The Road Not Taken: From Edwards, Through Chauncy, to Emerson

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Charles Chauncy had already split the Puritan heritage.
—Perry Miller

WITH DISARMING SURRENDER, one key element of his rhetorical
brilliance, Perry Miller admitted the apparent failure of perhaps
his greatest essay, "From Edwards to Emerson," when it was republished
in 1956, sixteen years after its initial appearance: "There can be no
doubt that Jonathan Edwards would have abhorred from the bottom of
his soul every proposition Ralph Waldo Emerson blandly put forth in the
manifesto of 1836, *Nature*." In his headnote, Miller went on to claim
the title "essay" for his piece, "in the original sense of an endeavor or an
exertion that does not quite reach its goal," and called for others to try
to provide the "volume of documentation" that he had never been able
to assemble, "even though that shall prove my hunches wrong" (Miller,
Errand 184). Miller's humility is a good indication that he did not
expect to be proven wrong, and that he realized his essay had proven to
be one of the great acts of synthesis in American literary history. Its
success lay in Miller's ability to provide, by force of will and rhetoric,
continuity between aspects of a culture which might better have been
defined as antagonistic. Miller's rhetorical humility aside, he was right
in surmising that Edwards would have "laughed . . . over the discomfi-
ture of the Unitarians upon discovering a heresy in *their* midst" (*Errand*

184). Miller had asserted the presence of cultural continuity to an intellectual community in search of one, and the continuing vitality of his essay lies in its yoking two of the strongest intellectual forces in antebellum American culture, Puritanism and Transcendentalism.[1]

Miller could afford to be humble about the obvious doctrinal chasm that separated Edwards from Emerson because he had rejected explicit doctrine as a key to this cultural continuity. He argued instead that "certain basic continuities persist in a culture—in this case taking New England as the test tube—which underlie the successive articulation of 'ideas'" (*Errand* 184–85). "Ideas," the rational articulation of values and perspectives, were therefore rendered a secondary and relatively inconsequential aspect of literary history, which paled in comparison to the exploration of the more obscure feelings and motivations that were culturally formative. "The history of ideas," Miller wrote, "demands of the historian not only a fluency in the concepts themselves but an ability to get underneath them" (*Errand* 185). Not only as a bold conjuncture of two forceful intellectual figures, but also as an attempt to work at a more profound level of understanding of intellectual forces, Miller's essay validated a sense of American intellectual continuity whose peaks were Edwards's work during the Great Awakening and Emerson's launching of Transcendentalism.

The ground that Edwards shared with Emerson was the predisposition "to confront, face to face, the image of a blinding divinity in the physical universe" (*Errand* 185), a stance that established nature as the focal point of American culture and varying forms of mysticism or antinomianism as persisting responses to it. For Miller, it was less significant that Edwards and Emerson came to different conclusions about the implications of the divinity revealed in nature than that they asked questions of this same fundamental experience. Emerson was thus "an Edwards in whom the sense of original sin has evaporated" (*Errand* 185), a serious lack, but one that nevertheless helped to explain why one whose theology was a consistent denial of Calvinism might, even so, be taken as an heir of the Calvinist tradition.

If Miller's metaphor of deeper investigation is turned on his own essay, however, another connection between Edwards and Emerson seems to overshadow their shared sense of the immanence of divinity. Miller's essay subtly but unmistakably paints Edwards and Emerson as bound by their sharing of a common enemy. Edwards knew it as "that

degenerate 'Arminianism,' the initial stirrings of which he had been the first to detect and to the destruction of which he devoted his life" (*Errand* 184). Emerson knew it as "the pallid and unexciting liberalism of Unitarianism" (*Errand* 201). More than a description of an unrecognized cultural continuity, Miller's essay was a critique of a particular religious tradition. Only by suppressing this tradition was Miller able to link Edwards to Emerson. And that link was forged, more than we have yet recognized, by the force of that suppression.

The curious fact is that the very "organic evolution of ideas" that Miller admitted did not exist between Edwards and Emerson did undoubtedly exist between Emerson and Charles Chauncy, Edwards's nemesis. In his intense opposition to Edwards's great achievement, the Great Awakening of the 1740's, Chauncy initiated the public articulation of a tradition of liberal theology in eastern Massachusetts, dreaded by Edwards as "Arminianism," and eventually known as Unitarianism.[2] Into this milieu Emerson was born and educated, from within it he launched his intellectual career, and out of it emerged Transcendentalism. It was therefore by no subterranean path that an intellectual continuity between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries developed in New England. To reexamine Miller's dismissal of New England liberalism is to suggest a new conception of the shape of American cultural history.[3]

II

Miller felt that Emerson's submerged Puritan genealogy could be understood as a result of a bifurcation in the Puritan tradition: Edwards was the last great thinker able to hold in synthesis the divergent strands of his tradition. Miller explained Edwards's dilemma by focusing on the central concern of his theology, the concept of God. On the one hand, Edwards's God was a grand exemplar of self-assertion, having made the world "by an extension of Himself, by taking upon Himself the forms of stones and trees and of man" (*Errand* 194). Such a creative act was pure in its insulation from the consideration of any external purpose, which would have represented a restraint on the omnipotence of God. "He created without any ulterior object in view," Miller explained, "neither for His glory nor His power, but for the pure joy of self-expression, as an artist creates beauty for the love of beauty" (*Errand* 194). It is not

difficult to see how this self-expressive God became a problem for Ed-
wards, first in the implication that he was present in all forms of the
creation, including nature and the human soul, and second in the im-
plication that self-expression, at least divine self-expression, was a holy
act. The combination of these two logical conclusions, fermenting in
an unrestrained human psyche, threatened to produce a mystical anti-
nomianism, in which the perception and expression of the human self
were taken to be divine. This was the chaos that loomed behind Ed-
wards's triumphs in the Great Awakening. As Miller read Edwards (with
the image of Emerson's later Transcendentalism much in mind), the
spectre of antinomianism created enormous personal tension, and gen-
erated in him a counterforce of caution and restraint. Miller of course
admitted some degree of surmise in his portrait (his qualifications and
reassertions suggest a certain defensiveness), but for him such historical
recreation was necessary to the comprehension of Edwards's situation,
and the fate of Puritanism:

> Nevertheless, assuming, as we have some right to assume, that
> what subsequent generations find to be a hidden or potential
> implication in a thought is a part of that thought, we may
> venture to feel that Edwards was particularly careful to hold in
> check the mystical and pantheistical tendencies of his teaching
> because he himself was so apt to become a mystic and a pan-
> theist. (*Errand* 195)

   Like Edwards himself, "the New England tradition contained a dual
heritage." Miller's description of this dualism revealed his judgment of
the subsequent intellectual history of New England:

> It gave with one hand what it took away with the other: it
> taught men that God is present to their intuitions and in the
> beauty and terror of nature, but it disciplined them into sub-
> jecting their intuitions to the wisdom of society and their im-
> pressions of nature to the standards of decorum. (*Errand* 192)

Miller's canny sense of the divided nature of the Puritan mind, which
accorded well with modern fascination with conflicting inner drives,
shattered the stereotyped image of the Puritans's narrow complacency
and conformist self-righteousness. He effectively countered the early
twentieth-century tendency to lay the blame for every form of national

ill on Puritanism (Wood 26). Miller thus made of the "troubled spirit," wrestling with the implications of an obscure but compelling deity, a legacy to the twentieth century. Edwards's bearing of this "heritage of the troubled spirit" made him a contemporary of the twentieth century (*Errand* 192).[4] What could not be salvaged in this reading, Miller attributed to Chauncy and the liberals.

Edwards's fresh and dangerous sense of the potential to experience the deity led him to "[strain] theology to the breaking point. . . . Holding himself by brute will power within the ancient forms of Calvinism," Miller explained, "he filled those forms with a new and throbbing spirit" (*Errand* 195). Although Miller does not complete the narrative that he begins, his compelling portrait of Edwards does indeed take us to the point at which Calvinist theology broke: the Arminian rejection of the doctrine of innate depravity. It is certainly clear that in Edwards's generation a dividing of the ways occurred, the catalyst of which was the Great Awakening. Miller had absorbed too uncritically the Puritan jeremiads which warned of the degeneracy of Arminianism and the danger of a falling away from the original faith of the pilgrims. Edwards may have been Miller's subject, but Edwards himself could not have articulated the Puritan myth of history better than Miller did. If, as Miller argued, the Puritan spirit was troubled by the threat of antinomianism, it was also haunted by the doctrines of depravity and an inscrutable election to grace. This doctrine became particularly troubling during the Great Awakening, and the dissent to those revivals, led by Chauncy, reminds us of another legacy of the troubled spirit that marked Puritanism.[5]

The defining gesture of the liberal movement was to modify or reject those doctrines, replacing them with an emphasis on human ability. Miller saw the liberals' discomfort with the excessive zeal of the revivals as evidence of their growing distance from the access to divinity that was the core of Edwards's theology, and he argued that it rendered liberalism a withered and fruitless branch of the Puritan tradition. Central to the building dissent from Calvinism was the feeling that the doctrines of innate depravity and election to grace alienated men and women from the source of divinity, and that such doctrinal obstacles to religious experience had to be swept away.[6]

The liberals' focus on doctrine, and their obvious embrace of rational argument as a weapon against the confinements of orthodoxy,

have tended to obscure the extent to which the rebellion from the
doctrines of innate depravity and election to grace were gestures of the
heart as well as of the mind. If the liberals used reason to attack Calvin-
ism, the Calvinists used it to reply, but in both cases there were more
than academic motivations behind their thinking. The dissent to the
Great Awakening, which eventually ripened into the Unitarian con-
troversy, was not a battle of piety against rationalism, as Miller pre-
sented it, but a discourse on the means of piety.

There was more than a distrust of rationalism in Miller's characteriza-
tion of the emergence of Unitarianism. Even Miller, after all, would
have found it difficult to defend the *doctrine* of Edwards's "Sinners in
the Hands of an Angry God," or Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom* to a
modern audience. Miller had little use for the mythological trappings
of Christianity, but regarded Calvinist doctrine as a sign of a particular
stance toward experience that he felt accorded well with modern forms
of experience. The inscrutability of an unapproachable God seemed to
cohere with a contemporary alienation before threatening and certainly
inexplicable conditions of existence. Miller overlooked Puritan doc-
trine itself to look for its deeper sources, much as he ignored liberal
doctrine in order to attack what he felt were its social manifestations.
He could, that is, safely attack liberal theology as the masking ideology
of the spiritually barren Boston elite, and contrast it unfavorably with
an Orthodox tradition which tried to preserve the primitive zeal of an
original religious experience. The Calvinists in this way became proto-
Transcendentalists, and the bridge between the eighteenth and nine-
teenth centuries was complete.

Miller thus described the development of Arminianism as not only
rationalist but socially degenerate. His populist portrait of the Armin-
ians looks forward to his explanation of the grounds of a later Transcen-
dentalist rebellion against it:

> In the eighteenth century, certain sections of New England, or
> certain persons, grew wealthy. It can hardly be a coincidence
> that among those who were acquiring the rewards of industry
> and commerce there should be progressively developed the sec-
> ond part of the heritage, the tradition of reason and criticism,
> and that among them the tradition of emotion and ecstasy
> should dwindle. (*Errand* 192–93)

The "reason and criticism" of this tradition represented for Miller an essentially negative force which, with questionable economic motives, attempted to harness the considerable repressive energy of Puritanism itself into a form of social control: "In Unitarianism one half of the New England tradition—that which inculcated caution and sobriety—definitely cast off all allegiance to the other. The ideal of decorum, of law and self-control, was institutionalized" (*Errand* 196). The empty formality which he describes here is a pejorative characterization of the liberal determination to value moral and ethical action as a standard for religious aspiration. In C.C. Goen's definition, Arminianism is best understood as a manifestation of "a mood of rising confidence in man's ability to gain some purchase on the divine favor by human endeavor" (Goen 10). This is empty formality only if viewed through the lens of Calvinist dogma.

Miller cited Chauncy's argument, heretical to orthodox Calvinists, that "'the surest and most substantial Proof [of salvation] is, *Obedience to the Commandments of God*'" (*Errand* 193), as the evidence of this drift toward an ethical account of religious experience; thus he identified correctly, if he did not describe accurately, the central strand in the development of liberal thought. For Chauncy and his colleagues, religion began to be conceived as a process of character-building, which insisted on the organic connection between the inner experience and the outer act. The obverse of Miller's sense of empty and cautious decorum was an intense concern with character formation, and an insistence that the spirit embodied itself in human acts and human institutions. For Miller, "the heavy stone of dogma . . . had sealed up the mystical springs in the New England character" (*Errand* 197). The liberals had rolled it away, confident that a "code of caution and sobriety" would serve as protection from an excess of freedom. As the liberals themselves saw it, however, they were removing the weight of a dead theology from the souls whose development it had crippled.

Character development, of course, played a very ambiguous role in the development of early nineteenth-century culture as both a theological and social doctrine. Character formation was the chief concern of William Ellery Channing, Henry Ware, Jr., and other key Unitarian thinkers, and they passed this theological legacy in substantial part to Emerson and the Transcendentalists.[7] Unitarianism as a theology was fueled by a resistance to Calvinist dogma on moral grounds, and Chan-

ning quite effectively argued that Calvinist fatalism had a crippling
effect on moral development. Character formation was a fundamental
concern of liberals with a quite different sensibility and world-view, as
the example of Benjamin Franklin will remind us. When taken outside
a theological context, theories of character formation had important
social implications. Franklin's pursuit of the perfect character, with its
mixture of moral and entrepreneurial motives, suggests the ways that
liberal values reinforced the economic aspirations of the rising middle
class. Although Miller was insistent that Puritan Calvinism be inter-
preted seriously as a theology, he tended to see Unitarianism as merely
the religion of the Boston entrepreneurial class. He read the Unitarian
displacement of Calvinism (itself, and famously, the source of capital-
ism) as a masking device for the expansion of commercial values.

Miller linked Edwards to Emerson by arguing that the wellspring of
Puritan mysticism, forced underground by the Arminian rationalists,
bubbled to the surface again in the generation of Emerson: "If the inher-
ent mysticism, the ingrained pantheism, of certain Yankees could not
be stated in the old terms," Miller explained, "it could be couched in
the new terms of transcendental idealism" (*Errand* 197). His explana-
tion of the resurfacing of Puritan mysticism in Transcendentalism does
not account for the tradition of Puritanism after Edwards, a curious and
revealing gap. His remark on the subject, brief though it is, speaks
volumes. "We know," he wrote, "that Edwards failed to revitalize Cal-
vinism" (*Errand* 196). It is an offhand admission that the liberal revolt
against Calvinism was part of a larger structure of cultural change, and
it leaves the inference that the intellectual momentum of the later
eighteenth century was Arminian. This casts a rather different light on
the tradition of "sobriety" and "decorum" that Miller had portrayed,
and suggests that Arminianism itself found, beyond its rejection of Cal-
vinist dogma, a rather compelling mission of its own. After Edwards
the energy of the Calvinist tradition was split between the revivalists
who would transform it from within, and the liberals who would attack
it from without.

The historical irony of Edwards's career is that he unleashed through
the revivals of the Great Awakening the very forces that doomed his
own theology. If the liberals would not live with the implications of
innate depravity and election, the revivalists could not—at least they
could not and stay in business long. As an intellectual historian, Miller

was thus forced to look from Edwards to the next profoundly innovative figure in American thought, Emerson, despite his discomfort with the liberal tradition from which Emerson emerged.

III

Miller defined Emerson as a mystic, and emphasized his break from his Arminian roots. These emphases have until recently defined the place of Transcendentalism in American literary history, and suggest that the deepest implications of Miller's essay were not for Puritan studies, but for the historiography of Transcendentalism. Even as he painted Emerson as Edwards's heir, Miller constantly attempted to distance himself from Emerson's ideas: "The doctrines of the Over-Soul, correspondence, and compensation seem nowadays to add up to shallow optimism and insufferable smugness" (*Errand* 186). He regarded Transcendentalism as a garbled mysticism, weakened by the lack of restraints from Calvinism. The Transcendentalists spoke the language "of Platonism, of Swedenborg, of 'Tintern Abbey' and the Bhagavad-Gita, in the eclectic and polyglot speech of the Over-Soul, in 'Brahma,' in 'Self-Reliance,' in *Nature*" (*Errand* 197). The diffusion of Transcendentalist sources, and their experimentation in styles, in fact among their finest achievements, were aspects of the movement that Miller held at arm's length.

In so diffuse a movement, the goals of which were only dimly recognized by the participants themselves, genesis becomes a central interpretive category. "There is no such thing as a Transcendental *party*; . . . there is no pure Transcendentalist," Emerson wrote in 1841, at the height of the ferment (Emerson 1:205). Wracked themselves by differing temperaments and important divisions on key issues, the Transcendentalists have presented recurring interpretive problems to later readers. Studies of the movement's historical context have thus loomed especially large. Miller's emphasis on Emerson's revival of an Edwardsean strain of mysticism has thus been formative, even though he presented the Transcendentalists as shallow heirs of Edwards:

> The ecstasy and the vision which Calvinists knew only in the moment of vocation, the passing of which left them agonizingly aware of depravity and sin, could become the permanent

joy of those who had put aside the conception of depravity,
and the moments between could be filled no longer with self-
accusation but with praise and wonder. (*Errand* 198)

This liberation from Calvinist dogma was to Miller a reduction of the
gravity of experience. Emerson's mysticism was real, but by comparison
with the Puritans, it was naive. As Donald Weber has shown, Miller
found in Edwards the sense of "critical realism" crucial to the world-
view of twentieth-century neo-orthodoxy, and this trait marked Ed-
wards as a modern (Miller, *Edwards* xix–xx). The lack of precisely this
quality, Miller felt, rendered Emerson a comparative lightweight, with
little sense of the harsh realities of existence.

The most problematic legacy of Miller's interpretation was its almost
exclusive stress on Emerson's mysticism, a stress which implied that
there was little social and political grounding of the Transcendentalist
movement. He did not emphasize the speculative thrust of Emerson's
thought, nor his capacity to meld disparate sources into a working
philosophical stance, nor his stylistic or generic innovations, nor his
ethical emphasis and political concern. While Emerson's ecstatic mo-
ments are surely important, they are part of a much more complex set
of concerns than Miller understood. "Unitarianism had stripped off the
dogmas," Miller said, "and Emerson was free to celebrate purely and
simply the presence of God in the soul and in nature" (*Errand* 198).
But such celebrations in Emerson are never simple. Emerson's essays
suggest that his mystical affirmations were dogged by rational doubts,
ethical constraints, and the frequently baffling absence of the very mys-
ticism that he craved. His journals are further evidence of the complex-
ity of his religious experience. We cannot overlook Emerson's mysti-
cism, but mysticism alone is an interpretive dead end.[8]

Miller's reading thus contributed to the image of Transcendentalism
as a movement beset by other-worldly bedazzlement, a persistent form
of caricature for the movement, but one which obscured some of its key
accomplishments. In particular, it overlooks the strain of intense prag-
matism in the movement, the determination of the Transcendentalists
to translate idealism into a workable philosophy of daily life, work and
vocation, friendship and love, politics and ethics.[9] That Thoreau began
Walden by discussing economy, house-building, and food preparation,
that Emerson wrote on "Friendship," "Politics," and "Domestic Life,"

that Alcott, Peabody, Fuller and others worked for educational reform, that Brownson and W.H. Channing were essentially political theorists—these facts can easily be lost in the otherworldly stereotype of the movement. The question of the relative importance of the mystical and the social orientations of Transcendentalism stands now as a key interpretive issue in Transcendentalist historiography. In fairness, Miller himself later brought much of the political direction of the group into prominence in his influential anthology of Transcendentalist writings, but in "From Edwards to Emerson," that sense of the Transcendentalists as political progressives was almost entirely lost.

Yet Miller did portray Emerson as a rebel, albeit narrowing his rebellion to his Unitarian context, and thus obscuring the significant ways that Transcendentalism was an extension and modification of Unitarianism. As Lawrence Buell has noted, "the rhetoric of the Transcendentalist literati easily yields a myth of revolution against, as opposed to evolution from, its Unitarian background" (Wright 169).[10] This myth, which may have been an essential form of self-conception at certain historical moments in the movement, is much harder to confirm historically. Yet Miller found dramatic appeal in the rebellious Emerson. "In [Emerson's] imagination transcendentalism was a saturnalia of faith," Miller explained, "but in his fancy it was a reaction against Unitarianism and in his understanding a revulsion against commercialism" (*Errand* 198). For Miller, Unitarianism and commercialism were synonyms. "One does not have to be too prone to economic interpretation," he argued, to see the "connection between the Unitarian insistence that matter is substance and not shadow, . . . and the practical interests of the society in which Unitarianism flourished" (*Errand* 199). He followed Emerson in arguing that idealism was not an economically convenient philosophy, and in locating some resistance to it in Boston commercial interests. As he had absorbed Edwards's jeremiads against Arminianism, however, so he had accepted Emerson's rhetorical stance of martyrdom at the hands of vested economic interests. The relationship between Unitarianism and Transcendentalism was much more organic than Miller understood.

The irony of Miller's essay is that it reveals his unrecognized affinity with Andrews Norton, Emerson's Unitarian arch-enemy. While Miller used Norton as the genteel Unitarian strawman against whom he could portray the Transcendentalist revolt, Norton located the very heresies

in Emerson that seemed to bother Miller the most.[11] The Transcendentalist controversy might well have been much less prominent and divisive without Norton. His public alarm at Emerson's "infidelity" did articulate a wider worry within the mainstream of Unitarianism, but it brought more heat to the issue than many Unitarians would have liked. Norton's flair for public drama, almost irresistible to an historian like Miller who thrived on the conflict of ideas, eventually made him seem to be a much more representative spokesman for Unitarianism than he really was. He was an antagonist who made Emerson seem more embattled and thus more sympathetic. Yet for Miller, Norton was a "forthright" man who "could not help perceiving" that Emerson's transparent eyeball passage in *Nature* "was both mysticism and pantheism" (*Errand* 189). Was this intolerance, or was it plain-speaking and common-sense caution? Miller was inclined to draw Norton as both a repressive conservative and a perceptive witness against excess, a division of mind which sprang from his own ambivalence about Emerson, whom he saw partly as a heroic youthful rebel, and partly as a well-meaning but irresponsible charlatan. Norton was a much less representative spokesman for the Unitarian mainstream than Channing, whom Emerson and all his associates continued to revere, or Henry Ware, Jr., who criticized Emerson in more telling and much less strident ways than Norton did.[12]

Unitarianism was more than Boston commercialism, and more than the prickly conservatism of Norton. Almost every principal aspect of Transcendentalist discourse and activity—a mystical emphasis on religious experience, an ethical stress on the cultivation of moral character, a determination to translate religious ideals into political action, and a growing aesthetic-spiritual sensibility—can be found in inchoate or even mature form in the Unitarianism which Emerson himself preached. The real problem for Transcendentalist historiography, when one begins to consider its origins, is not to enumerate the similarities between Transcendentalism and Unitarianism, but to specify the ways in which there were consistent differences.[13]

IV

If we find Emerson by way of Chauncy, what are the implications for a new sense of the Transcendentalist movement? Certainly we will have to affirm Miller's contention that Transcendentalism was at bottom "a

religious demonstration" but not in the sense that he intended it (*Tran-scendentalists* 8). While their training and inclinations were indeed religious, their program was a demonstration of liberal religion, and not the sort of neo-Puritanism that Miller had in mind. The term "religious" is a good deal more complex historically than many students of Transcendentalism, especially those who approach it primarily as a literary movement, have yet realized. When the Arminian legacy is fully understood, the mystical element of the movement can no longer be regarded as a defining tenet, unless one focuses on the problematics as well as the presence of mystical experience. While Miller regarded that Arminian rationalism as an obstacle to the real source of New England spirituality in the Puritan tradition, that tradition was in fact a mode of transmission of New England spirituality to the Transcendentalists, and thus a conditioner of it.[14] Daniel Walker Howe's description of the tradition of pietism in nineteenth-century Unitarianism confirms the continuing presence of a vital form of intense spirituality in the generation before Emerson, and Emerson himself had close association with one of its principal exponents, Henry Ware, Jr. The "mysticism" that we find in Emerson, Thoreau, or Very, is cut from the same cloth as the spiritual intensity of Channing and Ware.

Fundamental to this spirituality was an emphasis on process and dynamism. Puritanism sustained a sense of dynamism through its doctrines of "preparation for grace," a theological stance that carried the seed of later liberal doctrines of character formation.[15] The Arminians stressed moral development, Channing preached self-culture, and Emerson described the expanding circle as the emblem of the growing soul. This was a crucial but nevertheless problematic aspect of Transcendentalist thought, for mysticism implies an achieved and static perfection, while the cultivation of the soul implies the continual need for work toward perfection. Emerson and Thoreau at best achieved a kind of dialectical balance between these two ideas on a metaphysical level. The culture of the soul was also pursued by means of pragmatic action, for Transcendentalism was a philosophy of doing as well as of being. It remains a question of judgment whether the social virtues associated with character formation might be considered subordinate to the orientation toward mysticism in Emerson and other Transcendentalists. The argument for the predominance of mysticism can be more easily made for the Emerson of the late 1830s than for the later Emerson, who

became increasingly concerned with the ethical and social. Much has
already been done to recover the pragmatic side of Transcendentalism,
particularly in its political ramifications, but the more clearly that ac-
tion is seen as an essential expression of the movement's values, the
more the emphasis on mysticism, and a concomitant otherworldliness
will assume its proper proportion.[16] If the Transcendentalists had
abstractly posited the growing soul as a locus of value, moral growth
through pragmatic action remained an essential mode of realization.
Their political positions, their experiments in living, their vocational
choices, and their daily habits all reflect this concern, which must re-
main a definitive element of their interpretation. "The true romance
which the world exists to realize," Emerson wrote, "will be the transfor-
mation of genius into practical power" (3: 49).

Now, almost a half century after the appearance of Miller's essay, it
is easier to see its underlying assumptions, and easier to see Miller
himself as an engaged critic as well as an objective literary historian.
Very much a part of the early twentieth-century revolt against genteel
optimism, and strongly influenced by the stance of "critical realism,"
Miller had read Emerson's attacks on the "Unitarian and commercial
times" (Emerson 1: 206) of the 1840s with sympathy. That Emerson
was able to disconcert the Boston establishment was evidence to Miller
that there was some worth in the Transcendental ferment, though when
he examined its doctrines he was more inclined to be derisive. His
work on the Puritans had taught him to find grounds of sympathy in
figures whose philosophy was alien to him, however, and he seized on
the fact that Edwards and Emerson had found a common enemy in the
tradition of Arminianism. That Emerson had exaggerated that animos-
ity, and that Miller himself failed to understand the complexity of the
tradition he had criticized, was for later students to find.

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                                NOTES

   1. Miller's influence on American literary studies has been immense, and con-
tinues to be so. For an excellent recent assessment of his impact on Puritan studies,
and some revisions of his positions by later scholars, see Wood; for personal assess-
ments of Miller's impact and achievement see Levin and Lynn.
   2. The definitive history of the development of eighteenth-century Arminian-
ism is Wright, The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America.

3. Miller has been much under revision in recent years, but principally in his interpretation of Puritanism. As Lawrence Buell notes, "The newer scholarship has contested Miller in some important respects but on the whole has sustained his contrast between Unitarianism as representing a negative phase of secularization versus Transcendentalism as representing a re-energized expression of Puritan spirit." See Wright, "The Literary Significance of the Unitarian Movement" 169.

4. As Donald Weber has persuasively argued, Miller was influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr and the neo-orthodox movement in twentieth-century American theology. Weber notes Miller's explicit analogy between Edwards's reaction to the eighteenth century, and Niebuhr's reaction to the twentieth century. See Weber's introductory essay, "Perry Miller and the Recovery of Jonathan Edwards," in Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* v–xxix.

5. For Chauncy's dissent, see his *Enthusiasm Describ'd and Cautioned Against* (Boston: 1742); and *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (Boston: 1742). His work is assessed by Wright 36–58; and Griffin.

6. See in particular Wright 59–114. Also illuminating is C. C. Goen's discussion of "The Arminian Threat" in the "Editor's Introduction" to his edition of Edwards, *The Great Awakening*.

7. On the development of the theology of self-culture within Unitarianism, see Robinson, *Apostle of Culture* 7–29.

8. In a recent reading of Emerson, which has had an important impact on Emerson studies, Barbara Packer has explained Emerson's career as a series of overlapping affirmations each with a concomitant version of the "fall," or the inability fully to translate the ideal vision into human life. Her thesis suggests the complexities attendant on any reading of Emerson's religious sensibility. See *Emerson's Fall*.

9. For a particularly persuasive discussion of this aspect of Transcendentalism, see Richardson 47–88. Len Gougeon has recently traced Emerson's deep involvement in the antislavery movement. See *Virtue's Hero*.

10. For influential discussions of the connections of Unitarianism and Transcendentalism, see Hutchison; and Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism*.

11. Norton was a complicated man, and however unsympathetic during the Transcendentalist controversy, has yet be fully understood by historians. For a very illuminating portrait of his early career, see Handlin in Wright 53–85.

12. For an argument that Henry Ware, Jr., was more representative of Unitarian sensibilities at the time of the Transcendentalist controversy, see Robinson, "Poetry, Personality, and the Divinity School Address."

13. There remained a significant epistemological break between the empiricism of many Unitarians and the idealism of the Transcendentalists. Another persuasive explanation of the break, not unrelated to the epistemological shift, focuses on Transcendentalist linguistic innovation. See Gura, *The Wisdom of Words*.

14. I note here Robert Milder's persuasive recent rehabilitation of the idea that Emerson's spiritual experience can be explained through the categories of Puritan spirituality. See "Emerson's Two Conversions." Milder's essay suggests that any reading of Emerson in a Unitarian context cannot overlook the psychological dynamics

of religious conversion as they were understood in the larger Congregational tradi-
tion in New England.

   15. For the definitive discussion of "preparationist" theology, see Pettit, *The
Heart Prepared.*

   16. For overviews of some of this work see Buell, "The Emerson Industry," and
Lopez, "De-Transcendentalizing Emerson."

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