Fugitive Slave Law brought the evils of slavery to the northern part of the country: metaphorically comparing slavery to moral pollution, Emerson described how the Compromise had managed to darken northern landscapes, "The sun paints: presently we shall organize the echo, as now we do the shadow" ("Concord" 149). Using the classic association of "light" and "morality", Emerson deplored the "shadow" in which the North of the United States has been plunged. As Thomas Constantinesco pinpoints, "[t]el un éclair déchirant le ciel, la loi sur les esclaves fugitifs, ou plutôt la crise politique et morale dont elle est le signe, fait éclater la vérité au grand jour"[3] ("Amérique Fugitive" 5). Indeed, what emerges most clearly from Emerson's tone is his disappointment when faced with "the slightness and unreliableness of our social fabric", his coming to terms with "what stuff reputations are made of; what straws we dignify by office and title …. It showed the shallowness of leaders; the divergence of parties from their alleged grounds; showed that men would not stick to what they have said" ("Concord" 137). Emerson was inhabited by a strong sense of disillusionment with regards to American politics : in fact, he now could clearly see "l'inanité d'une politique du compromis qui, dès l'origine et pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle, aura chercher à préserver l'Union au prix de l'asservissement des noirs et de l'avilissement des populations blanches, à la fois

[3] "As a flash of lightning that shine through the sky, the Fugitive Slave Law – and the political and moral crisis which it embodied – made the truth shine through"

complices et coupables"[4] (Constantinesco, "Amérique Fugitive" 5). Emerson was shocked by the realization that his was an age of "metaphysical debility" (Emerson, "Concord" 137). Denouncing moral corruption, he attacked how the evils of slavery had spread throughout the country: "What is the use of admirable law-forms and political forms, if a hurricane of party feeling and a combination of monied interests can beat them to the ground?" (Emerson, "Concord" 137). As Daniel Robert Koch remarks, "Emerson believed that support for the law was the result of a materialist spirit, which united southern slaveholders and corrupted 'officials' who attempted to persuade northern communities through 'the mischievous whisper ''Tariff and southern market, if you will be quiet"' (179). As he had written in his address on the "Emancipation of the British West Indies", Emerson again denounced the monetary benefits of slavery, which he recognized as the source of politicians' corruption of soul": "Relying on a transcendentalist convention regarding excess (*luxus*) and dependency as unnatural" (Rowe 26), Emerson attacked politicians' thirst for profit. A series of rhetorical questions stand for Emerson's disappointment: "What kind of legislation is this? What kind of Constitution which covers it?" (Emerson, "Concord" 142), "Great is the mischief of a legal crime" (Emerson, "Concord" 143). As previously demonstrated, Emerson never rejected capitalistic economy; yet he believed that laws should follow a higher law, not the one of Mammon. In fact, "[d]espite his condemnation of commercial interests in the debate over slavery, … and his fiery condemnation of political and legal processes in America, Emerson reverts to the same solutions to slavery he had proposed in 1844: economic and legal" (Rowe 31).

[4] "the futility of political compromise which, from its very start and throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, safeguarded the Union while causing the enslavement of African-Americans and the debasement of white Americans, both accomplices and guilty"

According to Emerson, an immoral law should not be obeyed - “An immoral law makes it a man’s duty to break it, at every hazard” (Emerson, “Concord” 138) – for the only law that should is the Higher law. Showcasing the corruptness of Webster’s ruling, Emerson thus stated that it would be immoral to conform to it - “You have a law which no man can obey, or abet the obeying, without loss of self-respect and forfeiture of the name of a gentleman” (“Concord” 144). In his rejection an unlawful government, Emerson went back to the principles of “Self-Reliance”, deeming that in the absence of a moral government, one should follow one’s own inner morality. As he wrote in 1841, Emerson believed that “[t]he relations of the soul to the divine spirit are so pure, that it is profane to seek to interpose helps” (“Self-Reliance” 62). In fact, at the heart of Transcendentalist philosophy stood the belief that each individual possesses an inner morality and a direct connection to the divine: “Whenever a mind is simple, and receives a divine wisdom, old things pass away, – means, teachers, texts, temples fall; it lives now, and absorbs past and future into the present hour” (Emerson, “Self-Reliance” 63). The strength of Emerson’s appeal thus lies in its peremptory injunction to react against political corruption and immoral rulings by relying on individual morality: “Condemning leaders like Webster for their lack of character and the legal and political processes for their ‘metaphysical debility,’ Emerson appeals for the renewal of virtue in civil disobedience” (Rowe 30). As Rowe remarks, it is important to emphasize that Emerson’s invitation to rebel against government’s decisions never encompassed any armed reaction: - “Yet the civil disobedience that Emerson counsels does not lead relentlessly either to a call to arms or comparable revolutionary practice” (31). His appeal to civil disobedience was more symbolic than it was factual, “Emerson enjoint donc son auditoire de reconstituer une communauté alternative, une nation parallèle et véritablement naturelle cette fois” [5]

[5] “Emerson invites his audience to become part of an alternative community, a parallel nation obeying, for real this time, natural law”

(Constantinesco, "Amérique Fugitive" 10). His invitation, however theoretical, was clear: "You know that the Act of Congress of September 18, 1850, is a law which every one of you will break on the earliest occasion" (Emerson, "Concord" 141). Thus, Emerson did not call to armed "action" yet he plead for intellectual "re-action". In order to better understand Emerson's sudden entrance into the world of engaged intellectualism, it would be useful to adopt a transatlantic perspective on the thinker's European travels. In fact, when Emerson delivered his "Address to the Citizens of Concord" in 1851, he had just come back from his second European tour (1847-1848). As Koch remarks, Emerson had been affected by the European revolutions he witnessed while travelling and, even though he "initially found the European revolutions, especially the revolution in France, to have been tragicomic failures", Emerson "drew parallels … between American supporters of slavery and European reactionaries and rulers of the post-1848 order in Europe" (182). Koch adds that "[i]nspired by his participation in what he understood to be a revolution against the moral abomination of slavery, he came to see the idealism of the French revolutionaries of 1848 as the spirit that connected 1848 and the American Civil War within an epic struggle for human dignity and freedom" (182-183). Affected by European revolution and American political changes, Emerson thus went from a promotion "of panreligious tolerance and coexistence [to] an apparent embrace of secular nationalism" (Ziser 336): as Koch concluded, "we can understand Emerson's lionization of European revolutionary leaders during the first half of the 1850s as related to his vision of a sublime struggle for freedom against a materialist fatalism, which he saw affecting both Americans and Europeans" (186).

Deeply disappointed by the Compromise of 1850, Emerson thus denounced the government's indulgence towards the Slave states and attacked Daniel Webster's moral corruption. Nevertheless, however critique Emerson's address was, the latter's rejection of

the government never fell into a rejection of America: Emerson's patriotism resisted his disappointment and was strengthened by it. It is indeed in an effort to build a nation of moral, uncorrupted men that Emerson urged his audience to resist – Emerson's civil disobedience consisted in an effort to recreate that moral elite by which the United States of America should be ruled. In the same way as Carlyle argued for a return to past social organizations and feudal relations, Emerson argued for a return to the Founding Fathers and the great Puritan principles of his country. For Emerson, the unmatchable superiority of the Higher Law shadowed any human government and legitimated resistance against a potentially unlawful government – justifying actions such as John Brown's armed rebellion against pro-slavery government.

Chapter Three

On War: Transatlantic Tensions and Amicable Resolutions

During the American Civil War, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle's relationship strongly deteriorated because of their dissentions concerning the conflict. Between 1861 and 1865, the two intellectuals in fact only exchanged six letters – a sparsity that accounts for a considerable crisis in their relationship. Paralyzed by their disagreements, Emerson and Carlyle's communication progressively shifted from the private sphere to the public one, turning into an exchange of lectures and articles. It is Thomas Carlyle who opened fire first: his "Ilias (Americana) in Nuce", published by *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1863, outraged both British and American abolitionists. Indeed "Carlyle's response to the American Civil War was characteristic of a man who courted controversy and reveled in paradox" (Sorensen, "Frederick" 91). Reluctant to publicly criticize his friend, Emerson indirectly retorted to Carlyle's satire through a series critical lectures. In his 1863 address "Fortune of the Republic", Emerson indicted England's non-supportive attitude towards the Union and deplored Carlyle's disinterest in the North's moral cause. It is therefore on the question of slavery that the two authors collided: the American Civil War, and the abolition of slavery, became the point of convergence of the authors' philosophical differences.

I – Praising Action: Where Does the Scholar Stand?

Despite being a man of letters, Emerson legitimized war defining it as a necessary step into action in order to abolish the Institution of Slavery. As he stated his in "Address to the Citizens of Concord" in 1851, Emerson did not disapprove of forms of violent action when employed in extreme circumstances, echoing his friend Henry David Thoreau's 1849

"Civil Disobedience". In a eulogy delivered in 1859 in honor of John Brown, Emerson therefore praised the latter's armed resistance because justified by an unlawful state of things. As Michael Ziser wrote in "Emersonian Terrorism", Emerson did authorize a "suspension of normative ethics and law to allow for genuinely revolutionary change" (352). More particularly, Emerson used the heroic figure of John Brown as counter-argument to the general accusation that abolitionists were mere idealists. Brown was the proof that being an idealist was not a sign of passivity, for "John Brown … believed in his ideas to that extent that he existed to put them all into action" ("John Brown" 189). Emerson admired how, in the person of John Brown, words were synonymous with action. He even elevated Brown to the role of representative of the Nation, describing him as a national hero - "There is a Unionist …. He believes in the Union of the States, and he conceives that the only obstruction to the Union is Slavery, and for that reason, as a patriot, he works for its abolition" (Emerson, "John Brown" 188). Surprisingly enough, even though Brown had led a terrorist rebellion against the government in Harpers Ferry, Emerson portrayed him as a model of morality - "he is so transparent that all men see him through. He is a man to make friends wherever on earth courage and integrity are esteemed, the rarest of heroes, a pure idealist, with no by-ends of his own" ("John Brown" 188). In Emerson's eyes, the U.S. government had lost all moral authority with its 1850 "Fugitive Slave Act": therefore, rebelling against it was now not only justified, it was to be praised. Emerson praised John Brown's patriotism as well as his attempt to reassert the foundational Puritan values of American democracy: as Ziser pointed out, "[b]oth an anachronistic throwback to primitive and absolutist Calvinism and a racial progressive who helped precipitate the war that modernized and centralized the United States, Brown embraced violence and martyrdom as means of opposing first proslavery settlers" (345).

In the figure of John Brown, Emerson thus found the concretization of words into action, which had haunted him for so long. Initially reluctant to step out of the world of pure abstractions, Emerson had long hesitated before entering the political sphere for he deemed that the solitary life of an intellectual was incompatible with that of politics. Even after publicly joining the abolitionist cause in 1844, Emerson found it difficult to fully perceive himself as an "engaged intellectual": his support for the abolitionist cause threw him into doubt, caught between moral abstractions and pragmatic concerns. Indeed, in juxtaposition to his praise of abolitionist action, Emerson also had to explain his role as an abolitionist scholar: where did he stand in the realm of political rebellion? Such a question agitated many of Emerson's lectures, including his 1862 "Emancipation Proclamation" address, in which he defines the role of politicians in comparison to that of orators. Emphasizing Lincoln's oratorical qualities, Emerson attempted to showcase that politicians and intellectuals were indeed both moved by idealism and morality. Emerson did not try to hoist himself to the role of "man of action" yet he justified his own place in politics by demonstrating how "men of action" were also "men of words". Indeed, Emerson's praise of Lincoln is interestingly pervaded with references to speech, "so fair a mind that none ever listened so patiently to such extreme varieties of opinion …,— the firm tone in which he announces it, without inflation or surplusage" ("Proclamation" 2). Comparing Lincoln to an orator, Emerson depicts the Emancipation Proclamation as a speech's climax:

> It is as when an orator, having ended the compliments and pleasantries with which he conciliated attention, and having run over the superficial fitness and commodities of the measure he urges, suddenly, lending himself to some happy inspiration, announces with vibrating voice the grand human principles involved;—the bravos and wits who greeted him loudly thus far are surprised and overawed. ("Proclamation" 1)

In Emerson's eyes, the emancipation of slaves represented the successful communion of the world of morality and that of politics: Emerson thus celebrated Lincoln's Proclamation for it endowed the conflict with a moral end, transforming the war into a crusade towards "liberty" (Emerson, "Proclamation" 1). According to his belief in the general progress of humanity, Emerson viewed the war as one of history's major "moments of expansion" ("Proclamation" 1).

As Gougeon noted after analyzing Emerson's reaction to the news of emancipation, "[f]or Emerson, the true victory here is for principle, no matter what the actual effects are" (*Virtue's Hero* 288). Emerson "welcomed" the victory of emancipation "as an effort to fulfill America's original promise of equality and justice and a necessary clarification of the purpose of the war" (Gougeon, "Emerson, Carlyle" 411). Yet the Proclamation did not only fulfill America's moral destiny; it also crossed the North-American borders, uniting abolitionists from all over the world over morality's dictates. For Emerson, the abolition of slavery was a universal ideal in which all intellectuals should believe:

> The truly cultivated. They exist in England, as in France, in Italy, in Germany, in America. The inspirations of God, like birds, never stop at frontiers or languages, but come to every nation. This class like Christians, or poets, or chemists, exist across all possible nationalities, strangers to their own people, - brothers to you." (Emerson, *The Later Lectures* 333)

When Emerson pronounced these words in 1863, he "was becoming increasingly concerned about relations with Great Britain" (Gougeon, *Virtue's Hero* 302). Personally "aware that the British lacked sympathy or understanding for the Union cause almost from the war's beginning" (Gougeon, "Emerson, Carlyle" 410), Emerson thus tried to display the war's new abolitionist turn overseas. By emphasizing the universality of the abolitionist sentiment, he

justified the Northern cause in the eyes of rest of the word. As he had cleverly phrased it in his "Emancipation Proclamation" address, Emerson countered all opponents by asserting that siding with the abolitionist cause equaled siding with reason, for:

> "every spark of intellect, every virtuous feeling, every religious heart, every man of honor, every poet, every philosopher, the generosity of the cities, the health of the country, the strong arms of the mechanic, the endurance of farmers, the passionate conscience of women, the sympathy of distant nations,— all rally to its support." (3)

II- British Positions and Transatlantic Tensions

The universal morality of the abolitionist cause, the idealism and benevolence which Emerson found so noble, were not always unanimously received in Europe, and in Britain more particularly. Despite Emerson's efforts to state that abolitionism was a universal principle, British reactions to the Civil War – both on behalf of British government and British people – were not all in favor of the North. In fact, even though the government had asserted its neutrality in 1861, "[t]he upper and middle classes, the conservatives, most High Anglicans, and *The Times* mostly sympathized with the South and sometimes suggested British intervention for the South" (95), as noted by Peter T. Park. Carlyle was among those who opposed the Northern cause from the start, deeming that slavery was not worth the deaths of thousands of white soldiers: Carlyle in fact did not understand why the North would fight the "South to the death just to free the slaves" (Kinser, *Shaping* 36). He thus wished that the United States would avoid any bloody conflict, and as he wrote to his friend Charles Butler: "Wise men seem to be of the opinion that you will not go to cutting of throats, but will settle pacifically (being a prudent People)" (*Collected Letters* 97-98). Through the years, however, Anglo-American relations kept deteriorating over diplomatic incidents; "Although

by 1863 there was little likelihood that either France or England would intervene in the war on behalf of the Confederacy, there was a possibility that the Union might drift into a war with England over the issue of British shipbuilding for the Confederate navy" (Gougeon *Virtue's Hero* 302). In 1861, two Confederate diplomats who were on the British mail ship *Trent* were illegally captured by the Union, who accused them of violating international laws of neutrality in high seas. Although soldiers were eventually freed, this diplomatic incident increased tensions between Britain and the North and "Great Britain nearly declared war on the United States as a result of the *Trent* affair" (Park 96). It is true that British sympathy for Southern troops was also motivated by the already-existing commercial relations between the two countries: in fact, "apart from resenting U.S. commercial competition, the British needed Southern cotton and believed in a Southern victory until 1863" (Park 95). However, British antipathy towards the North was not only caused by their financial agreements with the South; throughout the years, British people had become "cynical about Northern abolitionism, which they regarded as a hypocritical cloak for sordid commercial and political ambitions" (Park 95). In fact, British antipathy towards the Union began in the early years of the American conflict, when

> anti-slavery feeling inclined English observers to expect, quite falsely, a federal war for emancipation. When this anti-slavery crusade failed to materialize, when the cotton famine created hardship in Lancashire, and when federal forces proved inept in the field, Englishmen of a broad range of political opinion and social background came to see no point or purpose in the northern campaign. (Lorimer 420)

As Douglas A. Lorimer concluded, "[t]his critical attitude toward the north turned sympathies more favourably toward the south" (406): hence, British abolitionists chose not to side with the Union and believed that, once independent, the South would free its slaves.

From the very beginning, Carlyle saw the Civil War as "a nightmarish conflict over phantoms and illusions" (105): it was, in his eyes, "a tragically pointless conflict" (Park 93). However, as Kinser rightfully remarks, "Carlyle's insistence that the American Civil War was an absurd tragedy about nothing did not mean he was uninterested or uncaring" (*Shaping* 37). As he wrote to his friend Charles Butler in 1863, "We are all much interested in your American excitements" (*Collected Letters* 97-98). Carlyle's satirical piece "Ilias (Americana) in Nuce" - "the American Iliad in a Nutshell" – was Carlyle's "only published comment on the war" (50), as Gerald M. Straka pinpointed in his article. With its publication in the *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1863, the piece caused great scandal and even its editors were for a moment disconcerted by it. As George Worth recounts in his article, "[f]ollowing the publication … Alexander Macmillan, the self-described foe of slavery and friend of the Union, had some explaining to do" (195).

> PETER *of the North (to* PAUL *of the South):* "Paul, you unaccountable scoundrel, I find you hire your servants for life, not by the moth or the year, as I do! You go straight to hell, you - !"
>
> PAUL: "Good words, Peter. The risk is my own; I am willing to take the risk. Hire your servants by the month or day, and get straight to Heaven; leave me to my own method."
>
> PETER: "No, I won't, I will beat your brains out first." (*And is trying dreadfully ever since, but cannot yet manage it*.)
>
> (Carlyle, "Ilias")

Consisting of only three lines, "Ilias in Nuce" is a short dialogue between two fictional characters – "Peter of the North" and "Paul of the South". The generalizing character of their

names, their biblical origins and the absence of last name, indicates to the reader that the scope of Carlyle's satire is broad. The accumulation of exclamatory sentences – "You unaccountable soundrel, I find you hire servants for life, not by the month or year as I do!" "You are going straight to Hell, you –!", "Good words, Peter!" – takes away all possible credibility from the dialogue and its characters. The tools of satire are all at use: short sentences, exaggerated violence – "I will beat your brains out first" – and syllogistic nonsense all partake to the satirical effect of the piece. Eventually, the ludicrousness of the dialogue comes from the final italics - "*And is trying dreadfully ever since, but cannot yet manage it"* - which satirize "Peter" through an ironic imitation of stage directions. Complaining that Paul hires "servants for life, not by the month or year", Peter encapsulates the North's hypocrisy, which Carlyle is criticizing: his grotesque violence is indeed used to debunk Northerners' hypocritical morality. As Len Gougeon pointed out, Carlyle "had been intensely critical of democratic thought as early as the 1840s" ("Emerson, Carlyle" 407) - hence his natural antipathy for Northern abolitionist discourses. Emerson's ideals of morality and progress were hypocritical nonsense to the ears of Carlyle, who "attacked democracy as an impossible ideology because it failed to recognize that some men are born to govern and others are born to serve" (Gougeon "Emerson, Carlyle 408). According to the thinker, "strong leadership was the only practical answer to the organization of labor question" (Straka 47): in the same way as he had criticized the emancipation of West Indian slaves, Carlyle seemingly condemned the abolition of slavery in America. Because of "Ilias in Nuce", Carlyle "was immediately branded a de facto supporter of the South" (Kinser, *Shaping* 36), which also grew to admire him. As Straka remarks, "Carlyle's influence on the growth of Southern nationalism is obvious" (52): the thinker's writings became very popular in the American South, inspiring through their blatant racism. Among those writers, George Fitzhugh, "Virginian lawyer, sociologist, and pro-slavery theorist George Fitzhugh (1806-1881) had

long regarded himself as a Carlylean disciple" (Sorensen, "Frederick" 104). Fitzhugh indeed borrowed the title of his second book - *Cannibals All! or Slaves Without Masters* (1857) – from the latter's *Past and Present* (Sorensen, "Frederick" 104). In his "Introduction" to *Cannibals All*, Fitzhugh overtly declared his admiration for Carlyle's ideas: "At the very time we were writing our pamphlet entitled *Slavery Justified*, in which we took ground that Free Society had failed, Mr. Carlyle began to write his *Latter-Day* Pamphlets, whose very title is the assertion of the failure of Free Society" (12). More precisely, Fitzhugh applauded Carlyle's denunciation of "the physical impoverishment of the English working classes" (Sorensen, "Frederick" 104) - "Mr. Carlyle … vindicate[s] Slavery by showing that each of its apparent relaxations in England has injured the laboring class" (Fitzhugh 12). Like Carlyle, Fitzhugh was strongly opposed to laissez-faire economics, and perceived slavery as the only way of maintaining a balance between "labor" and "capital", "It is impossible to place labor and capital in harmonious and friendly relations, except by the means of slavery, which identifies their interests" (Fitzhugh 31). However, one must be careful about comparing Fitzhugh and Carlyle for, as Sorensen rightfully pinpoints, Fitzhugh's "ideal of society was aristocratic in a far more traditional way than Carlyle approved" ("Frederick" 105). However influential Carlyle had been in the South, Straka thus rightfully asks: "One last question poses itself: were the Southerners right in interpreting Carlyle as they did? He never published a direct opinion on the South. He had condemned West Indian policy, but he did not support outright the South's slavery system" (54). Although Southerners joyfully used Carlyle as a form of propaganda for pro-slavery arguments, Kinser convincingly observes that in "in the 'Ilias', Carlyle was in fact simply professing his long-held position against democracy and democratic reform in Britain" (*Shaping* 36). "But to which camp did Carlyle belong? Was he a progressive or a reactionary, a leftist or a rightist, a crypto-communist or a proto-fascist?" (111), asks Marc Harris. Carlyle's ideas had been manipulated by his

contemporaries, and continued to be misinterpreted until the twentieth century when, in "the thirties and forties, for example, a few German professors sought to enshrine him as precursor of National Socialism" (Harris 111).

III/ American Reactions and Amicable Resolution

Whereas "Ilias" was generally welcomed in the South as pro-slavery propaganda, the piece outraged most Northerners: as Gougeon remarks, "[w]hile to Carlyle the snippet may have appeared but a mild rebuke to both parties, for many Northern readers it was an unpardonable affront" ("Emerson, Carlyle" 412). Indeed, even though Emerson "had been aware of Carlyle's views on the subject of slavery for some time, he was apparently stung by the *Macmillan's* piece" (Gougeon "Emerson, Carlyle" 414). Whereas until 1863 Carlyle and Emerson had always managed to accept their political differences, "Ilias in Nuce" put their relation at risk. Emerson was deeply disappointed by his friend, for he was convinced that "scholars such as Carlyle should be providing moral leadership and enlightenment for the masses" (Gougeon *Virtue's Hero* 304). Thus, Emerson felt appalled by the satire and was encouraged, by many in his surroundings, to retort to Carlyle by way of a public letter. One can only imagine the amount of public pressure to which Emerson was subjected; his friendship with Carlyle was well-known by the general public. When Emerson finally "chose the lecture platform to unleash a bitter attack on the British generally, and Carlyle in particular" (413), "Emerson's audiences must have been pleased that America's honor, and the North's moral stand, had been vindicated by such a prestigious spokesperson, the man who had recommended Carlyle to America" (Gougeon "Emerson, Carlyle" 420). It is in "Fortune of the Republic", an address delivered in 1863, that Emerson finally confronted his friend Thomas Carlyle. In his speech, Emerson mirrored the frustrations of his times: while Britain had developed an antipathy towards the North, the Union had been strongly

disappointed by the British government and British intellectuals. “Fortune of the Republic” is indeed pervaded with a certain anger towards Britain, of which Emerson repeatedly condemns the lack of maturity: “Now, English nationality is babyish”, “The English have a certain childishness”, “They are insular, and narrow”, “they retain their Scandinavian strength and skill; but their morals do not reach beyond their frontier” (Emerson “Fortune” 323). In fact, while the “Queen’s Neutrality Proclamation of 13 May 1861 seemed reasonable enough to the British, it was considered an act of outright perfidy by many Northerners” (Gougeon “Emerson, Carlyle” 406). Emerson’s indictment against Britain was therefore direct and straightforward:

> it is time that you should hear the truth,- that you have failed in one of the great hours that put nations to test. When the occasion of magnamity arrived, you had none: you forgot your loud professions, you rubbed your hands with indecent joy, and saw only in our extreme danger the chance of humbling a rival and getting away his commerce.” (Emerson *The Later Lectures* 327)

If Britain is depicted as childish, America is presented as a wiser entity which managed to expel those European vices - “America was opened after the feudal mischief was spent, and so the people made a good start. We began well. No inquisition here; no kings, no nobles, no dominant church” (Emerson *The Later Lectures* 326). Emerson’s disappointment and anger are blatantly expressed - “We who saw you in a halo of honor which our affection made, now we must measure your means; your true dimensions” (*The Later Lectures* 327). Yet the author also tempers his accusations with a final captatio benenvolentiae, which spares some from his hard critique: “In speaking of England, I lay out of question the truly cultivated class. They exist in England, as in France, in Italy, in Germany, and in America” (*The Later Lectures* 333). Emerson also extends his critique to his friend Carlyle, expressing his

disappointment about his friends' political attitude - "Even Carlyle, her ablest living writer, a man who has earned his position by the sharpest insights, is politically a fatalist" (*The Later Lectures* 323). Accordingly with what he said in his "Emancipation Proclamation" address, the role of intellectuals in society should not be underestimated and it is "Britain's artists and intellectuals who must bear the brunt of the criticism for this failing" (Gougeon, *Virtue's Hero* 304). Reiterating the universalism of abolitionist ideals - "[t]he inspirations of God, like birds, never stop at frontiers or languages, but come to every nation" (*The Later Lectures* 333) – Emerson was therefore disappointed by his friend's lack of sympathy for the Union and her moral cause. Deeming that trade was the main reason of Britain's pro-southern convictions, Emerson condemned trade with the same verve with which Carlyle condemned democracy; "Never a lofty sentiment, never a duty of civilization, never a generosity, a moral self-restraint is suffered in the way of commercial advantage" (*The Later Lectures* 323). The ternary insistence on the adverb "never" emphasizes America's morality while it denounces British vicious attachment to trade. "Fortune of the Republic" thus ends on a patriotic celebration of American democracy: while recollecting the memory of the American Revolution, Emerson now announces the Union's moral destiny - "But the moment one enemy appeared, we woke out of sleep. No country! We had nothing else but a country. Business was thrust aside. Every house hung out the flag. Every street was full of patriotic songs. Almost every able-bodied man put on a uniform." (*The Later Lectures 330*). Based once again on a ternary repetition - "every house" "every street" and "every man"- this sentence sounds like the patriotic prayer of American democracy. While defending his country with vigor and passion from foreign attacks such as Carlyle's "Ilias", Emerson's tone still leaves room for hope of a British redemption. As Len Gougeon explained, the "failure of intellectuals in England was particularly disturbing to Emerson because, unlike the South, … England seemed to possess all the advantages of a developed and advanced culture" (*Virtue's*

Hero 310). In a private letter to Carlyle written in September 1864, Emerson thus tried "to correct erroneous impressions regarding the war which had unfortunately circulated some time among the British" (Gougeon "Emerson, Carlyle" 422). In a benevolent tone, Emerson tried to open his friend's eyes - "A few days here would show you the disgusting composition of the party which within the Union resists the national action" (*Correspondence* 541). Moreover, Emerson excuses Carlyle for his mistakes by depicting him as the victim of slaveholders' manipulation - "Slaveholders in London have filled English ears with their wishes & perhaps beliefs" (*Correspondence* 542). Emerson was not the only person who saw Carlyle as the "duped victim of Southern propaganda" (Kinser, *Shaping* 37). Moncure Daniel Conway, who had been recommended by Emerson, visited Carlyle in London during the Civil War: as Kinser remarks, "[h]is estimation of Carlyle is perhaps surprisingly positive" (*Shaping* 37). Originally from Virginia, Conway had renounced his pulpit like Emerson because of his opposition to slavery. In his reflections, Conway recounted: "There reached him the tidings that in the Southern States of America there was such a fair country. … In his longing that his dream should be no dream, but a reality, he had listened to the most insubstantial representations" (*Thomas Carlyle* 92-93). In the same way, forgiving his friend's radical opinions, Emerson set aside political divergences as "he tactfully urges him 'to forgo petty differences and to support the cause'" (Gougeon "Emerson, Carlyle" 421-422). As Sorensen hypothetically suggests, "Emerson may have been accurate in his supposition that Carlyle had failed to play a part in the 'battle for humanity' less from racial prejudice than from a furious need to be idiosyncratic" ("Frederick" 110).

The American Civil War is considered by critics as the strongest crisis in Emerson and Carlyle's relationship. During the war, Emerson's abolitionism became more and more intertwined with a patriotic belief in American democracy: therefore, his friend Carlyle's satire "Ilias (Americana) in Nuce" both offended his personal, and patriotic convictions. On

the other hand, Carlyle had become intolerant of abolitionists' discourse and his intention was to debunk their pretense morality by exposing their real, violent natures. However concise, Carlyle's satire is useful for it enables us to understand the political context in which it was written and the national influences after which it was carved. Thus, Emerson and Carlyle's divergences during the Civil War are not only to be seen as personal misunderstandings, yet help reveal the transatlantic dissentions of their times. In fact, "[t]ensions between the writers of Old England and New became acute as a result of the Civil War, and in many respects, Carlyle and Emerson's experience was representative. For some, the animosities generated at the time would endure or the rest of their lives" (Gougeon "Emerson, Carlyle" 423). However, "[a]mid the dissension and conflict of the period, … the friendship of Emerson and Carlyle was both tested and reaffirmed" (Gougeon, "Emerson, Carlyle" 423).

Conclusion

Despite holding very divergent views on a variety of topics, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle managed to remain friends until the latter's death, in 1881. As shown throughout this dissertation, it is on the question of slavery that their views mostly diverged – putting their relationship to test during the American Civil War. However, their friendship resisted and the two thinkers were able to maintain amicable relations until their last days. Even though Emerson and Carlyle's friendship might seem absurdly paradoxical at first sight, thorough close-readings of both authors have revealed that, in order to understand their relationship, one should drop any biases about the authors' reputation. Known as a modern abolitionist thinker, Emerson has indeed obtained, throughout the years, an unparalleled popularity among critics; on the other hand, "Carlyle's reputation" still has not "recovered from the dubious role he played in distorting the historical significance of the American 'Iliad'" (Sorensen 110). Thus, although their friendship was "a sort of paradox in nature", it is important to analyze the similarities that united these thinkers and that enable us today to explain their correspondence. Emerson and Carlyle have often been described as intellectual polar opposites for, even though they were "paradoxically" similar in their approaches, they reached very different in their conclusions. As we have seen in Chapter One, the thinkers held opposite views on the emancipation of British West Indies: whereas Carlyle condemned it as failure in his "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question", Emerson rejoiced over the civility of black populations. However, the two interestingly used the same socio-economical approach and defined slavery in relation to labor and economy. Whereas Carlyle plead in favor of a return to feudal modes of social organization, Emerson described the benefits of free labor and advocated in favor of legal freedom. As proven in Chapter Two, even as they criticized governments and democracy, the two authors still held similar Romantic ideals.

Carlyle attacked democracy – and the United States – for he believed that a few should govern the masses. He believed that dictators were the heroes that society needed and denounced laissez-faire's liberalism. On the other hand, Emerson believed that a moral elite should rule the country - whereas Carlyle's hero consisted in a dictatorial figure, Emerson suggested that it is the wise men who should be in power. Deeply disappointed by the Compromise of 1850, Emerson thus accused the government and denounced its moral corruption while advocating the necessity of a moral elite. As he became more and more invested in politics, Emerson had to modify his way of being a Transcendentalist: faced with war and the evils of slavery, Emerson praised action and rebellion against unlawful governments. As shown in Chapter Three, the clearly different stances adopted by Emerson and Carlyle on the Civil War put their relationship at risk: mirroring the transatlantic tensions of their times, the two wrote less and less letters to each other and debated over abolition through lectures and speeches. As Marc Harris concluded, "History may not forgive Carlyle for the comfort he gave to slave drivers and racists, in his own time and after, but his friend [eventually] did forgive him" (157).

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