

TRANSLATION AND NATION:
THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY IN THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the significance of translation in the making of American national literature. Translation has played a central role in the formation of American linguistic, literary, cultural, and national identity. The authors of the American Renaissance were multilingual, involved in the cultural task of translation in many different ways. But the importance of translation has been little examined in American literary scholarship, the condition of which has been exclusively monolingual. This study makes clear the following points. First, translation served as an important agency in the building of American national language, literature, and culture. Second, the conception of translation as a means for domesticating foreign influences in antebellum American literary culture was itself a translation of a traditionally European idea of translation since the Renaissance, and more specifically, of the modern German concept of it. Third, despite its ethnocentric, nationalistic, and imperialistic tendency, translation sometimes complicated the identity-formation process. The American Renaissance writers worked in the complex international culture of translation in an age of world literature, a nationalist-cosmopolitan concept that Goethe promoted in the early nineteenth century. Those American authors' texts often take part in and sometimes come up against the violence of translation, which obliterates the marks of otherness in foreign languages and cultures. To elucidate these points, this dissertation focuses mainly on the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville, each of whom embodies some unique characteristics of the American theories and practices of literary and cultural translation in antebellum America.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION:
TRANSLATION AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

Translation played a central role in the formation of American language, literature, culture, and nation in the history of antebellum America. Writers of historical, political, philosophic, scientific, religious, and literary writings since the time of the earliest settlements were polyglot, engaged in the task of translation in many different fields. The list of translators in the early republic includes, to name but a few, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, James Fenimore Cooper, and Washington Irving. The authors of the American Renaissance, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, were also multilingual, involved in the cultural task of translation in their unique ways. But the importance of translation in classic American literature has been little investigated in American literary scholarship, the condition of which has been exclusively monolingual.

As theorists of the nation and nationalism have suggested, language has been an essential constituent for the building of modern nations.¹ In his classic study of nationalism, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, E. J. Hobsbawm stresses that national languages are “almost always semi-artificial constructs and occasionally, like modern Hebrew, virtually invented” (54). In the case of the United States, English became the

¹ For the analyses of the role of vernacular national languages in the formation of modern nations and nationalism, see Hobsbawm 51-63; and Benedict Anderson 67-82.

dominant language very early on. In the course of the country's development from the earliest settlements through independence, English-speaking settlers established ascendancy over non-English-speaking natives and incomers. Consequently, English came to be perceived as the virtual national language. The history of the expansion of US territory roughly coincides with that of the spread of English language.² And, in the making of a national language, translation often served as a means for the domestication of indigenous and immigrant languages, literatures, cultures, and peoples.

It may sound ironic that the founding of classic American literature and culture was inseparably entwined with translation activities. But translation was demanded and provided at varied occasions and locations in antebellum America. Since the "discovery" of America, indeed, translation had been always a necessary tool for European settlers to communicate with aboriginal people as well as other groups of Europeans. The literature on indigenous people written by the Europeans is essentially a work of translation. In their cultural tradition, Native American people did not use alphabetic writing systems.³ The translation of indigenous languages into English and other European languages often involved the problematic politics of assimilation and domestication.⁴ "Virtually all examples of recorded Native American literature prior to the twentieth century were," Eric J. Sundquist argues, "a combination of transcription and translation, with the attendant potential for misrepresentation, intentional or not, that those processes imply"

² In *Imagined Communities*, a classic study of nationalism, Benedict Anderson claims that there is "an almost perfect isomorphism between the stretch of the various empires and that of their vernaculars" (77) in the nation-building projects in the Americas.

³ See Woodsworth, "Translation in North America."

⁴ For example, see Todorov, *The Conquest of America*.

(*Empire and Slavery in American Literature* 89).⁵ Eric Cheyfitz even claims that “translation was, and still is, the central act of European colonization and imperialism in the Americas” (*The Poetics of Imperialism* 104).

Many translation activities since the early colonial period were driven by an evangelical fervor for spreading God’s words and a missionary conviction that God’s truths would eventually transcend all language barriers, which were considered to be inessential but superficial. Edward Gray argues that Protestant missionaries, including John Eliot as a notable example in America, generally believed that “[w]ords were merely the utterances that harbored that [divine] truth, but they in no way determined its meaning” (*New World Babel* 83). As Gray also suggests, this idea of the translatability of divine truth was based “on the Christian assumption that all languages were descended from the same original language given by God to Adam” (24), and “language change was a process of degradation and decay” (24). As I will show in the following chapters, this Protestant view of language and translation was resurrected in the antebellum nationalist cultural movement for making the American language and literature, in which all the literary authors that I refer to as the main subjects of this study more or less participated.

Translation was also practiced widely in the locus of high culture. Since the Renaissance, the reading of Greek and Latin had been considered an invaluable part of higher education in the Humanities. The literacy of Greek and Latin constituted valuable

⁵ In a similar vein, Joshua Bellin claims that “it is imperative to recognize that Indian ‘voices’ in American texts exist in translation,” and “they have been transmitted in an alien modality and languages” and “shaped by the visions and ideologies of Euro-America” (*The Demon of the Continent* 6).

cultural capital for educated classes. Moreover, many modern Western nations have made use of Greek and Latin cultures, literatures, and histories as sources on which their own cultures and histories would be modeled—in much the same way that translations of sacred texts have been made and remade by rulers for the purpose of establishing, exerting, and expanding their powers.⁶ The translation of Greek and Latin literatures and languages into the vernacular was deemed an important cultural task of transporting the mythical authority and sovereignty of the old republic and the old empire onto one's native soil. As John Guillory suggests, “the translation of the ‘classics’ into one’s own vernacular is a powerful institutional buttress of imaginary cultural continuities; it confirms the nationalist agenda by permitting the easy appropriation of texts in foreign languages” (*Cultural Capital* 43). In American colleges, too, standard curricula required students to learn to read, interpret, and translate Greek and Latin writings into English. Thanks to their academic training, average college graduates at that time were much more skilled in the translation of foreign languages than nowadays.

The prevalence of translation was also seen in the sphere of popular culture. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of US political and cultural nationalism and imperialism, later labeled as American exceptionalism. But, on the international level, English was still a minor language, and the United States a minor country. The common language used in international politics in Europe was mostly French in those days. The present-day status of English as a lingua franca was gradually gained along with the expansion of the British colonies through the nineteenth century and sealed by

⁶ For the study of the use of classical literature and the Bible in the founding of German national culture, see Berman. For a thorough analysis of the history of classical education in the US, see Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism*.

US economic, military, political, and cultural hegemony in the twentieth century.⁷ The situation of the international circulation of literatures and languages was not nearly the same as that of today. There was a significant imbalance in the international trade of publications between languages. The translation of foreign texts into English exceeded by far in quantity that of English texts into other languages.⁸ This is almost entirely opposite to the present situation. Translations of foreign texts were popular cultural products for the then-emerging reading public in English-speaking countries. Due to the absence of international copyright laws, numerous European literary works were translated into English, imported oftentimes via Britain and sometimes directly to America. Colleen Glenney Boggs estimates that “translations from languages other than English and reprints of English works jointly held a market share of 70 percent in 1820 and 30 percent in 1850” (*Transnationalism and American Literature* 32).⁹ In the face of pervasive foreign influences, to invent American national identity through the act of translation—to assimilate the oral traditions of indigenous peoples to the written ones of the colonizers and to domesticate other European languages and cultures into their vernacular English—became a daunting challenge in the US nationalist agenda.

In the emergent field of American national literary culture, the influence of German literary culture cannot be overemphasized. An 1840 issue of the *North American Review* reports that “translations from all the distinguished authors, and

⁷ For a sociolinguistic study of the diffusion of English over the world, see Crystal.

⁸ For the minority-status of English language in translation until the mid-nineteenth century, see Hale, “Romanticism and the Victorian Age.” For the present-day hegemony of English language in translation, see Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility* 1-42.

⁹ Also see Boggs, “Translation in the United States” 20.

imitations of every sort, already abound. A German mania prevails . . . manifest[ing] itself not only in poetry, but in various departments of literature and philosophy” (qtd. in Cromphout, *Emerson’s Modernity and the Example of Goethe* 1).¹⁰ The impact of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe on the formation of antebellum American literature, which I discuss in detail in the following chapters, needs a special mention. Goethe celebrated the rise of world literature, “in which an honorable role is reserved for us Germans” (*Essays on Art and Literature* 225).¹¹ This combination of the nationalistic celebration of one’s own language and culture and the cosmopolitan interest in the foreign and the ancient in Goethe’s conception of world literature was transferred to America. Goethe’s example must have suggested a good model for American literary and cultural nationalist movements. American authors learned the way to build up their own vernacular culture through the active translation of foreign literatures and cultures without taking a risk of their own language’s being weakened by too much foreign influence. Moreover, reading Goethe and other German authors, American writers imagined the possibility that the American language would play a central role in different fields of international exchange.

It is, thus, no coincidence that the American Renaissance writers started their literary careers as translators and critics of foreign literatures. Under the strong influence

¹⁰ For the reception of German literature and culture in antebellum America in general, see Pochmann 59-242; and Mueller-Vollmer, “Translating Transcendentalism in New England.”

¹¹ For the influence of Goethe on the authors of the American Renaissance, see Cromphout, *Emerson’s Modernity and the Example of Goethe*; Cromphout, “Melville as Novelist” 32; Boggs, *Transnationalism and American Literature* 91-110; and Zwarg, *Feminist Conversations* 59-96.

of German Romanticism, Transcendentalist writers actively participated in the cultural task of translation. Through his entire life, Ralph Waldo Emerson habitually translated miscellaneous texts from Latin, French, Italian, and German in his journals and used numerous quotes in translation in his writings. *Representative Men* marks his answer to the question of how to confront prevalent foreign influences, a question with which he had long wrestled since “The American Scholar,” as I will discuss in Chapter 2.

Margaret Fuller was also an avid and able translator. Thanks to her father’s enthusiastic homeschooling, she acquired excellent translation skills and a profound knowledge of the classic languages. She also translated various texts from contemporary German works, including Goethe’s, and wrote a number of reviews of translations of historiographical and literary works, publishing them in the *North American Review*, the *Dial*, and other journals.¹² Later in her life, she translated Italian newspaper articles to make reports on the state of affairs in Italy and published them as *Dispatches from Europe* in the *New York Tribune*. Her lost last work was said to be titled *The History of The Roman Republic*, which should have been the culmination of her work as a translator, historian, and literary author. Henry David Thoreau edited and probably translated Eugene Burnouf’s *Introduction a l’Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien* and published part of it as “The Preaching of Buddha” in the *Dial*. He had a life-long interest in world literatures, religions, and philosophies, reading numerous translations about them. He is also said to have attempted some translations from Sanskrit himself.¹³

Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was outside but close to the Transcendentalist circle, also

¹² See Zwarg, *Feminist Conversations* 59-96; Boggs, *Transnationalism and American Literature* 91-111; and Dimock, *Through Other Continents* 52-72.

¹³ See Dimock, *Through Other Continents* 23-4.

read many foreign works of history and literature both in the originals and in translation. His collections of juvenile stories, such as *A Wonder Book (or Wonder-Book) for Girls and Boys* and *Tanglewood Tales*, were adapted from English translations of classical myths. Later in his life, he crossed the Atlantic to stay in Britain, France, and Italy for over six years and was exposed to foreign languages, cultures, and people. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, Hawthorne's works indicate his deep-seated ambivalence about the questions of linguistic and cultural translation, which is carried over to his unfinished romance *Septimius Felton*. Herman Melville, a self-educated novelist who did not go to college, was introduced to translation through a somewhat different channel. While his avid reading introduced him to numerous contemporary translations of European works, his journey to the South Seas as a seaman offered him an invaluable opportunity to have contact with a variety of foreign languages and cultures. From his first publication *Typee* to *Moby-Dick*, all of his early works register his fascination with foreign languages, cultures, and peoples. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, the question of translation continued to occupy a central place in his works, such as *Pierre*, "Benito Cereno," "Bartleby," *Clarel*, and his last story *Billy Budd*.

Translation Studies and American Literary Scholarship

Translation studies for the past two decades have illuminated the ways in which translation functions as an agency of—not always but often ethnocentric, nationalistic, colonialistic, and imperialistic—monolingualist ideologies. Lawrence Venuti traces the dominant discourse of fluency in English translation back to the seventeenth century and reveals the invisible workings of Anglo-American ethnocentrism, nationalism, and

imperialism in various literary translations into English. He claims that “the translator’s invisibility at once enacts and masks an insidious domestication of foreign texts, rewriting them in the transparent discourse that prevails in English and that selects precisely those foreign texts amenable to fluent translating” (*The Translator’s Invisibility* 17), adding: “The translator’s invisibility is symptomatic of a complacency in Anglo-American relations with cultural others, a complacency that can be described—without too much exaggeration—as imperialistic abroad and xenophobic at home” (17). From a similar but more specifically feminist and postcolonialist perspective, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls our attention to the colonialist and imperialist ideologies implicit in today’s quick and easy translations from third world women’s non-English writings, which often ignore the cultural, linguistic, and rhetorical particularities—“the mark of *untranslatability*” (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 195)—of those texts.¹⁴

As opposed to this violent translation of other languages and cultures, some translation theorists have explored what they call the ethics of translation. In the oft-cited essay “Des Tours de Babel”—which is based on Walter Benjamin’s influential essay, “The Task of the Translator”—Jacques Derrida compares translation to marriage, saying that “a translation espouses the original when the two adjoined fragments, as different as they can be, complete each other so as to form a larger tongue in the course of a *sur-vival* that changes them both” (190-91). According to Derrida, or Benjamin translated by him, in an ideal translation “the native tongue of the translator” “is altered

¹⁴ Also see Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* 179-200; and Spivak, “Acting Bits/ Identity Talk.”

as well,” and “the original becomes larger; it grows rather than reproduces itself . . . like a child” (191). Drawing on Benjamin, Derrida, and the German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher, Antoine Berman defines “bad translation” as that “which, generally under the guise of transmissibility, carries out a systematic negation of the strangeness of the foreign work” (*The Experience of the Foreign* 5). But “the ethical aim of translating,” which he claims is “the essence of translation,” is “to be an opening, a dialogue, a crossbreeding, a decentering” (4). Based on Berman’s concept of ethical translation, Venuti also distinguishes “a domesticating method [of translation], an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values” from “a foreignizing method, an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad” (*The Translator’s Invisibility* 20). Following Berman’s lead, Venuti claims that “insofar as foreignizing translation seeks to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation, it is highly desirable today,” and “[f]oreignizing translation in English can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical-relations” (20).¹⁵

But to categorize literary authors and translators in antebellum America as ethically right and wrong from our present point of view would be anything but my goal. Nor do I believe it is easy to make a clear-cut distinction between domesticating and

¹⁵ In *Scandals of Translation*, Venuti also uses the term “minoritizing translation,” based on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “minor literature,” saying: “Good translation is minoritizing: it releases the remainder [of the foreign] by cultivating a heterogeneous discourse, opening up the standard dialect and literary canons to what is foreign to themselves, to the substandard and the marginal” (11).

foreignizing translations in theory or practice.¹⁶ Rather, this study attempts to reconceive translation as a textual space of conflicts and tensions between different languages and cultures—a “translation zone,” in Emily Apter’s term, a site “in-translation,” “belonging to no single, discrete language or single medium of communication” (*The Translation Zone* 6)—which is also similar to a “contact zone,” in Mary Louise Pratt’s term, “where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination, such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (*Imperial Eyes* 7). By resituating the literary works of the American Renaissance in the complex transnational matrix of translation and modern Euro-American cultural nationalism and imperialism, I will illuminate the specific ways in which those literary authors responded to the theories and practices of translation widespread in Antebellum America. The American Renaissance authors, directly or indirectly, shared in the cultural task of translation. In their responses to contemporary theories and practices of translation, they oscillated between the violence of translation and the ethics of it. Their relations to translation were often ambivalent and sometimes contradictory. They

¹⁶ Some scholars have criticized Venuti’s dualistic formulation of foreignizing and domesticating translations. For example, see Boyden, “Language Politics, Translation, and American Literary History”; and Delisle and Woodsworth 229-44. Venuti himself admits the difficulty of applying such a simple differentiation to actual cases, saying: “Whether the effects of a translation prove to be conservative or transgressive depends fundamentally on the discursive strategies developed by the translator, but also on the various factors in their reception, including the page design and cover art of the printed book, the advertising copy, the opinions of reviewers, and the uses made of the translation in cultural and social institutions, how it is read and taught” (*Scandals of Translation* 68).

labored to domesticate other literatures, cultures, and histories, using them as a model on which to establish American cultural identity. But at other times they also applied to their works, intentionally or unintentionally, what would be called foreignizing translation, which calls into question the ethnocentric, nationalistic, and imperialistic political tendencies inherent in the act of translation.

While I think that Venuti's concepts of foreignizing and domesticating translations can serve as a good theoretical model for critiquing the political and ethical issues of linguistic and cultural translation, I should also reemphasize the importance of the Benjamin-Derrida line of argument. We tend to consider translation to be a simple act of translating a language into another. In this definition of translation, we presuppose the existence of self-evident differences between one language and another. On the Benjamin-Derrida model, on the other hand, translation comes before linguistic differences. Translation is a performative act that actually invents the differences between languages, making the differences look as if they have originally and essentially existed. Translation is the very site for producing differences. In this vein, Homi Bhabha's call for rereading Benjamin's above-mentioned essay, "The Task of the Translator," as "a theory of cultural difference" (*The Location of Culture* 235), can help expound the meaning that I assign to "translation" in this study. The ultimate aim of translation in Bhabha's reading of Benjamin is to "makes all cultural languages 'foreign' to themselves" (235): "In the act of translation the 'given' content becomes alien and estranged; and that, in its turn, leaves the language of translation Aufgabe [task], always confronted by its double, the untranslatable—alien and foreign" (235).

I submit this study as a modest proposal for the application of translation theories

to reading classic American literature. By “translation” I do not only mean translation proper, that is, the pure linguistic aspects of translating. To conduct a detailed comparative study of translated texts in antebellum America would be far beyond the scope of this study. Nor do I intend to establish a sweeping meta-narrative on translation in the United States, which also seems far beyond my capacity. According to Noah Webster’s *An American Dictionary of English Language*, the first comprehensive dictionary of American English, the verb “translate” is defined as: 1) to “bear, carry or remove from one place to another”; 2) to “remove or convey to heaven, as a human being, without death”; 3) to “transfer; to convey from one to another; 4) to “cause to remove from one part of the body to another; as, to translate a disease”; 5) to “change”; 6) to “interpret; to render into another language; to express the sense of one language in the words of another”; 7) to “explain.”¹⁷ The latitude of Webster’s definition of translation suggests that the general concept of translation in the early nineteenth century was not as limited to the mere linguistic transference of words from a language into another as in the present day. Tracing back to Webster’s conception of the term, this study seeks to illuminate the cultural and the historical as well as the linguistic aspects of translation.

For the past few decades, we have seen the upsurge of new Americanist literary studies conducted from transnational, transatlantic, postcolonial, postnational, hemispheric, planetary, and world-literary perspectives.¹⁸ But, despite (or because of)

¹⁷ There are numerous versions and editions of Webster’s *American Dictionary*. In this dissertation, I refer to the first edition published in 1828 in two volumes.

¹⁸ Paul Giles’s works have shown how productive American (and British) literary studies can be by introducing transatlantic perspectives to analyzing literary texts. See

our ever-increasing interest in the borderless literary studies, we still do not have many studies focused on the American Renaissance writers' works in this relatively new light.¹⁹ In *European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance*, one of the earliest examples of transatlantic American literary studies, Larry Reynolds illustrates the ways in which the European revolutions in 1848-49 influenced the shaping of the American Renaissance. He argues that "the critical tradition in American literary studies has emphasized the national features of the literature it has treated, thus obscuring the substantial international influences" (xii). Reynolds's point here resonates with above-mentioned translation theorists' complaint about the nonexistent status of translations and translators in modern literary histories. In *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, one of the earliest works of contemporary translation studies, André Lefevere argues that "[l]iterary histories, as they have been written until recently, have had little or no time for translations, since for the literary historian translation has had to do with 'language' only, not with literature," which exhibits "another outgrowth of 'monolingualization' of literary history by Romantic historiographers intent on creating 'national' literatures preferably as uncontaminated as possible by foreign influences" (39). It is still surprising how long American literary

especially *Transatlantic Insurrections*; *Virtual Americas*; and *The Global Remapping of American Literature*. Dimock's monograph *Through Other Continents* and her coedited book *Shades of the Planet* present a much larger-scaled and less specific reconsideration of American literature from planetary perspectives.

¹⁹ Lawrence Buell also emphasizes the importance of reading antebellum American literature in terms of what he calls "postcolonial anxiety" ("Melville and the Question of American Decolonization" 217). For a recent example of the study in this vein dedicated to a single author's works, see Berthold, *American Risorgimento*.

scholarship has ignored the crucial role that translation must have played in the formation of American national literature, culture, and history. The problem is that classic American literary authors, the object of our study, are in some ways the very “Romantic historiographers” who contributed to the invention of national cultural identity. Consequently, we have recurrently ended up in a tautological celebration of American cultural exceptionalism. But we should remember that national exceptionalism is not unique, but foundational in the shaping of national identity, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter 2. And the obscuration of translation—the monolingualization of a nation’s (literary) history—is a necessary process for the obliteration of omnipresent foreign influences.²⁰

While scholars of comparative literature have been active in translation studies, few Americanists have paid attention to the issue of translation in classic American literature. Eric Cheyfitz’s *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan* is one of the earliest studies on the crucial role that translators played in the colonization and imperialistic expansion of the United States. In investigating a variety of texts from *The Tempest* to *Tarzan*, Cheyfitz illuminates the ways in which US imperialism “historically has functioned (and continues to function) by substituting for the difficult politics of translation” that encourage dialogues between different cultures “another politics of translation that represses these difficulties” (xxii). While I mostly agree with his powerful thesis that “translation was, and still is, the central act of European colonization and imperialism in the Americas” (104), I would

²⁰ For the contribution of translators in the development of national identities in the Dutch Republic, Ireland, Scotland, Argentina, Cameroon, and other African nations, see Delisle and Woodsworth, *Translators through History* 67-100.

rather complicate his argument by showing that not all translations necessarily end up in the monological and monolingual assimilation of others in my reading of the American Renaissance writers' works.

Wai Chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* deals with a topic slightly similar to Cheyfitz's. Dimock traces the influence of foreign literatures on American literature, and vice versa, back to ancient world histories, proposing the new concept "deep time" to highlight "a set of longitudinal frames, at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and binding continents and millennia into many loops of relations, a densely interactive fabric" (3-4). Obviously, my research is conducted on a much smaller scale, focused on (but not limited to) the influence of modern German theories and practices of translation on the shaping of the American literary Renaissance, which Dimock mentions at some points but does not explore in detail. Dimock is right in pointing out that American transcendentalists, like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Henry David Thoreau, are all enthusiastic translators of foreign literatures. But she does not consider the role that their translation activities may have played in the promotion of American nationalist and imperialist causes. As Paola Gemme suggests, it would be hard to ignore the correlation between Fuller's version of the history of the Italian Revolution portrayed in her *Dispatches from Europe* and her nationalist idea of the United States as the vanguard of universal world history, which Sacvan Bercovitch calls "American Jeremiad."²¹ Nor does it seem possible to entirely deny the affinity of Emerson's universalist view of world histories and religions with the antebellum expansionist discourse called Manifest Destiny. Some

²¹ See Gemme 89-106. Also See Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*.

of us may well have a misgiving that Dimock's repositioning of American literary authors as part of world literature might be a new model of cultural imperialism that seems to come hand in hand with the expansion of global capitalism. This reminds us, for example, of "world music," a music genre popular in the US music industry since the 1980s. It is true that American writers created their works under the strong influence of other world literatures and cultures. But she quickly bypasses the problems of domesticating translation possibly inherent in any cultural encounter, especially in an asymmetric power relation between one culture and another.²²

In this connection, it should be noted that Dimock's use of the word "planetarity" significantly differs from that of Spivak, from whom Dimock originally borrows the term. Spivak says that "planetarity" is "perhaps best imagined from the precapitalist

²² I am not alone in addressing an objection to Dimock's method of study. Trish Loughran says:

But does [Dimock's] model of transhistorical, deterritorialized community differ from the nineteenth century's own faith in the ability of texts to erase the claims of spatial and/or temporal distance—and if so, how? On this question, Dimock is quiet, and she is quiet in large part because she is not measuring the distance between diverse sites so much as teleporting between each one instantaneously. ("Transcendental Islam" 59)

Paul Giles's comment, which Loughran also mentions, summarizes the problem of the excessive optimism prevalent in recent "hemispheric" literary studies, which is indeed "simply replacing nationalist essentialism predicated upon state autonomy with a geographical essentialism predicated on physical contiguity" ("Commentary: Hemispheric Partiality" 649). Giles's statement also resonates with Emily Apter's comment about the recent revival of world literature, that she has "serious reservations about tendencies in World Literature toward reflexive endorsement of cultural equivalence and substitutability, or toward the celebration of nationally and ethnically branded 'differences' that have been niche-marketed as commercialized 'identities'" (*Against World Literature* 2).

cultures of the planet,” and “[the planet’s] alterity, determining experience, is mysterious and discontinuous—an experience of the impossible” (*Death of a Discipline* 101-2). The scope of Spivak’s argument is no less planetary than that of Dimock. But as her reading of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* suggests, Spivak’s study is rather focused on the continuity between varied traumatic historical events in the diaspora that happen in different times and spaces.²³ Spivak also claims that a “death in the birth of a story” in a diasporic experience “is not to translate or pass on,” and is, “therefore, an aporia or unbridgeable gulf,” going on to say: “Yet it is passed on, with the mark of untranslatability on it” (“Acting Bits/ Identity Talk” 792). With this attention to the untranslatable, Spivak’s view of translation makes a stark contrast with Dimock’s cosmopolitan optimism, which presupposes the possibility of the easy transcendence of language barriers in translation. In this sense, my position is slightly closer to that of Spivak than to that of Dimock. And my aim is much more modest and less ambitious than that of Dimock. I would rather complicate Dimock’s argument by considering specifically the ethical problem of translation, the politics of translation, and the context of translation within which antebellum American literary authors engaged in the act of translation. In other words, I do not wish to erase national boundaries in literary studies (or in the actual world) at one magic brush, but to foreignize American literature from within the demarcation of it.

Colleen Glenney Boggs’s *Transnationalism and American Literature* will be a good model for the present project.²⁴ I share a lot with her main thesis that “American

²³ See Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* 88-90.

²⁴ For another example of discovering the multilinguality of nineteenth-century American literary history, see Rosenwald, *Multilingual America*. In Ch.1 of the book, he analyzes the translation strategy in Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*.

writers conceptualized and practiced translation as American literature, and vice versa, that they understood American literature as a form of writing that was always in translation” (6). But at the same time I disagree with her statement that “English did not take precedence over or erase those other languages, but functioned as a *lingua franca* that facilitated their coexistence in a fractured transatlantic nation” (6). We might well wonder if there might not be many indigenous languages that have already disappeared as a result of English linguistic imperialism in America. It is worth noting that her argument about the *lingua franca* status of English in America seems almost identical with the nationalist-cosmopolitan rhetoric that Goethe in Germany and Emerson in America employed, which I discuss in the following chapters.

Also, my reading of some individual texts will significantly differ from that of Boggs. For example, her reading of Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* rests firmly on Bercovitch’s powerful formulation of the American literary canon as an agent of American liberal nationalist ideology.²⁵ But, carefully read, Hawthorne’s text often deconstructs itself, revealing the workings of such nationalist ideology. The problem of Boggs’s formula is that despite her objection to the ontological understanding of language, her analysis of literary works often ends up being ontological. By highlighting the multilingualness of some relatively unknown works and the monolingualness of some canonical works, Boggs implicitly privileges multilingualism over monolingualism. Consequently, she ends up reifying the differences between one language and another, falling into linguistic essentialism, which her argument initially intended to avoid. What is even more ironic in Boggs’s argument is that she presents only in English her critique

²⁵ See Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent* 194-245; and *The Office of The Scarlet Letter*.

of English monolingualism in some American literary authors' works.²⁶ When it comes to language, we cannot escape the fundamental contradiction between what we say and what we do, which Joshua Miller calls "the tautological conundrum that the only way to problematize language is with language itself" ("American Languages" 127). As I will suggest in Chapter 3, Hawthorne indeed foregrounds this aporia of language in his allegedly monolingual and monolingualist writings.

What I attempt in this study is to deconstruct the self-same identity of a language and illuminate the process of the identification, pointing out the violence inherent in the differentiation of one language from another through the task of translation. What is at stake is, therefore, not necessarily the distinction between the multilingual and the monolingual. Theoretically, there is no great difference between multilingualism and monolingualism in that both positions tend to presuppose the identity of a language as something natural and essential. This study rather aims to trace in antebellum literary texts what Gilles Deleuze calls "a foreign language within language," which is "neither another language nor a rediscovered patois, but a becoming-other of language, a minorization of this major language" (*Essays Critical and Clinical* 5). At several crucial moments in Deleuze's (and his sometime co-author Felix Guattari's) concept of what

²⁶ Boggs writes: "The efficacy of Hawthorne's linguistic construct depends on the transparency of his language, which does not acknowledge the presence of competing languages in the American scene and thereby naturalizes English as *the* language, that is, as the *only* language of American literature" (10). You could easily rewrite the passage: "The efficacy of Boggs's linguistic construct depends on the transparency of her language, which does not acknowledge the presence of competing languages in the American scene and thereby naturalizes English as *the* language, that is, as the *only* language of American literary scholarship." And the same goes for my argument, which is presented only in English here.

literature is and does, works of American literature—most notably of Herman Melville, an American counterpart of Franz Kafka—figure as an exemplar of “minor literature.” But Deleuze’s numerous fragmentary texts on American literature have been rarely mentioned in American literature proper. While some Deleuzian terms, such as “deterritorialization,” have been widely used for the past few decades, the name of the French philosopher still remains relatively minor in today’s American literary scholarship. What perplexes American literary scholars, especially in the US, is perhaps Deleuze’s (and Guattari’s) idea of the minor. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor*

Literature, Deleuze and Guattari ask:

How many people today live in a language that is not their own? Or no longer, or not yet, even know their own and know poorly the major language that they are forced to serve? This is the problem of immigrants, and especially of their children, the problem of minorities, the problem of a minor literature, but also a problem for all of us: how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one’s own language?

Kafka answers: steal the baby from its crib, walk the tightrope. (19)

For Deleuze (and Guattari), the status of a minority is something one becomes, not necessarily something one is. This would sound hardly acceptable or even understandable in the US cultural context in which a minority people (in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and so forth) are identified as essentially and ontologically a group of minorities. To be a minority is always a matter of being, not of becoming. The identity politics, or what is otherwise called the politics of recognition, is infiltrated into every

corner of American culture, not to mention American literary scholarship. While Deleuze's high praise of American literature can slightly flatter American people's nationalistic pride, many US scholars of American literature might be perplexed about how to respond to the French philosopher's peculiar comment. Deleuze himself did not extend his contemplation of American literature as a "minor literature" to any thorough analyses of actual American author's works.²⁷ In this study, I will try exploring for the traces of foreign languages within language "always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed" (*Essays Critical and Clinical* 1) that haunt antebellum American literary works. Thus, this study seeks to reconsider the American Renaissance as a space of tensions and conflicts between a monolingualist tendency to territoriarize and essentialize language, culture, and the nation and a (not necessarily multilingual) anti-monolingual inclination to deessentialize and deterritoriarize them.

Having argued against linguistic essentialism, I do not mean to ignore the earnest efforts to preserve minor languages disappearing on an everyday basis or to rediscover already extinct languages.²⁸ Neither do I intend to denounce any minority groups or

²⁷ For examples of Deleuze's analysis of some American literary works, see Ch. 8 on Whitman and Ch. 10 on Melville in *Essays Critical and Clinical*.

²⁸ For an example of the recent attempts to rediscover multilingual literatures of America, see Shell and Sollors (eds.), *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature*. Sollors, one of the editors of the book, encourages us to reconsider what "American literature" is, saying:

The disappearance of non-English texts written or published in the United States is a loss of more than antiquarian significance. Reading, rereading, studying, and discussing these works should bring about a much-needed reorientation in historical consciousness and, both in popular debates and in the specialized

individuals fighting for their linguistic, cultural, or any fundamental human rights in the US or elsewhere. Unfortunately, this study does not present a solution to the difficult problems of endangered languages, cultures, or peoples in the world. But I do hope that this study of translation, language, literature, and culture side by side with monolingualism, nationalism, and universalism in the US will be a case study for considering the ideal conditions under which the preservation of the minor might be possible. Here I borrow linguist David Crystal's words: "I believe in the fundamental value of multilingualism, as an amazing world resource which presents us with different perspectives and insights, and thus enables us to reach a more profound understanding of the nature of the human mind and spirit" and "I believe in the fundamental value of a common language, as an amazing world resource which presents us with unprecedented possibilities for mutual understanding, and thus enables us to find fresh opportunities for international cooperation" (*English as a Global Language* xiii). Also, I agree with Crystal that we "need to take both principles on board if we are to make any progress towards the kind of peaceful and tolerant society which most people dream about" (xiv), which, as I will show in the following chapters, the authors of the American Renaissance also dreamed about in their ways. As an American literary scholar who was born and lives in a foreign country and rarely speaks English in one's everyday life, I believe that writing about all these issues in English—the most common language in the world as of now—as well as in Japanese—my mother tongue, whose status is relatively minor, but not so minor in terms of the size of its population—will be a small contribution toward

approaches of many academic fields, a contemporary understanding of the United States as a multilingual country. ("Introduction" 10).

My argument clearly overlaps with Sollors's point.

the realization of the society supported by the two principles that Crystal advocates.

But, eventually, the main idea of this study might not be really new at all if we go back to the point of the original conception of the term “the American Renaissance.” Paul Giles reminds us that F. O. Matthiessen’s second book, based on his doctoral dissertation, was titled *Translation: An Elizabethan Art*. Giles notes that it is “not difficult to see a thematic link between this book, where Matthiessen describes how classical literature is reworked through English diction, and the narrative direction of American Renaissance ten years later, where he argues that the nationalist energy associated with the style of the English literary Renaissance has found a new incarnation in mid-nineteenth-century America” (*Transnationalism in Practice* 144). The purpose of this study is, in a sense, to reintroduce the comparative perspective of reading classic American literature that Matthiessen attempted to employ but did not fully develop for some private and institutional reasons within the ideological constraints of US Cold-War cultural politics.²⁹

To summarize my argument, first, translation has served as an important agency in the building of antebellum American national literature, culture, and identity. Second, the use of translation as a tool for domesticating foreign influences in antebellum American literary culture was itself a translation of a traditionally European idea of translation since the Renaissance, and more specifically, of the modern German conception of translation. Third, despite its ethnocentric, nationalistic, and imperialistic tendency, translation sometimes complicated the nation-building process. The American Renaissance writers worked in the complex matrix of translation. Their texts at some

²⁹ See Giles, *Transnationalism in Practice* 141-51.

times take part in and at other times stand against the violence of translation. To elucidate these points, this study will focus mainly on the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville, each of whom embodies the unique characteristics of American theories and practices of literary and cultural translation at that time. Finally, I hope that the examination of these authors' fascination and wrestling with the question of translation will be a test case for our own issues of language and society in an ever-globalizing world.

CHAPTER II

“ARISTOPHANES & HAFIZ & RABLAIS FULL OF AMERICAN HISTORY: EMERSON, TRANSLATION, TRANSNATION, AND TRANSCENDENCE

In the essay “Books” in *Society and Solitude*, published in 1870, Emerson writes: “I do not hesitate to read all the books I have named, and all good books, in translations. What is really best in any book is translatable, —any real insight or broad human sentiment” (*The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* 7: 103).¹ He continues:

I rarely read any Latin, Greek, German, Italian, sometimes not a French book in the original, which I can procure in a good version. I like to be beholden to the great metropolitan English speech, the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven. I should as soon think of swimming across Charles River, when I wish to go to Boston, as of reading all my books in originals, when I have them rendered for me in my mother tongue. (*CW* 7: 103)²

¹ The original essay was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in January 1858. For a detailed genealogy of the essay, see *CW* 7 xix-xxi. *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* is abbreviated to *CW* hereafter. I have discussed some points in this section in my paper written in Japanese, “Birudung to Choetsu.”

² Emerson originally wrote almost the same passage in a journal entry on 23 March 23, 1843:

I thank the translators & it is never my practice to read any Latin, Greek, German, Italian, scarcely any French book, in the original which I can procure in an English translation. I like to be beholden to the great metropolitan English speech [,] the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven, the Rome of nations, and I should think it in me as much folly to read all my books in originals when I have them rendered <in>for me in my mother’s speech by men who have given years to that labor, as I should to swim across Charles River when ever I

Emerson's comment on translation here manifests his trust in the essential translatability of any language and the capacity of English for appropriating other languages and cultures as well as, arguably, his tacit embrace of cultural colonialism and linguistic imperialism. As is well-known, Emerson was committed to celebrating the rise of the English language and American literature. Through his long career, he was at once the witness and the promoter of the nationalist movement to win the cultural independence of America. In the famous essay "Self-Reliance," he complains about the cultural dependence of his country on old and foreign models: "We imitate; and what is imitation but the travelling of the mind? Our houses are built with foreign taste; our shelves are garnished with foreign ornaments; our opinions, our tastes, our faculties, lean, and follow the Past and the Distant" (*Essays: First and Second Series* 278).³ His trajectory as a representative American public intellectual traces both his individual and the country's collective desire to establish a new national culture and history through the translation of old and foreign ones.

It is ironic that Emerson's call for establishing an entirely new national culture and history is itself a translation of modern German theories of translation, advocated most famously by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In Johann Peter Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe in the Last Years of His Life*, which Margaret Fuller translated from German, the author records Goethe's words in his conversation with a young English engineer officer: "But, as I said before, you young Englishmen do well to come to us and learn

wished to go to Charlestown. (*The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* 8: 357). *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* is abbreviated to *JMN* hereafter.

³ *Essays: First and Second Series* is abbreviated to *E* hereafter.

our language; for, not only does our own literature merit attention, but no one can deny that he who knows German can dispense with many other languages” (121). While Goethe concedes that French “cannot be dispensed with; for it is the language of conversation, and essential to comfort in travelling, as everybody understands it, and in all countries it serves you instead of an interpreter” (121), he continues:

But, as for Greek, Latin, Italian, and Spanish, we can read the best works of those nations in such excellent German translations that, unless we have some particular object in view, we may well dispense with spending much time upon the toilsome study of their languages. It is the German nature duly to honor every thing produced by other nations, and to sympathize fully with what is foreign. This, with great flexibility of our language, makes German translations both faithful and complete. And you get a great deal from a good translation. (121-22)

Goethe’s concept of translation as an adequate means of understanding other cultures represents a crucial aspect of modern German translation, which he characterizes as at once cosmopolitan and nationalistic, universal and particular. Emerson’s statement above should be also read as an Anglo-American version of this popular idea of translation. In much the same way as Goethe celebrates the rise of the German language, Emerson glorifies the ascendancy of English, which he believed would soon take the place of lingua franca that other Old World languages once occupied.⁴

Like many young people of the educated classes in Europe and America from the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, Emerson conducted his Grand

⁴ For a study of Goethe’s influence on Emerson, see Cromphout, *Emerson’s Modernity and the Example of Goethe*.

Tour to Italy, though he followed a somewhat reverse route, starting from southern Italy and arriving in northern Britain. This trip allowed him to experience foreign cultures and review himself, his culture, and his mother tongue from an outsider's perspective, "which new sides of the panorama shall call forth in" him (*JMN* 4 68). At the port of Malta, he was excited at the sight of "the wildest masquerade," saying: "There jabbered Turks, Moors, Sicilians, Germans, Greeks, English, Maltese, with friars & guards & maimed & beggars. And such grotesque faces! . . . The human family can seldom see their own differences of color & form so sharply contrasted as in this house" (*JMN* 4 116). But at the same time he became aware of his own provincial mindset at the international port town, noticing that "all the curiosity manifested was on our part," and his "cousins of Asia & Europe did not pay us the complement of a second glance" (*JMN* 4 116). He got acquainted with a group of English residents in Malta who were engaged in the translation and publication of the Bible and other English texts "in modern Greek, in Italian, in Armenian, & Turkish" (*JMN* 4 118), witnessing an actual scene of translation in a global context. He also heard about a stipulation in the island under the British rule that "the scriptures should not be printed in the Maltese," observing English linguistic imperialism in embryo, supported by a monolingual policy. Although he was disappointed at his poor command of foreign languages, he sometimes enjoyed conversations with local people in his "bad Italian" (*JMN* 4 133). Watching all other tourists speaking "alternately French, Spanish, & Italian," he realized the minority status of English in southern Europe and concluded that a traveler "should speak all the four" (*JMN* 4 139). Along with this observation, he also had a feeling of the cultural inferiority of his own country, that art "was born in Europe & will not cross the ocean" (*JMN* 4

139).

As Emerson traveled through Italy, a sense of uneasiness about being in a foreign country gradually overtook his initial excitement about the strange land, people, culture, and languages. He was apparently disillusioned about Naples and Rome seething with tourists, beggars, and thieves, saying: “I had thought in my young days that this picture & one or two more were to surprise me with a blaze of beauty . . . but this familiar simple home-speaking countenance I did not expect” (*JMN* 4 153). Neither was he very much impressed by the Pope’s ceremony at the Vatican, writing: “All this pomp is conventional. . . . [T]o the eye of an Indian I am afraid it would be ridiculous. There is no true majesty in all this millinery & imbecility. Why not devise ceremonies that shall be in as good & manly taste as their churches & pictures & music” (*JMN* 4 153). It is noteworthy that in expressing his anti-Catholic sentiment, this Unitarian minister identifies with “an Indian” to denounce the traditional Catholic ceremony for its lack of “good and manly taste.” The appropriation of Indianness to emphasize American Protestant identity as opposed to Europe can be read as a small example of nationalist cultural rhetoric at the time. Meanwhile, he was repelled by the vulgar commercial tourism in Italy, which he saw inextricably entwined with the Catholic Church, exclaiming: “These beggarly Italians! . . . [I]f you are presented to the Pope, it costs you five dollars” (*JMN* 4 154). He often felt more comfortable with his “countrymen & country women,” who are “so civil & social,” and quite lonely when they were gone (*JMN* 4 158). He was frustrated by his slow progress in his learning of Italian, writing: “No man should travel until he has learned the language of the country he visits. Otherwise he voluntarily makes himself a great baby—so helpless & so ridiculous”

(*JMN* 4 161). In Passignano, a small town near Perugia, he was pleased by “the clear pleasant air which savors more of New England than of Italy” (*JMN* 4 179). By encountering other cultures, Emerson discovered his American identity. Toward the end of the journey, he seems to have had a growing conviction that “[t]raveling is a fool’s paradise,” which he would later write in “Self-Reliance” (*E* 278).⁵

During the trip in Italy, Emerson carried Goethe’s *Italienische Reise*, or *Italian Journey*, in his bag and often consulted it as a guidebook of Italy and a textbook of German.⁶ It is understandable that Goethe supplied a good model for Emerson and many New England literary authors engaged in the project of American cultural independence, of building one’s own language and culture by appropriating and domesticating others. As Gail Finney suggests, “without a national literary canon and a national style, in the face of what was perceived as the poverty of German history and the resulting scarcity of national themes, Goethe and his contemporaries were forced to be eclectic, to look to other nations and eras for their subjects, for instance to classical

⁵ In the passage following this sentence, Emerson reflects on his entire trip in Italy, writing:

Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of places. At home I dream that at Naples, at Rome, I can be intoxicated with beauty, and lose my sadness. I pack my trunk, embrace my friends, embark on the sea, and at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from. I seek the Vatican, and the palaces. I affect to be intoxicated with sights and suggestions, but I am not intoxicated. My giant goes with me wherever I go” (*E* 278).

Here we can see Emerson’s experience of the foreign rather solidify “the sad self, unrelenting, identical”—the self which is at once individual and collective.

⁶ See *JMN* IV 178, n. 34.

Greek and Latin models” (262).⁷ Emerson saw in Goethe’s Germany a reflection of his own country lacking a national culture and a national tradition. In “Goethe; or the Writer,” included in *Representative Men*, Emerson commends the German author in that “[h]e lived in a small town, in a petty state, in a defeated state, and in a time when Germany played no such leading part in the world’s affairs as to swell the bosom of her sons with any metropolitan pride”; yet “there is no trace of provincial limitation in his muse” (E 751). The story of Goethe’s rise from a provincial writer to a world-famous literary genius may well have served as an exemplar for the producers of American literature and culture, bitterly conscious of their own minority status in the world, especially if they lived in provincial Concord.

We can further explore the influence of the German concept of translation in the formation of American literature in a wider context. The significance of translation in modern Germany is not limited to its mere linguistic aspects. In *The Experience of the Foreign*, Antoine Berman points out the structural sameness between the concept of translation and that of “Bildung,” a well-known German term that generally means “culture” and, in its broader sense, connotes “formation,” “development,” and “education.” Bildung, according to Berman, “is a process, as well as its result,” through which “an individual, a people, a nation, but also a language, a literature, a work of art in general are formed and thus acquire a form, a *Bild*” (43-4). Bildung is also defined as part of “experience,” “Erfahrung” in German. The word “Erfahrung” implies not only “a passage from the particular to the universal” (44) but also “the formation of self through

⁷ Damrosch also points out that “Goethe has an uneasy sense that German culture is provincial, lacking a great history, lacking political unity” (*What is World Literature?* 8).

the experience” of “the *alterity of the world*” (45), which “must finally emerge as reunion, identity, unity supreme though delayed moment” (45). The structural sameness between Bildung and translation is that in both cases one departs “from what is one’s own, the same (the known, the quotidian, the familiar), in order to go towards the foreign, the other (the unknown, the miraculous, the Unheimliche), and, starting from this experience, to return to its point of departure” (46). The concept of translation as a cyclical movement thus covers a series of other “trans-lations” conducted in Germany from the late-eighteenth century through the nineteenth century, such as “the rise of folklore, of great national dictionaries, of literary and art criticism” and “even the memorable travels of Alexander von Humboldt” (47).⁸ We can see similar developments, including Emerson’s trip to Europe, happening in early-nineteenth-century America.

Emerson adapted the German idea of translation as a means for Bildung to the making of American literature and culture. Through his long career, he habitually translated miscellaneous texts from Latin, French, Italian, and German in his journals, using numerous quotes in translation in his writings and including translations from world poets in his collections of poems for publication, such as *Poems* and *May-Day and Other Pieces*. But Emerson’s idea of translation extends far beyond the mere linguistic transferring of a text from one language into another. In “The American Scholar,” Emerson states that the revolution “is to be wrought by the gradual domestication of the idea of Culture,” and the “main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the

⁸ In this connection, Finney also points out that for Goethe, “world literature also involves physically crossing these boundaries, traveling to foreign countries, getting to know the inhabitants of other nations as well as their literature” (261).

upbuilding of a man” (*E* 67). The “upbuilding” of American identity through the “domestication of the idea of Culture,” or *Bildung*, became the great challenge that Emerson would tackle in his numerous works. In “Heroism,” Emerson explains the use of heroic narratives and states: “All these great and transcendent properties [of the heroes] are ours. If we dilate in beholding the Greek energy, the Roman pride, it is that we are already domesticating the same sentiment” (*E* 377). He goes on: “Massachusetts, Connecticut River, and Boston Bay, you think paltry places, and the ear loves names of foreign and classic topography. But here we are; and, if we will tarry a little, we may come to learn that here is best” (*E* 378). *Representative Men* also marks Emerson’s answer to the question of how to domesticate foreign cultures. In “Uses of Great Men,” an introductory chapter of the book, Emerson explains the uses of reading foreign books: “Our affection toward others creates a sort of vantage or purchase which nothing will supply. . . . Other men are lenses through which we read our own minds” (*E* 616). These passages indicate that his concept of reading is structured by the same cyclical movement of *Bildung* that Berman sees in the modern German concept of translation. In reading foreign books, says Emerson, we “need not fear excessive influence” (*E* 629). An individual, a nation, a culture, a language, and a literature must go through the stage of accepting foreign influences to reach the final stage of physical and mental independence, where one discovers one’s identity and establishes one’s self, as children who “think they cannot live without their parents” soon find their “detachment” from their parents, and “[a]ny accident will now reveal to them their independence” (*E* 629).

Some critics have underlined a multicultural and cosmopolitan attitude in

Emerson's reading habits.⁹ Wai Chee Dimock argues that in the literary culture of New England Transcendentalists, "there is nothing to stop a Hindu Sacred, the Bhagavad Gita, from being read side by side with the Christian Bible" (23). But we should notice that such cosmopolitan eclecticism is often coupled with an unabashed celebration of patriotism and ethnocentrism, which American Transcendentalists imported from Germany. In his later career, Goethe conceived the idea of Weltliteratur, or world literature, which is mentioned in several texts translated into English.¹⁰ In Eckermann's

⁹ For Emerson's reading of non-Western texts in translation, see Carpenter 61-184; Yohannan, "Emerson's Translations of Persian Poetry from German Sources"; Versluis 51-79; Bilwakesh, "Emerson, John Brown, and Arjuna: Translating the Bhagavad Gita in a Time of War."

¹⁰ For Goethe's conception of Weltliteratur, or world literature, see Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* 1-35; Pizer 18-46; Bhabha 16-17; Berman 53-68; Finney 261; and Lawall 12-20. Especially for the relation of Goethe's translation theory to world literature, see Berman 53-68. Critics differ widely in their views as to Goethe's engagement with ethnocentrism, nationalism, and Eurocentrism in his conception of Weltliteratur. Finney, for example, claims that "for Goethe, world literature meant only European literature" (261). On the other hand, Pizer highlights "Goethe's prophetically global, non-nationalistic understanding of the term, an understanding grounded in a principle of radical alterity based on a novel view of translation" (45-6). While admitting Goethe's profound Eurocentrism, Bhabha also suggests that "world literature could be an emergent, prefigurative category that is concerned with a form of cultural dissensus and alterity, where non-consensual terms of affiliation may be established on the grounds of historical trauma" (17). Bringing in a postcolonial perspective, Bhabha calls for the study of world literature as "the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of 'otherness'," where "perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions – may be the terrains of world literature" (17). My point here is that nationalism and cosmopolitanism are not always mutually exclusive, but often deeply interconnected, and the same thesis applies to Goethe's case. For recent

above-cited *Conversations with Goethe*, the author records Goethe's words:

I am more and more convinced that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself in every place, and at all times, in hundreds of men. . . . But, really, we Germans are very likely to make this pedantic mistake, if we do not take heed to look beyond the narrow circle which surrounds us. I therefore gladly make excursions to other countries, and advise every one to do the same. National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World literature is at hand, and each one must strive to hasten its approach. But, while we know how to value what is foreign, we must not fix our attention on any thing in particular, as the only pattern and model. We must not think the Chinese are a model, or the Servian, or Calderon, or the Nibelungen. If we want examples, we had best return to the ancient Greeks, in whose works the beauty of manhood is constantly represented. All the rest we must look at historically, appropriating what is good in them, so far as we can use it. (203-4)

While Goethe celebrates the progress of "poetry" as "the universal possession of mankind," he demonstrates his steadfast loyalty for West European literary traditions modeled on Greek classics, adding that literatures from other areas in the world can be useful only as the objects of appropriation. Goethe's conception of world literature cannot be separated from his ethnic and national pride regarding the superiority of the German language over other world languages in its flexibility to absorb and transform foreign cultures. In a different place, Goethe also writes: "I am convinced a universal

theoretical debates about the concept of world literature, see Damrosch, ed., *World Literature in Theory*; Apter, *Against World Literature*; and Lawall, *Reading World Literature*.

world literature is in the process of being constituted, in which an honorable role is reserved for us Germans” (*Essays on Art and Literature* 3: 225). David Damrosch claims that Goethe is “no multiculturalist” (12) from our twenty-first century perspective. But Goethe is indeed a proto-multiculturalist in many ways.

In a journal entry of 1845, Emerson writes: “Plato is no Athenian. An Englishman says how English! a German, how Teutonic! an Italian, How Roman & how Greek! It transcends sectional lines, the great human Plato. . . . Plato seems to us an American Genius” (*JMN* 9: 248). In another journal entry, which Dimock also quotes, Emerson also writes: “A good scholar will find Aristophanes & Hafiz & Rabelais full of American history” (*JMN* 10: 35). It is difficult not to see Emerson’s tacit embrace of a nationalist desire to subsume world traditions into an American one.¹¹ Emerson’s advocacy of reading foreign texts in English is overall identical with Goethe’s call for world literature “appropriating what is good in them, so far as we can use it” (Eckermann 204). As Nikhil Bilwakesh suggests, Emerson’s preoccupation with the translation of foreign languages, including Sanskrit, can be seen as “evidence of an Anglo-Saxon cosmopolitanism that allowed that race to flourish on every continent in the nineteenth century” (“Emerson, John Brown, and Arjuna” 35).¹² And, as I mentioned in the introduction, it seems worth considering whether the recent popularity of transnational

¹¹ With regard to American Transcendentalists’ reading of Asian texts, Arthur Versluis suggests that “American Transcendentalism was not entirely a kind of intellectual colonizing (to say that is to do an injustice to the richness of the literary works that Emerson and Thoreau produced), but at times it seems nearly so” (5).

¹² Bilwakesh also points out Emerson’s “championing of somewhat obscure translators such as Thomas Taylor and J. J. Garth Wilkinson” (35) as examples of those who contributed to the formation of national culture through translation.

American literary studies, which is conducted only in English by American literary scholars, is not boosted by the same cosmopolitan-nationalist desire to appropriate other literatures and cultures.

But Emerson does not always agree with Goethe. He also criticizes the German author for his Classic Humanist worldliness, lack of “moral sentiment,” and indifference to “pure truth” (*E* 758). “All the geniuses are usually so ill-assorted and sickly, that one is ever wishing them somewhere else,” writes Emerson, “[b]ut this man was entirely at home and happy in his century and the world” (*E* 760). Goethe sometimes expresses his reservations about the translatability of languages, acknowledging the existence of the untranslatable in foreign texts. In *Italian Journey*, Goethe states that the “idioms of every language are untranslatable, for any word, from the noblest to the coarsest, is related to the unique character, beliefs and way of life of the people who speak it” (88-9). In another place, Goethe also writes: “The translator must proceed until he reaches the untranslatable; and then only will he have an idea of the foreign nation and the foreign tongue” (*Maxims and Reflection of Goethe* 171). Apparently, Emerson entertained a different idea, that any text in any language is translatable. In “The American Scholar,” Emerson states that “he who has mastered any law in his private thoughts, is master to that extent of all men whose language he speaks, and of all into whose language his own can be translated” (*E* 64). In a journal entry titled “Vocabulary,” Emerson also writes: “[I]n going through Italy I speak Italian, through Arabia, Arabic: I say the same *things*, but have altered my speech. But ignorant people think a foreigner speaking a foreign tongue a formidable, odious nature, alien to the backbone . . . [L]ate in life, perhaps too late, we find he was loving and hating, doing and thinking the same *things* as we, under

his vocabulary” (*JMN* 7: 117). In the essay “Books,” which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, he reads out his list of must-reads:

I mean the Bibles of the world, or the sacred books of each nation, which express for each the supreme result of their experience. After the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, which constitute the sacred books of Christendom, these are, the Desatir of the Persians, and the Zoroastrian Oracles; the Vedas and Laws of Menu; the Upanishads, the Vishnu Purana, the Bhagvat Geeta, of the Hindoos; the books of the Buddhists; the “Chinese Classic,” of four books, containing the wisdom of Confucius and Mencius. (*CW* 7: 110-11)

He continues to say: “All these books are the majestic expressions of the universal conscience They are not to be held by letters printed on a page, but are living characters translatable into every tongue and form of life” (*CW* 7: 111). But we might wonder if all religious books in the world are truly “the majestic expressions of the universal conscience.” Are they really “translatable into every tongue”?

In the “Language” section of “Nature,” Emerson also writes: “A man’s power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it, depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth, and his desire to communicate it without loss” (*E* 22). Emerson continues to say: “The moment our discourse rises above the ground line of familiar facts, and is inflamed with passion or exalted by thought, it clothes itself in images. A man conversing in earnest . . . will find that a material image . . . arises in his mind, cotemporaneous with every thought, which furnishes the vestment of the thought” (*E* 23). In a similar vein, Emerson’s idea of poetic imagination in “The Poet” is worth an examination:

But the quality of the imagination is to flow, and not to freeze. The poet did not stop at the color, or the form, but read their meaning; neither may he rest in this meaning, but he makes the same objects exponents of his new thought. Here is the difference betwixt the poet and the mystic, that the last nails a symbol to one sense, which was a true sense for a moment, but soon becomes old and false. For all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead. Mysticism consists in the mistake of an accidental and individual symbol for an universal one. The morning-redness happens to be the favorite meteor to the eyes of Jacob Behmen, and comes to stand to him for truth and faith; and he believes should stand for the same realities to every reader. But the first reader prefers as naturally the symbol of a mother and child, or a gardener and his bulb, or a jeweller polishing a gem. Either of these, or of a myriad more, are equally good to the person to whom they are significant. Only they must be held lightly, and be very willingly translated into the equivalent terms which others use. (*E* 463-64)

We may well wonder if there have not been numerous poets who took pains “to freeze” in their singular poetic languages the particular “color” of “the morning-redness” and the particular “form” of “the meteor” that they may have seen at particular moments. It is very much debatable whether one’s particular experiences, thoughts, or feelings can be removed from one’s language and be “translated into the equivalent terms which others use.” But Emerson apparently gives credit to the translatability of any particular languages of an individual person or group into a sort of pure universal language. In this sense, Emerson’s concept of translation, interconnected with his poetics, is sometimes

more metaphysical and idealistic than Goethe's Classicist view of it.¹³

Emerson's idea of translation thus comes close to that of the German Romantics. Berman cites an impressive passage that "all poetry is translation," and "the German Shakespeare today is better than the English" (105) in Novalis's letter to A. W. Schlegel, translator of Shakespeare in German. Berman suggests that German Romantics had a theory that translation can "provide a better version" of the original, for translation "constitutes the original, through its very movement, into a *potentiation*" (107).¹⁴

Berman explains:

The original itself, in what the Romantics call its "tendency," possesses an *a priori* scope: the Idea of the Work which the work wants to be, tends towards (independently from the author's intentions or not), but empirically never is. In this respect, the original is the copy—the translation, if you want—of this *a priori* figure which presides over its being and gives it its necessity. Now, translation aims precisely at this Idea, this origin of the original. Through this aim, it necessarily produces a "better" text than the first. . . . In other words, the translated work is closer to the internal scope, and further from its finite gravity.

The translation, the second version of the work, brings it closer to its truth. (107)

Berman's explanation of German Romantic translation theory can also apply to Emerson's examples. In "Uses of Great Men," Emerson writes: "Each material thing has

¹³ Goethe often distanced himself from contemporary Romantic thoughts and even said that "the classical is *health*, and the *romantic, disease*" (*Maxims and Reflections* 166).

¹⁴ Versluis also argues that "Novalis was a predecessor for Transcendentalism in this tendency to regard the various traditions as reflecting a central reality: to him, as to Emerson and Thoreau, the various names were not nearly so significant as the Transcendent reality that they signified" (21).

its celestial side; has its translation, through humanity, into the spiritual and necessary sphere where it plays a part as indestructible as any other. And to these, their ends, all things continually ascend” (*E* 619). As Sonia Di Loreto argues, “according to Emerson the work of translation becomes the journey from the material world to the spiritual sphere,” which “is an unveiling of something that is already there, that has always been there, because the core of every language remains the same” (“Emerson as Translator of Dante” 93).¹⁵ Therefore, Emerson can assert: “When we are exalted by ideas, we do not owe this to Plato, but to the idea, to which, also, Plato was debtor” (*E* 623).

It is in “Quotation and Originality,” an essay included in his later book *Letters and Social Aims*, that Emerson most clearly expounds his Romantic concept of translation. Unlike in his early essays, he now admits frankly that “there is no pure originality, and “[a]ll minds quote” (*CW* 8: 94). In the essay, he shows numerous quotes translated from different languages to claim: “The originals are not original. There is imitation, model, and suggestion, to the very archangels, if we knew their history” (*CW* 8: 94). Emerson also mentions a defense of Shakespeare against the charge of his borrowings from his predecessors, writing: “Yet he was more original than his originals. He breathed upon dead bodies and brought them into life” (*CW* 8: 100). As Nikhil Bilwakesh points out, Emerson’s recognition that every translation is based on another translation “finds an echo for us when we consider Derrida’s notion of the signifier not so much signifying a transcendental signified but merely other signifiers” (*Emerson and American Cosmopolitanism* 99). But, as Bilwakesh also suggests, “while Derrida’s deconstruction

¹⁵ Boggs also claims that Emerson embraced “a metaphysical model [of translation] that ultimately disavowed linguistic difference” (*Transnationalism and American Literature* 101).

of the transcendental signified has tended to negate ideas of ‘pure’ or sacred language, Emerson, following Romantic theories of translation, finds in Biblical compilation and translation an approach towards a pure language unbound by locality” (99).

We should notice that the nineteenth-century Transcendentalist concept of translation often goes beyond the linguistic transferring of a word into another. In the definition of the word “translate” in *An American Dictionary of English Language*, the author and editor Noah Webster writes: “The Old Testament was translated into the Greek language more than two hundred years before Christ. The Scriptures are now translated into most of the languages of Europe and Asia.” Webster’s definition of the same verb also includes: “[t]o remove or convey to heaven, as a human being, without death,” which, as I will discuss later, also constitutes an important meaning in Emerson’s concept of translation. These examples suggest that the development of translation until the early nineteenth century, which Emerson also witnessed during his trip in Italy, was often driven by the evangelical fervor to spread God’s words along with a Christian belief that translation is itself a sacred practice that figuratively or literally leads one to heaven.

The source of the Romantic concept of translation can be traced back to the Early Modern period. Edward G. Gray suggests that “Medieval and Renaissance writers generally assumed that in felling the Tower of Babel, God transformed the world from a place unified by a single language to one divided into seventy-two distinct mother tongues” (*New World Babel* 21), going on to say that “[t]his deep and lasting reprimand” carried “the burden of reunifying humanity in the community of God through the universal language of prayer—an imperative” “very much central to the early modern

Christian missionary impulse” (21). According to Gray, the “impulse to render the Bible in vernacular tongues was” “part of a broader Reformist impulse to reduce Scripture to its purest, most immediate and primitive form,” “part of a broader seventeenth-century impulse to make the meaning of the Word more readily obtainable and affecting by stripping away the accumulated layers of perversion imposed by a corrupt and decadent church” (76), which, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, the early Puritans in America also shared. It is then no coincidence that the Transcendentalist concept of translation entails a similar desire to translate God’s words into “its purest, most immediate and primitive form,” for, as Lawrence Buell has suggested, Transcendentalism “really began as a religious movement, an attempt to substitute a Romanticized version of the mystical ideal that humankind is capable of direct experience of the holy for the Unitarian rationalist view that the truths of religion are arrived at by a process of empirical study and by rational inference from historical and natural evidence” (*New England Literary Culture* 46-7).¹⁶ We can hear the echoes of that early missionary impulse most clearly in Emerson’s above-mentioned assertion that all religious texts in the world are “the majestic expressions of the universal conscience” “translatable into every tongue and form of life” (*CW* 7: 111).

Translation in multiple ways plays a central role in Emerson’s writing process. His numerous texts are structured by two concepts of translation: a Goethean, or Classicist, concept of translation as a process of *Bildung*, characterized by its cyclical movement toward developing a rather stable and comfortable relationship between one (an

¹⁶ Buell also points out that the “Transcendentalists’ first organized activity, the ‘symposium’ or Transcendental Club, was originally intended to be for ministers only, though the organizers quickly changed their minds” (*New England Literary Culture* 47).

individual, a language, a culture, and a nation) and the others, and a Romantic concept of translation as a means of transcendence, marked by its rising movement to transcend all the boundaries between one and the others. The former type of translation serves to establish one's particular identity, while the latter tends to go beyond the particular to the universal. These two tendencies, not entirely the same yet closely tied together, in Emerson's writings produce a sort of upward spiral—at once circling and ascending—movements, which is driven by the recognition of the untranslatable and the desire to transcend it. But, as we will see in this chapter, Emerson's numerous texts also illuminate the remains of the untranslatable, suppressed or erased in the complex process of translation, all the more dramatically for the intensity with which he strives to transcend the influences of others.

Translating World Histories into His Story

In a journal entry, which I mentioned above, Emerson writes: "A good scholar will find Aristophanes & Hafiz & Rabelais full of American history" (*JMN* 10: 35). As I have discussed so far, this aphorism precisely captures Emerson's universalist tendency to assimilate world languages and cultures into one's own, a tendency that he adapted from Goethe. At the same time, this statement also indicates that for Emerson the translation of other world literatures coincides with the making of national history, with which he was preoccupied through his long career. The examination of Emerson's concept of translation thus necessitates the reconsideration of his idea of history, which is inseparably entwined with his idea of translation.

The task of the translator indeed overlaps the task of the historian. We could not

have or even imagine history if it had not been for translation—from foreign languages, local variations of a language, or ancient languages. Consider how we learn Greek history, Roman history, Persian history, Chinese history, American history, and any histories on earth. How many translators have contributed to the making of the world history? In *Metahistory*, a classic study of nineteenth-century historiography, Hayden White argues that nineteenth-century historians and novelists often shared the same linguistic, narrative, and rhetorical structures in their works. But we should notice that most of those historiographers and literary authors were at once translators. Washington Irving wrote a number of historiographical and biographical works as well as fictional ones, including *A History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, *The Chronicles of the Conquest of Granada*, *Tales of The Alhambra*, and *Mahomet and His Successors*, drawing numerous details from Spanish sources.¹⁷ In this case, it would be extremely difficult to draw clear lines between the works of a historian, a literary author, and a translator. George Bancroft, the popular historian and Democratic politician renowned for *History of the United States*, also published translations in his first book, some of which were included in George Ripley's anthology of foreign literature translated into English, *Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature*. From the 1810s to the 1820s, Bancroft and other Harvard scholars, including George Ticknor, Edward Everett, and Ralph Waldo Emerson's brother, William, crossed the Atlantic to study contemporary theories of history and theology at the University of Göttingen and other colleges in Germany. After returning to the United States, they taught German

¹⁷ See the preface of *Mahomet and His Successors*. Irving admits that “most of the particulars for this were drawn from Spanish sources, and Gagnier's translation of the Arabian historian Abulfeda” (v).

historicism and theology as well as German literature and culture at Harvard and other institutions. Bancroft also joined the faculty of Harvard as a professor of Greek. The translation of Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren's *Ancient Greece* from German is one of many examples of his work as a historian, literary author, translator, and teacher of foreign languages.

Antebellum America indeed saw an unprecedented rise of public interest in history.¹⁸ According to George Callcott's comprehensive study, of "the 248 best-selling books in the United States from 1800 to 1860, ninety of them, or 36 per cent, dealt with history" (*History in the United States* 31-2). During the same period, popular magazines, such as the *North American Review*, *Christian Examiner*, *Harper's Magazine*, and the *Atlantic Monthly* devoted roughly 25 to 35 percent of their pages to the narratives of historical events (34). The topics of those historiographical writings varied. But many popular works at that time are either direct or indirect translations from other languages. US history comprised only one third of history books published in the early nineteenth century. Greek, Roman, and Medieval histories were the most popular topics among many. The rise and fall of nations and empires became a favorite motif among history enthusiasts of the time (93-7). The biographies of great men, which include Emerson's *Representative Men*, both in America and in other countries were widely read though the antebellum period (97-101).¹⁹ Meanwhile, Walter Scott's historical romances gained an

¹⁸ See also Hoffer 17-31; Levin, *History as Romantic Art*; Van Tassel 31-141; Vitzthum; and Wish 39-108.

¹⁹ This public enthusiasm about historical writings in the early nineteenth century was followed by the rise of historical societies in New England and the introduction of history education into the primary and secondary schools. These actions were mostly

immense popularity among American readers, producing numerous followers, including James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving.²⁰ As George Dekker shows, Scott's Scottish historical romances also served as a model for American romancers and historiographers to narrate US history.²¹ The establishment of US history through the appropriation of foreign models was urgently demanded and practiced on the national level.

The public interest in national history was partly led by the intellectual community of theologians, historians, and scholars in Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts. As David Van Tassel suggests, the popular historicism of the era is marked by “a belief that the history of the human race was a series of events, each developing out of the one before and all combining to illustrate the progressive education of the human mind” (Callcott 111). The above-mentioned German-educated scholars came to portray America as the leading nation of the universal progress of the human race. It is during the Jacksonian era that the opuses of American national history, such as Bancroft's *The History of the United States*, first appeared (86-90). Over the 1820s, Romantic nationalism, influenced by contemporary German philosophy and literature, gradually appeared as the dominant mode of representing history. The *North American Review*—a journal based on the Harvard-Unitarian line of Boston intellectual community—played a

endorsed by local and national governments. For further details, see Callcott 35-82. Antiquarianism, which Van Tassel named “documania” (103-10), was also prevalent. The establishments of local antiquarian societies spurred this public obsession with details of the past. See also Callcott 109-119.

²⁰ See Dekker, *The American Historical Romance*.

²¹ See Dekker 29-73. For the contemporary critics' response to Scott's works, see Cunningham, “Sir Walter Scott” on the April 1833 issue of the *North American Review*.

central role in the propagation of the antebellum Romantic nationalist discourse on history. The magazine devoted a substantial number of pages to reviews and extracts of both historiographies and historical romances, many of which were translations from foreign languages.²²

In a review of Jonathan Gottfried von Herder, a German philosopher and historian who had a great influence on early-nineteenth-century American historians, Bancroft emphasizes Herder's "poetic" ("Writings of Herder" 138) mind that allowed him to create works "compared to a fanciful piece of mosaic, composed of costly stones from all parts of the world" (139). This idea of fine historiography echoes with Goethe's (and Emerson's) advocacy of reading world literatures for making one's own national culture. As Sarah Lawall suggests, indeed, Goethe "first described world literature as cross-cultural reception inside an evolving *world history*, a concept he (and others) found already developed by" Herder ("Introduction: Reading World Literature" 17). According to Lawall, "Herder's broad concept of a universal world history and universal literary history, his belief in a grand totality of cosmic design, his study of ethnic units and national character, and his description of folk poetry from around the world as a universal language of humanity (*Humanität*), had a strong influence on Goethe and German Romanticism" (17)—and, as I will show, on Emerson and American Transcendentalism likewise.²³

²² For German philosophy of history featured in the *North American Review*, see Firda, "German Philosophy of History and Literature in the *North American Review*: 1815-1860."

²³ For a detailed analysis of Herder's influence on Bancroft and American literary nationalism, see Frank and Mueller-Vollmer 157-176; and Mueller-Vollmer. They argue that "it is in the work of George Bancroft that [Herder's] share in the formation of an

Emerson shared the popular enthusiasm about history with his contemporaries.²⁴ During adolescence, he enjoyed reading an English translation of the French historian Charles Rollin's *The Ancient History* and even attempted writing a heroic epic (Rusk 36-7). Harvard College, where he studied from 1817 to 1821, was the very center of the new American historicism under the strong influence of German Romantic historicism. The record of his borrowings from the college library suggests that he read a number of historiographical works in translation in his first year at Harvard.²⁵ After graduating from the college, he continued to read foreign history books, including Gibbon's popular *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Meanwhile, Scott's historical romances were his favorites—Emerson noted, “Genius, Sir Walter Scott, defined to be, the power of sustained intellectual exertion” (*JMN* 4: 196); and he praised Scott's American follower James Fenimore Cooper when his *The Pioneers* was first published (92-3). In 1822, he completed an article, “Thoughts on the Religion of the Middle Ages,” a historical study of the problems of the Catholic Church in Europe, published in *The Christian Disciple* for November and December of the same year (Rusk 96). As I mentioned above, his elder brother William studied in Germany, where Edward Everett, Emerson's favorite teacher at Harvard, and George Ticknor, another teacher at the college, had studied before him. Through them, Emerson learned about influential

American national consciousness is most visible, and the effectiveness of his ideas appears most evident” (161).

²⁴ His father Reverend William Emerson wrote *A Historical Sketch of the First Church in Boston*; later, the son read the posthumously published Unitarian historiography.

²⁵ According to Kenneth Cameron, the list includes Oliver Goldsmith's *The History of England*, David Hume's *The History of England*, and Joseph Priestley's *Lectures on History* (44).

German authors, such as Goethe and Herder (Rusk 105-9).²⁶

To understand what the popularity of foreign historiographical works means to the formation of national culture, Homi Bhabha's analysis of nationalism and national history can be helpful. Bhabha argues that "the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of the anxiety of its irredeemably plural modern space—representing the nation's modern territoriality is turned into the archaic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism" (*The Location of Culture* 213). He continues: "The difference of space returns as the Sameness of time, turning Territory into Tradition, turning the People into One. The liminal point of this ideological displacement is the turning of the differentiated spatial boundary, the 'outside,' into the authenticating 'inward' time of Tradition" (*The Location of Culture* 213). Such a rhetorical strategy of turning the outside space into the inside time can exactly explain the logic of nationalist historicism, encapsulated in Emerson's "Historical Discourse at Concord," which marks a turning point in Emerson's early career, as I will discuss below.

As the national craze for history and the public demand for authoritative US history grew, the name of Concord gradually became popular as the site of the first battle of the American Revolutionary War. Through the first half of the 1820s, as Sara Purcell puts it, "commemorative activity at many of the traditional sites of the Revolutionary War memory intensified as the fiftieth anniversary of the war's beginning approached"

²⁶ As David Levin points out, the Unitarian Church actively engaged in the heated debate about "the historicity of miracles" in Emerson's day (*History as Romantic Art* 5). Emerson as a minister of the Second Church of Boston subscribed, if not wholeheartedly, to the Unitarian religious inclination to scientific historical studies, though he would later abandon them along with Unitarian doctrines. See Levin, *History as Romantic Art* 3-23.

(176-77).²⁷ On April 19, 1825, Edward Everett—historian, former editor of the *North American Review*, and professor of Greek (and Emerson’s favorite teacher) at Harvard—delivered an oration at the fifteenth anniversary celebration of the Battle of Concord.²⁸ In the speech, Everett repeatedly emphasizes the American Revolution as a series of great world events comparable with those in Greek and Roman histories that “have extensively changed and are every day more extensively changing the condition and prospects of the human race” (*An Oration Delivered at Concord, April the Nineteenth, 1825* 41).²⁹ Everett’s oration thus determined the image of Concord as the

²⁷ For a study of the vogue of commemorating the American Revolution in American popular culture, see also Kammen, *Season of the Youth*.

²⁸ For records of the ceremony of April 19, 1825, see McWilliams, “Lexington, Concord, and the ‘Hinge of the Future’”; and Gross, “Commemorating Concord.” The event was planned after the model of the nationally acclaimed Bunker Hill Monument Project. Everett “parlayed his role as secretary of the Bunker Hill Monument Association into a successful candidacy for the Middlesex County seat in Congress at the recent November 1824 elections” (“Commemorating Concord”). For the details of the Bunker Hill Monument Association, see Purcell 194-209.

²⁹ Everett’s narration of the course of the events is fully loaded with the nationalist rhetoric typical of the early nineteenth century. The oration begins with the celebration of the heroism and patriotism that voluntarily arose among the residents of small New England towns and villages. In the middle of the speech, Everett dramatically recounts Paul Revere’s heroic deeds in the way popular authors of historical romance, such as Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper, often do in their works. The scenes of America’s resistance against the British army are depicted with the strong imagery of fire: “The British companies were sent out to great distances as flanking parties: but who was to flank the flankers? Every patch of trees, every rock, every stream of water, every building, every stone wall, was *lined* (I use the word of a British officer in the battle), was lined with an unintermitted fire” (36). Toward the end of the speech, Everett shifts the focus to the “people” again, emphasizing that the “people” who spontaneously joined the battles are the true “hero” of the Revolution. In so doing, Everett does not forget to

sacred ground for liberty in the newly forming authoritative history of the United States as the vanguard of universal democracy.

Two years later, when the competition between Lexington and Concord for the honor of the “true” birthplace of the American Revolution heightened, Reverend Ezra Ripley, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s step-grandfather, published a treatise, *A History of the Fight at Concord, on the Nineteenth of April, 1775*, to defend the town’s status as the foremost site of American democracy.³⁰ In the tract, Ripley contends that the Lexington militia did not fire back when a British troop fired, while Concord militia fired back against the British; he contrasts Lexington’s non-resistance with Concord’s resistance, thus glorifying his town as the very place where American people took the first forcible action of resistance. Ripley also refers to Reverend William Emerson, Ralph Waldo’s grandfather, as “a zealous patriot” who “encouraged people” in the course of the revolutionary events (15).³¹ Accordingly, Ripley helped solidify the reputation of the town as the holy place of the Revolution and legitimized the role of parish minister as a

assure the audience of the sanctity of the events, saying, “THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE is THE VOICE OF THE GOD [*sic*]” (49). As Gross mentions, the speech was followed by the celebration of the laying of a cornerstone of the monument of the Concord Fight at the center of the town, not by the North Bridge where the battle actually occurred (“Commemorating Concord”).

³⁰ Ripley had long occupied the position of the minister of the town and resident of the Old Manse, both previously held by Reverend William Emerson, whose widow became Ripley’s wife. The original North Bridge was now in the back pasture of his property. For further details, see Gross, “Commemorating Concord.”

³¹ Ripley never mentions the existence of the black slaves who once lived in the same town; thus, he purified the collective memory of slave-holding Concord. For a history of African American slaves in Concord, See Lemire, *Black Walden*. Lemire’s book can support my argument about the collective elision of negatives in American history.

leader of the revolutionary town. When young Emerson made occasional visits to Concord, the step-grandfather often rode the young man around the town, reciting its detailed history (Rusk 44). When Emerson finally moved to Concord, he started to engage in the making of an authoritative national history through the displacement of British colonial history with American history.

By the time Emerson moved to Concord at the end of 1834, the local leaders had held annual commemorations of their revolutionary ancestors for ten years.³² At the bicentennial anniversary of the town on September 12, 1835, Emerson delivered the speech “Historical Discourse at Concord” and joined the tradition of the patriotic commemoration that had been popular since Everett’s oration in 1825. In the oration he fully deploys the rhetoric of popular traditionalism.³³ We might well see a wide

³² This politically enhanced commemorative mood coincided with the passing of the old generation which actually experienced the Revolution. See Purcell 171-209.

³³ We have several studies about Emerson’s relation to the history of Concord. McWilliams’s “Lexington, Concord, and the ‘Hinge of the Future’” is a good reference for this study. McWilliams shows how the myth of American Revolution was being created and recreated in popular historical narratives during the antebellum period. In the article, McWilliams illustrates how Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne distanced themselves from the patriotic rhetoric of the Romantic historiography of the Revolution. True, Emerson also records his reluctance to join the cult of ancestral worship in a journal entry, noting, “Yet why notice it? Centuries pass unnoticed” (*JMN* 5: 55). While I find McWilliams’s summary of the Concord historiographies quite beneficial, my view of Emerson is that he was no more distant from the myth of Concord as the sacred ground of the Revolution than his contemporaries were. Gross’s “Commemorating Concord” also deals with Emerson’s response to the commemorative events of Concord. Gross implies that Emerson was a sort of double-faced pragmatist: while in Concord Emerson celebrated his Revolutionary ancestors, at other places he often upbraided his

discrepancy between this Emerson who proudly narrates his ancestral legacy in the local town and later Emerson who criticizes his filiopietistic contemporaries, saying that he is “ashamed to see what a shallow village tale our so-called History is” (*E* 256).³⁴ But, given that the speech “Historical Discourse at Concord” was intended to assure himself of his role as a leading public intellectual, his seeming contradiction is understandable. Indeed, this relatively unmarked oration marks some rhetorical traits peculiar to Emerson’s renowned works starting with *Nature*. As Leonard Neufeldt has shown, “[w]hat seemed to be thoroughly conventional labor [in “Historical Discourse”] . . . had a purpose only he could really appreciate—defining himself and his new allegiance” (8) as a torchbearer of the new era.

“Historical Discourse at Concord” indeed can be read as an early example of Emerson’s strategy of displacing territoriality with temporality. In the process of writing the draft of the oration, Emerson meticulously studied the history of Concord and rediscovered with pleasure that his ancestors were the leaders of the town who led the people by dint of their eloquence. In the speech, he mentions that Concord was built by

filiopietistic contemporaries for being too “retrospective.” I agree more with Gross than McWilliams in my argument.

³⁴ In many of his works, Emerson repeatedly denounces his contemporaries for being too passive in receiving the influence of the past. For example, Emerson begins his first book *Nature* with now one of the best-known passages in American literature: “Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism” (*E* 7). In “The American Scholar,” he faults “the bookworm” (*E* 57) and advises young students to engage in “laborious reading” (*E* 59). In an oration titled “Literary Ethics,” he counsels his audience: “Do not foolishly ask of the inscrutable, obliterated past Be lord of a day, through wisdom and justice, and you can put up your history books” (*E* 99).

“a party of non-conformists” (*The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* 11: 31) and that the covenant was made with Indians (*CRWE* 11: 38).³⁵ The form of this democratic narrative itself conforms to the convention of the contemporary nationalist historiography that Everett, Bancroft, and other Harvard historians imported from Germany and translated from German.³⁶ It is noteworthy that John Eliot, known as the Apostle to the Indians, plays a crucial role in Emerson’s narrative, though Eliot’s relation to the town of Concord was indeed somewhat tangential.³⁷ As I will discuss in detail in Chapter 3, in the early nineteenth century, the myth of the Puritan evangelist was widely mentioned as a symbol of the imagined unity of different races in America. Emerson stresses the town’s connection to Eliot and its collective effort to civilize the Indians. Emerson says that it is “piteous to see their [the Indians] self-distrust in their request to remain near the English, and their unanimous entreaty to Captain Willard, to be their Recorder, being very solicitous that what they did agree upon might be faithfully kept without alteration” (53). The Indians voluntarily entrusted Captain Willard with the task of their official “Recorder”—a position to which Emerson implicitly declares he will succeed. Through the entire discourse, Emerson repeatedly emphasizes that his ancestors—from Reverend Peter Bulkeley, who engaged in the founding of Concord, to his own grandfather Reverend William Emerson, who took an active part in the

³⁵ *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* is abbreviated to *CRWE* hereafter.

³⁶ For Bancroft’s historical works, see Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent* 168-193.

³⁷ According to Richard Cogley, Simon Willard of Concord helped the Musketaquid Indians draw up “the Musketaquid code,” the religious guidelines for their civil government and behaviors. They “requested and obtained permission from the selectmen of nearby Concord to establish an English-style town” (*John Eliot’s Mission to the Indians* 58). But the actual construction of the town was not successful (59).

Revolutionary War—played central roles in the development of the town toward the realization of universal freedom and democracy. As a new comer from Boston, Emerson needed some way to establish himself as an insider rather than an outsider to his fellow townspeople. On a symbolic level, he sought to reconfigure himself at the center of American history.

It is noteworthy that in “Historical Discourse” Emerson almost personifies the town of Concord and “the Town Records.” In the course of the oration, he tells of how Concord achieved independence from Boston, saying, “Concord and the other plantations found themselves separate and independent of Boston, with certain rights of their own, which, what they were, time alone could fully determine; enjoying, at the same time, a strict and loving fellowship with Boston, and sure of advice and aid, on every emergency” (*CRWE* 11: 46). It may not be entirely off the mark to read this passage as an analogy of his radical move in his personal life: his resignation from the Second Church of Boston and his relocation to Concord. In the passages that follow the above-cited one, indeed, he highlights the independence, not only political but financial and spiritual, of the town from Boston; in particular, his emphasis on the importance of “self-government” (*CRWE* 11: 49) anticipates one of the essential Emersonian concepts, “self-reliance.”

Emerson goes on to mention a recent event, that the British government presented several public libraries in the United States “copies of the splendid edition of the Doomsday Book, and other ancient public records of England” (*CRWE* 11: 49). In response to this event, he suggests that “it would be a suitable acknowledgement of this national munificence, if the records of one of our towns,—of this town, for

example,—should be printed, and presented to the governments of Europe; to the English nation, as a thank offering, and as a certificate of the progress of the Saxon race; to the Continental nations as a lesson of humanity and love” (*CRWE* 11: 49). This passage indicates the rudiments of his cultural nationalism seen in many of his works, such as “The American Scholar.” Emerson accurately understands the significance of making one’s history and publicizing it as an effective means for a community or a nation to achieve cultural and political independence from others on both international and national levels.

When the oration reaches its climax in its depiction of events in the Revolution, the personification of history becomes most conspicuous. Emerson mentions that during the war-time, “the Town Records breathe a resolute and warlike spirit, so bold from the first as hardly to admit of increase” (*CRWE* 11: 67-68). In this passage, he points to the ceaseless continuance of an eternal spirit beneath the changing surface of history. Here can we see the Emersonian idealist concept of history, which is recapitulated in the essay “History,” that “[w]ithout hurry, without rest, the human spirit goes forth from the beginning to embody every faculty, every thought, every emotion, which belongs to it in appropriate events” (*E*: 237). To return to “Historical Discourse,” just after the above-cited passage, he quotes a substantial number of passages from the “Town Records” on the Revolutionary War, instead of retelling those events as if he were the “Town Records” themselves. In those passages, Emerson almost identifies with the “Town Records.” In the act of reciting the town history, Emerson makes himself, so to speak, the embodiment of the spirit of the town: all town history translates itself into his biography.

In order to establish his authority as the representative man of Concord, Emerson actually appropriated Shattuck's meticulous work, *A History of the Town of Concord*, which was to be published shortly and was expected to be the definitive history of the town. As Neufeldt shows, Emerson had already read the manuscript before its publication; and as he himself admits, "Historical Discourse" was very much indebted to Shattuck's thorough research.³⁸ But Emerson did not hesitate to borrow a lot from Shattuck. Later, in "Quotation and Originality," he boldly claims: "A great man quotes bravely, and will not draw on his invention when his memory serves him with a word as good. What he quotes, he fills with his own voice and humor, and the whole cyclopaedia of his table-talk is presently believed to be his own" (*CW* 8: 96). According to Emerson's theory of translation, "[o]riginal power in me is usually accompanied with assimilating power" (*CW* 8: 100). Emerson's affirmation of "assimilating power" echoes the German Romantic translation theory, which I have already discussed in the previous section, that translation makes a text better than the original, for it brings the text "closer to its truth" (Berman 107). After praising Shattuck for "the zeal and patience of his research" and voicing his hope that "[Shattuck's] History will not long remain unknown" (*CRWE* 11: 83), Emerson reverts to the "Town Records," saying: "Meantime, I have read with care the Town Records themselves. They must ever be the fountains of all just information respecting your character and customs. They are the history of the town" (*CRWE* 11: 83). By declaring that the "Town Records" themselves are the definitive history of the town, Emerson "preempt[s] Shattuck's *History*" (Neufeldt 9) and at the same time announces himself to the people of the town as the legitimate heir to the

³⁸ See Neufeldt, note 6 (9).

legacy of Concord. “Historical Discourse” was, in Ralph L. Rusk’s words, “his inaugural address as a Concordian” (221).

With regard to the American Revolution, which he argues is the most important event in the history of Concord, Emerson stresses the sanctity of forcible actions taken by Concord militia, saying: “A deep religious sentiment sanctified the thirst for liberty. All the military movements in this town were solemnized by acts of public worship” (*CRWE* 11: 72). It was Reverend William Emerson, his grandfather, who presided over the public worship “attended by . . . 700 soldiers” on the second day after the outbreak of the Battle of Concord (*CRWE* 11: 77). Emerson notes: “The cause of the Colonies was so much in his heart that he did not cease to make it the subject of his preaching and his prayers, and is said to have inspired many of his people with his own enthusiasm” (*CRWE* 11: 77). In the passages following this, he details how generously the town sacrificed “with cheerfulness” their money and the lives of youths for the cause of the Revolution (*CRWE* 11: 79). Later in his own life, he would reenact these actions taken by his grandfather and other ancestors at several crucial moments in the history of the town: the financial support of John Brown, the extremist in the radical abolitionist movements, the ideological justification of his terrorist activities, and the religious consecration of military acts of the Union Army.

Derrida’s analysis of the complicit relation between nationalism and cosmopolitanism is helpful for understanding the reason for Emerson’s relocation to his ancestral place at the beginning of his literary career. Derrida writes: “National hegemony . . . claims to justify itself in the name of a privilege in responsibility and in the memory of the universal and, thus, of the transnational—indeed of the

trans-European—and, finally, of the transcendental or ontological” (*The Other Heading* 47). Derrida wryly personifies the workings of nationalism that go hand in hand with cosmopolitan universalism: “I am (we are) all the more national for being European, all the more European for being trans-European and international; no one is more cosmopolitan and authentically universal than the one than this ‘we,’ who is speaking to you” (48). Derrida’s analysis can precisely apply to Emerson’s case if we replace “European” with “American.” Emerson’s logic is that America is the country that has reached the most advanced stage of “the progress of the Saxon race” and of universal democracy, and Concord is the town that has led such development of the country—and he is the man who is the legitimate heir to the town and will thereafter lead the town and the country to even greater success and glory.

As Neufeldt summarizes, Emerson’s “discovery of a usable past of Concord’s history stands out as the single most important definition of self at the threshold of his literary vocation” (9)—a vocation that is, we might say, at once, literary, religious, and political. What marks “Historical Discourse” is his unique proclivity for the fusion, or confusion, of the private with the public, the personal with the social, the individual with the collective, the national with the cosmopolitan, and the local with the global, which his succeeding works often show. This is a typically Emersonian transcendental tendency “to merge history into the individual rather than to merge the individual to the process of history” ([the editors’ untitled introduction to “The Philosophy of History”] *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson 2*: 3), as the editors of the collection suggest, seen in many of his major works.³⁹ When Emerson celebrates the local history

³⁹ *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson* is abbreviated to *EL* hereafter.

of Concord that symbolizes the history of America, he does so in the name of the transnational, transatlantic, and transcendental progress of democracy. Emerson's translation of world histories into national history and of national history into his story becomes the fundamental structure of Emerson's writing hereafter.

The Remains of the Untranslatable

In numerous essays and lectures presented after "Historical Discourse at Concord," Emerson repeatedly advocates the appropriation of old and foreign examples as a means to build up one's identity and to bring it to the realm of universality, a concept that he adopted from the translation theories of Goethe and German Romantic writers. In "The Philosophy of History," he says: "Let us unfetter ourselves of our historical associations and find a pure standard in the idea of man" (*EL* 1: 11). In "Literary Ethics," he asserts that "[t]he whole value of history, of biography, is to increase my self-trust, by demonstrating what man can be and do" (*E* 97). In "History," he also writes:

The world exists for the education of each man. There is no age or state of society or mode of action in history, to which there is not somewhat corresponding in his life. . . . He should see that he can live all history in his own person. . . . We are always coming up with the emphatic facts of history in our private experience, and verifying them here. All history becomes subjective; in other words, there is properly no history; only biography. (*E* 239-40)

For Emerson, "assimilating power" (*CW* 8: 100) constitutes the essence of one's original identity, personally or nationally.

But we may well wonder if Emerson really succeeded in translating the relics of

“the Past and the Distant” (*E* 278) into one’s firm and unified identity. Or, we might ask why he had to declare his transcendence over the material again and again if he had successfully “disburden[ed] the memory of its hoarded treasures as old rubbish” (“Self-Reliance” *E* 271). The repetition of the same motif gives us an impression that his mission was very difficult to accomplish. Carefully reading, as I will show, we can detect the irreducible remains of the actuality of events “painfully accumulated, atom after atom, act after act, in an aged creeping Past” (*Nature*, *E* 39), which cannot be easily translated into a transcendental sphere. B. L. Packer’s question about identity formation exactly points out the fundamental problem of Emerson’s idea of translation. Packer says, “What do we mean by a ‘self,’ anyway? How do we acquire a sense of self, if a great part of what we think of as constituting out selves is derived—by imitation, incorporation, distraction, or even outright reversal—from the people or the texts that surround us” (113). Emerson’s struggle to build up one’s identity, whether personal or national, by minimizing the influence of others in his writings paradoxically illuminates the fact that one is already inextricably entwined with the others.

The following is a passage from the last paragraph of *Nature*, in which he makes his famous declaration of independence from the old and the foreign: “Build, therefore, your own world. As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions. A correspondent revolution in things will attend the influx of the spirit. So fast will disagreeable appearances, swine, spiders, snakes, pests, madhouses, prisons, enemies, vanish; they are temporary and shall be no more seen” (*E* 48). We should not overlook that in this passage he says that by “conform[ing] your life to the pure idea in your mind” (*E* 48), the “disagreeable appearances” of “swine, spiders,”

other detestable things, and even “evil” (which he mentions at the end of the same paragraph) will be “no more seen” (*E* 49). In other words, he does not say that those matters themselves will cease to exist. This is also the case with another passage from *Nature*:

For, nature is not always tricked in holiday attire, but the same scene which yesterday breathed perfume and glittered as for the frolic of the nymphs, is overspread with melancholy today. Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man laboring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then, there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by who has just lost by death a dear friend the sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population. (*E* 11)

The material world, or nature, is indifferent to the human being. But the appearance of the world, like a costume, can change as the human mind that perceives it also changes. Therefore, Emerson goes on to say: “There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful. And the stimulus it affords to the sense, and a sort of infinitude which it hath, like space and time, make all matter gay. Even the corpse has its own beauty” (*E* 14). In other words, it is possible to make invisible the “disagreeable appearances” of “material death” with “intense light,” even though it is impossible to make the “corpse” vanish completely.

As is very well-known, Emerson had enough personal reason to be obsessed with the materiality of death. His elder brother John Clark died in 1807, and his father William in 1811. In his adult life, he recurrently saw his family members and friends passing away from him: his first wife Ellen in 1831; his younger brother Edward in 1834,

another younger brother Charles in 1836; his first child Waldo in 1842; his friend Margaret Fuller in 1850; his mother Ruth in 1852; his disciple and friend Henry David Thoreau in 1862; his aunt and advisor Mary Moody Emerson in 1863, and so forth. Scholars have noticed “an undersong of elegy in Emerson’s writing” (Richardson, *Mind on Fire* 189) in *Nature* and many other writings thereafter.⁴⁰ Indeed, his journal entries written when he was writing his first and presumably most optimistic work, *Nature*, and other material for his early lectures—most of which was worked up into *Essays: First Series*—indicate that the shadows of the dead never left his mind.

About ten months after Charles’s death, Emerson started to edit the brother’s

⁴⁰ Critics have seen *Nature* as Emerson’s response especially to Charles’s death. Robert Richardson argues that *Nature* is “Emerson’s open letter to the world on behalf of Charles” (225). James Cox argues that “Emerson literally feeds off the death of those around him” (71-2). B. L. Packer also contends that “the final chapters of [*Nature*] are largely shaped by Emerson’s complex response to Charles’s death (*Emerson’s Fall* 30), adding that the death of Charles was “the greatest shock Emerson had yet suffered” (48). Christopher Gaul attempts to revise Packer’s argument, stressing that “Charles’s death was not so much an existential crisis as it was a crisis of masculinity for Emerson” (“Mourning, Manhood, and Epistemology in Emerson’s *Nature*” 13). John Michael also notices the shadow of Charles looming in *Nature*, asserting that the “corpse” is the dead brother (*Emerson and Skepticism* 87-104). It is plausible that Emerson had the image of the brother in mind when he wrote *Nature*. But we should note that it was actually before Charles’s passing that Emerson started to mention the beauty of “corpse” in his journal. In an entry written in October, 1835, he writes: “Even the corpse that has lain in our chambers has added a solemn ornament to the house” (*JMN*: 5 101). The sentence was later reused in “Spiritual Laws.” In another entry, written on March 14, 1836, he again mentions “corpse”: “Misery is superficial and the remedy, when it can be attained, of presenting to the mind Universal Truths, is a perfect one. The wise man, that is, the healthy mind[,] learns that even the corpse has its own beauty” (*JMN*: 5 140); the last part of this passage was exactly repeated in *Nature*.

written texts for the future publication of his memoir.⁴¹ But he “read with some surprise the pages of his journal,” saying: “They show a nocturnal side which his diurnal aspects never suggested—they are melancholy, penitential, self accusing; I read them with no pleasure; they are creeping of an eclipsing temperament over his abiding light of character” (*JMN* 5: 152).⁴² His surprise and disappointment continued: “Like my brother Edward, Charles had a certain severity of Character which did not permit him to be silly—not for moments, but always self possessed & elegant whether morose or playful; no funning for him or Edward. It was also remarkable in C. that he contemplated with satisfaction the departure of a day” (*JMN* 5: 239-40). Emerson kept trying to find the cheerful brother whom he knew well. In a journal entry of March 19, 1837, he writes:

Yesterday I read many of C. C. E.’s letters to E. H. [Elizabeth Hoar, his fiancé] I find them noble but sad. Their effect is painful. I withdrew myself from the influence. So much contrition, so much questioning, so little hope, so much sorrow, harrowed me. I could not stay to see my noble brother tortured even by himself. No good or useful air goes out of such scriptures, but cramp & incapacity only. I shall never believe that any book is so good to read as that which sets the reader into a working mood, makes him feel his strength, & inspires hilarity. Such are Plutarch, & Montaigne & Wordsworth.

But also Charles would say this, & his conversation was of this character; but when he shut his closet door, “a quality of darkness” haunted him. (*JMN* 5:

⁴¹ For details of the plan, see *JMN* 6: 255-86; and *JMN* 7: 445-56.

⁴² Emerson thought Charles shared this view with him, too, noting, “[Charles] thought Christianity the philosophy of suffering; the religion of pain” (*JMN* 5: 154).

288-89)

This passage recapitulates the direction Emerson would take thereafter: his works to be written would be at once biographic, essayistic, and transcendental, and they would set “the reader into a working mood, make[s] him feel his strength, and inspire[s] hilarity.” Eventually, Emerson abandoned the project of the memoir, saying: “Let us not stoop to write the annals of sickness & disproportion” (*JMN* 7: 446). Instead, he began to conceive a new project of portraying “the interior & spiritual history of New England” “through the exhibition of family history” of the Emersons, especially of his aunt Mary Moody and Charles (*JMN* 7: 446). For the moment, he edited some passages from Charles’s journal and published them as “Notes from the Journal of a Scholar” in the first volume of *The Dial*. The published essay does not retain any “nocturnal” aspects of Charles’s thought, which Emerson cut out in the editing process. We should notice that Emerson’s editing of his brother’s texts and his attempt to rewrite his family history is structurally identical to what recent translation theorists consider to be ethically problematic translation, which “generally under the guise of transmissibility, carries out a systematic negation of the strangeness of the foreign work” (Berman 5).⁴³ Of course, Emerson did his deeds with what he believed were good intentions.⁴⁴ But we can also see the risk that even a well-intentioned translator may distort the actuality of events

⁴³ With regard to Emerson’s editing of Oriental religious texts in English translation for articles in the *Dial*, Versluis suggests that Emerson drastically cut the contexts of religious tales “to ignore the religious context of the various traditions and to regard them as purely intellectual, as aphorisms devoid of a wider religious and cultural context that fit neatly into an essay” (189).

⁴⁴ Emerson also did a careful editing for the publication of *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* after she was killed in a ship wreck. See Zwarg, *Feminist Conversation* 238-68.

represented in a text. The problem is all the more difficult to solve when one tries to represent the dead, for one can never know what the dead really thought or felt. We should see Emerson's editing and rewriting of others' texts as part of his translation as a process of transcending, which tends to remove the marks of otherness from original texts.

Emerson's ambivalence toward history can be summed up in Shoshana Felman's observation that "[h]istoriography is as much the product of the passion of forgetting as it is the product of the passion of remembering" (214). In many places, Emerson recurrently records his discomfort with historiography in general. We should see this repeated invective against history not just as a mere criticism of the "cold and cheerless" knowledge-based modern historicism that the Unitarian church advocates, but as a dramatic self-proclamation of his transcendence over the actuality of this world.

In an entry of May 26, 1837, Emerson reflects on an experience of transcendental euphoria: "As a plant in the earth so I grow in God. I am only a form of him. He is the soul of Me. I can even with a mountainous aspiring say, *I am God*, by transferring my *Me* out of the flimsy & unclean precincts of my body, my fortunes, my private will, & meekly retiring upon the holy austerities of the Just & the Loving—upon the secret fountains of Nature" (*JMN* 5: 336). Although Emerson does not use the word "translation" here, it is not difficult to see that his idea of "transferring my *Me* out of the flimsy & unclean precincts of my body, my fortunes, my private will" to the higher, divine sphere echoes the concept of translation in a biblical sense, which Webster defines in his *American Dictionary*, the transference of a person from earth to heaven without dying. Through translation, Emerson seeks to save the godly "Me" from the

dark “Me” and transfer it to the higher sphere in much the same way as he picked up only the diurnal parts of Charles’s journal for publication. The repetition of the same pattern in Emerson’s writings perhaps should be seen as his endless effort of self-translation to remove negatives from his past texts and rewrite his old history, by means of which he can ever ascend to the higher platform.

Kenneth Burke terms Emersonian transcendental dialectics “A Happiness Pill” (“I, Eye, Ay” 875), arguing that Emerson demonstrates “how evils will have good results, but play[s] down the reciprocal possibility whereby good might have evil results” (879). Burke’s reading of Emerson’s logic of symbolic transcendence serves as a precise explanation of the way in which Emerson employs his strategy of translation as a means for transcendence in many of the works following *Nature*. In “Compensation,” for example, Emerson emphatically says: “The heart and souls of all men being one, this bitterness of *His* and *Mine* ceases. His is mine. I am my brother, and my brother is me. . . . His virtue, —is not that mine? His wit, —if it cannot be made mine, it is not wit” (*E* 301). But he does not explain how “this bitterness of *His* and *Mine* ceases” nor mention “his” vice that might be also “mine.” In the mixing of “He” and “I” in translating “his” story into “mine,” all the negative aspects of “His” and “Mine” suddenly evaporate into the air. The same underestimation of negatives is also seen in “The Divinity School Address.” In the lecture, he mentions the episode of Massena, a general in Napoleon’s army, saying “that [Massena] was not himself until the battle began to go against him; then, when the dead began to fall in ranks around him, awoke his powers of combination, and he put on terror and victory as a robe” (*E* 90). Emerson concludes: “So it is in rugged crises, in unweariable endurance, and in aims which put

sympathy out of question, that the angel is shown” (*E* 90). In this passage, he stresses Massena’s heroic deeds, while minimizing the losses the commander incurred. Moreover, he avoids mentioning another aspect of Massena’s glorious victory: the losses on the opposite side. In this way, he identifies with the heroes of all ages and civilizations who endured their hardships in the most difficult times, saying: “Every history in the world is my history. I can as readily find myself in the tragedy of the Atrides as in the Saxon Chronicle, in the Vedas as in the New Testament, in Aesop as in the Cambridge Platform or the Declaration of Independence” (*JMN* 7: 389). Consequently, his transcendental historicism that tends to assimilate world histories into his own biography is often aligned with a rather vulgar masculine rhetoric that can be seen in numerous war narratives in the world.

World Disaster Literature

Gay Wilson Allen argues that “Emerson’s confidence in the healthy effect of the harmony between his conscious and unconscious mind was an early example of psychiatric therapy” (*Waldo Emerson* xi). A. W. Plumstead and Harrison Hayford also write: “Earlier wounds suffered in Emerson’s personal life had healed [by the middle of 1838]” (*JMN* 7: ix). But was the therapy really successful? Did his endless self-translation really help him remove the fear of death and the pain of loss? A host of critics have understood Emerson’s life and work in the framework of a growth myth. But we should notice that it is Emerson himself who derived such a Bildungsroman model from Goethe and some German literary works to construct his work and life based on it. To read Emerson’s life and work as a mere progressive history of a mind—as a

Bildungsroman—would result in the unintended repetition of the framework that the author established over a hundred and fifty years ago.⁴⁵ Emerson’s numerous texts indeed indicate that Emerson may have successfully learned how to alleviate his sufferings temporarily, but the cause of his fear and pain never left him. His journal entries also suggest how short-lived the effect of the therapy was.⁴⁶ He may never have had enough time to work thoroughly through his traumas. While he was getting over a crushing experience, another event hit him. He only temporarily suppressed the pain and sufferings by using, or abusing, his strategy of translation as a process of transcending. His writings did not change drastically toward his later career; rather, we can see the intensified self-translation of the same motif—the manipulation of history and the selective elision of negatives—in his so-called mature works as well as in his earlier ones.

The essay “Experience” is considered to be Emerson’s direct response to the death

⁴⁵ Michael Lopez opposes this evolutionary model, citing Thomas McFarland’s words: “Chronology . . . can often have a specific value; but its reverence by the scholarly tradition is largely a convention of that tradition, complementing the scholarly prejudices that require ‘development’ in the sense of progressive steps” (qtd. in “The Conduct of Life: Emerson’s Anatomy of Power” 247). My argument in this chapter also follows that of Lopez and McFarland.

⁴⁶ His journals show his continuous suffering. In a journal of 1837, he notes: “I am already thirty four years old. Already my friends & fellow workers are dying from me. Scarcely can I say that I see any new men & women approaching me; I am too old to regard fashion; too old to expect patronage of any greater or more powerful” (*JMN* 5: 322). In a journal entry of April 14, 1842, he again laments: “I have almost completed thirty nine years and I have not yet adjusted my relation to my fellows on the planet, or to my own work. Always too young or too old, I don’t satisfy myself; how can I satisfy others” (*JMN* 7: 458)?

of his son Waldo, but we should notice that he had already written some of the key phrases in the essay before the incident actually occurred. In a passage contemplating the event, Emerson says: “[S]ome thing which I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me, not enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me, and leaves no scar. It was *caducous*” (*AOL 473 italics added*). But this is not the first time that he uses this impressive word. In a journal entry of April 16, 1837, he notes, “At last they [all the angels and the gnomes] discover that all that at first drew them together was wholly *caducous*” (*JMN 5: 288 italics added*). In an entry of August 17, 1837, he again says, “These *caducous* relations are in the soul as leaves, flowers, & fruits are in the arboreous nature, and wherever it is put & how often soever they are lopped off, yes still it renews them ever” (*JMN 5: 363 italics added*). The word “caducous” is, so to speak, a magic word for Emerson that defends him against the fear of death and the pain of loss. And we should also notice that the image of caducous plants is structurally similar to that of transcendental translation, through which particular words in one language are “lopped off,” while the essential meanings remain the same. It is true that, as Packer has suggested, “the ending of ‘Experience,’ if it restates the old hope—or at least restates the impossibility of giving it up—hardly leaves us cheered” (*Emerson’s Fall 178*). But it is also hardly credible that he found “the middle way,” as Packer suggests (*Emerson’s Fall 199-211*).

Emerson’s later works indicate that he made as great an effort to increase the effect of self-healing through self-translation as before; he struggled to invent a more efficacious method of manipulating memory, of remembering positives and forgetting negatives. Or, in some extreme cases, he seems to go even further to affirm all positives

and negatives: the line between positive and negative effects of history is obscured, and the words of pure affirmation are reiterated for their own sake. As I have already mentioned, Emerson's writings often demonstrate his peculiar tendency to fuse (or confuse) the private with the public, personal biography with collective history. What is even more stunning in his works is that even his most personal writings of mourning can be read as an allegory of national melancholy. In some of his later works, the very private story of his struggle to master his grief often seems to overlap the national narrative of overcoming traumatic historical events, and vice versa. Sacvan Bercovitch's explanation of what he terms "American Jeremiad" most clearly elucidates the persistent logic in Emerson's writings: "Even when they are most optimistic, the jeremiads express a profound disquiet. Not infrequently, their affirmations betray an underlying desperation—a refusal to confront the present, a fear of the future, and effort to translate 'America' into a vision that works in spirit because it can never be tested in fact" (*American Jeremiad* xiv).⁴⁷

In that Emerson's work is structured in the cycle of receiving the shock of a loss and recovering from it by appropriating the lost one, there is no drastic change in his writings between *Nature* and *The Conduct of Life*. Even in "Fate," the essay that many

⁴⁷ Citing this passage of Bercovitch, John Michael also argues that we can see the same "combination of anxiety and denial in the final pages of" *Nature* (*Emerson and Skepticism* 151). While I find Bercovitch's explanation of American jeremiad beneficial to understanding the mechanism of cultural nationalism, I should emphasize that perhaps national jeremiad is not really peculiar to America. The problem of Bercovitch's logic is that in many of his writings, it seems often hard to tell whether he is analyzing the distinct characteristics of American nationalist culture or is actually producing them through his writing as a performative act.

critics believe marks Emerson's acquiescence to empiricism in his later career, toward its ending he celebrates a strong restart from "fate" to "freedom" as those critics have seen him do in his earlier works.⁴⁸ Emerson declares that "Fate involves melioration," and

⁴⁸ In his classic Emerson study, *Freedom and Fate*, Steven Whicher asserts that "[w]ith time Emerson became sharply aware of the contrast between the transcendental Self and the actual insignificant individual adrift on the stream of time and circumstance" (171), concluding that "[Emerson's] final optimism took him to a wise and balanced empiricism, a detached report on the human condition, and a genuinely humanist ethics" (171). This thesis of Emerson's acquiescence to the limitation of human potential for changing circumstances, which Laurence Buell terms "the plot of declension" ("Emerson's Fate" 12), has been highly influential in Emerson scholarship. In *Emerson on Race and History*, Philip Nicoloff argues, in the same vein as Whicher, that "Emerson's usual method of countering the evidence of experience through recourse to an exalted 'transcendental' view was largely subordinated in *English Traits* to the use of a historical relativism" (244); he further claims that in his later works, "[m]ore and more Emerson was inclined to explain the human past, present, and future in terms of some long-range destiny implicit in racial seed and the fated cycle of circumstance" (245). In "Emerson and the Dialectics of History," Cromphout, drawing on Whicher's thesis, argues: "Emerson not only thought and wrote about history; he also acted history. . . . In books such as *English Traits* and *The Conduct of Life* he wrote about his civilization rather than against it. He had become, in other words, a Representative Man himself, a synthesis of his age and the Soul" (63-64). More recently, Frank Shuffelton has also maintained that toward his later career, Emerson gradually shifted from his immersion in his interior world to a more active engagement in the exterior world. Shuffelton attempts to revise Whicher's thesis by stressing Emerson's successful synthesis of "freedom" and "fate" with regard to his conception of history in his "mature" works, saying: "Biography against history [in Emerson's early works] led to personal and private freedom, but biography against culture, the position of the mature Emerson, would, he hoped, underwrite the freedom of society, the higher civility which is in turn the historical guarantee of private freedom" (65)—though this hypothesis still remains within the framework that Whicher firmly established. The critical consensus has especially acknowledged the death of his son Waldo in 1842 as the most crucial event in

“[e]very calamity is a spur and valuable hint” (*E* 960), preaching a lesson that “by the cunning co-presence of two elements, which is throughout nature, whatever lames or paralyzes you, draws in with it the divinity, in some form, to repay” (*E* 967).⁴⁹ The same logic of compensation is easily found in many of his earlier works, as I have already shown. But if there is any small difference between his earlier works and *The Conduct of Life*, it is the intensity of repetition in his writing. Near the beginning of “Fate,” he writes:

But Nature is no sentimentalist,—does not cosset or pamper us. We must see that the world is rough and surly, and will not mind drowning a man or a woman; but swallows your ship like a grain of dust. The cold, inconsiderate of persons, tingles your blood, benumbs your feet, freezes a man like an apple. The diseases, the elements, fortune, gravity, lightning, respect no persons. The way of Providence is a little rude. The habit of snake and spider, the snap of the tiger and other leapers and bloody jumpers, the crackle of the bones of his prey in the coil of the anaconda, —these are in the system, and our habits are like theirs. You have just dined, and, however scrupulously the slaughter-house is concealed in the graceful distance of miles, there is complicity, —expensive races, —race living at the

his life that forced him out of transcendental idealism to moderate empiricism, from youth to maturity. See Packer, *Emerson’s Fall* 148-212; Sharon Cameron, “Representing Grief: Emerson’s ‘Experience’”; Pease, “‘Experience,’ Antislavery, and the Crisis of Emersonianism”; and O’Keefe, “‘Experience’: Emerson on Death.”

⁴⁹ For example, Zwarg also points out the trace of Margaret Fuller in “Fate” and his other writings saying: “In his expression of grief over Fuller’s death, Emerson conflates his sense of the traumatic historical event with the personal trauma of Fuller’s death” (“The Work of Trauma” 69).

expense of race. The planet is liable to shocks from comets, perturbations from planets, rendings from earthquake and volcano, alterations of climate, precessions of equinoxes. Rivers dry up by opening of the forest. The sea changes its bed. Towns and counties fall into it. At Lisbon, an earthquake killed men like flies. At Naples, three years ago, ten thousand persons were crushed in a few minutes. The scurvy at sea; the sword of the climate in the west of Africa, at Cayenne, at Panama, at New Orleans, cut off men like a massacre. Our western prairie shakes with fever and ague. The cholera, the small-pox, have proved as mortal to some tribes, as a frost to the crickets, which, having filled the summer with noise, are silenced by a fall of the temperature of one night. Without uncovering what does not concern us, or counting how many species of parasites hang on a bombyx; or groping after intestinal parasites, or infusory biters, or the obscurities of alternate generation; —the forms of the shark, the labrus, the jaw of the sea-wolf paved with crushing teeth, the weapons of the grampus, and other warriors hidden in the sea, —are hints of ferocity in the interiors of nature. Let us not deny it up and down. Providence has a wild, rough, incalculable road to its end, and it is of no use to try to whitewash its huge, mixed instrumentalities, or to dress up that terrific benefactor in a clean shirt and white neckcloth of a student in divinity. (*E* 945)

This is probably one of the darkest passages in the history of American literature. I do not believe that I am the only person who is appalled by the slightly ecstatic tone of his reading out the catalogue of fatal natural disasters in the world and shocked by the planetary scale of his imagining the “wild, rough, incalculable road” of Providence.

Indeed, this is not the first time that he contemplates the ferocious power of nature and history. In *Nature*, he also mentions “disagreeable appearances, swine, spiders, snakes, pests, madhouses, prisons, enemies” (*E* 48). But here in “Fate” the reiteration of the same motif is much more compulsive and exhaustive than in his early works. As I have already pointed out, Emerson’s cosmopolitan eclecticism rests on a Goethean concept of world literature—that “poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself in every place, and at all times, in hundreds of men” (Eckermann 203)—which is also derived from Herder’s concept of world history as “a grand totality of cosmic design” (Lawall 17) and a “total organism governed by principles of balance and compensation” (18). What Emerson is writing here is a darker version of world literature: he now sees a visitation of Providence “revealing itself in every place, and at all times, in hundreds of men.”

We can see Emerson’s almost compulsive repetition even escalating toward the end of “Fate.” All the last three paragraphs of the essay begin with almost the same phrase: he says, “Let us build alters to the Blessed Unity” in the third from the last paragraph; and “Let us build alters to the Beautiful Necessities” in the second-to-last and the last paragraphs (*E* 967). Furthermore, in the last paragraph almost the same phrase is again iterated three times as follows:

Let us build altars to the Beautiful Necessity, which secures that all is made of one piece; that plaintiff and defendant, friend and enemy, animal and planet, food and eater, are of one kind. In astronomy, is vast space, but no foreign system; in geology, vast time, but the same laws as to-day. Why should we be afraid of Nature, which is no other than “philosophy and theology embodied”? Why should

we fear to be crushed by savage elements, we who are made up of the same elements? *Let us build to the Beautiful Necessity*, which makes man brave in believing that he cannot shun a danger that is appointed, nor incur one that is not; *to the Necessity* which rudely or softly educates him to the perception that there are no contingencies; that Law rules throughout existence, a Law which is not intelligent but intelligence, — not personal nor impersonal,—it disdains words and passes understanding; it dissolves persons; it vivifies nature; yet solicits the pure in heart to draw on all its omnipotence. (*E 967-68 italics added*)

This recurrence of the same phrase is a unique element that is rarely seen in his earlier works. While in *Nature* Emerson assures us of the intense light of the mind that can cover up all the disagreeable appearances of the natural world, in the passage above he rather celebrates the crushing power of nature as a remedy for all the problems on this planet. It is also remarkable that in the latter he repeatedly urges his audience to take part in the construction of “altars” to what might happen in the future. This call for the active participation of the readers in the project of building new altars follows his censure of his contemporaries obsessed with the commemoration of the past in the opening sentences of *Nature*: “Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers” (*E 7*). The difference is that in *Nature* he is a critic of the time, while in “Fate” he is rather becoming an agent in a historical event, the on-going war.

To read the above-cited passage against the backdrop of the tumultuous 1850s would help us better understand the intensity and militancy pervading through the entire essay. As Packer suggests, it is mainly during “the unquiet decade between the Compromise of 1850 and the execution of John Brown [in 1859]” that Emerson

composed the essay (“History and Form in Emerson’s ‘Fate’” 446). On August 11, 1844, Emerson delivered a speech titled “An Address on the Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies.” At the end of the address, he mentions “a blessed necessity by which the interest of men is always driving them to the right” (*Emerson’s Anti-Slavery Writings* 33). This passage anticipates his later political thought, which prioritizes the future over the present and diminishes the importance of present woes. Thereafter, Emerson endorsed the abolitionist movement in public, expressing his moral indignation against slavery in the South and advocating the abolition of the inhumane system in his occasional political addresses.⁵⁰ While political tension was building up after the Compromise of 1850 through the implementation of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, Emerson gradually came to affirm the necessary use of force for social and political changes.⁵¹ Above all, John Brown, the militant extremist in the abolitionist movement, is considered to be the greatest influence on Emerson’s ultimate conversion to the

⁵⁰ For Emerson’s participation in the abolitionist movements, See Gougeon 138-313; and Allen 543-646.

⁵¹ Michael Ziser explains how Emerson’s seemingly abstract consideration of fatalism in “Fate” was under the strong influence of the then-emerging postsecular absolutism, represented by John Brown’s political and religious thought, arguing that Emerson “is the first American philosopher of this form of postsecular martyrdom,” which “remains open to the differences that constitute a pluralistic society” while “retaining religion’s transcendental justification for violent reform of the status quo” (“Emersonian Terrorism” 353). While Ziser’s argument about the “transcendental justification for violent reform of the status quo” in Emerson’s writings is clearly convincing, we could also argue that Emerson’s moral absolutism is rather “pre-secular,” stemming from the Puritan tradition of intolerance.

affirmation of violence for moral justice.⁵²

We might wonder how Emerson, who must have known the pain of losing one's family and friends better than anyone, ended up in this unabashed endorsement of force. But we should not overlook that the risk was already embedded in the original structure of his idea of translation as a path for transcendence, which tends to sacrifice the material to the ideal. When he says in "The Divinity School Address": "[Massena] was not himself until the battle began to go against him; then, when the dead began to fall in ranks around him, awoke his powers of combination, and he put on terror and victory as a robe" (*E* 90), his intention is to show the military hero as a figurative role model for empowering him and his audience who fight their own battles not in actual battle fields but in their own lives. Those heroes in world historical narratives do not exist in the material world, but in his romantic imagination; only their inspiring effect on his psyche is real for him. But it seems as if, watching Brown's terrorist activity, he started to believe that the real warrior embodying his heroic ideal finally appeared in front of him—as if the person were born from his fantasy to the actual world. As Julie Ellison argues, in Emerson's writing "imagination, which needs actively to control what it perceives, manipulates history until it becomes a phantasmagoria of fictions" (*Emerson's Romantic Style* 224). Ellison goes on to say: "To turn facts into fiction is not to write fiction, but to read history as fiction. . . . Anything he reads becomes, by virtue of that reading, 'fiction'; the truth he discovers in this fiction is that only he can endow it with

⁵² In "A Speech at a Meeting to Aid John Brown's Family," he called Brown "the hero of Harper's Ferry" (Emerson, *Emerson's Anti-Slavery Writing* 117) and "a pure idealist, with no by-ends of his own" (118), thus endorsing the terroristic employment of violence.

meaning; and, therefore, that *he* is its meaning. He deprives history of truth by interpreting it; then claims that it is true because *he* has done so” (226-27). Emerson incessantly retranslated his own past, editing out negative aspects of his life. Moreover, he even reconstructed world history as a mere projection of his inner drama.

Thoreau’s address “The Last Days of John Brown” speaks for the radical abolitionist sentiments of the time in which Emerson and many of his Concord neighbors also participated. Thoreau mentions: “On the day of [Brown’s] translation, I heard, to be sure, that he was *hung*, but I did not know what that meant; I felt not sorrow on that account; but not for a day or two did I even *hear* that he was *dead*, and not after any number of days shall I believe it” (*Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers* 75, italics in original). It is not difficult to see in Thoreau’s use of the word “translation” an example of the Biblical definition of translation as a means of transcendence, that is, the transferring of a person to the higher place without dying. They did not die, but were just translated alive from earth to heaven. This rhetoric of translation, connected to that of martyrdom, seems to have gained popularity among many New Englanders at that time for accepting the sacrifices to be made.⁵³

⁵³ Dimock also pays attention to Thoreau’s use of the word “translation” here, but her interpretation of the same word significantly differs from mine. Dimock claims:

Translation—the movement of a corpse by a vehicle driven by something other than himself, and the movement of a text by a vehicle driven by something similarly alien unites the living and the dead in a gesture steeped in mortality and inverting it, carrying it on. Rather than banishing the body of the deceased: from the eternity of the soul, as Krishna does, translation restores it and turns it over to as many receiving hands as the history and habitat of the species will allow. (*Through Other Continents* 16)

At a crucial moment in “Fate,” Emerson contemplates the “freedom of man,” saying:

Intellect annuls Fate. So far as a man thinks, he is free. And though nothing is more disgusting than the crowing about liberty by slaves, as most men are, and the flippant mistaking for freedom of some paper preamble like a ‘Declaration of Independence,’ or the statute right to vote, by those who have never dared to think or to act, yet it is wholesome to man to look not at fate, but the other way” (*AOL* 953-54).

This passage marks not only his persistent concern about the slavery issue, but also his inveterate habit of idealizing concrete social and political issues, such as the abominable material condition under which a specific group of people live and labor. He seems to have believed that the abolition of slavery is less the gradual change of the material condition of the world than the absolute transformation, or translation, of the moral situation of it.

Emerson developed his strategy of translation as a means for transcendence—the manipulation of memory and the selective amnesia of negative effects of history—to defend himself from the otherwise unbearable pain of and suffering from losing others. Of course, it is not ridiculous, much less reproachable, that someone who survived such traumatic experiences would wish to assuage his grief by considering those devastating events to be part of “beautiful necessity,” as many religions have preached. Nor is it

As I have discussed so far, I rather problematize a risk inherent in this type of idealist thinking that buttresses the Transcendentalist concept of translation, which by privileging the spiritual over the material, often makes light of the actual physical consequences that one’s act or remark, political or non-political, can bring about.

absurd that someone who has already faced numerous losses tries to prepare for another shock that “dissolves persons” by seeing it as “a danger that is appointed.” These are all understandable as a sort of self-defense mechanism common to many of us. As Packer suggests, “if Emerson had not developed such defenses very early in life, it is hard to see how he could have survived as a man, let alone a writer” (*Emerson’s Fall* 52). But is there not a risk that because of the habitual manipulation of memory, one somehow comes to believe even some avoidable losses to be already predetermined—as part of “beautiful necessity”? Are the “altars to the Beautiful Necessity” for those who are already dead or for those who may be dying in the near future? In 1860, when the tension between the North and the South had increased to the full extent, it was probably not very clear for which his fighting words were meant. The problem is that there is only a very thin line between the words of mourning for the dead and those of celebration of the dying. It depends on the context in which the words are uttered and received whether they are understood as a constative statement or a performative one. As the difference in quality between the excitement of a football stadium and that of a political speech in face of a military campaign is not very great, Emerson’s fight song for grief-stricken people in peacetime can easily translate into a battle hymn in wartime. Also, in response to the excitement of his audience, the warlike rhetoric in his speeches may have escalated. In the thrill of the coming war, he says that “we gladly forget numbers, money, climate, gravitation, and the rest of Fate” (*AOL* 957). The disquieting words in “Fate” may have reflected the time of a crisis, but it may have also worked as a language that, if slightly, accelerated the crisis of the time.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For Emerson’s gradual conversion from pacifism to militarism, see Larry Reynolds,

In the journals written after the war broke out with the South's attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, Emerson often notes his affirmative view of the war. He writes: "The War is a great teacher, still opening our eyes wider to some larger consideration. It is a great reconciler, too, forgetting our petty quarrels as ridiculous" (*JMN* 15: 145). In an entry titled "Benefits of the War," he also observes that the War "[m]ade the Divine Providence credible to many who did not believe Heaven quite honest" (*JMN* 15: 329); this sentence was exactly repeated later in "Address at the Dedication of the Soldiers Monuments in Concord" after the war. In the face of his son Waldo's death, Emerson had written: "Returned this day, the South-wind searches, / And finds young pines and budding birches; / But finds not the budding man; / Nature, who lost, cannot remake him; / Fate let him fall, Fate can't retake him; / Nature, Fate, men, him seek in vain" (*CRWE* 9: 149), lamenting the loss that "the South-wind" "cannot restore" (*CRWE* 9: 148). But his writings after 1861 lack the sense of irreparable losses. The address "Fortune of the Republic," which Emerson delivered on December 1, 1863 at the height of the Civil War, marks his willing acceptance of the sacrifice necessary for a social and political change. Emerson writes:

For such a gain, —to end once for all that pest of all free institutions, —perhaps it will be, —that this continent be purged, and a new era of equal rights dawn on the universe. Who would not, if it could be made certain, that the new morning of universal liberty should rise on our race, by the perishing of one generation, —who would not consent to die? (*Emerson's Anti-Slavery Writing* 153)

Emerson's logic of sacrifice is that "the perishing of one generation," not to mention one

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particular person, is not important, for it would help pave the way for “universal liberty.” We may well notice that the prioritization of the ideal and the minimization of the material are fundamental to Emerson’s concept of translation. When the language adapted from popular Romantic historiographies in the world and that employed for accusing the inhumane system of slavery are tied together, the affirmation of the figurative violence of history subtly translates into the celebration of actual force. In the process, the care of those who because of the war may experience the same sort of pain and sufferings as he has done vanishes from his mind.⁵⁵ Thus, his words originally meant for the personal work of psychological self-defense inadvertently come close to those of political propaganda supporting the total war that might—and actually did—cause a great many losses on both sides. The slightly excessive power in his drive to escape from the fear of death and the pain of losses urges him to utter words that might invite even more deaths. This ironic process may remind us of what Freud would call “the death drive.”⁵⁶

On April 9, 1865, the Civil War ended with more than 620,000 soldiers’ lives lost (James McPherson 854). No one would deny that it was a fortunate event that the chattel slavery in the South was finally abolished as a result of the war. But it would be probably a mistake to think that the war was conducted according to “the Divine Providence” as Emerson seems to have believed. Likewise, it would be an error to take

⁵⁵ Emerson dissuaded his son Edward from joining the Union army. See Allen 610-11, 617, and 622. But the critics who think highly of Emerson’s engagement in the political rarely mentioned the fact. I confess that I feel slightly relieved to know that Emerson did not entirely lose the fear of losing his son, though the admittance of the fact would charge him with moral inconsistency.

⁵⁶ See Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontent*.

the particular man-made disaster as part of a universal natural disaster, which Emerson does in his writings in and after “Fate.” On April 19, 1867, he delivered “Address at the Dedication of the Soldiers Monuments in Concord” at the commemorative event of the Civil War, praising the dead in the Union Army as war heroes who served the second revolution succeeding the American Revolution. Following the event, the town dedicated an obelisk to the war heroes. It was the second obelisk built in the town; the first one commemorating the Battle of Concord had been built by the North Bridge. It was Emerson who dedicated his famous poem “Concord Hymn” to the heroes of the Revolution for the unveiling ceremony on July 4, 1837. Thus, he served as the minister for the celebration of two of the most crucial events in the history of Concord consecutively; and this time his generation finally built the sepulcher of their sons beside that of “the fathers.”

In the address, Emerson iterates the rhetoric of at once naturalizing and universalizing the war, by saying: “I shall say of this obelisk, planted here in our quiet plains, what Richter says of the volcano in the fair landscape of Naples: ‘Vesuvius stands in this poem of Nature, and exalts everything, as war does the age’” (*CRWE* 11: 351-52). He goes on to say that “a plain stone like this . . . mixes with surrounding nature,—by day with the changing seasons, by night the stars roll over it gladly,—becomes a sentiment, a poet, a prophet, an orator, to every townsman and passenger, an altar where the noble youth shall in all time come to make his secret vows” (*CRWE* 11: 352). We should notice that here again does he use the same word “altar” as he recurrently did at the end of “Fate.” The repetition of the same phrase gives us an impression that when he wrote “Fate,” he may have already expected the scene of his

dedicating the altar to the war heroes of the then-coming war. He also mentions that the war removed the poison that “in eighty years corrupted the whole overgrown body politic” of “the Republic” (*CRWE* 11: 352), reemphasizing the continuity of the spirit of the town as he did in the address “Historical Discourse at Concord.” But while reciting the benefits of the war, he never mentions the trace of negative effects of the war, omitting the nocturnal side of history in the same way he excluded some negative events from his history of Concord in “Historical Discourse.”

It is not the grim aspects of the war alone that are removed from Emerson’s translation of US Civil War history. What he forgets or forsakes in the address is the most difficult and important project that had to be carried out after the war: the reconstruction of the South, including the improvement of ex-slaves’ standard of living on the political, social, and material level. He casually contemplates the reason the North waged the war: “Reform must begin at home. The aim of the hour was to reconstruct the South; but first the North had to be reconstructed” (*CRWE* 11: 352). The following passage sums up not only his personal, but also, perhaps, many New Englanders’ typical view of the South and their indifference to the reconstruction of the land:

The opinions of masses of men, which the tactics of primary caucuses and the proverbial timidity of trade had concealed, the war discovered; and it was found, contrary to all popular belief, that the country was at heart abolitionist, and for the Union was ready to die.

As cities of men are the first effects of civilization, and also instantly causes of more civilization, so armies, which are only wandering cities, generate a vast heat, and lift the spirit of the soldiers who compose them to the boiling point. The

armies mustered in the North were as much missionaries to the mind of the country as they were carriers of material force, and had the vast advantage of carrying whither they marched a higher civilization. Of course, there are noble men everywhere, and there are such in the South; and the noble know the noble, wherever they meet; and we have all heard passages of generous and exceptional behavior exhibited by individuals there to our officers and men, during the war. But the common people, rich or poor, were the narrowest and most conceited of mankind, as arrogant as the negroes on the Gambia River; and, by the way, it looks as if the editors of the Southern press were in all times selected from this class. The invasion of Northern farmers, mechanics, engineers, tradesmen, lawyers and students did more than forty years of peace had done to educate the South. “This will be a slow business,” writes our Concord captain home, “for we have to stop and civilize the people as we go along.” (*CRWE* 11: 354-56)

The point is that while, all the population in the North is civilized, most of the white population of the South is “the narrowest and most conceited of mankind, as arrogant as the negroes on the Gambia River.” Here the concrete social and political issue of governing the post-slavery South is reduced into a mere abstract moral and religious issue. Also, the present difficulty (and the possible failure) of reconstructing the South is implicitly attributed to the innate—and almost racial—defects of Southerners, who are closer to “negroes” in their characters than Northerners are. And the care of the most oppressed, the emancipation of whom had to be the ultimate goal of the war, eventually evaporates in the air, for in many Northerners’ minds they have already solved all those problems by winning the sacred war. The end of the Civil War must have been the

beginning of the extremely complex and difficult process for the effectuation of abolition on the material as well as symbolic level. But for many Northerners, the end of the war was that of abolitionism; in the half-nation-wide exhilaration accompanying the glorious victory of the Union, the most crucial project of emancipating the most oppressed was gradually forgotten.⁵⁷

I do not intend to claim that Emerson is an ideologue of the collective amnesia of the dark side of American history, but it would be fair to say that his problematic concept of translation as a means of transcendence reflects the structure of remembering and forgetting the past and the foreign in a national history. As Bhabha suggests, “the very idea of a pure, ‘ethnically cleansed’ national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex inter-weavings of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood” (*The Location of Culture* 5). Emerson’s numerous texts, at once private and public, illuminate the traces of the national struggle to establish American national identity through the act of linguistic and cultural translation and to situate the nation, whose territory was rapidly expanding at that time, as the masthead of the universal history of ever-progressing democracy.

In the above-mentioned essay “Fortune of the Republic,” Emerson glorifies the arrival of universal liberty:

Let the passion for America cast out the passion for Europe. Here let there be what the earth waits for us, —exalted manhood, the new man, whom plainly this

⁵⁷ Charles Elliot Norton’s observation of aging Emerson, which Rusk quotes, is noteworthy: “Emersonian optimism was degenerating into ‘into fatalistic indifference to moral considerations, and to personal responsibilities’ and was ‘at the root of much of the irrational sentimentalism in our American politics’” (478).

country must furnish. . . . We are all of English race. But climate and country have told on us so that John Bull does not know us. It is the Jonathanizing of John. They have grown cosmopolitan. Once the most English of English men, hating foreigners, they have grown familiar with the foreigner, and learned to use him according to his gift. (151)

America is America, and it is all the more so for being trans-European, cosmopolitan, and universal. Emerson's circling and ascending rhetoric like an upward spiral mirrors the fundamental structure of national exceptionalism, which tends to consider the nation in essence to be at once particularly original and universally progressive. It is in this sense that Emerson has been and will be the representative man of American cultural identity. As we will see in the following chapters, there is no antebellum American literary author who was completely free from this nationalist-cosmopolitan rhetoric of translation.

CHAPTER III

“SUCH A WRETCHED MEDIUM AS WORDS”:

HAWTHORNE, JOHN ELIOT, AND THE QUESTION OF TRANSLATION

Like most students in his time, Hawthorne received a classical education at home and school. He is said to have been an excellent translator of Greek and Latin at Bowdoin College (Wineapple 52). His lifelong friend Horatio Bridge remembers that Hawthorne excelled particularly in “the Latin, which he wrote with great ease and purity” (*Personal Recollections* 33). Compared with Harvard, Bowdoin offered a rather traditional education with little influence of German and other modern literatures and languages on their curriculum (Turner 35-6). Hawthorne’s view of literature and language was overall less cosmopolitan and more classical than that of the New England Transcendentalists. His work as classical translator would culminate in his two books for children: *A Wonder Book* (or *Wonder-Book*) *for Girls and Boys* and *Tanglewood Tales*, though both collections were not direct but indirect translations from Greek and Roman myths.¹ He had a certain interest in the enthusiastic reception of German literature among his contemporaries, even taking German lessons at the Peabody house. During his first residence in Concord, he attempted a translation of Gottfried August Bürger’s German gothic ballad “Lenore” into English (*The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* 8: 369).² But he never acquired the same level of proficiency in

¹ According to Hugo McPherson, Hawthorne’s stories in these two collections were based on Charles Anthon’s *Classical Dictionary*. See McPherson 47-107.

² *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* is abbreviated to *C* hereafter.

German or any modern European languages as did his Transcendentalist neighbors, such as Fuller, Emerson, and Thoreau, or even his sister Elizabeth, also known as Ebe, who “studied languages with ease, Spanish, French, and German” (Wineapple 29).³ Hawthorne struggled to read the German author Ludwig Tieck’s tale “slowly and painfully” (C8: 372), “choking with a huge German word” (C8: 378). While apparently having a hard time in his German training, Hawthorne was also working at Charles Fourier in the original French, which eventually led to a detailed analysis of the French philosopher’s political thoughts on sexuality in *The Blithedale Romance*.⁴

Hawthorne’s idea of language and translation makes a stark contrast with the contemporary Transcendentalist view of language as a reliable medium to convey thoughts and feelings. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Emerson entertained an idea that it is possible to translate any language into a sort of universal language, by means of which one can perfectly communicate with another. Numerous passages from Hawthorne’s

³ Hawthorne’s problem with translation dates back to much earlier days. In a journal entry of October 25, 1835, he writes:

Sentiments in a foreign language, which merely convey the sentiment, without retaining to the reader any graces of style or harmony of sound, have somewhat of the charm of thoughts in one’s own mind that have not yet been put into words. No possible words that we might adapt to them could realize the unshaped beauty that they appear to possess. This is the reason that translations are never satisfactory, —and less so, I should think, to one who cannot than to one who can pronounce the language. (C8: 16)

⁴ For a comprehensive study of Hawthorne’s relation to Fourier, see Loman, *Somewhat on the Community System*. Also see Berlant, “Fantasies of Utopia in *The Blithedale Romance*” 38-42. Loman estimates that both Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne read Fourier’s *Théorie de l’unité universelle* in the original “several years earlier than 1845” (18-9).

letters and notebooks suggest that he also had the same dream of communication without loss through incorrupt language “contemporaneous with every thought” (Emerson, *E* 23). But Hawthorne differs from his Transcendentalist neighbors in that he never finds it possible to recover such pre-babelic perfection of language. In a letter to Sophia dated January 13, 1841, for example, Hawthorne expresses his disagreement with the Transcendentalist view of language and his slight antipathy toward nineteenth-century feminism in general, saying: “And what wilt thou do to-day, persecuted little Dove, when thy abiding-place will be a Babel of talkers? Would that Miss Margaret Fuller might lose her tongue!—or my Dove her ears, and so be left wholly to her husband’s golden silence” (C15: 511). In so doing, Hawthorne also confides his dream of language in such a perfect order and his despair at the impossibility of such a dream coming true, saying:

Dearest wife, I truly think that we could dispense with audible speech, and yet never feel the want of an interpreter between our spirits. We have soared into a region where we talk together in a language that can have no earthly echo. Articulate words are a harsh clamor and dissonance. When man arrives at his highest perfection, he will again be dumb!—for I suppose he was dumb at the Creation, and must perform an entire circle in order to return to that blessed state. (C15: 511-12)

Hawthorne apparently considered human language irrevocably wretched and the lack of communication, as is described in the story of the Babel, a fundamental condition of human life.

Hawthorne wrote many love letters to his future wife Sophia—and he continued to do so after their marriage when they were apart. In those letters, he recurrently notes his concern about the inadequacy of language as a medium to communicate his true feelings, saying, “No tongue can tell—no pen can write what I feel” (C15: 481). This sort of phrase, of course, is a cliché universally used in a love letter. But Hawthorne’s use of this type of expression is a little out of the ordinary. His expression of love for a woman often becomes a philosophical contemplation on the inadequacy of language and the impossibility of translation. In his letter to Sophia dated April 15, 1840, he writes:

In truth, I never use words, either with the tongue or pen, when I can possibly express myself in any other way;—and how much, dearest, may be expressed without the utterance of a word! . . . In heaven, I am very sure, there will be no occasion for words;—our minds will enter into each other, and silently possess themselves of their natural riches. Even in this world, I think, such a process is not altogether impossible—we ourselves have experienced it—but words come like an earthy wall betwixt us. Then our minds are compelled to stand apart, and make signals of our meaning, instead of rushing into one another, and holding converse in an infinite and eternal language. Oh, dearest, have [not] the moments of our oneness been those in which we were most silent? It is our instinct to be silent then, because words could not adequately express the perfect concord of our hearts, and therefore would infringe upon it. . . . such a wretched medium as words. (C15: 440-41)

While this passage could be almost read as circumstantial evidence of their premarital relations, it also indicates his profound distrust of “such a wretched medium as words,”

which, like “an earthy wall,” hinders his perfect communion with his love.⁵ In a letter to Sophia dated May 19, 1840, about a month after the above-cited letter, he complains about the inadequacy of language: “I have felt, a thousand times, that words may be a thick and darksome veil of mystery between the soul and the truth which it seeks. Wretched were we, indeed, if we had not better means of communicating ourselves, no fairer garb in which to array our essential selves, than these poor rags and tatters of Babel” (C15: 462).⁶ The problem of language as a medium for communication continues to bother Hawthorne. In a letter dated January 20, 1842, he again writes: “Most dear, I love thee beyond all limits, and write to thee because I cannot help it; —nevertheless, writing grows more and more an inadequate and unsatisfactory mode of revealing myself to thee. . . . Even the spoken word has long been inadequate” (C15:

⁵ Hawthorne scholars have denied the possibility of the premarital relations between Hawthorne and Sophia Peabody. Walter Herbert argues that “[a]lthough Nathaniel and Sophia almost certainly did not consummate their relationship sexually before the wedding, their premarital marriage was not ascetic” (*Dearest Beloved* 115).

⁶ In a letter dated April 2, 1839, Hawthorne writes: “When we shall be endowed with our spiritual bodies, I think they will be so constituted, that we may send thoughts and feelings any distance, in no time at all, and transfuse them warm and fresh into the consciousness of those whom we love,” continuing to say: “Let us content to ourselves to be earthly creatures, and hold communion of spirit in such modes as are ordained to us—by letters . . . by our heartfelt words, when they can be audible; by glances—through which medium spirits do really seem to talk in their own language. . . .” (C15: 294-95). In a letter dated April 30, 1839, he likewise writes that “when I have written, the soul of my thoughts has not readily assumed the earthly garments of language” (C15: 305-6). In a letter dated September 18, 1840, he also writes: “If thou shouldst talk in an unknown tongue, I should listen with infinite satisfaction, and be much edified in spirit at least, if not in intellect. When thou speakest to me, there is mingled with those earthly words, which are mortal inventions, a far diviner language, which thy soul utters and my soul understands” (C15: 491-2).

605-6).⁷ He writes because he “cannot help it,” but “writing grows more and more an inadequate and unsatisfactory mode” of expressing himself. As he would write later in a journal entry: “Language—human language—after all, is but little better than the croak and cackle of fowls, and other utterances of brute nature; sometimes not so adequate” (C8: 294). This curse of Babel would become a central concern for Hawthorne, coming up time and again in his numerous writings.

There was a moment in time when Hawthorne enjoyed himself free of his nagging unease about the problem of language. Satisfied with his marriage with Sophia and his new life in Concord, he was, if momentarily, absorbed in the transcendental ethos of the town. He tellingly writes: “Happiness has no succession of events; because it is a part of eternity; and we have been living in eternity, ever since we came to this old Manse. Like Enoch, we seem to have been translated to the other state of being, without having passed through death” (C8: 315). This passage sounds almost like what Emerson would say—except for the insertion of “seem to,” which Emerson would not probably use in a similar passage. In any case, the perfect moment of transcendence over the material through translation did not last long. The problem of translation soon returns to Hawthorne’s mind. His journal entries after the birth of his first child Una suggest his persisting trouble with translating his children’s words into comprehensible forms as well as describing “their actions and moods, as to paint the shifting hues on a dove’s neck” (C8: 400). Watching Una and his first son Julian playing together, Hawthorne

⁷ In a letter dated Sept 3, 1841, he also writes: “Thou lovest like a celestial being, (as truly thou art,) and dost express thy love in heavenly language;—it is like one angel writing to another angel; but alas! the letter has miscarried, and has been delivered to a most unworthy mortal” (C15: 565).

finds it “impossible to describe the continual vicissitude—the cooperation and little contests of these children; sometimes talking together in language to be understood by nobody else, making strange noises in rivalry of each other” (C8: 407).

Hawthorne’s contemplation on the question of translation can be also traced back to the early short story “Rappaccini’s Daughter.” The story is presented as a mock translation of “Beatrice; ou la Belle Empoisonneuse” by the French author Monsieur de l’Aubépine, whose name stands for the same species of plant as “hawthorne” in English (C10: 91-3).⁸ In the mock preface of the story, the editor introduces the obscure French author to the reader, saying: “We do not remember to have seen any translated specimens of the productions of M. de l’Aubépine—a fact the less to be wondered at, as his very name is unknown to many of his own countrymen as well as to the student of foreign literature” (91). In this passage, Hawthorne highlights the extensive popularity of translations of foreign literatures in the early nineteenth century, typically seen in the publication of numerous anthologies, such as George Ripley’s edition of *The Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature*. In so doing, Hawthorne underlines his “unfortunate position” “without an audience” between the Transcendentalists and “the great body of pen-and-ink men who address the intellect and sympathies of the multitude” (91). Indeed, the story includes a critique of the ethically problematic translation that either ignores or overstates the affective aspects of everyday life, translating lived human experiences into mere signs and thus turning a human into a lifeless object—a tendency that, as I will discuss later in this chapter, Hawthorne found prevalent in the works of both Transcendentalists and sentimental novelists.

⁸ For the possible sources of the characters’ names. see Cappello 264-65.

As is well known, the story of “Rappaccini’s Daughter” revolves around Giovanni’s struggle to solve the mystery of the beautiful but poisonous girl Beatrice. According to his mentor Professor Baglioni, the girl is tainted with some poison, which her father Dr. Rappaccini had administered into her body since her childhood. In the end, Giovanni trusts Baglioni’s words, persuading Beatrice to drink the medicine the professor prescribed for her to “be purified from evil” (C10: 126). Eventually, the antidote proves fatal to her. In the story, as Larry Reynolds suggests, Hawthorne “explore[s] the destructive effects upon a young woman of male dominance disguised as benign perfectionism” (“Hawthorne’s Labors in Concord” 20). Giovanni’s problem is that he cannot accept his sensual attraction to Beatrice, continually denying the actuality of his corporeal experience and imposing upon her his idealized image of “a heavenly angel” (122). At her last moment, she challenges Giovanni’s moral puritanism, saying: “Oh, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine” (127)? As Mary Cappello has already argued, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” is a story about translation that “illuminates an interpretive dilemma of everyday life by implying that we project our desires, present or past, onto signifiers; we give new realities old descriptions; we have a tendency to see only what we are accustomed to seeing, what we have seen in the past” (“‘Rappaccini’s Daughter’ as Translation” 269). The same ethical problem of translation recurrently shows up as a central motif in Hawthorne’s works.

Hawthorne’s meditation on the question of translation also grows into complex questions about representation. In his notebooks, Hawthorne repeatedly notes his inability to translate impressions, thoughts, and feelings into words. In a journal entry dated as early as October 23, 1841, he writes that “[n]o language can give an idea of the

beauty and glory of the trees, just at this time,” adding that it “would be easy, by a process of word-daubing, to set down a confused idea of gorgeous colors, like a bunch of tangled skeins of bright silk; but there is nothing, in the reality, of the glare which would thus be conveyed” (C8: 216-17). In his notebooks on his travels in Europe, Hawthorne also repeatedly mentions the impossibility of translating into words the visual images of the scenes, architectures, and landscapes he sees. During his trip in Italy, for example, he writes: “The bright Italian moon was throwing a shower of silver over the scene, and making it so beautiful that it seemed miserable not to know how to put it into words; a foolish thought, however, for such scenes are an expression in themselves, and need not be translated into any feebler language” (C8: 236).⁹

Hawthorne’s lifelong fascination with the question of translation manifests itself in the fact that throughout his career he wrote a number of important works featuring

⁹ During the same trip, he also notes: “No language nor any art of the pencil can give an idea of the scene. When God expressed himself in the landscape to mankind, he did not intend that it should be translated into any tongue save his own immediate one” (C8: 255). His problem of translation continues: “It is idle to mention one or two things, when all are so beautiful and curious; idle, too, because language is not burnished gold, with here and there a brighter word flashing like a diamond; and therefore no amount of talk will give the slightest idea of one of these elaborate handiworks” (C8: 375). When visiting Westminster Abbey, he also writes: “. . . but it is useless to attempt a description:—these things are not to be translated into words; they can be known only by seeing them, and, until seen, it is well to shape out not idea of them. Impressions, states of mind, produced by noble spectacles of whatever kind, are all that it seems worth while to attempt reproducing with the pen” (C8: 319). In Oxford, he also notes that “it is so impossible to express them in words. They are themselves—as the architect left them, and as Time has modified and improved them—the expression of an idea which does not admit of being otherwise expressed, or translated into anything else” (C8: 114).

translator figures, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Blithedale Romance*, and his posthumously-published work *Septimius Felton*, or *Septimius Norton*, along with numerous journal entries and letters touching on the issue. Those texts often foreground a variety of political and ethical problems in the nineteenth-century culture of translation, thus presenting a subtle critique of monolingual nationalism concomitant to it. Given the author's putative political ideology as Anglo-American nationalist and conformist, which Sacvan Bercovitch and many others have pointed out, it might seem counter-intuitive to contend that his texts at some crucial moments opposes such monolingual nationalism as I have outlined in the previous chapters.¹⁰ Because of his well-controlled style, which lacks the cosmopolitan eclecticism characteristic of Transcendentalists' works or the radical neologism rampant in Melville's writing, Hawthorne may well seem a monolingual literary ideologue typical in Antebellum America. As Colleen Glenney Boggs argues, "Hawthorne thought that American literature needed to be written in a single language, English, which would take precedence over all other languages within the Americas" (2), though, obviously, this comment would apply to most American literary authors in the US who never write in any languages other than English. But, carefully read, Hawthorne's texts often illuminate the marks of the untranslatable in a nationalist narrative or in a national language, thus delineating the limits of such a monolingualist cause. Having said that, I do not intend to claim that Hawthorne is an exponent of multilingualism, which he is obviously not. What I would like to show in this chapter is the ways in which his works

¹⁰ The most influential works in this vein are Bercovitch, Ch7 of *The Rites of Assent*; Bercovitch, *The Office of The Scarlet Letter*; and Arac, "The Politics of *The Scarlet Letter*."

dealing with the questions of translation complicate incipient US monolingual nationalism and destabilize American national identity.

John Eliot in *The Scarlet Letter*

Hawthorne's special attraction to the questions of translation manifests itself particularly in his fascination with John Eliot, the seventeenth-century Puritan missionary known as the apostle to the Indians. Eliot was renowned for translating the Bible into the Massachusetts Indian language and establishing the so-called praying towns for Indian Christian converts in Massachusetts. There has been a heated debate over the causes and effects of the missionary efforts to bring literacy to the Indians in colonial America.¹¹ Scholars have suggested that Eliot helped to propagate the popular Puritan view about Indian conversions, still influential in the nineteenth century, that Indians should be civilized before being Christianized.¹² Eliot acknowledged the

¹¹ For the critical history of the missionary effort to achieve literacy for the Indians, see Monaghan 48-9.

¹² Edward Gray claims that "Eliot assumed Indian Christianity would be possible only after a complete reformation of the Indians' way of life, and this was reflected in his priorities as a missionary" (*New World Babel* 64). Cogley also argues that "Eliot and other Puritans insisted that civility had to accompany religion," since "the latter could not endure without the former" (*John Eliot's Mission to the Indians before King Philip's War* 7). In the same vein, Julius Rubin also mentions that missionaries "needed to reduce Indians to civility before they would be worthy of Christianization" (28). In Eliza Buckminster Lee's 1848 novel *Naomi, or Boston Two Hundred Years Ago*, which Hawthorne may have read during his composition of *The Scarlet Letter*, the narrator mentions Eliot's name: "Faith's good-sense would have suggested to the Rev. Mr. Eliot, their faithful evangelist, that civilization and physical comfort should have preceded conversion; that the squaw should have made the wigwam neat before she attended the

especial importance of achieving literacy for the Indians in order to instruct them in civility and Christianity. His translation of the Bible into the Massachusetts language can be seen as the first step of the literacy education in America that promoted the alphabetization of indigenous oral traditions and paved the way for the later monolingualization of America.

Scholars have also discussed the revival of John Eliot's legend by New England writers during the period of Indian Removal in the first half of the nineteenth century. For nineteenth-century readers, the story of Eliot's failed mission often served as a reminder of their benevolent ancestors' past efforts and thus as an excuse for the present campaign for Indian Removal. Reading Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, Lucy Maddox points out that the name of "Eliot provides a sanction for the idea" "that only a benevolent, enlightened form of Christianity can save the Indians from their own vengeful nature and allow them to participate in the full benefits of white civilization" (*Removals* 109). In his analysis of the nineteenth-century interpretation of Eliot, Joshua David Bellin also concludes that "Eliot was created by the nineteenth century in order to bolster expansionism by circumventing critical inquiry; arising from the need to support actions many knew were unsupportable, the cult of Eliot helped to limit the range of imaginative possibilities that might have made such actions unnecessary" ("Apostle of Removal" 32).

Hawthorne partly shared in the nineteenth-century resurrection of the Puritan evangelist, though it is debatable whether his portrayal of Eliot actually endorses the

lecture, and should have been taught to make her garments before she was taught to pray" (83).

imperial expansionism developing in the early nineteenth century. Hawthorne published a review of Convers Francis's biography *The Life of John Eliot, the Apostle to the Indians* in 1836 in the *American Magazine of Entertaining and Useful Knowledge*, which he co-edited with his sister Elizabeth Manning Hawthorne. Hawthorne writes that Francis "has done justice to the conduct of the first colonists of New England towards the Indian tribes," accepting the author's view that Eliot's legend "constitutes a chapter in the annals of benevolence, which every Christian will contemplate with pleasure" ("Life of Eliot" 495). Hawthorne concludes the review by quoting a passage from Francis's book:

A century and a half has elapsed since the last impression of the volume appeared, and it is a thought full of melancholy interest, that the people for whom they were designed may be considered as no longer in the roll of living men, and that probably not an individual in the wide world can read the Indian Bible. It is a remarkable fact, that the language of a version of the Scriptures, made so late as the latter half of the 17th century, should now be entirely extinct. (496)

As Larry Reynolds suggests, Hawthorne, who often considered himself to be a failed writer in the early 1840s, saw Eliot as an ideal of "the inspired and dedicated intellectual" (*Devils and Rebels* 38).¹³ Hawthorne's interest in Eliot in the book review is mostly centered on his personal melancholy about his obscure status as a writer.

¹³ Larry Reynolds also suggests that Eliot "served as Hawthorne's political exemplar" as a pacifist thinker (*Devils and Rebels* 38). But, as I discuss in this chapter, Hawthorne's political thought differs from Eliot's in that the former is not entirely convinced of the validity of the evangelical certitude that the latter symbolizes. Hawthorne pays much attention to the fallibility of all human beings, from which, in his

In *The Whole History of Grandfather's Chair*, one of his works for juvenile readers, Hawthorne also spares a chapter for Eliot. In the chapter "The Indian Bible," Grandfather tells of Eliot's tale apparently drawing on Francis's biography, for he mentions that "Dr. Francis had written a very beautiful Life of Eliot" (C6: 49). Laurence, one of the children gathering around Grandfather to hear his stories, laments that Eliot "should have toiled so hard to translate the Bible, and now the language and the people are gone" (49).¹⁴ The image of Grandfather edifying children gathering around him in

eyes, both his Puritan ancestors and his many contemporaries, including Transcendentalist writers and sentimental novelists, believe that they are free.

¹⁴ Critics have debated over Hawthorne's employment of the nineteenth-century rhetoric to sanction Indian Removal as part of the natural process or inevitable progress of history in *The Whole History*. Maddox claims that the "story of Eliot, therefore, while it emphasizes his unique compassion, also illustrates for the children the inability of the reformer, no matter how well-meaning he or she might be, to have any significant or lasting effect on the course of history" (*Removals* 115). In a similar vein, Derek Pacheco situates the work in the thread of popular nineteenth-century patriotic historiography, asserting that "[r]elegating the Indian to the early epochs of American history, *The Whole History* reproduces the cultural myth of the vanishing Indian, a fantasy of a race destroyed not by the policies of Anglo-America, but by the movement of time itself" ("Vanished Scenes . . . Pictured in the Air" 190). According to Pacheco, "The Indian Bible" is "not simply a story of Christian benevolence . . . but also of a specifically *white* kind of benevolence, in which Eliot labors for the red man's well being *despite* the obstacles existing between the two races" (198). Bellin, on the other hand, argues that Hawthorne "offers nothing but irony in the face of a history that would invoke a saint to justify a slaughter" ("Apostle of Removal" 25), going on to claim that "Hawthorne adopts, but reframes, the worshipful portraits of earlier interpreters" (27), for to "Hawthorne, the interpretation of Eliot is precisely a problem of American history, of the ways in which history is constructed and the purposes such constructions serve" (27-8). Gillian Brown also sees a touch of irony in the narrative strategy Hawthorne employs to introduce the Eliot myth. Brown argues that "[p]lacing Eliot and the

The Whole History seems drawn from that of Eliot preaching in the wood in popular nineteenth-century historical narratives. In the above-mentioned biography, Francis writes: “The heart of the good man glowed within him, as the children of the forest gathered around him, and, in the familiar confidence inspired by his unwearied affection, gazed on his countenance with curious wonder, and sought instruction from his lips” (261-2). We can also see a similar image of Eliot in the first volume of George Bancroft’s *History of the United States*. Bancroft writes: “He lived with the red men; spoke to them of God and of the soul, and explained the virtues of self-denial. He became their law-giver. . . . he instructed them in his own religious faith, and not without success. Groups of them used to gather round him as round a father, and often perplexed him with their doubts” (384). We should notice that in these passages the authors compare the Indians to children. In *Imaginary Citizens*, Courtney Weikle-Mills introduces the term “imaginary citizenship” to analyze the “post-revolutionary metaphors of both the nation and its citizens as children” that “tend to reflect ambivalence about childhood as a model for political identity” (2). According to

American Indians in the teleology of Christian history, Grandfather situates American identity in eternity, offering a longer genealogy to Americans than that found in the chronicles of Puritan settlement,” while “the storytelling framework of the book reminds us that Grandfather’s Christian narrative of America is yet another fantasy which can be embraced or replaced” (“Hawthorne’s American history” 139). *Naomi*’s narrator most clearly expresses the rhetoric of vanishing Indians:

There was also an immobility in the Indian character that made them averse to civilization. . . . His cabin gave him no room to breathe, — scarcely could he have breathed in a cathedral; the wide forest and the prairie, with the Great Spirit near him, made his dwelling-place. One by one they perish, like the leaves of the forest that are swept away by the autumn winds; melancholy shrouds them; they die of sadness, and are effaced from the earth by an inexorable destiny. (101)

Weikle-Mills, “imaginary citizenship—both representations of children’s citizenship and metaphors of citizens as children—allowed Americans to consider the limits and potentials of imagination, and the limits and potentials of rights, as aspects of citizenship” (7-8). Following this lead, we might say that in the early American formulation of the nation and its citizens, Indians (and other excluded members of the society, such as women and slaves) are conceptualized as children, and vice versa, in that they are possible future citizens of the nation. In this logic of children’s imaginary citizenship, the adult members of the society—that is, adult white men—are responsible for the education of prospective citizens as figurative or actual children. Like his contemporaries, Hawthorne adopts this traditional model of citizenship education for noncitizens in the characterization of Grandfather and the children in *The Whole History*. The apostle Eliot serves Hawthorne as a model for the ideal adult member of the society. But it is also a fact that Hawthorne returns to the story of Eliot in some of his later works with elevating irony.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne again invokes Eliot’s name, but this time he rewrites the colonial legend as the story of another Puritan minister who is much more morally-questionable than Eliot was considered to be and a mother and a daughter who are identified with Indians in many ways. Scholars have pointed out that the popular nineteenth-century images of the Indians are attached to the characters of Hester and Pearl.¹⁵ Their cottage is located on “the outskirts of the town, within the verge of the

¹⁵ Maddox suggests Hester’s affinity to the Indians, pointing out that in Hawthorne’s works “all those who wander—who separate themselves from the communal sources of social, political, and moral stability” “endanger their lives as well as their souls” and “face the choice between civilization and extinction” (*Removals* 114-15). Renée

peninsula, but not in close vicinity to any other habitation” (C1: 81). Hester is “shut out from the sphere of human charities” (81). The mother and daughter stand “together in the same circle of seclusion from human society; and in the nature of the child seemed to be perpetuated those unquiet elements that had distracted Hester Prynne before Pearl’s birth” (94-5). Their peripheral status on the fringe of the Puritan town can be indeed compared to that of Eliot’s praying Indians who lived outside the town of Natick, the planned settlement for Indian converts that Eliot took pains to establish.¹⁶ Hester confronts Governor Bellingham “with almost a fierce expression” (112) to keep the custody of her daughter, addressing a “wild and singular appeal” (113) for Dimmesdale to approve her claim. Hester’s character is portrayed as follows:

Her intellect and heart had their home, as it were, in desert places, where she roamed as freely as the wild Indian in his woods. For years past she had looked from this estranged point of view at human institutions, and whatever priests or legislators had established; criticizing all with hardly more reverence than the Indian would feel for the clerical band, the judicial robe, the pillory, the gallows, the fireside, or the church. (199)

Meanwhile, Pearl, in whom “the warfare of Hester’s spirit at that epoch was perpetuated” (91), is even more clearly associated with Indians than her mother is. Pearl “could not be made amenable to rules” (91). Having noticed in the daughter’s face “a look so intelligent, yet inexplicable, perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally

Bergland also points out that both Hester and Pearl are identified with Indians, though she stops short before going to a thorough analysis of the entire story (147, 157-8).

¹⁶ For the details of the construction of Natick, see Cogely, *John Eliot’s Mission to the Indians* 105-139.

accompanied by a wild flow of spirits,” the mother cannot “help questioning” if her daughter is “a human child” (92). Pearl is “a born outcast of the infantile world,” “[a]n imp of evil, emblem and product of sin, who “had no right among christened infants” (93). All these passages suggest that Hawthorne sees an equation between the Indians and the mother and daughter in that both groups are not civilized or Christianized and, therefore, not granted full membership in society.

The plot of *The Scarlet Letter* revolves around the question of how to accommodate, acculturate, or assimilate the two uncivilized Indians-women-children into civil society. Thus, the education of Pearl, “a nature wilder than” a “wild Indian” (C1: 244), becomes the central motif of the entire story.¹⁷ The argument between Hester and the Puritan authorities over how to instruct Pearl indeed mirrors less the sixteenth-century Puritan discourse about child education per se than the nineteenth-century pedagogical debate over how to teach young children who still do not understand adult language, in which Hawthorne was involved in his writings for and about children—and in his life. Hawthorne entertained a Romantic concept of children as innocent geniuses, which his reformist friends and acquaintances, including the Peabody sisters (Mary, Elizabeth, and Sophia, too) and Bronson Alcott, advocated.¹⁸ As

¹⁷ Critics have suggested that the characterization of Pearl reflects Hawthorne’s observations of his first daughter Una. For the most detailed biographical reading of *The Scarlet Letter* focused on Hawthorne’s problem with Una in terms of the nineteenth-century ideologies of gender and childhood, see Walter Herbert, “Nathaniel Hawthorne, Una Hawthorne, and *The Scarlet Letter*.”

¹⁸ In the preface of *A Wonder Book*, Hawthorne explains his idea of child innocence, saying that children “possess an unestimated sensibility to whatever is deep or high, in imagination or feeling” (C7: 4). With this Romantic concept of children, Hawthorne was

Patricia Valenti suggests, they all support an idea that “children were naturally innocent and that their spirituality and intellect would flower by using methods such as conversation, by cultivating imagination through stories, and by eliminating coercion,

basically against the employment of any corporal punishments, though occasionally he or his wife may have considered some chastisement necessary. Watching his restless son Julian, he writes in a notebook entry, “I really think it would do him good to spank him” (C8: 458), which suggests that the parents had probably agreed not to spank their children. But apparently they later changed their policy. During their stay in Liverpool, Nathaniel and Sophia planned to have Julian take French lesson. But in a letter to the wife, the husband complained about his inability to discipline their son, saying, “. . . thou hast so often told me of the strength of my will (of which I am not in the least conscious) that it is very possible I may have been ruling him with a rod of iron” (C17: 458). The passage suggests that physical punishments, if not with “a rod of iron,” were still commonly employed at home or in school as a method of language training in the middle of the nineteenth century, and Hawthorne may have occasionally adopted the method. But Hawthorne continues to say: “. . . but I am always inclined to let him wander around at his own sweet will, as long as the path is a safe one” (C17: 458), adding, “I find it an arduous business, now-a-days, to take him across my knee and spank him; and unless I give up the attempt betimes, he will soon be the spanker, and his poor father the spankee” (C17: 459).

Nina Baym argues that Hawthorne “blends Rousseausistic notions common to many romantic works—Blake’s songs, Wordsworth’s immortality ode, Emerson’s Nature—of the intrinsic poetic nature of the child, with the popular notion of the innocence, even angelicisim, of childhood” (“Hawthorne’s Myths for Children” 41). In the same vein, Gillian Brown claims that “Hawthorne and his wife, Sophia, held their own distinct ideas about the upbringing of children” based on “the conviction of the basic goodness of children” (“Hawthorne and Children in the Nineteenth Century” 89). For Hawthorne’s involvement in the new literature for children in Antebellum America, see also Laffrado, *Hawthorne’s Literature for Children*; Sanchez-Eppler, “Hawthorne and the Writing of Childhood”; and Ginsberg, “The ABCs of *The Scarlet Letter*.” Also for the work’s relation to the domestic ideology of nineteenth-century parental guides, see Nudelman, “‘Emblem and Product of Sin’.”

corporal punishment, and rote memorization” (“None But Imaginative Authority” 5-6).¹⁹ In the chapter “Pearl,” the narrator explains the characteristics of traditional Puritan pedagogy: “The discipline of the family, in those days, was of a far more rigid kind than now. The frown, the harsh rebuke, the frequent application of the rod, enjoined by Scriptural authority, were used, not merely in the way of punishment for actual offences, but as a wholesome regimen for the growth and promotion of all childish virtues” (C1: 91). Governor Bellingham, who represents the Puritan authorities, proposes that for the child’s “temporal and eternal welfare,” Pearl “be taken out of [the mother’s] charge, and clad soberly, and disciplined strictly, and instructed in the truths of heaven and earth” (110). Hester resolutely opposes the governor’s proposal, crying out, “I can teach my little Pearl what I have learned from this [the scarlet letter]” (111)! The narrator says:

Hester Prynne, nevertheless, the loving mother of this one child, ran little risk of erring on the side of undue severity. Mindful, however, of her own errors and misfortunes, she early sought to impose a tender, but strict, control over the infant immortality that was committed to her charge. But the task was beyond her skill. After testing both smiles and frowns, and proving that neither mode of treatment possessed any calculable influence, Hester was ultimately compelled to stand aside, and permit the child to be swayed by her own impulses. Physical compulsion or restraint was effectual, of course, while it lasted. As to any other

¹⁹ Lesley Ginsberg argues that by illustrating the process of Pearl “being taught, in essence, not to read as well as she does,” Hawthorne “critiques and exposes antebellum pedagogies of repression in *The Scarlet Letter*, especially in relation to the middle class family-cum-school, as the Hawthorne family itself combined when Una and Julian were young” (“The ABCs of *The Scarlet Letter*” 26).

kind of discipline, whether addressed to her mind or heart, little Pearl might or might not be within its reach, in accordance with the caprice that ruled the moment. (91-2)

Hester's pedagogy anachronistically reflects the nineteenth-century progressive pedagogy that denies the efficacy of coercion or corporal punishment, encouraging children's voluntary learning of language and letters.²⁰

Hester's perplexity may well reflect the author's experience of engaging in the schooling of young children. In a notebook entry, Hawthorne famously writes about his first child Una that "there is something that almost frightens me about the child—I know not whether elfish or angelic, but, at all events, supernatural" (C8: 430). He was bemused with Una's incomprehensible words as well as her unaccountable behaviors,

²⁰ Like Hester, Hawthorne was anything but a disciplinarian in terms of child-rearing and schooling. But his written records of children also indicate that he did not altogether relinquish the old Calvinist concept of children as innately sinful and occasionally applied it to his female child in particular. In his observation of children, Hawthorne writes: "Julian is a little outlaw or pirate—fonder, I think, of mischief than Una, and yet, more easily kept within rules. . . . When Una is mischievous—which is not often—there seems to me a little spice of ill nature in it, though I suppose her mother will not agree to this" (C8: 407). We can see a complex gender politics working here. Julian's mischief did not trouble Hawthorne very much. But, apparently, the father had a lot of problem with his daughter's mischievousness, which carried "a little spice of ill nature," despite the fact that she fell into the mood less frequently than her little brother did. Hawthorne's view of Una often oscillates between the Romantic idea of children as naturally good and the Calvinist concept of infants as innately evil, never settling down in either position. With regard to Hawthorne's view of Una, Herbert suggests that "Hawthorne's perplexity illustrates a leading feature of the cultural construction of gender, the way in which perceptions of human reality are concerted—and disconcerted—by the systems of meaning through which gender is construed" (285).

noting that sometimes “she pours out an apparently half unconscious rhapsody, occasionally rhythmical, flowing along like a river, dim and vague, but occasionally gleaming with an idea that it seems unaccountable how she should have become possessed of” (C8: 421).²¹ While Hawthorne struggles to “see her real soul” behind “something external,” he also accepts that his daughter has many different sides that all belong to her, which remain “uncertain and unaccountable” to the father (C8: 413). He is aware of his own paternal ego that tends to see only what he wants to see in his daughter and to translate her words into what he wants them to mean. And this question over child education entails another difficult question of how to educate linguistic and cultural others.

Hawthorne’s contemplation on the issue of education in an asymmetric power relation most prominently figures in the Puritan establishment’s reaction to Pearl’s behavior. When the pastor John Wilson attempts to hold Pearl for examination, she escapes from his hand to stand “on the upper step, looking like a wild, tropical bird, of rich plumage, ready to take flight into the upper air” (C1: 111). The pastor eventually examines Pearl in catechism, for at her age she “could have borne a fair examination in the New England Primer, or the first column of the Westminster Catechisms” (111-12), asking, “Canst thou tell me, my child, who made thee” (111)? But “that perversity,

²¹ In another journal entry, Hawthorne also writes that his daughter’s “beauty is the most flitting, transitory, most uncertain and unaccountable affair, that ever had a real existence” (C8: 413). He goes on to say that when her beauty is “really visible, it is rare and precious as the vision of an angel; it is a transfiguration—a grace, delicacy, and ethereal fitness,” adding that “on these occasions, we see her real soul; when she seems less lovely, we merely see something external” (C8: 413). “But,” he continues, “in truth, one manifestation belongs to her as much as another” (C8: 413).

which all children have more or less of, and of which little Pearl had a tenfold portion, now, at the most inopportune moment, took thorough possession of her, and closed her lips, or impelled her to speak words amiss” (112). And “with many ungracious refusals to answer good Mr. Wilson’s question,” Pearl “finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses, that grew by the prison-door” (112).²² Watching this exchange, Governor Bellingham cries, “Here is a child of three years old, and she cannot tell who made her! Without question, she is equally in the dark as to her soul, its present depravity, and future destiny” (112)!

Historians have made clear that the practice of catechism played a formative role in literacy education since the early colonial period. Parents taught children to memorize the answers to questions about Christian doctrine printed in many different versions of primers and catechisms widely available in New England.²³ David H. Watters contends that the Puritan practice of catechism “reveals a basic distrust of the tongues of Babel and of baby” (195), saying that the practice of catechism “prepares the child to accept the root metaphors concerning the authority of the Word of God the Father in the *Primer*, for one’s own voice finds parentally acceptable expression only in the words of the religious tradition” (197). In the half-comical description of Pearl’s almost intentional failure to give a correct answer in a catechism, we can see Hawthorne’s distrust of the traditional Puritan pedagogy that limits the power of child imagination. But we should

²² Focusing on the catechism scene, Baym points out that “Pearl expresses all the resentment, pride, anger, and blasphemy that Hester feels but may not voice, and perhaps does not even admit to feeling” (*The Shape of Hawthorne’s Career* 134) and “confirms the conflict in Hester’s case as one between a woman and a patriarchal social structure” (135).

²³ Also see Monaghan 31-45; and Watters, “‘I Spake as a Child.’”

also notice that the pastor Wilson's question in the catechism is historically inaccurate, for in the historical *Westminster Catechisms*, the first question is: "What is the chief end of man"?²⁴ The first catechism for children printed in New England is John Cotton's 1656 book *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes in Either England*, originally published in 1646 in London under the title *Milk for Babes*. In Cotton's version, the first question is: "What hath GOD done for you" (*Milk for Babes* 1)? This differs from the pastor Wilson's first question to Pearl. I could not find exactly whose version of catechism Hawthorne used in *The Scarlet Letter*, but it is most likely that Hawthorne borrowed the question from some of numerous editions of the popular catechisms for young children widely available in nineteenth-century New England. One of many possible sources might be *Dr. Watt's Plain and Easy Catechisms for Children* published by the Cambridge publisher Hilliard and Metcalf, in which the first question is: "Can you tell me, child, who made you" (5)? This sounds similar to pastor Wilson's first question: "Canst thou tell me, my child, who made thee" (C1: 111)? Then, Hawthorne's criticism may have been aimed at less early-colonial Puritan pedagogy per se than the nineteenth-century educational theory still under the strong influence of the old Calvinist tradition. Hawthorne rather sees a continuity than a discontinuity from the past to the present.²⁵

Historical John Eliot also used catechism as the first step for instructing the Indians in Christian doctrine. At their second opportunity to preach to the Massachusett

²⁴ There are many versions of the *Westminster Catechism*. For the first question in the catechism, see The Westminster Assembly of Divines 3.

²⁵ It is also possible that Hawthorne chose this question to use because it goes to the heart of the romance, the curse of the absent father.

Indians on November 11, 1646, Eliot and his companions attempted catechizing “the younger sort of Indian children” ([Anonymous,] *The Day-Breaking* 9) in the Massachusetts language. Eliot and his companions “thought meet to aske them but only three questions in their own language, that we might not clog their mindes or memories with too much at first” (9). Their first question was thus: “Who made you and all the world” (9)? As I have already mentioned in Chapter 2, “the burden of reunifying humanity in the community of God through the universal language of prayer” was an imperative “central to the early modern Christian missionary impulse” (Gray 21). Therefore, Eliot did not hesitate to modify words in his translation of the Bible, the catechism, or other Christian writings into the indigenous tongue. As Gray also puts it, “what mattered in Eliot’s mind was the sincerity and depth of feeling that lay behind that language” (54), for Eliot “assumed truths to be universal,” having a firm belief “that while the process of translation may affect the form of knowledge, it did not affect its underlying Christian substance” (60).

We can hear in Convers Francis’s above-mentioned Eliot biography the echoes of the early missionary conviction of the universal truth beyond language differences and desire to recover the original language. Francis, the Unitarian minister and Harvard Professor who was also known as a brother of Lydia Maria Child and the eldest member of the Transcendental Club, presents a translation theory similar to Emerson’s, which I discussed in Chapter 2.²⁶ Francis contends that “the fact that the whole Bible could be

²⁶ Francis was not a self-proclaimed Transcendentalist, but he had a close tie with his Transcendentalist contemporaries. He especially admired Emerson’s talent and personality, attending his lectures over many years. See Myerson, “Convers Francis and Emerson”; and Woodall, “Convers Francis and the Concordians.”

translated into [the savage's] language and be made intelligible to him, affords sufficient evidence, that moral relations and even metaphysical ideas could be adequately expressed in his speech, however destitute it might be of the polished refinement, or the critical precision belonging to the tongues of civilized nations" (41-2). His evaluation of the Eliot Indian Bible is that "his version, we may fairly presume, was such as to give the Indians, in all important respects, about as correct and competent a knowledge of the Scriptures, as translations are generally found to give" (237). But, as he admits, it is a mere presumption that Eliot's translation was a great success, for Francis himself cannot understand the Massachusetts language. Francis continues:

It was a long, heavy, hard work, wrought out by the silent but wasting efforts of mental toil, and relieved by no immediately animating excitement. It was truly a labor of love. When we take that old dark volume into our hands, we understand not the words in which it is written; but it has another and beautiful meaning which we do understand. It is a symbol of the affection, which a devoted man cherished for the soul of his fellow-man; it is the expression of a benevolence, which faints in no effort to give light to those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death; and so it remains, and will ever remain, a venerable manifestation of the power of spiritual truth and spiritual sympathy. (241-2)

It is eventually not by facts but by efforts—made with "love," "affection," "benevolence," "the power of spiritual truth and spiritual sympathy," and so forth—that the success of translation is measured. Francis also stresses that Eliot's Indian "version of the Scriptures was the first *Bible* ever printed on the continent of America" (226), commemorating the Indian Bible as a monument of national independence, despite the

fact there were only few people left in the nineteenth century who could possibly read it. While the Transcendentalists in their attitude toward other languages, cultures, and religions in general are more secular and more nationalistic than Early Modern writers were, we can easily see a continuity from the early Puritan view of translation to the early-nineteenth-century concept of it.

Francis also mentions a Massachusetts Indian's question to Eliot, which in Eliot's original version was "whether Jesus Christ did understand, or God did understand *Indian* prayers" ([Anonymous,] *The Day-Breaking* 5). Eliot's answer was that "Jesus Christ and God by him made all things, and makes all men, not onely *English* but *Indian* men, and if hee made them both . . . then hee knew all that was within man and came from man, all his desires, and all his thoughts, and all his speeches, and so all his prayers" (5). Francis, a liberal-Unitarian minister and a committed supporter of Transcendentalism, finds this anecdote "valuable as an illustration of the manner in which the religious sentiment is developed among savage tribes" (53). But in this case the Massachusetts man may have had a more rational understanding of the untranslatability of some religious doctrines beyond linguistic barriers than Eliot or Francis did. Both Puritans and the Transcendentalists, who attempted to revitalize "the mystical ideal that humankind is capable of direct experience of the holy" (Buell, *New England Literary Culture* 46-7), presuppose the fundamental translatability of universal truths into every language that goes beyond all linguistic differences.

We should also notice a coincidence between Eliot's catechism translated into the Massachusetts language and the popular catechisms for young children on which Hawthorne apparently draws in his composition of the catechism scene in *The Scarlet*

Letter. In both versions of catechism, the questioner prepares a simple set of ready-made questions and answers and begins a catechism with the question: “Who made you”? By simplifying the words and phrases that the learner has to memorize, both Eliot and the editors of the catechisms for children preclude all other possible answers and try to elicit only expected answers. As I have already discussed in the previous chapters, recent translation theorists have called attention to the violence of translation that in favor of transmissibility obliterates the marks of otherness in a specific language and culture. James Axtell summarizes the ways in which Europeans and indigenous people tackled the difficulty of communication at the early stages of contacts. According to Axtell, the “prevalent option was for one party to create a pidgin by reducing its native speech to its simplest elements and suppressing most of the features that made it distinctive and therefore difficult for strangers to learn” (“Babel of Tongues” 29). But, as Axtell also puts it, this type of solution was “predicated on treating the ‘others’ not as capable adults but as young children just learning to wrap their tongues around polysyllabic words and to tease out of usage the imperfect regularities of grammar and syntax” (29-30). It is not difficult to imagine which group played the part of young children in a colonial setting. We can see the same strategy of reduction in both Eliot’s translation of the catechism and the nineteenth-century adaptation of catechisms for young children.

We do not know whether or not Hawthorne actually read any of the Eliot tracts, first published in the seventeenth century. But it is apt that Hawthorne chose “Who made you?” as the first question of the Puritan’s authorities’ examination of the Indian-child Pearl, for over the entire narrative of *The Scarlet Letter* the author apparently makes an equivalence between the edification of the Indians and the education of children.

Through his research of Eliot's legend and his observation of his own children, Hawthorne seems to have been attentive to the problem that the act of translation, even with good intent, can be biased by the translator's wishful thinking.²⁷ Adults expect children to take their words exactly as they mean, while trying to understand children's words as they want them to mean. Like a catechism, an everyday exchange of questions and answers pushes, literal or figurative, children into the symbolic order of language, compelling them to obey the patriarchal law of the society based on it. The entire process of translation in an unequal power relation is potentially an act of subjugating the Other into the law and order of society.

Like Hawthorne's daughter Una—Pearl resists all attempts to civilize her. When Pearl "mumbled something" about Chillingworth's identity "into his ear that sounded, indeed, like human language, but was only such gibberish as children may be heard amusing themselves with," Dimmesdale is bewildered by the "tongue unknown to the erudite clergyman" (C1: 156). The child is a product of "the sympathy of Nature—that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated by human law, nor illumined by higher truth" (C1: 203). In writing this passage, somewhat like Freud, Hawthorne illuminates the undercurrent of "wild, heathen Nature"—which caused Hester and Dimmesdale to break the Puritan law—inherent in a human being. By the same token, he also highlights the fragility of the symbolic order of society, whose protean nature

²⁷ For a study of how early missionaries were often trapped in wishful thinking and self-delusion in their attempts to communicate with native people, see Axtell, "Babel of Tongues."

manifests itself in the ever-changing signification of the letter A.²⁸ In Hawthorne's view of language, there is no transcendental signifying or signified. Once realizing the unstable nature of language, Dimmesdale cannot dismiss Pearl's words just a meaningless gibberish, feeling as if the patriarchal law that his position in society is supposed to represent were crumbling down at his feet.

If Hester and Pearl resemble Eliot's praying Indians in many ways, then we can also see Dimmesdale, who is indeed introduced as a sort of Eliot's disciple, as a lesser version of the apostle, and the entire story of *The Scarlet Letter* as a parody of Indian conversion narratives. Dimmesdale achieves eminence over his fellow ministers thanks to "the gift that descended upon the chosen disciples, at Pentecost" (C1: 141) "to express the highest truths through the humblest medium of familiar words and images"—"the Tongue of Flame" "symbolizing" not just "the power of speech in foreign and unknown languages, but that of addressing the whole human brotherhood in the heart's native language" (142). All other Puritan patriarchs lack this power of sympathy, and thus they are unfit for the education of prospective citizens of the society. Hawthorne sees an ideal

²⁸ Patricia Crain argues that Hawthorne has "a grim sense of the strenuous artificiality of alphabetization" and "seems almost to stand outside of language, looking in with resistance and longing" (181). Although her argument is focused on what she calls the problem of alphabetization brought by the rise of the modern printing culture, my argument about Hawthorne's recognition of the artificiality of language system is aligned with it. But at the same time I am not entirely convinced by her argument that "Hawthorne recovers the primal strangeness and unfamiliarity of alphabetization, but with the intellectual and investigative equipment of an official and scientific adult" (185). As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Hawthorne's recognition of the unfamiliarity of his mother tongue caused him constant anxiety, which is why he recurrently turns to the same motif of translation in his works.

of the benevolent father in the beautified image of Eliot, but at the same time he is not fully convinced that such an educational model as the legendary apostle symbolizes is viable in nineteenth-century America. Dimmesdale, an effete version of Eliot, is no longer as certain about the legitimacy of his mission as the apostle is considered to have been, for he bitterly knows, even if he does not want to admit, that he has his share of “that wild, heathen Nature of the forest.” What distinguishes Dimmesdale from Eliot—and Hawthorne from many of his contemporaries—is that the former, if not entirely, accepts the artificiality of the human law, recognizing the impossibility of recovering the original language of God.

While Hawthorne exposes the artificiality of the law through the entire narrative of *The Scarlet Letter*, he nevertheless seems to think that, as Weikle-Mills put it, “the artificial ordering mechanisms of the law are necessary to prevent the destabilization of society” (198).²⁹ In Hawthorne’s vision of society, the symbolic order of language is a sort of collective wishful fantasy without which the society can fall into total chaos. The story thus focuses on Dimmesdale’s futile efforts to prevent the breakdown of the law and order. The greatest irony is, as Nina Baym suggests, that “the true source of [Dimmesdale’s] power over the people is not the spirituality to which he sincerely attributes his success but his denied and despised passionate nature” (137-8) embodied in his sensual, musical voice that “bypasses language to become a direct expression of

²⁹ In her analysis of Hawthorne’s writings for and about children, Weikle-Mills continues to argue that “reflecting his ambivalence about transcendentalism, Hawthorne’s idealized portraits of children are often accompanied by skepticism about the natural child’s ability to produce a moral society without the force of textual and legal discipline” (199).

unmediated feeling” (138). Baym quotes a passage from the scene of Dimmesdale’s Election Sermon: “This vocal organ was in itself a rich endowment; insomuch that a listener, comprehending nothing of the language in which the preacher spoke, might still have been swayed to and fro by the mere tone and cadence. Like all other music, it breathed passion and pathos, and emotions high or tender, in a tongue native to the human heart, wherever educated” (C1: 243). But we should note that the musical quality in Dimmesdale’s “tongue native to the human heart,” which other Puritan fathers lack, is a trait often attributed to the popular nineteenth-century image of the Indians. In Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*, Eliot, one of the judges investigating Magawisca, exhorts her to reveal the whereabouts of her people. She finally replies, “raising her eyes to Heaven, and speaking in a voice that sounded like deep-toned music after the harsh tones addressed to her; ‘my people are gone to the isles of the sweet southwest—to those shores that the bark of an enemy can never touch: think ye I fear to follow them’” (164)? Whether or not Hawthorne actually draws on this scene for writing the section of Pearl’s examination in *The Scarlet Letter*—in which Hester refuses to disclose the identity of Pearl’s biological father, and Pearl gives a perverse answer to the pastor Wilson’s question—it is hard to overlook the coincidence between these two scenes.

In *Grandfather’s Chair*, Hawthorne himself adopted the convention, attributing a musical quality to an Indian voice. Ordered to read a passage from the Indian Bible, “would the Indian boy cast his eyes over the mysterious page, and read it so skillfully that it sounded like wild music” (C6: 46). The passage goes on: “It seemed as if the forest leaves were singing in the ears of his auditors, and as if the roar of distant streams were poured through the young Indian’s voice. Such were the sounds amid which the

language of the red man had been formed; and they were still heard to echo in it” (C6: 46-7). But when Hawthorne later writes the scene of Pearl’s examination in *The Scarlet Letter*, he overturns the convention, rather emphasizing the Puritan minister’s musical eloquence in his voice: “The young pastor’s voice was tremulously sweet, rich, deep, and broken. The feeling that it so evidently manifested, rather than the direct purport of the words, caused it to vibrate within all hearts, and brought the listeners into one accord of sympathy” (C1: 67). Also in the above-mentioned Election Sermon scene, Dimmesdale’s voice carries “the low undertone, as of the wind sinking down to repose itself” (243). In his effort to put wild nature in order, Dimmesdale indeed has gone wild.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha explores the possibility of the counter-influences on the colonizer in a situation where cross-cultural, cross-linguistic encounters take place. Bhabha argues that in colonial settings, the “grounds of evangelical certitude are opposed not by the simple assertion of an antagonistic cultural tradition,” but the “process of translation” opens up “another contentious political and cultural site at the heart of colonial representation” (49). He continues to say that “the word of divine authority is deeply flawed by the assertion of the indigenous sign, and in the very practice of domination the language of the master becomes hybrid—neither the one thing nor the other” (49). Bhabha’s argument here might sound a little too optimistic, for in many cases of colonial domination the culture of the colonized seems wholly subordinated to that of the colonizer. But we still cannot entirely deny the possibility of changes in culture and language on the side of the colonizer that might occur as a result of one’s contact with the colonized, and Hawthorne for one sees such possibility.

Hawthorne represents the language of “wild, heathen Nature” as something repressed, waiting to intrude into the symbolic order of society. The brook running through the forest where Dimmesdale and Hester secretly meet, “with its never-ceasing loquacity,” “kept up a babble, kind, quiet, soothing, but melancholy, like the voice of a young child that was spending its infancy without playfulness” (C1: 186). The “dark, old trees” in the dell “with their multitudinous tongues, would whisper long of what had passed there,” and “the melancholy brook would” “still kept up a murmuring babble” (213). Returning from the forest, Dimmesdale almost loses control of his tongue as if he were infected by the language of nature. He “absolutely trembled and turned pale as ashes, lest his tongue should wag itself, in utterance of” “certain blasphemous suggestions that rose into his mind” (218). On the occasion to give a widow “a word of warm, fragrant, heaven-breathing Gospel truth,” “up to the moment of putting his lips to the old woman’s ear,” he “could recall no text of Scripture, nor aught else, except a brief, pithy” “unanswerable argument against the immortality of the human soul,” which “would probably have caused this aged sister to drop down dead, at once, as by the effect of an intensely poisonous infusion” (219). Seeing the youngest girl among his church members, “the minister felt potent to blight all the field of innocence with but one wicked look, and develop all its opposite with but a word” (220). All these instances occur on the return trip from his official visit to “the Apostle Eliot.” On his way back to the town, Dimmesdale comes across Mistress Hibbins, who acutely perceives his great agitation. He defensively says, “My one sufficient object was to greet that pious friend of mine, the Apostle Eliot, and rejoice with him over the many precious souls he hath won from heathendom” (221)! But Hibbins laughs out loud. Upon his return home,

Chillingworth also knowingly says, “Welcome home, reverend Sir. . . . And how found you that godly man, the Apostle Eliot? But methinks, dear Sir, you look pale: as if the travel through the wilderness had been too sore for you” (223). To the reader of the story, the mention of Eliot’s name in these scenes sounds doubly ironic. Clearly, Hawthorne intends to contrast Dimmesdale with Eliot, famous for his evangelical certitude in the nineteenth-century popular representation of the apostle. Dimmesdale is a failed apostle who sought to win “precious souls” “from heathendom” but instead succumbed to the heathen. By dramatizing the unintentional transformation, or indigenization, of a Puritan minister through his contact with the wild nature that Hester’s uncivilized sexuality figuratively represents, Hawthorne allegorizes the possibility of accidental hybridization that might happen in the process of cultural and linguistic translations.

Back in his study, Dimmesdale experiences an uncanny sense of dislocation that familiar places and objects—and even his self—have turned somewhat foreign to him. He “entered the accustomed room, and looked around him” “with the same perception of strangeness that had haunted him throughout his walk from the forest-dell into the town” (C1: 222). He finds on the table a manuscript of “an unfinished sermon” (222). He “knew that it was himself” who wrote the sermon, but he “seemed to stand apart, and eye this former self with scornful, pitying, but half-envious curiosity. That self was gone! Another man had returned out of the forest; a wiser one; with a knowledge of hidden mysteries which the simplicity of the former never could have reached. A bitter kind of knowledge that (223)! This sense of estrangement from his old place and old self is almost exactly the same as what Bhabha terms hybridity. According to Bhabha, hybridity is a “displacement of value from symbol to sign that causes the dominant

discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative” (162). In an uncanny state of dislocation, the texts of the sermon that Dimmesdale had written no longer seem to carry the authority of the law but now look like meaningless signs to his eyes.

Throwing the manuscript into the fire, Dimmesdale “began another, which he wrote with such an impulsive flow of thought and emotion, that he fancied himself inspired; and only wondered that Heaven should see fit to transmit the grand and solemn music of its oracles through so foul an organ pipe as he” (C1: 225). This typically Hawthornean narrator is slightly satirical of Dimmesdale’s renewed enthusiasm for writing the sermon. By saying that “he *fancied* himself inspired,” instead of “he felt inspired” (or, more straightforwardly, “he was inspired”), Hawthorne implies that Dimmesdale mistakes the “impulsive flow of thought and emotion” for the revelation coming down from heaven, confusing a carnal excitement with a spiritual uplift.

“Unable to identify his ‘self’ with the passionate core he regards as sinful,” as Baym among other critics has pointed out, “he is even less able to admit that this sinful core can produce great sermons” (138).³⁰ Consequently, “leaving that mystery to solve itself, or go unsolved for ever, he drove his task onward, with earnest haste and ecstasy” (C1: 225). But what he regards as a “mystery” is no mystery to the reader. In writing the manuscript, Dimmesdale seeks in vain to purify himself of the very source of power that

³⁰ Michael Bell points out that Dimmesdale “fully shares his society’s equation of the source of his art—passionate, forbidden ‘impulse’—with sin” (“Arts of Deception” 48) and that “he himself can acknowledge ‘impulse’ and ‘emotion’ only when they are disguised as divine ‘inspiration’” (49). Citing Bell, James Mancall also argues that Dimmesdale’s composition of the Election Sermon “suggests the sexuality that has been the undertone to his writing all along” (*Thoughts Painfully Intense* 61).

inspires him and to recover the symbolic order of language that as a member of the Puritan authorities he is obliged to represent. This irreparably split state of mind encapsulates the ambivalence of the hybrid subject, which internalizes “the difference of cultures” between one and the other, no longer able to see the disparity as an object “of “epistemological or moral contemplation” from the safety of the outside (Bhabha 163).

The confession of a hybridized minister who underwent a prolonged period of religious melancholy and despair now becomes similar in structure to the Indian conversion narratives that Eliot and his companions transcribed, translated, and published in a series of tracts. Julius Rubin examines those tracts to describe the ways in which the new perception of religious melancholy that Puritan missionaries brought to the indigenous cultures may or may not have transformed the inner lives of the native people, arguing that “previously unimaginable conceptions of sin and depravity necessitated unending tears of repentance as prefatory to the joyful, ecstatic reception of grace and adoption as a child of God” (*Tears of Repentance* 40). In *The Day Breaking*, one of the Eliot Tracts, Eliot records a memorable event that occurred after his above-mentioned second sermon. He finds an Indian participant “hanging downe his head with his rag before his eyes weeping” ([Anonymous,] *The Day Breaking* 17). His observation continues:

I easily perceived that his eyes were not sore, yet somewhat red with crying; and so held up his head for a while, yet such was the presence and mighty power of the Lord Jesus on his heart that hee hung downe his head againe, and covered his eyes againe and so fell wiping and wiping of them weeping abundantly, continuing thus till prayer was ended, after which hee presently turnes from us,

and turnes his face to a side and corner of the Wigwam, and there fals a weeping more abundantly by himselfe, which one of us perceiving, went to him, and spake to him encouraging words; at the hearing of which hee fell a weeping more and more; so leaveing of him, he who spake to him came unto mee (being newly one out of the Wigwam) and told mee of his teares, so we resolved to goe againe both of us to him, and speake to him againe, and wee met him comming out of the Wigwam, and there wee spake again to him, and he there fell into a more abundant renewed weeping, like one deeply and inwardly affected indeed which forced us also to such bowels of compassion that wee could not forbear weeping over him also: and so wee parted greatly rejoycing for such sorrowing. (17)

After this event, Eliot concludes that “certainly those abundant teares which we saw shed from their eies, argue a mighty and blessed presence of the spirit of Heaven in their hearts, which when once it comes into such kinde of spirits will not easily out againe” (21). Eliot not only saw the abundance of weeping and tears as the evidence of successful conversion but also considered it important that the missionaries and the natives shared the same experience of “sorrowing” and “weeping” before “rejoycing.”

On further investigation, however, Rubin also claims that while the Praying Indians interiorized the “consciousness of sin, depravity, and self-loathing,” their “repentance and submission to God’s law” (59) may have been incomplete and imperfect, concluding that “the tracts marked by a penitential sense of life and the rational theodicy of misfortune did not exhibit the expected psychodynamics of conversion—the depths of despair and religious melancholy and the sublime possession of divine love, ‘God’s caress’ of the saint” (65). This incompleteness of inward

transformation indeed parallels the limited nature of Dimmesdale's confession in his dying speech. When Dimmesdale is reading the Election Sermon, his speech also bears a similar tone of religious melancholy,

A loud or low expression of anguish,—the whisper, or the shriek, as it might be conceived, of suffering humanity, that touched a sensibility in every bosom! At times this deep strain of pathos was all that could be heard, and scarcely heard But . . . if the auditor listened intently, . . . he could detect the same cry of pain. What was it? The complaint of a human heart, sorrow-laden, perchance guilty, telling its secret, whether of guilt or sorrow, to the great heart of mankind; beseeching its sympathy or forgiveness,—at every moment,—in each accent,—and never in vain! It was this profound and continual undertone that gave the clergyman his most appropriate power. (C1: 243-4)

As I have already pointed out, the “profound and continual undertone” in his voice has its origin in his wild, passionate nature that he loathes. While he obliquely reveals that he had a relationship with a married woman, yet to the end he will not admit that his inner self has such a wild side or accept that he had a pleasure in those sinful acts, which he feels is even more sinful than acts themselves. Therefore, his confession remains incomplete, and possibly so does his (re-)conversion. At the moment of revealing the letter A on his breast, indeed, he suddenly cries out, “It was on him” (255)! Hereafter, he never refers to himself as “I” or “me” as if to say that it was not “I” but “he” who had sex with a married woman—even twice. The open-ending of the story does not deny the possibility that he is eventually a failed saint, however deep and sincere his religious melancholy is.

In his last sermon, Dimmesdale's "eloquent voice, on which the souls of the listening audience had been borne aloft" is likened to "the swelling waves of the sea" (C1: 248). Over the entire narrative, the sea as well as the forest is featured as a metaphor for the exterior of the symbolic order of society. "The sea, in those old times," the narrator says, "heaved, swelled, and foamed, very much at its own will, or subject only to the tempestuous wind, with hardly any attempts at regulation by human law" (233). The sailors from "the Spanish Main" as well as the Indians are also described as "rough-looking desperadoes" who "transgressed, without fear or scruple, the rules of behaviour that were binding on all others" (232). Pearl is also compared to a "small sea-fowl" (178) and a "floating sea-bird" (236). It is indeed "by the sea-shore" that "thoughts visited her, such as dared to enter no other dwelling in New England; shadowy guests, that would have been as perilous as demons to their entertainer" and that Hester "imbibed this spirit" of the change in "the whole system of ancient prejudice" and "cast away the fragments of a broken chain" (164). Hester's (re-)conversion is even more incomplete than Dimmesdale's. But in her case she does not feel a strong need for conversion, for she is much more radical than Dimmesdale, not altogether thinking that what she did was wrong.

The final question of *The Scarlet Letter* is: Is the conversion of Pearl really successful? In the famous climax of the story, Pearl unexpectedly takes on the role of protagonist in an Indian conversion narrative:

Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human

joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it.

Towards her mother, too, Pearl's errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled.

(C1: 256)

In this scene, the narrator adopts not only the convention of Indian conversion narratives that the abundance of tears proves the sincerity of religious conversion experience, but also the nineteenth-century Romantic concept of innocent children as agents for moral reform. But many readers would think that there is no reason for Pearl to feel any sense of obligation to be thankful to her biological father, who has never admitted her paternity in public. Her tears look somewhat watery. "If this were a movie," as Leland Person puts it, "we would hear the swell of music, the promise of a rebirth, and see a fadeout to a glorious future" (80-1).³¹ The recovery of the order in this sentimental ending seems less a convincing conclusion than a wishful fantasy on the part of Dimmesdale, the narrator, or, perhaps, the author. It is hard to tell exactly whose fantasy it is, but it would be fair to say that the ambiguous ending of the story mirrors not only the author's personal ambivalence about the theoretical and practical issues of parenting and language education, but also the social anxieties about the babelic disorder of the nation, whose origin can be traced back to the point of the earliest colonial contacts in

³¹ Nudelman, focusing on the point that "[t]he work of revelation, reformation, and unification . . . is finally done by the father's, rather than the mother's body, argues that "[h]aving exploited the punitive function of the mother-daughter relationship, Hawthorne reconstructs the exemplary family in the sentimental alliance of father and daughter" ("Emblem and Product of Sin" 209). Although I agree with Nudelman that Hawthorne's focus in his contemplation of parenting is shifted from the mother-daughter relationship to the father-daughter relationship, yet, as I have already pointed out, the temporary work of unification is rather done by the daughter's tears, which many readers might feel unnecessary.

America. Both of those private and public concerns about language are summed up in the difficult question of linguistic and cultural translation. What Hawthorne illustrates in describing the psychodrama of a Puritan minister's incomplete confession and (re-)conversion is the split nature of the symbolic order of society, which in the process of translation has internalized conflicting cultural and linguistic codes, becoming hybrid. By contrasting the national foundational myth of the Apostle Eliot—who was said to have made an essential contribution to the early formation of the country by his missionary efforts to civilize its indigenous population through his translation of the Bible and language education—with the story of another Puritan minister, who is not as successful as the former, Hawthorne illuminates how artificial—and impure—the foundation of the nation may actually have been. For Hawthorne, the symbolic order of society is always and already tainted with the marks of the Other. The failure of Dimmesdale purifying himself of the Other's influences is an allegory of the impossible national desire to identify one's language, culture, and nation as a fixed and unified entity. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne supposes the abundance of sympathy, accompanied by weeping and tears, as a tentative solution to repair the broken law. But the reestablishment of the symbolic order remains uncertain. Hawthorne continues to return to the same question of cultural and linguistic translation in his later works.³²

³² Maddox has argued that in *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne combines “a number of themes—the place of women, the uselessness of reform movements, the moral dangers to which reformers expose themselves, the disappearance of the Indians” into a single motif, to which he returns in *The Blithedale Romance* and *Septimius Felton* (126). I also follow Maddox's path in reading Hawthorne's continued concerns about the motif, though my argument is more specifically focused on his contemplation on the question of translation.

John Eliot and Miles Coverdale: The Two Translators in *The Blithedale Romance*

For some time after finishing *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne worked at more family-oriented and less controversial works, such as *The House of the Seven Gables* and *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*. But some of those works also reflect Hawthorne's continued concern about the ethical problem of translation in asymmetric power relations. "The Golden Touch," a story in *A Wonder Book*, is designed as a didactic narrative about avarice. King Midas gains the magic power to turn everything he touches into gold, which he loves more than anything except his beloved daughter Marygold. But because of the magic touch, he accidentally transforms Marygold into a golden statue. Following the convention of children's literature, the story ends in a happy mood with Midas willingly abandoning his golden touch and Marygold brought to life again. The story can be also read as an allegory of ethically problematic translation, which often ignores the marks of one's corporeal experience inscribed in the materiality of a written text. Having acquired the magic touch, Midas exerts his power to change everything into gold. He draws out "his handkerchief, which little Marygold had hemmed for him" to find it also turned to "gold, with the dear child's neat and pretty stiches running all along the border, in gold thread" (C7:46). "Somehow or other," the story goes, "this last transformation did not quite please King Midas," since he "would rather that his little daughter's handiwork should have remained just the same as when she climbed his knee and put it into his hand" (46). Like Hawthorne as the narrator of the Custom-House chapter of *The Scarlet Letter* who finds the letter A in the attic room and experiences "a sensation not altogether physical, yet almost so, as of burning heat" (C1:32), Midas realizes, even if slightly, that Marygold's "neat and pretty stiches" on his

handkerchief are not just an abstract symbol, but a physical embodiment of her attachment to her father. This perception of the affective element of an object eventually saves him from becoming an incarnation of avarice. Following this scene, Midas also finds his glasses turned to gold, saying “very philosophically”: “It is no great matter, nevertheless. . . . We cannot expect any great good, without its being accompanied with some small inconvenience” (C7:47). In the use of the word “philosophically,” we can see Hawthorne’s subtle criticism of philosophical idealism, dominant in the Transcendentalist circle surrounding him. Finding that Midas had changed every flower in the garden into gold, Marygold cries: “I don’t care for such roses as this It has no smell, and the hard petals prick my nose” (49)! Through Marygold’s complaints about the loss of fragrance, Hawthorne illuminates the problem of idealist philosophy, which tends to translate concrete materials into abstract ideas, thus minimizing the irreplaceability of one’s embodied experience, the risk he saw in the contemporary literature of and for children.

While the characterization of Marygold mostly confirms the antebellum Romantic concept of infantile innocence as an agent of moral reform, the seemingly happy ending of the story complicates the idealized image of the innocent child. After Midas gave up his golden touch and recovered his beloved daughter, the narrator says, there were “two circumstances” that reminded him of the Golden Touch: “One was, that the sands of the river sparkled like gold; the other, that little Marygold’s hair had now a golden tinge, which he had never observed before she had been transmuted by the effect of his kiss. This change of hue was really an improvement, and made Marygold’s hair richer than in her babyhood” (C7:57). We should notice the epistemological uncertainty brought into

this passage. In the narrative, it is not explicitly stated what actually caused “the change of hue” in her hair. Did the change of color actually occur as she grew up? Or did the color just look changed because Midas saw the world also changed? The ending of the story remains meticulously open:

When King Midas had grown quite an old man, and used to trot Marygold’s children on his knee, he was fond of telling them this marvellous story, pretty much as I have now told it to you. And then would he stroke their glossy ringlets, and tell them that their hair, likewise, had a rich shade of gold, which they had inherited from their mother.

“And to tell you the truth, my precious little folks,” quoth King Midas, diligently trotting the children all the while, “ever since that morning, I have hated the very sight of all other gold, save this!” (57)

Hawthorne subtly obscures the distinction between the narrator “I” and the character Midas to make it difficult for the reader to decide whether it is the narrator or Midas who finds a golden tinge in Marygold’s hair, which, as Midas “told them,” his grandchildren “had inherited from their mother.” By suggesting the possibility that the entire story is a fiction made by Midas, the author also implies that such an idealized image of the innocent child “with a golden tinge” in her hair might be a product of an adult imagination to see only what they want to see in a child—an imagination that might not be necessarily damaging to a child. We should note that Hawthorne’s insight that adults tend to read what they want to read in children parallels the political and ethical problem of translation in a colonial setting, which Hawthorne explored in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Writing *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne again tackles the problem of translation. This time, the author not only reemploys the Eliot myth in the creation of the Transcendentalist reformer Hollingsworth but also names the first-person narrator after the sixteenth-century Protestant translator Miles Coverdale, renowned for the first complete English translation of the Bible.³³ The story is centered on the rivalry of the two male characters who literally or figuratively seek to dominate two female Blithedale residents, Zenobia and Priscilla. Like Giovanni in “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” each of the two translators demonstrates a tendency to impose his male fantasy of female ideals on actual women.

Scholars have noticed Hawthorne’s allusion to Eliot in the portrayal of Hollingsworth.³⁴ During their stint in the Blithedale commune, it becomes a custom for Hollingsworth, Zenobia, Priscilla, and Coverdale “to spend the Sabbath afternoon at a certain rock” known to them “under the name of Eliot’s pulpit, from a tradition that the venerable Apostle Eliot had preached there, two centuries gone by, to an Indian auditory” (C3: 118). “Beneath this shade, (with my eyes of sense half shut, and those of the imagination widely opened,)” says Coverdale, “I used to see the holy Apostle of the

³³ For Miles Coverdale’s translation of the Bible into English, see Cummings 213-14; Bruce 53-66; and Norton 29-34.

³⁴ Byron Stay writes: “John Eliot represents the survival of Puritan integrity in a world dominated by Puritan brutality. Eliot plays a purely ironic role in *The Blithedale Romance*; all characters fall short of his genuine spirituality” (284). I agree with Stay that Hawthorne’s use of Eliot in the story is ironic, but, as I discuss in this chapter, not all characters think much of spirituality. Both Coverdale and Zenobia criticize Hollingsworth for his denial of passion and lack of sympathy. As I have discussed so far, in Hawthorne’s view, “Puritan brutality” is rather caused by its too much focus on spirituality and negligence of corporeality in one’s lived experience.

Indians, with the sunlight flickering down upon him through the leaves, and glorifying his figure as with the half-perceptible glow of a transfiguration” (119).³⁵ As is often the case, Coverdale’s narration becomes deliberately complex at this crucial moment. While he emphasizes the similarity between Hollingsworth and Eliot on the surface, the phrase in parentheses also suggests that it is only in half-fantasy that the nineteenth-century reformer looks like the legendary apostle, which means that Hollingsworth is not Eliot. On Eliot’s pulpit, Hollingsworth often gives Zenobia, Priscilla, and Coverdale lectures, of which Coverdale says that “[n]o other speech of man has ever moved me like some of those discourses” (C3: 119). It is obvious that Hawthorne configures Hollingsworth in the position of Eliot, while comparing the other three to Eliot’s praying Indians.³⁶ But,

³⁵ Critics differ in the interpretation of this scene. Maddox claims that “[t]he shade of Eliot is present,” “since the very absence of Indians from the place that Blithedale now occupies is evidence of the failure of Eliot’s effort to save them; his pulpit ought to be a reminder to the gathered group of reformers that their own brand of utopianism is as doomed as Eliot’s was” (126). Maddox’s argument is that in this Coverdale’s irony here is directed at the Blithedalers as a whole. “In the ‘glorification’ of Eliot,” Bellin also argues, “Hawthorne brings to the surface the self-serving nature of such historical mystifications, revealing . . . the role of Eliot-worship in the dispossession of the peoples whom Eliot ostensibly served (or saved)” (“Apostle of Removal” 29). Although I agree with Bellin in considering that “the role of Eliot-worship” (not Eliot himself) may have served as an ideological support for “the dispossession of the peoples,” I think that Coverdale’s irony is rather directed at self-glorifying Hollingsworth, who resembles Eliot only “with my eyes of sense half shut,” and that through Coverdale, Hawthorne satirizes his reformist contemporaries. In this sense, my argument is rather close to that of Maddox, though the position from which I evaluate the author significantly differs from hers. For Maddox, Hawthorne’s antipathy toward reformism itself shows his defects as a writer.

³⁶ Berlant also points out that “Coverdale is very much like an Indian listening to John Eliot: he may or may not actually comprehend the content of what he hears, but he

as Lauren Berlant points out, “Hollingsworth’s exhortations are valuable less for what they contain—Coverdale never reports their content to us—than for what they sound like” (“Fantasies of Utopia in *The Blithedale Romance*” 43). The irony is, as Berlant also suggests, that as is the case with Dimmesdale, “Hollingsworth’s seductive pulpit moves listeners not by the light of reason but by the attraction of emotions transmitted by rhetoric—even while Hollingsworth is emphatically against theories of the passionate basis of social reform” (43). In this sense, Hollingsworth is an incarnation of Dimmesdale, though this time Hawthorne is more overtly critical of what he considers to be the defects in the Puritan-Transcendentalist line of spiritualist thinking that belittles the corporeal aspects of human experiences. Hollingsworth is thus described as a sort of moral “murderer” (C3: 243).

But the difficulty in reading the text of *The Blithedale Romance* is that the accusation of self-righteousness behind ostensibly benevolent motives is voiced by another morally-questionable figure, whose narration, or translation, is even more unreliable than the former. Some critics have noted the role of Coverdale as a narrator

thinks he knows the sense of the language itself, and thinks he knows that the act of translation from one system (English; Hollingsworth’s philosophy) to another (Indian; the proselytes’ combined ignorance and resistance) is an act of love” (44), adding that the “parallels between Eliot’s and Hollingsworth’s utopian plans are clear: Hollingsworth’s criminal, the nineteenth-century version of Eliot’s Indian” (46). In a similar vein, Bellin claims that “Coverdale’s response to Hollingsworth’s sermon on the nature of woman is laden with the language employed in both Eliot’s and Hawthorne’s time to debate the fate of the Indians,” going on to say that “it is only appropriate that Hollingsworth choose Eliot’s pulpit as his stage—for both preach a gospel of white male superiority over the nation’s others and both wear such supremacism as benevolence” (Bellin 29).

and translator. Charles Swann suggests that by naming the notoriously unreliable narrator after a translator of the Bible Hawthorne raises “the problems of authority and writing” inevitable in any written text (“*The Blithedale Romance*—Translation and Transformation” 240). As we have already seen, the antebellum culture of translation demanded of the translator a prophetic sense of artistic creativity often intermixed with a nationalist tendency to appropriate other cultures and peoples. The characterization of Coverdale as a failed poet, translator, and narrator complicates such a dominant culture of translation. By suggesting the inevitable failure of Coverdale’s translating historical events into a coherent narrative, Hawthorne illuminates the fundamental difficulties and ethical problems inherent in any act of translation.

It is Zenobia who most directly challenges the authority of Coverdale as poet, translator, and narrator. As scholars have pointed out, Coverdale’s unreliable narrative is driven by his deep desire to interpret, understand, and thus appropriate the inhabitants of the Blithedale commune, especially Zenobia, a woman who irresistibly attracted and repulsed him.³⁷ But his attempts to discover “the mystery” (C3: 47), or “the riddle” (48), of her life and to translate his fragmented memories of her into a beautiful ballad never succeed, rather solidifying his first impression about her that “[i]f you were to snatch it away, she would vanish, or be transformed into something else” (45)! Zenobia, at once as a particular object of his interest and as a direct critic of his and other men’s masculine egos, challenges the validity of his male authorship. When Coverdale first meets Pricilla, he makes an inference about her background based on his rather

³⁷ For a source study of the work’s Biblical allusions, see Magretta, “The Coverdale Translation.”

stereotypical view of “some young girl” (33). But Zenobia replies with obvious sarcasm: “Since you see the young woman in so poetical a light . . . you had better turn the affair into a ballad. It is a grand subject, and worthy of supernatural machinery. . . . And when the verses are written, and polished quite to your mind, I will favor you with my idea as to what the girl really is” (33). As the story goes on, the opposing female voice recurrently penetrates through Coverdale’s narrative, undermining his self-conviction that he is qualified to make a romantic depiction of past events, especially of a woman.

In the “Coverdale’s Hermitage” chapter, the narrator settles himself in a hiding place in a tree, which he finds “an admirable place to make verses, tuning the rhythm to the breezy symphony that so often stirred among the vine leaves; or to meditate an essay for ‘The Dial,’ in which the many tongues of Nature whispered mysteries, and seemed to ask only a little stronger puff of wind to speak out the solution of its riddle” (C3: 99). In the hermitage, he also enjoys smoking cigars, which indeed attaches a little Indianness to his character. To the would-be Transcendentalist poet, the place seems like his “own exclusive possession” symbolizing his “individuality” among “the socialists” (99). But his self-complacent transcendence over the actual human society is shortly compromised by Zenobia and the womanizer Westervelt approaching the tree. In this scene, Coverdale’s narrative turns meticulously unreliable. Coverdale, as he alleges, first recognizes “with perfect distinctness, somewhere in the wood beneath, the peculiar laugh” of Westervelt. Overhearing—or eavesdropping on—their conversation about what he assumes to be their past love affair, he thinks it “the design of fate to let [him] into all Zenobia’s secret” (103). But, as it turns out in a few seconds, “Zenobia’s voice was so hasty and broken, and Westervelt’s so cool and low” that he “hardly could make

out an intelligible sentence, on either side” (104). In narrating these events, the narrator inserts some self-reflexive passages to explain the difficulty of translating past events into the present. “What I seem to remember,” says Coverdale, “I yet suspect may have been patched together by my fancy, in brooding over the matter afterwards” (104). He continues to say: “Other mysterious words, besides what are above written, they spoke together; but I understood no more, and even question whether I fairly understood so much as this. By long brooding over our recollections, we subtilize them into something akin to imaginary stuff, and hardly capable of being distinguished from it” (104-5). The narrator is suggesting the possibility that his narration as well as anyone’s suffers from unavoidable distortions of facts.

In his analysis of Coverdale’s narration in this hermitage scene, Michael Borgstrom has referred to Coverdale’s above-cited comments as the examples of his recognizing epistemological uncertainty in knowing the past, arguing that in “this candid moment, Coverdale admits that there are limits to his comprehension” (“Hating Miles Coverdale” 376). While I entirely agree with Borgstrom that the author’s deliberate employment of unreliable first-person narrator questions “stable, comprehensible forms of social knowledge” (365), it is, I think, still arguable whether the narrator’s admission of the limitation of his comprehension is as “candid” (376) as Borgstrom claims. It remains an open question whether Coverdale is honestly accepting the difficulty of recollecting the past or making an awkward excuse for his intentional omissions of some events that he actually remembers, but does not want to articulate for some reason. It would be possible likewise to claim that the interpreter’s desire to make a consistent argument about the indeterminacy of Coverdale’s narrative may have urged him to read

Coverdale's admission as completely true only in the scene.³⁸ Is it just a coincidence that he seated himself in the tree? Was he not waiting for a long time for Zenobia to show up underneath the tree? Did he really miss some important words in their conversation? Did he not omit some words he heard in their conversation? Coverdale concludes the chapter:

In a few moments they were completely beyond ear-shot. A breeze stirred after them, and awoke the leafy tongues of the surrounding trees, which forthwith began to babble, as if innumerable gossips had all at once got wind of Zenobia's secret. But, as the breeze grew stronger, its voice among the branches was as if it said—"Hush! Hush!"—and I resolved that to no mortal would I disclose what I had heard. And, though there might be room for casuistry, such, I conceive, is the most equitable rule in all similar conjunctures. (C3: 105)

While admitting that he "heard" some facts about Zenobia's secrets, Coverdale refuses to "disclose" them. But his refusal to disclose Zenobia's secrets seems to come not only from his awareness of epistemological uncertainty, but from his authorial desire to appropriate her to himself and to declare that no one but he knows Zenobia's truth, that no one but he can write the true story of Zenobia against "numerous gossips" about her. True, Coverdale admits that his logic here might sound like "casuistry," yet just to admit it would hardly prove his honesty. We should notice that the nucleus of Hawthorne's narrative strategy lies in the process of deconstructing the narrative itself, an endless process in which the reader is irresistibly involved. As Clark Davis suggests, Hawthorne

³⁸ That being said, I am by no means dismissing Bortstrom's point. It would be no more difficult to analyze my reading of the scene than his in much the same way I have done so far.

“has created in Coverdale a type of narrative voice that makes room for and even solicits response and critique, that intentionally opens itself to his readers’ alternative ‘voices’” (*Hawthorne’s Shyness* 110). The truth, if there is one, might be only slightly perceived in “a helpless sort of moan; a sound which, struggling out of the heart of a person of her pride and strength,” which affected him “more than if she had made the wood dolorously vocal with a thousand shrieks and wails” (104). Coverdale’s choice of the phrase “a thousand shrieks and wails” indicates his disapproval of literary sentimentalism popular at the time. But Coverdale, or Hawthorne, has not found a narrative voice that allows him to express what he thinks the true female voice sounds like. Hawthorne does not speak for women, but through Coverdale’s unreliable narration rather dramatizes the ethical problem of male authorship, which tends to translate female voices into narratives conforming to the dominant discourse of patriarchy.

In the next chapter, the members of the Blithedale society enjoy Zenobia’s storytelling of a legend titled “A Silvery Veil.” It is a story about a man called Theodore obsessed with solving the secrets of “the Veiled Lady” hidden behind the veil she is wearing. At the end of the story, Theodore is finally given a chance to catch “a glimpse of a pale, lovely face beneath,” but “just one momentary glimpse, and then the apparition” vanishes, leaving him alone (C3: 114). Zenobia concludes the story: “Our legend leaves him there. His retribution was, to pine, forever and ever, for another sight of that dim, mournful face—which might have been his lifelong, household, fireside joy,—to desire, and waste life in a feverish quest, and never meet it more” (114). This ending offers an allegory of male authorship, which, like Coverdale, forever desires in

vain to translate his fragmented impressions of a woman into a fixed image or a consistent narrative.

After repudiating Hollingsworth's request for becoming his disciple, Coverdale leaves Blithedale. In Boston, he happens to see Zenobia in the house opposite to his hotel room—though we might no longer trust his explanation that he found her by mere coincidence. The narration of Coverdale watching her in the opposite house is highly symbolic and almost proto-psychoanalytic: “When I returned to my chamber, the glow of an astral lamp was penetrating mistily through the white curtain of Zenobia's drawing-room. The shadow of a passing figure was now and then cast upon this medium, but with too vague an outline for even my adventurous conjectures to read the hieroglyphic that it presented” (C3: 161-2). Zenobia, like a “hieroglyphic,” the same term signifying Pearl, resists Coverdale's attempt to interpret her, to penetrate through “the white curtain” like the silvery veil of the Veiled Lady. In his actual confrontation with Zenobia, she says, as Coverdale remembers, “As long as the only spectator of my poor tragedy is a young man, at the window of his hotel, I must still claim the liberty to drop the curtain” (163), thus denying him the authority to write her true story. After the meeting, Zenobia along with Westervelt and Priscilla vanishes, leaving Coverdale an ever-lasting impression in his mind that “I hardly know whether I then beheld Zenobia in her truest attitude, or whether that were the truer one in which she had presented herself at Blithedale,” for in “both, there was something like the illusion which a great actress flings around her” (165). With her employment of flamboyant theatricality and vocal criticism—accusing Coverdale of “[b]igotry; self-conceit; an insolent curiosity; a meddling temper; a cold-blooded criticism, founded on a shallow interpretation of

half-perceptions; a monstrous scepticism in regard to any conscience or any wisdom, except one's own" (170)—Zenobia outplays the narrator, who ends up repeating vain attempts to appropriate her, to translate her history into his story that he could well understand. In their last conversation before she drowns herself, Zenobia once again challenges Coverdale, saying, "You are turning this whole affair into a ballad. Pray let me hear as many stanzas as you happen to have ready" (223). But Coverdale has not completed even a single line of the ballad and will never do so.

As I have already mentioned, Early Modern missionaries had a widely-accepted view that the universal language of God transcends superficial language differences, a conviction that endorsed many projects to translate the Bible into vernacular languages. As biblical scholars and historians have pointed out, historical Miles Coverdale was not as scholarly a translator as his predecessors. Because he had little knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, his translation of the Bible draws heavily on Latin and German sources as well as Tyndale's translation in English.³⁹ Coverdale was never proud of his literary skills in translating the Bible, and "his devotion" "to the truth" and "his zeal" "for the people to know the truth" encouraged him to tackle the daunting mission of translation (Norton 30). "Despite his fondness for ungainly compounds," however, as Frederick Fyvie Bruce points out, "Coverdale's style is racy and idiomatic" (61). Many distortions of words and meanings mark those early English translations of the Bible. It is, then, appropriate that Hawthorne named the narrator of the story after the historical translator, for Coverdale's narration is also laden with not always intentional but unconscious distortions of facts. As Thomas Mitchell puts it, Dimmesdale "both reveals and 'covers'"

³⁹ See Bruce 58-9; and Norton 30-1.

meaning through the inevitable distortions of translation” (Mitchell 182).⁴⁰ In their last encounter, Hollingsworth expresses his words of repentance: “Ever since we parted, I have been busy with a single murderer” (C3: 274). Upon hearing this, says Coverdale, “Then the tears gushed into my eyes, and I forgave him” (274). As in the climax of *The Scarlet Letter*, an abundance of “tears” brings about a sudden reconciliation between the two competing translators, which leads to a relatively happy ending of the story. The last chapter is aptly titled “Miles Coverdale’s Confession,” though, like Dimmesdale’s confession in *The Scarlet Letter*, his confession of his love for Pricilla does not sound authentic.⁴¹

Septimius the Translator

In his unfinished work *Septimius Felton, or Septimius Norton* (later published in a single volume titled *The Elixir of Life Manuscripts* in the *Centenary Edition*), Hawthorne creates the eponymous protagonist Septimius as a translator. Septimius is a Harvard graduate theologian, descended from “the stock of a distinguished Puritan divine” who were “great and learned men, scholars of old Cambridge” on one side and an “early emigrant, who seemed to have been a remarkable man” and a “strange, wild

⁴⁰ Mitchell continues to argue that “Coverdale’s self-consciously unreliable, reconstructed recollections are Hawthorne’s own translation of the workings of a mind haunted by its desire to distinguish between the Actual and the Imaginary that compose the fictions of perception” (182). Although Mitchell’s study is mainly biographical and does not specifically mention the ethical and political problem of translation, his point here overlaps my main argument in this chapter.

⁴¹ Richard Millington has argued that Coverdale’s last confession “announces its own inauthenticity” (173). Both Mitchell and Carolyn Maibor agree with Millington. See Mitchell 202; and Maibor 82.

lineage of Indian chiefs, whose blood was like that of persons not quite human intermixed with civilized blood” on the other side (C13: 143). Septimius is metaphorically a descendent of both Eliot and his praying Indians. The unfinished work had been long considered an artistic failure.⁴² But against the backdrop of the author’s lifelong contemplation on the question of translation, the story shows a completely different aspect. Written at the early stage of the Civil War, the story is set around the outbreak of the American Revolution. The plot of the story revolves around Septimius’s futile effort to decipher the secret recipe of the elixir of life, which he believes is hidden in an aged manuscript that he accidentally acquires from a British soldier he killed.

Scholars have long discussed Hawthorne’s interest in historical representation and examined the ways in which he produced many of his works based on his meticulous research of historical documents.⁴³ As is encapsulated in Walter Benjamin’s well-known premise that “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (“Theses on the Philosophy of History” 256), the problem of how to represent the actual history free from the dominant ideology of a time and place has troubled many historians, philosophers, and literary scholars to this day.⁴⁴

⁴² For an overview of the scarcity of serious *Septimius* criticism, see Ullén 239-241. I have discussed Hawthorne’s idea of history and historiography in the work in my essay written in Japanese, “‘Atama o Tsukidashita Hebi no yo na Ginen’.”

⁴³ For Hawthorne’s use of historical documents in his works, see Levin, *In Defense of Historical Literature* 77-117; Bell, *Hawthorne and the Historical Romance of New England*; Henderson 91-126; Mizruchi, *The Power of Historical Knowledge*; Budick 36-142; Dekker 129-185; Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety*; and Cagidemetrico 3-106.

⁴⁴ For a theorization of the epistemological problem of history, for example, see Jameson, *Political Unconscious*. He argues that the real history “is *not* a text, for it is

Among nineteenth-century American literary authors, Hawthorne was most keenly aware of the problem of historical representation, which Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Hayden White, and other theorists of historiography have pointed out.⁴⁵ Hawthorne had an almost postmodern understanding of history that the writing of history is fundamentally a work of translation, the process of which necessarily entails inevitable distortions of the actuality of an event. As we have seen in the preceding sections, Hawthorne did not believe that the actuality of an event can be adequately translated into words. Hawthorne criticized the contemporary practice of popular historical narratives that tend to translate the often-contradictory actuality of past events into simple coherent narratives. But his rejection of the teleological representation of events inevitably led to the collapse of the plot in some of his later works.

We can see Hawthorne's problem with these questions of translation and historical representation most clearly in his last unfinished romance *Septimius Felton*. At the beginning of the story, a minister of the town of Concord preaches to Septimius on Christian doctrine. Septimius replies to him that faith is "habit, formality, the shallow covering which we close over what is real," adding, "[I]t is the snake-like doubt that thrusts out its head, which gives us a glimpse of reality. Surely such moments are a hundred times as real as the dull, quiet moments of faith or what you call such" (C13:11). This aspiration to see the "real" behind "shallow covering" is, as we have already seen,

fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational; what can be added, however, is the proviso that history is inaccessible to us except in textual form, or in other words that it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization" (82).

⁴⁵ Colacurcio, for example, claims that in *The Marble Faun*, one of Hawthorne's later works, "Hawthorne was (so to speak) a follower of Roland Barthes" (530) in his consideration of the problem of representing past events.

common to many Hawthorne characters and, perhaps, the author himself. The narrator of the story says: “Our story is an internal one, dealing as little as possible with outward events, and taking hold of these only where it cannot be helped, in order by means of them to delineate the history of a mind bewildered in certain errors” (15-6). But the narrator does not make it clear what kind of “errors” “bewilder” Septimius’s mind.

To consider this question, we need to examine the climax of the first part of the story, which deals with the Battle in Concord in the Revolutionary War. Septimius has a duel with the British soldier and ends up killing him. Some scholars have recently reexamined the work in its relation to the contemporary discourses of warfare. Larry Reynolds, for example, argues that in *Septimius Felton* Hawthorne employs the scenes of the Revolutionary War in Concord as a metaphor of the on-going Civil War to “draw upon his own ambivalence about the war fever surrounding him” (“Strangely Ajar” 43).⁴⁶ Randall Fuller traces the source of the duel back to Sir Walter Scott and claims that it is “anachronistic even for the Revolutionary period” (“Hawthorne and War” 678). But the practice of dueling was, in fact, not as anachronistic as we conventionally think. The prevalence of dueling was no small part of the political trend in antebellum America, especially in the South and the West.⁴⁷ For example, Andrew Jackson is said to have been involved in dueling at least eight times before he won the presidential election in 1828; he even killed a man in one of those duels. It is noteworthy that his reputation as a survivor of duels did not prevent him from being elected to the Presidency, but rather it

⁴⁶ See also Reynolds, *Devils and Rebels* 228-32 and *Righteous Violence* 174-81; Randall Fuller, “Hawthorne and War”; and Randall Fuller, *From Battlefields Rising* 160-181.

⁴⁷ See Wyatt-Brown 142-53.

seems to have enhanced his popularity.⁴⁸ As the tension between the South and the North intensified, Southern politicians occasionally employed the tactic to challenge their political adversaries.⁴⁹

Hawthorne himself lost a friend in a duel. Jonathan Cilley was one of Hawthorne's friends in Bowdoin College along with Franklin Pierce, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and other Democrats who entered public service during the Jacksonian era. In the twenty-fifth congress, Cilley was elected a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Maine as a Democrat.⁵⁰ On February 24, 1838, he was killed by William Jordan Graves, a Whig representative from Kentucky.⁵¹ After Cilley's death,

⁴⁸ See Burstein 51-61. For his other duels, also see Burstein.

⁴⁹ For the history of dueling in the nineteenth-century America, see Truman.

⁵⁰ For a more detailed biography of Cilley, see Eve Anderson, *A Breach of Privilege*.

⁵¹ According to these authors, it was on February 12, 1838, that a series of events that ended up with the death of Cilley started. In Congress, Henry Alexander Wise, a Whig representative from Virginia, presented an article in the Whig organ the *New York Courier and Enquirer* by an anonymous author, "Spy in Washington," which accused an unnamed Congress member of corruption. Wise called for the investigation of the event based on the article. But Cilley expressed his doubt about the credibility of the article. James Watson Webb, the editor of the newspaper, raised an opposition to Cilley's statement, sending a letter to him. It was Graves who delivered the correspondence. According to John O'Sullivan's article, "The Martyrdom of Cilley" published in the March 1 issue of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, Cilley refused to receive it for the reason that he did not want to be drawn into any controversy with him. Senator Henry Clay, one of the leading figures among the Southern Whigs, together with Wise had eagerly exhorted Graves to challenge Cilley. After several exchanges of words between the two congressmen, Graves challenged Cilley to a duel to retract his allegation against Webb. Cilley, who had obstinately refused to receive Webb's letter, finally accepted the challenge. On February 24, 1838, the duel was fought near the boundary between the District of Columbia and the state of Maryland. According to the

the House of Representatives appointed an investigation committee, which concluded that Graves and Webb were to blame entirely for his death. But no one involved in the duel was finally charged by public authorities; Graves still remained in the House and was even reelected for another term. In “The Martyrdom of Cilley,” John O’Sullivan harshly accused the southern Whigs involved in the death of Cilley, calling them “The Evil spirit” (495), “wretched creature,” “foul spirit—compounded of the monster and the reptile,” and “ghoul” (505), while glorifying Cilley as a patriotic hero who died for “the honor and the pride of New England” (502). Meanwhile, Hawthorne, who must have felt an enormous shock at his friend’s death, kept silent in public. It was six months after Cilley’s death before Hawthorne finally published “Biographical Sketch of Jonathan Cilley” in the *Democratic Review*. The tone of the essay is quite different from that of O’Sullivan’s. He deliberately curtailed the political aspects of the incident, focusing instead on making a portrait of Cilley’s private and domestic life. Only in the last paragraph did he add his opinion about the duel, saying:

Alas, that, over the grave of a dear friend, my sorrow for the bereavement must be mingled with another grief—that he threw away his life in so miserable a cause! Why, as he was true to the Northern character in all things else, did he swerve from his Northern Principles in this final scene! But his error was a generous one; since he fought for what he deemed the honor of New England; and now that death has paid the forfeit, the most rigid may forgive him. (C23: 119)

general code of dueling, after both of the opponents in a duel missed the first shots, the seconds are supposed to declare the end of it. However, oddly, this Cilley-Graves duel went on to the third round, which turned out to be fatal to Cilley. See Thayer; O’Sullivan; and Eve Anderson 181-96.

It should be noted that in this seemingly jingoistic passage, Hawthorne asserts that what Cilley did is an “error” even though he fought for “what he deemed” the honor of New England. In this way, Hawthorne refuses to participate in the public sentiment martyring Cilley and romanticizing his death. What seems to have excruciated Hawthorne even more deeply is that he may have been indirectly responsible for Cilley’s death. It was just a few weeks before Cilley’s death that another odd incident took place. Hawthorne, though somewhat jokingly, challenged O’Sullivan to a duel over a woman, and the matter was soon settled in a friendly manner. A few weeks later, however, Cilley was killed in a real duel. It was, indeed, Cilley who first introduced Hawthorne to O’Sullivan. He was also one of Hawthorne’s advisors on the attempted duel with O’Sullivan. Hawthorne’s son Julian claims that Cilley was inspired by Hawthorne’s willingness to fight for honor, adding that Hawthorne “felt as if he were almost as responsible for his friend’s death as was the man who shot him” (174).⁵²

It would not be too bold to say that these incidents may have urged Hawthorne to realize that almost childish heroism could prove fatal. Hawthorne’s rejection of martyring Cilley indicates his passive resistance against the Romantic discourse popular in the aggravating power politics of the era. Watching British soldiers marching toward the town, Septimius says, “It is the strangest thing in the world that we can think

⁵² In 1837, in Washington Hawthorne became acquainted with Mary Silsbee, a daughter of Senator Nathaniel Silsbee. She was a famous beauty in her late twenties, and through O’Sullivan Hawthorne had become acquainted with her. She is said to have been well-known for making sport of young males. Silsbee hinted to Hawthorne that O’Sullivan had tried to seduce her and asked him to be her defender. O’Sullivan immediately sent a letter to convince Hawthorne that Silsbee just trifled with them. See Sampson 48-57; and Turner 91-102.

of killing them Human life is so precious” (C13: 21). But, just after making this humanistic remark, Septimius kills a British soldier, who turns out to be his English kinsman. The dying British soldier says, “It was boy’s play, and the end of it is, that I die a boy” (27). What Hawthorne implies here is that war itself might be the ultimate form of “boy’s play”—regardless of its good cause or intention.⁵³ In the excessively prolonged scene of the soldier’s death, as Randall Fuller suggests, Hawthorne seems conscious of Sir Walter Scott’s historical romances, which were highly popular in early-nineteenth-century America.⁵⁴ But Hawthorne’s intention of using the framework of historical romance might not be as “anachronistic” (*From Battlefields Rising* 171) as Fuller claims. We can rather see a satire in his adaptation of the popular narrative form of historiography. By exaggerating the gap between the soldier’s comical and innocent immersion in chivalry and the tragic consequence such demonstration of masculine heroism causes, Hawthorne foregrounds the sinister power of Romantic heroism that bewitches even a person who believes killing another human to be wrong into a deadly violence—that may have spurred Cilley and Graves to the fatal confrontation and could have lured Hawthorne and O’Sullivan into the same trap.⁵⁵

⁵³ Melville may have shared the same idea of the Civil War as “boy’s play” in *Battle-Pieces and Aspect of the War*, saying: “All wars are boyish, and are fought by boys” (*The Writings of Herman Melville* 11: 14)

⁵⁴ For a comprehensive study of the influence of Scott on nineteenth-century American historical narratives, see Dekker 29-72.

⁵⁵ Hawthorne’s critique of the Romantic heroism dominant in the discourse of the present warfare anticipates Mark Twain’s acute observation in *Life on the Mississippi* published in 1883. In the collection of essays about the postbellum South, Twain comically denounces Scott for spreading “Sir Walter disease,” which set the South in love with “decayed and swinish forms of religion; with decayed and degraded systems

In “The Old Manse,” Hawthorne as the narrator refers to an anecdote of the Battle in Concord, which James Russell Lowell told him:⁵⁶

The story has something deeply impressive, though its circumstances cannot altogether be reconciled with probability. A youth, in the service of the clergyman, *happened to be* chopping wood. . . and when the noise of battle rang from side to side of the bridge, he hastened across the intervening field, to see what might be going forward. . . . [T]he lad now left his task, and hurried to the battle-field, with

of government; with the sillinesses and emptinesses, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society” (174), adding, “Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character . . . that he is in great measure responsible for the [Civil] war” (174-75). But his criticism in the guise of comical invectives aimed at Scott extends to the Romantic heroism that Twain claims equally permeated both the North and the South in antebellum America. Twain says:

One may observe, by one or two signs, how deeply [Scott’s] influence penetrated, and how strongly it holds. If one take up a Northern or Southern literary periodical of forty or fifty years ago, he will find it filled with wordy, windy, flowery “eloquence,” romanticism, sentimentality—all imitated from Sir Walter, and sufficiently badly done, too—innocent travesties of his style and methods, in fact. This sort of literature being the fashion in both sections of the country, there was opportunity for the fairest competition; and as a consequence, the South was able to show as many well-known literary names, *proportioned to population*, as the North could. (175 italics mine)

In the same way, by characterizing the British soldier as a Sir Walter type, Hawthorne illuminates the undercurrent of Romantic heroism in both the literatures of the American Revolutionary War and the contemporary discourses of the Civil War. Also, Twain deftly points out the contradiction of the idea of the American Revolution, saying, “The Southerner of the American Revolution owned slaves; so did the Southerner of the Civil War: but the former resembles the latter as an Englishman resembles a Frenchman” (175).

⁵⁶ It is Samuel Ripley who rented the Old Manse to Hawthorne.

the axe still in his hand. The British had by this time retreated—the Americans were in pursuit—and the late scene of strife was thus deserted by both parties. Two soldiers lay on the ground; one was a corpse; but, as the young New-Englander drew nigh, the other Briton raised himself painfully upon his hands and knees, and gave a ghastly stare into his face. *The boy—it must have been a nervous impulse, without purpose, without thought, and betokening a sensitive and impressible nature, rather than a hardened one—the boy uplifted his axe, and dealt the wounded soldier a fierce and fatal blow upon the head.* (C10: 9-10 italics mine)

This anecdote might be another source for *Septimius Felton*.⁵⁷ In that both the youth with an ax and Septimius are “without purpose, without thought” attracted to the killing field and kill a human, the circumstances of the two stories are almost the same. Hawthorne says that “as an intellectual and moral exercise” he has often “sought to follow that poor youth through his subsequent career, and observe how his soul was tortured by the blood-stain,” adding “[t]his one circumstance has borne more fruit” than “all that history tells us of the fight” (C10: 10).

In the seventh volume of George Bancroft’s *History of the United States*, first published in 1858, just a few years before the outbreak of the Civil War, we can see a passage similar to Hawthorne’s above-cited passage about the Battle of Concord.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See “Historical Commentary” in C13: 571-2.

⁵⁸ History was arguably the most popular field for the fast-growing publishing industry in nineteenth-century America. According to Harvey Wish, numerous historical books became bestsellers between 1830 and 1870. For further details, see Wish 70-108; Novick 42-46; and Burrow 433-45. Bancroft’s renowned twelve-volume *History of the*

Hawthorne knew Bancroft—Harvard-graduate historian, translator of classical languages, and Democratic politician from Massachusetts—personally.⁵⁹ Bancroft writes:

It was only for a moment; Buttrick, leaping into the air, and at the same time partially turning round, cried aloud, as if with his country's voice, "Fire, fellow-soldiers, for God's sake fire;" and the cry, "fire, fire, fire," ran from lip to lip. Two of the British fell; several were wounded. In two minutes, all was hushed.

United States was first published in 1834, and the series completed as late as 1874. Throughout the nineteenth century, it enjoyed enduring popularity; it went through at least twenty five editions. Bancroft's *History* became, as Bercovitch argues, "almost instantly acclaimed as definitive . . . and it retained its authority throughout the antebellum period as *the* source for the matter of America" (*The Rites of Assent* 173). This monumental work is characterized as an amalgam of German idealism, literary Romanticism, Jacksonianism, New England Puritanism, patriotism, and US nationalism. Bancroft saw history as a spontaneous progress through the course designed by God's will or higher laws toward the birth of the nation America, which Bercovitch calls "a secular version of sacred history or a sacral version of human progress" (174). While Bancroft made his authoritative US accessible to the emerging reading masses, Emerson, who commended Bancroft as the foremost historian of the era, gave theoretic and aesthetic endorsement to it. Emerson's share of "a sacral version of human progress" appears in passages like this:

Of the works of this [universal] mind history is the record. . . . Without hurry, without rest, the human spirit goes forth from the beginning to embody every faculty, every thought, every emotion, which belongs to it in appropriate events. But the thought is always prior to the fact; all the facts of history preexist in the mind as laws. . . . Epoch after epoch, camp, kingdom, empire, republic, democracy, are merely the application of his manifold spirit to the manifold world. ("History" 2-3)

Also see, for example, Anonymous, "Emerson: a Literary Interview."

⁵⁹ He was occasionally forced to seek Bancroft's political patronage for government positions. See Turner 170-71.

The British retreated in disorder towards their main body; the countrymen were left in possession of the bridge. This is the world renowned BATTLE OF CONCORD; more eventful than Agincourt or Blenheim. The *Americans had acted from impulse*, and stood astonished at what they had done. *They made no pursuit and did no further harm, except that one wounded soldier, attempting to rise as if to escape, was struck on the head by a young man with a hatchet.* (vol.7: 303-4 italics mine)

In this scene, Bancroft stresses that the American soldiers committed no atrocity to the defeated army, while obscuring the evidence of cruelty on the American side by mentioning the killing of the wounded British soldier only as an exception. On the other hand, Hawthorne foregrounds the atrocity on the American side that Bancroft tries to omit from his description of the same event. The contrast between the two texts in the depiction of “impulse” is also striking. In Bancroft’s text, “impulse” causes a unified action of the American soldiers and brings a victory to their sides. In Hawthorne’s version, “a nervous impulse” drives the boy into his extraordinary behavior and undermines the sacredness of the victory. While Bancroft’s narrative is embellished with unabashed patriotism, as Gillian Brown argues, “Hawthorne gets no patriotic remembrance, nor even the correlative to patriotic celebration of the dead, respect for the slain enemy” (“Hawthorne’s American History” 136). While Bancroft romanticizes the Battle of Concord in the guise of objectivity and puts the historic incident on what Bercovitch terms “the predetermined course of progress” (*The Rites of Assent* 175), Hawthorne de-romanticizes the same incident by refusing to reduce its extraordinariness

into a simple nationalist narrative.⁶⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's comment about the untranslatability of historical events precisely explains Hawthorne's (counter-)narrative strategy: "The lesson of the impossibility of translation in the general sense . . . readily points at absolute contingency" ("Acting Bits/ Identity Talk" 793). Hawthorne's representation of the event serves as, so to speak, a counter-translation of Bancroft's authoritative history of America, though the former version had appeared earlier than the latter.⁶¹

A significant difference between Bancroft's and Hawthorne's representations is that the former lacks the consideration of contingency that may have worked in the actual development of events. In Hawthorne's above-mentioned passage from "The Old Manse," elements of contingency are rather emphasized. Hawthorne mentions that the youth "happened to" be chopping wood with an ax. Hawthorne's description allows us to imagine what he would have done if by any chance the youth had not been chopping wood at that time. Hawthorne also writes that the wounded soldier "raised himself painfully upon his hands and knees, and gave a ghastly stare into his face." It is impossible to tell from this description what the soldier was trying to do and what he

⁶⁰ According to Robert Gross, the youth is "Ammi White," "a twenty-one-year old Minuteman" (*The Minutemen and Their World* 127).

⁶¹ In *The Rites of Assent* and *The Office of The Scarlet Letter*, Bercovitch situates Hawthorne's works in the same vein as Bancroft's. But, as I show in this chapter, Hawthorne's texts often oppose Bancroft's teleological description of American history. Bush also sees in Hawthorne's early tales his criticism of Bancroft's mythologization of Puritanism as the national foundation of America ("Re-inventing the Puritan Fathers"). Larry Reynolds also argues that in *Grandfather's Chair* Hawthorne implicitly criticized Bancroft's exoneration of common people from their accountability in the Salem witchcraft trial (*Devils and Rebels* 64).

thought. In Bancroft's text, the wounded soldier is described as "attempting to rise as if to escape." Consequently, the youth's atrocity is justified as part of the predetermined teleology of the national history. What Hawthorne resists here—and in *Septimius Felton*—is such a teleological description of the event.

Hawthorne's objection to teleological historicism is most clearly seen in his treatment of death in *Septimius Norton*, the later version of *Septimius Felton*. In Bancroft's description, a dying militia officer's face is described as "little altered and pleasant in death" (303).⁶² Septimius also finds a similar expression on the face of the dead British soldier, seeing the soldier's face "transfigured to nothing less than angelic" (C13: 244). Septimius also considers that "the death-radiance" in his face is "decreed by God's providence," and "the agonies and physical ugliness of death" "a delusion" (245). Watching the soldier's face, however, Septimius "struggle[s] so to interpret it," since "another view of the matter obtrude[s] itself" (245). In this way, Hawthorne highlights the irreducible corporeality of the dead body, calling into question the Romantic representation of death that translates the actuality of a corpse into the idealized image of a battle angel.

Hawthorne's resistance to the beautification of the dead (and the alive, likewise) is also seen in the description of nature in *Septimius Felton*. Hawthorne begins the story with a long description of the town of Concord jubilating at the news of the coming war:

It was a good time, everybody felt, to be alive in; a nearer kindred, a closer sympathy from man to man, a sense of the goodness of the world, of the sacredness of country Oh, high, heroic, tremulous juncture, when man felt

⁶² According to Bancroft, his name is Isaac Davis, the commander of Minutemen from Acton (302-3).

himself almost an angel, on the verge of doing deeds that outwardly look so fiendish; oh strange rapture of the coming battle. We know something of that time now; we that have seen the muster of the village soldiery on the meeting-house green, and at railway stations; and heard the drum and fife, and seen the farewells; seen the familiar faces that we hardly knew, now that we felt them to be heroes; breathed higher breath for their sakes; felt our eyes moistened; thanked them in our souls for teaching that nature is yet capable of heroic moments. . . . It was a beautiful morning, spring-like and summer-like at once; . . . such a morning was enough for life, only to breathe its air and be conscious of its inspiring influence” (C13: 17-8).

This passage reminds us of Emerson’s most famous essay “Nature.” Emerson says: “The high and divine beauty which can be loved without effeminacy, is that which is found in combination with the human will, and never separate. . . . Every natural action is graceful. Every heroic act is also decent, and causes the place and the bystanders to shine” (E 16). It might not be too difficult to see the risk inherent in this combination of Transcendental natural aesthetics and militant Romanticism, which I have discussed in Chapter 2, in this passage. By beautifying masculine heroism on the basis of his Transcendental aesthetics, Emerson refuses to see actual disastrous effects that such “heroic acts” can produce. Hawthorne, partly due to his concern about being labeled as anti-patriotic, implicitly criticizes the war craze among his Transcendentalist neighbors by describing it as the backdrop of the story. Through Septimius’s struggle to withdraw from the “whirlpool of public feeling” fraught with enormous “pleasure and happiness” (C13: 23), in which even his girlfriend Rose looks “frightened, excited, and yet half

pleased, but strangely pretty; prettier than ever before” (C13: 18), Hawthorne tries to have readers experience the atmosphere of the town in war-time.

In writing *Septimius Felton*, Hawthorne wrote to his British friend Henry Bright: “The war at first drew my thoughts wholly to itself, but latterly, I am meditating a Romance, and hope to have it finished by the time the public shall be ready for any other literature than the daily bulletin, or treatises on warlike strategy” (C18: 421). This passage shows not just Hawthorne’s non-commitment to the present war, but his concern about the postwar. His study of the subsequent life of the youth who killed a British soldier with an ax in “The Old Manse,” his observation of a Southern soldier in prison alleged to have killed “a wounded Union soldier” who “had crept on hands and knees to his feet and besought his assistance” by “tramp[ing] the soul out of his body” (C23: 430) in “Chiefly about War Matters,” his recollection of the death of Cilley, and his creation of *Septimius Felton*—all converge on Hawthorne’s concerns about animal-like atrocity at the core of all humans.

While Hawthorne is hoping to write a romance, the actuality of the war occasionally penetrates through the framework of romance. When Septimius is in his usual meditation, he suddenly encounters a chilling reality of the war. He sees “limping along the lane a disabled soldier, begging his way home from the field, which, a little while ago, he had sought in the full vigor of rustic health he was never to know again” (C13: 54). Dr. Jabez Portsoaken then appears in the story. As his last name connotes, he is an alcoholic quack who is incessantly imbibing strong liquor and smoking tobacco. This comic character is, in fact, another traumatized figure. Portsoaken turns out to be a war veteran, an ex-British-army-doctor, who left his regiment “when his Majesty’s army

quitted Boston” (69) in the American Revolutionary War. In examining Septimius’s aunt Keziah’s secret decoction, Portsoaken claims: “Henbane” (75) is needed to make it perfect. Henbane is actually a poisonous plant that has a hyoscyamine, an analgesic ingredient. Besides, the liquid in his “good-sized leathern-covered flask, with a sliver lip fastened on the muzzle” (75) seems to contain some pain-killer. These elements suggest that Portsoaken, as well as Septimius, are suffering from a sort of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The structural problem of the story is that while Hawthorne seeks to write a romance, he unintentionally turns to what would be called literary realism. By adopting the popular nineteenth-century view of the Indians as brute barbarians, Hawthorne’s narrator repeatedly blames the killing of the British soldier on Septimius’s “fierce Indian blood” (C13: 26). But Hawthorne must have been aware of the absurdity of such a plot, for he knew that the youth who killed the British soldier with an ax in the Battle of Concord did not have “Indian blood” in his vein. The narrator says: “Septimius wondered at the easiness with which he acquiesced in this deed. . . . Perhaps it was his Indian trait stirring in him again; at any rate, it is not delightful to observe how readily man becomes a blood-shedding animal” (56). The “Perhaps” in the passage reveals Hawthorne’s doubt about the popular theory of Indian genetic barbarism.⁶³ In *Septimius Norton*, the later version of the story, indeed, Septimius’s aunt Nashoba—whose name was most likely borrowed from Nashobah, one of Eliot’s praying Indian towns, which Emerson in “Historical Discourse” mentions—says: “Now I wonder . . . what portion of

⁶³ For the analysis of the discourse of Indian genetic barbarity in early nineteenth-century popular historical romances, such as *Hobomok* and *Hope Leslie*, See Chapter 3 of Maddox, *Removals*.

his blood he gets this strange coldness from. It is not Indian; and his English ancestors were great warriors, and the minister slew an Indian in Phillip's war" (C13: 212)!⁶⁴ As Randall Fuller precisely says, "the plot of this work is "neither willed nor desired: far from being the *meaning* of the novel, the irrepressible conflict between romance and reality is instead the work's unintended consequence" ("Hawthorne and War" 679).

Meanwhile, Hawthorne's skepticism toward Christian institutions is even deeper here than in his more famous earlier works. He unambiguously criticizes Christian institutions that support war with their bold use of crusader rhetoric. Septimius's advisor, a minister in the town, justifies killing in the war by saying that taking human life "only shortens his earthly life and brings a little forward a change which, since God permits it, is, we may conclude, as fit to take place then as at any other time" (C13: 35). This minister's remark resonates with the definition of translation as removal of a person into heaven without death in Webster's *An American Dictionary*, which I mentioned in Chapter 2. The minister even recommends Septimius to be a commander or a war chaplain. Septimius's remark that "women and clergymen are, in matters of war, the most uncompromising and bloodthirsty of the community" (56) may well be seen as a reflection of Hawthorne's view of questionable Christian institutions as well as his

⁶⁴ In his Eliot biography, Francis draws on Shatuck's *History of Concord* and Emerson's "Historical Discourse" to mention the town of Nashobah:

A few years afterwards, by the mediation of Eliot, the object was accomplished. An Indian town called Nashobah, a name given to a territory lying partly in Littleton and partly in Acton, was constituted. They had the institutions of Christian worship, and an Indian teacher, probably one prepared by our evangelist. The desire of enjoying some of those comforts of life, of which they saw the English in possession, seems to have led the natives at Concord to take the first step towards embracing Christianity. (85)

disdain for the rhetoric of sentimentalism. The narrator says: “More people become insane, I should suppose. . . suicides, murders, all ungovernable outbreaks of men’s thoughts, embodying themselves in wild acts, take place more frequently, and with less horror to the lookers-on” (67). The occasional intrusion of the first person singular narrator seems to reflect Hawthorne’s more personal—almost caring but agonized—voice. As John McWilliams suggests, Septimius’s responses to the Revolutionary War seem “closer to Hawthorne’s [to the Civil War] than he perhaps should like to admit” (22). Hawthorne was aware that the dualistic understanding of good and evil is inevitably complicit with the partisan rhetoric in war-time. He sought for words, beyond his familiar frameworks of romance, to describe a more actual history, in which “without purpose, without thought” a man can kill another.

In this light, Septimius’s half-comical, half-tragic quest for a panacea and his mission to translate the “mystic writing” of the recipe (C13: 66) in the second half of the story should be seen as an allegory of the impossibility of translating an actual historical event into a single coherent narrative. Septimius “continued to brood over the manuscript in his study, and to hide it under lock and key in a recess of the wall, as if it were a secret of murder” (67). Septimius’s apparently fruitless effort to translate the illegible recipe for the elixir of life parallels Hawthorne’s struggle to represent the present war-fare as a real history.⁶⁵ In the manuscript, just after the above-cited passage, Hawthorne has scribbled a note: “*Septimius is at the point of despair for want of a guide*

⁶⁵ This self-referential narrative with the use of double perspectives—the serious voice of Septimius and the mocking gaze of the narrator—is identical of that of “Chiefly about War Matters.” For Hawthorne’s strategic use of double narrators in “Chiefly about War Matters,” see Bense.

in his studies” (68). It would be fair to say that this sentence reflects the author’s own voice. After writing this, Hawthorne still continued to write this story, changing the title and plot, struggling to complete it without success.

Hawthorne’s ambivalent response to the on-going Civil War—reflected in Septimius’s struggle to translate the mystical writing in the face of the Revolutionary War—again overlaps the popular image of John Eliot still working on his translation of the Bible during King Philip’s War, which Hawthorne also mentioned in *Grandfather’s Chair*. In Francis’s biography of Eliot, Eliot “applied himself to the work with great patience and sagacity carefully noting the differences between the Indian and the English modes of constructing words and having once got a clew to this he pursued every noun and verb he could think of through all possible variations” (43). In the same way, Septimius also “could not at first read a word of it, nor even satisfy himself in what language it was written. There seemed to be Latin words, and some interspersed ones in Greek characters, and here and there he could doubtfully read an English sentence; but on the whole, it was an unintelligible mass” (C13: 49). Septimius, a Harvard-graduate theologian of Native ancestry, tackles the manuscript with the same scholarly patience and sagacity as Eliot did.

Meanwhile, Francis stresses the apostle’s undiminished zeal to civilize the heathens and the laudable failure of his mission. About King Philip’s War, Francis writes that “Mr. Eliot was seventy-one years old, when the war with Philip began, but was still strong, active, and full of the Christian zeal which had animated his earlier days,” and “when Mr. Eliot once offered to preach Christianity to [Philip] and his people, he rejected the offer with disdain” (270). Francis continues to say: “The voice of holy

persuasion, which reached the hearts of so many in the forest, could not subdue him. The war-cry, which rang through the woods and echoed from the hills, was more pleasant music to his ear, than all the eloquent words of peace and love which the good evangelist could utter” (270-1). The difference between the legendary apostle Eliot and Septimius in the face of a devastating warfare is that the latter is no longer certain if he is qualified to utter “the eloquent words of peace and love,” for he has already killed a man. The narrator of the story first blamed his deed on his Indian blood, but the author apparently changed his mind as the Civil War developed, for he is now aware that it is not only the Indians who commit barbarities. It is thus appropriate that Septimius’s mission to translate the manuscript that seems contain a solution to all the miseries on earth remains incomplete, so does Hawthorne’s composition of this work.⁶⁶

Near the end of the story, Septimius talks to Sybil about his plan after he has deciphered the secret recipe for the eternal life: “having lived so much of affairs, and having lived so many hundred years, I will sit down and write a history, such as histories ought to be, and never have been. And it shall be so wise, and so vivid, and so self-evidently true, because only an eye-witness could have written it, or could have gained so much wisdom as was needful for it” (C13:173). This might be every historian’s impossible dream. Hawthorne was aware of this impossibility of writing the History that is impartial, not biased in favor of winners. What Hawthorne almost unintentionally succeeded in doing during the process of writing this incomplete work is the description of the otherness inside himself. By translating into words the barbarity of

⁶⁶ Magnus Ullén even claims that Hawthorne possibly “played with the idea that the only true way of bringing this project to completion was to literally refrain from completing it in order that it might be figurally completed by some ideal reader” (260).

his own, he managed to present a miniscule history against the grain, which Benjamin would call the task of the historical materialist—which is indeed the task of the translator.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ For the concept of “historical materialist,” see Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”

CHAPTER IV

“ALL INTERWEAVINGLY WORKING TOGETHER”:

MELVILLE, WORLD LITERATURE, AND THE ETHICS OF TRANSLATION

In “The South Seas,” one of the speeches Melville delivered during a lecture tour between December 9, 1858, and March 3, 1859, he mentions an article in the *Honolulu Advertiser*, reporting on the state of affairs in Hawaii. According to the article, “now Americans and other foreigners are there, and lately a suggestion has been reported to abolish the Hawaiian language in their schools and exclude those children who speak it” (*The Writings of Herman Melville* 9: 420).¹ He goes on to say: “I threw down the paper on reading this, exclaiming, ‘Are they to give up all that binds them together as a nation or race—their language? Then are they indeed blotted out as a people?’” (W9: 420). While this remark apparently manifests his objection to US and European imperial expansionism and his support for a minority people, culture, and nation, it also indicates his anxiety about the flimsy foundation of his own country. If the Hawaiian language is, as he stresses in this statement, the mainstay of Hawaiian people’s identity “as a nation or race,” the same goes for the relation of American language to the United States. Were it not for a common language like English, how can the American people maintain their identity as a nation or a race (if we could suppose such a thing as an American race)? Moreover, how does the United States as a nation accommodate those non-English and non-standard American English speakers who are already within its borders? Melville’s call for multilingualism, expressed in his support for the conservation of a minority

¹ *The Writings of Herman Melville* is abbreviated to *W* hereafter.

language, conflicts with his tacit embracement of monolingual nationalism, implied by his conception of a language as the foundation of a nation. Such ideological contradiction can be even more palpable in a situation where the boundaries between nations incessantly shift and the common language of a nation continually changes its form.

This question of the relation between a language and a nation in an age of globalization, which features prominently in the twenty-first century, comes up on various occasions in *Moby-Dick*. While many readers have found an example of ideally democratic multiculturalism in the novel, some have noticed its entanglement with English monolingual ideology. Paul Lyons, for example, points out that while Melville “depicted an egalitarian multicultural mingling of the world’s peoples,” “their common language was English” (55). Considering the hegemony of English over other languages today, it may well sound plausible that *Moby-Dick* also has a share in the global phenomenon. But how can we explain the paradox that such critique of English linguistic imperialism must be presented also in English? Is it possible at all to build an egalitarian dialogue between peoples as to the problem of language without a common language like English?

It is indeed this aporia of language—in Jacques Derrida’s words, “One cannot speak of a language except in that language” (*Monolingualism of the Other* 22)—that Melville illustrates in dramatizing scenes of crosslingual communication in his works from *Moby-Dick* onward. While he meditates on the possibility of an egalitarian consortium of peoples in the world, his texts also reveal that such a cosmopolitan utopia would hardly be possible to realize in the actual scenes of crosscultural encounter. In

what follows, I will retrace the wake of Melville's exploration with the question of language in the ever-globalizing world through *Moby-Dick* and some of his later works.

Ishmael's Translation of Queequeg's Story

The difficulty in the effort to preserve a minority language in a colonial setting is that in order for an indigenous people to protect their own language from a dominant one, they seem to have little choice but either to shut out all foreign influences, which sounds simply impossible, or to find among their enemies sympathizers who completely understand their native language and culture and are righteous enough to fight for their right, which seems also impossibly difficult. Otherwise, they would have to articulate their objection to the hegemony of another language by speaking the very foreign tongue, while striving to conserve their native language and culture tightly knitted with it. In *Moby-Dick*, this dilemma of language is most clearly seen in Queequeg's history, narrated by Ishmael in the chapter "Biographical." Queequeg smuggled himself onto an American ship that had visited a port in his home island Kokovoko with "a profound desire to learn among the Christians, the arts whereby to make his people still happier than they were; and more than that, still better than they were" (62). The fact that American ships occasionally visit the island indicates that Kokovoko is not an earthly paradise in the South Sea, where holy savages still live a primeval life. Kokovoko was a cosmopolitan port town just as Nantucket, New Bedford, and other seaports on the U.S. East Coast were. When Ishmael first met him, Queequeg was already an English-speaker and a sort of cosmopolitan by necessity. This new recognition of the already established system of global economy leads Ishmael toward cultural relativism, a perception that

“even Christians could be both miserable and wicked,” and “it’s a wicked world in all meridians” (62).

This cultural relativism is one of the central themes that Melville scholars have noticed in the novel. The transition of the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg can be read as a process of Ishmael (and the readers) being enlightened by Queequeg, “a finely balanced, model cosmopolitan” (Gibian 29). The first step of the education is to learn about the “cannibal” by hearsay. Ishmael gives full plays to his imagination of the Other. The second step is to see and touch the strange object firsthand. As Ishmael’s maxim—“Ignorance is the parent of fear” (24)—suggests, this is the first occasion for Ishmael to actually meet a “cannibal.” In watching Queequeg’s manner and behavior closely from his bed, Ishmael reaches a conclusion that the cannibal is a human being just like him. The third step is to make an emotional investment in the strange human being. In the famous scene on the bed, Ishmael experiences a sort of transcendental moment, in which various boundaries—such as cultural, sexual, and racial ones—between him and Queequeg dissipate. In the course of mingling with Queequeg, Ishmael begins “to be sensible of strange feelings” like “a melting” in him (57), stating that in their “hearts’ honeymoon” they become “a cosy, loving pair” (58).

It is noteworthy that the tripartite process of Ishmael’s learning of a foreign language and culture parallels Goethe’s universalist concept of translation in “the epoch of World literature” (Eckermann 204), which I have already discussed in Chapter 2. As Merton Sealts and other scholars suggest, by the time he set out to write *Moby-Dick*, Melville had gained considerable knowledge about German literature since his second

trip to England in 1849.² His journal entries report that aboard the ship to Britain, he congenially discussed “German metaphysics, & discourses of Kant, Swedenborg &c” (W15: 4) with George J. Adler, a German American literary scholar at New York University. In London, he shopped around for numerous texts of world literature, including translations and criticisms of German literature, such as those by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle.³ According to John Pizer, Goethe conceives three developmental stages of translating foreign languages into his mother tongue. The first type of translation “makes us broadly aware of the foreign land in a manner familiar to us,” and “simple prose is most suited” for this purpose “because it neutralizes the foreign work’s distinct particularities and acquaints us with what is magnificent in the foreign through the filter of our own national domesticity” (8). At his first meeting with Queequeg, Ishmael has only secondhand information about the “cannibal.” This stereotypical understanding of a foreign object coincides with the simple prose translation in Goethe’s model that Pizer illustrates. At the second “parodistic” stage, Pizer continues, “the translator attempts to transport himself into the circumstances of the foreign but is really only at pains to appropriate the foreign sensibility and re-represent it with his own sensibility” (8-9). The same explanation can apply to

² For the reception of German literature and culture in antebellum America, see Pochmann 59-242.

³ For the influence of Goethe on Melville, see Sealts, *Melville’s Reading* 59-72; Duban, “‘Level Dead-Reckoning’.”; Duban, “‘Visible Objects of Reverence’.”; Giesenkirchen; McIntosh, “Melville’s Use and Abuse of Goethe”; McIntosh, “Melville’s Copy of Goethe’s Autobiography and Travels”; Cromphout, “Melville as Novelist: The German Example”; Milder, “‘Nemo contra Deum’.”; Dettlaff, “Ionian Form and Esau’s Waste”; Mansfield and Vincent, “Explanatory Notes” 704-5; and Pochmann 439-40.

Ishmael's more direct but still biased view of the foreigner and his customs and manners. "The last and 'highest' phase in Goethe's translation model," Pizer continues, "occurs when the translator wishes to make original and translation perfectly identical, so that the one can be validly interchanged with the other" (9). This last phase of translation in Goethe's formula exactly overlaps Ishmael's deeply emotional but possibly self-sufficient investment in the perfect unity and the egalitarian relationship between the two men of different races, cultures, and languages, like "a cosy, loving pair." But Ishmael stops short at the consummation of love between two different languages in the Goethean concept of translation.⁴

Many critics have read the interracial homoerotic bond between Ishmael and Queequeg (and other crew members) as an embodiment of a potentially democratic ideal.⁵ But what Melville demonstrates here is something beyond a mere sensual

⁴ As I have pointed out in Chapter 2, though, Goethe was also aware of the untranslatability of some words and concepts in foreign languages. Melville read Goethe through the lens of his Transcendentalist contemporaries.

⁵ Carolyn Karcher, for example, sees in the passage Ishmael's deepening assertion that "loving one's fellow man means wishing to overcome human separateness by sharing whatever is precious in one's own eye's with one's fellow, and that the union made possible by respecting this wish is more sacred than the most sacred institutions of any culture" (73). But Ishmael's affirmation of universal humanity, which Karcher claims Ishmael believes in, is itself highly problematic. On what ground can he assert that what he and his fellow man believe to be precious is more "sacred than the most sacred institutions of any culture"? Besides, how can he believe that his fellow man thinks and feels the same as he does, especially when his friend speaks a different language? Does Ishmael's assertion translate to a different language well? Is their putative shared belief still valid when it is translated into a foreign language? Focusing more specifically on homosexual aspects of *Moby-Dick*, Robert Martin also claims: "The homosexual relationship is invested by Melville with radical democratic potential; it is through the

unification or an egalitarian friendship between men of different races and cultures.

While enjoying Queequeg's "bodily warmth" to his heart's content, Ishmael "all at once" thinks that he will open his eyes, "for when between sheets, whether by day or by night, and whether asleep or awake," he has "a way of always keeping [his] eyes shut, in order the more to concentrate the snugness of being in bed" (60). He continues: "Because no man can ever feel his own identity aright except his eyes be closed; as if, darkness were indeed the proper element of our essences, though light be more congenial to our clayey part" (60). Upon opening his eyes, he will be no longer able to preserve what he has embraced as "his own identity" or "essences." Nevertheless, he eventually opens his eyes. Consequently, he is forced out of his "own pleasant and self-created darkness into the imposed and coarse outer gloom of the unilluminated twelve-o'clock-at-night" (60), which causes him "a disagreeable revulsion" (60). This subtle shift marks the third step of Ishmael's perceiving the relationship between himself and Queequeg. As the

affirmation of the values of nonaggressive male-bonded couples that the power of the patriarch can be contested and even defeated" (*Hero, Captain, and Stranger* 70).

On the other hand, Leo Bersani deconstructs such democracy-autocracy dualism, which Karcher, Martin, and other critics have found in the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg. By calling their homoerotic mingling "a nonpsychological homosexuality," he argues that "Melville proposes a social bond based not on the subordination to the great personality embodied by Ahab, not on the democratic ideal of power distributed according to intrinsic worth, not on those feelings binding either two friends or the partners in a marriage, not, finally, on the transgressed homage to all such legitimated social bonds in conventional images of homosexual desire" (147). Drawing on Bersani, Geoffrey Sanborn also claims: "Rather than a warm, unifying force that makes us see our separateness as an accident or a mistake, love in *Moby-Dick* is a shock that fades as rapidly as it comes, a thing that can never fully enter either our language or our identity" (231). My reading of *Moby-Dick* participates in the line of argument Bersani and Sanborn present.

metaphor of marriage might suggest, if you did not feel any romantic feeling or sensual attraction toward someone, you would never want to unite with him or her in the first place. But, if you really hope to sustain the relationship for long, you need to make a more practical effort on the “clayey part” of your life. What Melville shows us in this and other scenes of the mingling between Queequeg and Ishmael is the process of Ishmael’s opening himself to the possibility of more limited but more reciprocal relationships with others. And this shift occurs as he slowly graduates into language.

In the room “illuminated by the flame of new-lit lamp” (60), Queequeg begins talking about his history, which is narrated by Ishmael in the chapter “Biographical.” But we should notice Ishmael’s caveat on the risk of his misunderstanding and mistranslating Queequeg’s words.⁶ Ishmael says: “Though at the time I but ill comprehended not a few of his words, yet subsequent disclosures, when I had become more familiar with his broken phraseology, now enable me to present the whole story such as it may prove in the mere skeleton I give” (60). This passage can be read as an allusion to crosslingual communication and foreign language learning. Ishmael stresses at once the impossibility of perfect translation and the possibility of, if not perfect, good mutual understanding by listening carefully to each other’s words. This has been often overlooked, but it is indeed after Ishmael has spent a considerable time with Queequeg that he comes to be able to understand, to some extent, Queequeg’s words and make

⁶ Drawing on Spivak, Dirk Vanderbeke discusses the ultimate impenetrability of Queequeg. My argument departs from his in that he compares Queequeg to Poe’s “man in the crowd” to emphasize the former’s anonymous status as a subaltern (“Queequeg’s Voice” 73), while my argument is rather centered on Melville’s emphasis on the singularity of Ishmael’s experience and the this-ness of Queequeg for Ishmael.

himself understood by him. In the scene of their first encounter at the Spouter-Inn, Queequeg says to Ishmael, “Who-e debel you? . . . you no speak-e, dam-me, I kill-e” (26). Ishmael, unable catch these words, calls the landlord for help. For the sake of the readers’ convenience, Melville (or Ishmael as the narrator) puts these words into the text, but actually they are just incomprehensible words to Ishmael as a character in the present scene. The landlord, on the other hand, comprehends what Queequeg means, saying, “Queequeg, look here—you sabbee me, I sabbee you—this man sleepe you—you sabbee” (26)? This indicates that through the interaction with Queequeg, the landlord has already learned, most likely for a business reason, his peculiar vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and pronunciation. Moreover, he also has a knack of speaking in the way Queequeg can easily catch his words. The language they speak in this scene is a sort of pidgin English made from Nantucket dialect and Kokovokian English. In this scene, Melville takes pains to show the mutability of languages in actual crosslingual communication. Of course, as Ishmael cautions, Kokovoko is an imaginary island, “true places never are” (61). Melville may have had an option to use an actual language, some vernacular English spoken by indigenous people in the Pacific. But it would have been impossible to represent it exactly in the text or publish it for many practical reasons.⁷ Nor is there any promise that realistic depiction would be better-suited for the author’s

⁷ Emanuel Drechsel points out that the pidgin English that native Polynesians use in *Typee* and *Omoo* is not really based on the historical situation of that time. Queequeg’s pidgin English is similar to that in the above-mentioned two works (“Sociolinguistic-Ethnohistorical Observations”).

intention in the scene.⁸ It seems somewhat beside the point to censure Melville for writing *Moby-Dick* only in English, while such criticism can be more relevant to other works like *Typee*, advertised as based on facts when it was first published.⁹ It would be fair to say that in order to dramatize the variability of a language, Melville consciously chose a fictional language instead of an actual one.

In “Extracts,” one of the opening chapters before the story begins, the narrator warns us against the possibility of his mistranslation, saying that “you must not, in every case at least, take the higgledy-piggledy whale statements, however authentic, in these extracts, for veritable gospel cetology” (xxxix). These “extracts” are picked up by books written in varied languages, but they do not constitute the whole of “veritable gospel cetology.” Rather, they afford only a “glancing bird’s eye view of what has been promiscuously said, thought, fancied, and sung of Leviathan, by many nations and generations, *including our own*” (xxxix *Italics added*). What is emphasized here is that one’s understanding of the world does not transcend the framework of one’s own language, but stays within it—an epistemological understanding that one’s language is one of the numerous languages in the world; so is one’s perspective.¹⁰ The same epistemological uncertainty is also restated in the chapter “Cetology.” In explaining the objective of his cetological studies, the narrator “promise[s] nothing complete; because

⁸ For example, see the dramatic use of a fictional East-European language in *The Terminal*, a film directed by Stephen Spielberg.

⁹ Critics have argued that Melville’s representation of Hawaiian people is based on an ethnic stereotype popular in his days, criticizing Melville for participating in the reproduction and reinforcement of the stereotype. See Kaiwi; Avallone; Greenberg; and Breitwieser.

¹⁰ For an interesting close reading of these chapters, see Schleifer.

any human thing supposed to be complete must for that very reason infallibly be faulty” (147). The narrator stresses that his “object here is simply to project the draught of a systematization of cetology,” for he is “the architect, not the builder” (147), adding at the end of the chapter that the book he is now working on is “the draught of a draught” (157). This passage can be read as a trope of what writing should be for Melville as an author and what reading should be for us readers. The text of *Moby-Dick* invites us to participate in the construction of the work, which is incomplete because it is monolingual, by reading and translating it.

The chapter “Cetology” dwells further on the difficulty of establishing the definitive taxonomy of whales. The narrator says: “Some pretend to see a difference between the Greenland whale of the English and the right whale of the Americans. But they precisely agree in all their grand features; nor has there yet been presented a single determinate fact upon which to ground a radical distinction” (150). But what Melville suggests here is less the difficulty of distinguishing “the Greenland whale” from “the right whale” than that of drawing an ontological distinction between languages, like British and American English. “Whale” here is an analogy of language, and the problem of ontologically categorizing whales parallels that of classifying languages, a nationalistic effort that early-nineteenth-century American linguists, such as Noah Webster, initiated. The entire passage can indeed be read as a critique of Webster’s proposal for the establishment of American English as a foundation of national identity. One telling example of the nationalist efforts is seen in Webster’s renowned *An*

American Dictionary of the English Language.¹¹ In the preface of the first comprehensive dictionary of the national vernacular language, Webster writes:

It is not only important, but, in a degree necessary, that the people of this country, should have an *American Dictionary* of the English Language; for, although the body of the language is the same as in England, and it is desirable to perpetuate that sameness, yet some differences must exist. Language is the expression of ideas; and if the people of one country cannot preserve an identity of ideas, they cannot retain an identity of language. (Preface)

We might find a peculiar logic in the last sentence. Webster states: “if the people of one country cannot preserve an identity of ideas, they cannot retain an identity of language.” But, first of all, what is the necessary condition for “an identity of ideas”? Logically, it must be “an identity of language,” for if each speaker in a conversation does not share a common understanding that they are talking basically in the same language, they can hardly be sure about the identity of ideas that each of them mentions. Then, correctly, the sentence should read: “if the people of one country cannot preserve an identity of language, they cannot retain an identity of ideas.” But to mention “an identity of ideas” would risk leading readers to ask a more difficult question: What is “an identity of language”? Can Webster really answer such a question about a language? Probably, not. Webster seems to have ingeniously invented his twisted theory that an identity of ideas guarantees an identity of language in order to preempt an ontological question about the identity of a language. He must have been fully aware that it would have been

¹¹ For the contribution of translators in the making of dictionaries in the world, see Ch. 8 of Delisle and Woodsworth, *Translators through History*.

fundamentally impossible to answer such a question. What Webster does in the making of the first American dictionary—an important tool of translation—is to invent the concept of American English and materialize the language as if it had already existed as a unified and fixed entity.

Webster indeed admits that there is no essential difference between American and British English. Nevertheless, he asserts that “some differences must exist.” But what does he mean by “must”? Does he mean that “some differences are very likely to exist,” whose implication would be that “there might seem to be no difference, but if you look carefully you will actually find differences that already exist”? Or, does he mean that “some differences need to exist,” whose implication would be that “there is actually no difference between the two languages that already exists, but we need to produce differences”? Webster does not clearly explain this. But it is only through this undecidability that American English is produced as a single entity. In short, Webster’s statement above is at once a “constative act” and a “performative act,” which, in Jacques Derrida’s words, “must produce (proclaim) what in the form of a *constative* act it merely claims, declares, assures it is describing” (“The Laws of Reflection” 18).¹²

Meanwhile, Webster takes pains to naturalize American English as the common standard language of the people and at the same time redefines the people as those who speak the language, thus contributing to the shaping of national identity. Webster goes

¹² Also see Derrida’s reading of the Declaration of Independence. Derrida argues that “the people” who signed the declaration “do *not* exist as an entity, it does *not* exist, *before* this declaration, not *as such*. If it gives birth to itself, as free and independent subject, as possible signer, this can hold only in the act of the signature. The signature invents the signer. . . . That first signature authorizes him or her to sign” (“Declarations of Independence” 10).

on:

If the language can be improved in regularity, so as to be more easily acquired by our own citizens, and by foreigners, and thus be rendered a more useful instrument for the propagation of science, arts, civilization and Christianity; if it can be rescued from the mischievous influence of sciolists and that dabbling spirit of innovation which is perpetually disturbing its settled usages and filling it with anomalies; if, in short, our vernacular language can be redeemed from corruptions, and our philology and literature from degradation; it would be a source of great satisfaction to me to be one among the instruments of promoting these valuable objects. (Preface)

Webster's claim here sounds contradictory. While he hopes that the language will "be improved in regularity," he negates its mutability and advocates the protection of U.S. vernacular language from "innovation," "corruptions," and "degradation." In so doing, he also obfuscates the fact that the national language itself was an assortment of world languages, such as British English, other European languages, Native American languages, African languages, and numerous dialects, for to affirm the changeability of language in general would jeopardize the supposedly self-same identity of American English and thus the stability of the nation based on it. To deny the mutability of language would also undermine the claim that American English is now different from British English. But this contradiction is not only inevitable but necessary for the establishment of the identity of a language. What is American language? That is the language that American people speak. Who are, then, American people? They are those who speak American language. But, as I have suggested in the previous chapters, this

naturalization of a national identity through the invention of a national language is not nearly unique, but a ubiquitously seen phenomenon in the history of modern nations. As Ernest Gellner has said, “[n]ations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent . . . political destiny are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality” (*Nations and Nationalism* 47).

American exceptionalism is no exception. By illuminating the absurdity in an attempt to make a perfect taxonomy of whales and the arbitrariness intrinsic in the act of naming, Melville criticizes such a linguistic nationalism for its tendency to view a language as a fixed and unified entity that is naturally and essentially given to the speakers of a nation.

In the chapter “Etymology,” Melville writes: “The pale Usher—threadbare in coat, heart, body, and brain; I see him now. He was ever dusting his old lexicons and grammars, with a queer handkerchief, mockingly embellished with all the gay flags of all the known nations of the world. He loved to dust his old grammars; it somehow mildly reminded him of his mortality” (xxxviii). Reading this passage, Robert T. Tally, Jr. claims: “All the flags of all the known nations of the world, rather than decorate individually and specifically, are instead etymologies of an immanent state of mind, an ever-present multinational perspective” (12). But what Melville implies seems the opposite. We should not overlook that it is actually the very “pale old usher” with a handkerchief “embellished with all the gay flags of all the know nations of the world” who clings to “his old lexicons and grammars.” In the passage above, Melville satirizes such “an ever-present multinational perspective” complicit with monolingual nationalism as advocated by those “cosmopolite philosopher[s]” (119) of “liberal

professions” (118), who fail to see the practical difficulty and the ethical problem—and the rich potential—of actual translations in contact zones. While Goethe’s cosmopolitan translator seeks to provide translations through which speakers of different languages can perfectly communicate with each other, Melville’s translator recognizes his inability to translate the whole body of a foreign language into his own. And I would add that we can also see the author’s self-mockery in the helplessness of “the pale old usher” who feels nostalgic attachment to his old mother tongue. Melville must have been fully aware of the monolingual condition under which he could not write his works in any other languages than English. While Melville does not believe in the legitimacy of monolingual nationalism, he cannot trust the validity of multilingual cosmopolitanism, either.

Against the backdrop of ethically and politically problematic translation, we might better recognize the significance of Ishmael’s deepening quietism with regard to his relationship with Queequeg after one-fifth of the novel. As I have already mentioned in the introduction, translation theorists have recently examined the ways in which translation functions as a secret agency of often ethnocentric, nationalistic, colonialistic, and imperialistic political causes. Lawrence Venuti argues that “the translator’s invisibility at once enacts and masks an insidious domestication of foreign texts, rewriting them in the transparent discourse that prevails in English and that selects precisely those foreign texts amenable to fluent translating” (*The Translator’s Invisibility* 17).¹³ Following this lead, can we not see the possibility that Ishmael hesitates to translate Queequeg’s words into English because he has become aware of

¹³ See also Spivak, “Translating into English.”

the violence of translation that could appropriate something untranslatable in Queequeg's thoughts and feelings? In other words, can we not reconsider Ishmael's (and Melville's) reticence about Queequeg in terms of what translation theorists would call the ethics of translation, which restrains, in Venuti's words, "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values" (*The Translator's Invisibility* 20)—the violence of translation that, as Antoine Berman claims, "generally under the guise of transmissibility, carries out a systematic negation of the strangeness of the foreign work" (5)?

The ethical question over translation is repeatedly posed through the entire novel. For example, we can review Stubb as one of the figures who are inattentive to the traces of otherness in a language. In the chapter "Doubloon," he sees from hiding several characters stop in front of the Spanish gold coin to meditate on translating the Spanish words inscribed on it. Pip then shows up, saying: "I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look" (475). Watching this sight, Stubb cries out: "Upon my soul, he's been studying Murray's Grammar! Improving his mind, poor fellow!" (475). Lindley Murray's *English Grammar*, first published in 1795, enjoyed immense popularity both in England and America over the nineteenth century, contributing to the standardization of English grammar.¹⁴ While listening to Pip's repetition of the phrase to memorize the third person singular of regular verbs, Stubb, unusually for his nonchalant character, leaves the spot in a flurry. The reason for his discomposure is that Pip's chant produces a

¹⁴ For Murray's explanation of the use of number and person in verbs, see Murray, *English Grammar* 73-4. For the relationship between grammar books and literary works in antebellum America, see West. Especially for the popularity of *Murray's Grammar*, see West 68-72.

defamiliarizing effect that disintegrates a language into meaningless fragments of words and sounds, causing him to feel as if his mother tongue were becoming somewhat foreign. Stubb is a monolingualist and linguistic essentialist who cannot tolerate the ambiguity of a word, the variability of a language, or the obscurity of its origin. And Ahab, obsessed with his “monomaniac way” (470) of translation, is the representative monolingualist, and the white whale the embodiment of the untranslatable.

Father Mapple, who captivates his audience by the power of his uplifting eloquence, can also be read as an embodiment of the monolingualist cause. He preaches his audience to obey the teachings of the Bible. But his doctrine that there is only a single interpretation of the book can hold true only when we ignore the historical fact that its texts were not originally written in English and have come through numerous translations to this day. When he says that the essence of Jonah’s lesson consists in preaching “the Truth to the face of Falsehood” (54), he obliterates the fact that the words he quotes here are also a translation of foreign texts. Neither Ishmael nor Melville criticizes him straightforwardly. But it would be fair to say that by depicting Ishmael’s being out of place in the church Melville highlights Father Mapple’s fundamentalist rhetoric, which dismisses the possibilities of different translations of a text.¹⁵ Later, in

¹⁵ Critics differ widely as to Melville’s view of Father Mapple. Laurence Thompson stresses Ishmael’s (and Melville’s) anti-Christianity, arguing that the scene of the sermon is “a sarcastic and sneering burlesque of Christian doctrine” (*Melville’s Quarrel with God* 163). In a similar vein, William Spanos states that “Father Mapple’s jeremiad . . . is intended to recuperate the Puritan/ capitalist sociopolitical order” (100), claiming, as Thompson does, that Ishmael’s participation in Queequeg’s pagan rite implies his objection to Father Mapple’s doctrine. Giorgio Mariani contends that “Ishmael’s rhetoric turns its irony not so much against Christian ethics as against those

the chapter “Jonah Historically Regarded,” the narrator presents a variety of views to the story of Jonah to counterbalance Father Mapple’s dogmatic discourse. What allows Ishmael to keep some distance from him and his “simple hearers” (53) is the presence of Queequeg. The architecture of Father Mapple’s chapel imitating a whaling ship seems designed to build up the enthusiastic sense of unity between the preacher and his audience. When Ishmael comes into the chapel, the people present are solemnly reading the “frigid inscriptions” (41) on the wall and do not notice his entrance. But Queequeg, who is “the only one who could not read” (41) those English letters and, therefore, is careful to observe every minor event happening in the room, notices Ishmael. By identifying partly with Queequeg’s outsider status, Ishmael learns the way not to be taken in by the architectural rhetoric of the room, which enables him to distance himself from other members of the audience. What occurs between Queequeg and Ishmael is a sort of intersubjective perception of the present scene.¹⁶

institutional forms that turn religion into unquestionable dogma” (41), suggesting that Melville’s critique of Father Mapple is rather based on his close reading of Jonah’s story. Against these anti-Mapple arguments, from a liberal Christian standpoint, Duban sees in Father Mapple’s sermon his “advocacy of personal autonomy capable of self-willed reverence” (“Level Dead-Reckoning” 79). My argument is close to Mariani’s.

¹⁶ To explain the nature of the communication that might be taking place between Queequeg and Ishmael in this and several other scenes in the novel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s contemplation on his friend Paul and him looking at the same landscape is helpful:

My friend Paul and I point out to each other certain details of the landscape; and Paul’s finger, which is pointing out the church tower, is not a finger-for-me that I *think of* as orientated towards a church-tower-for-me, it is Paul’s finger which itself shows me the tower that Paul sees, just as, conversely, when I make a movement towards some point in the landscape that I can see, I do not imagine

In the next chapter, Queequeg takes a big book and, “placing it on his lap,” begins “counting the pages with deliberate regularity; at every fiftieth pages” “stopping a moment, looking around him, and giving utterance to a long-drawn gurgling whistle of astonishment” (55). This scene has been often read as a burlesque featuring an illiterate barbarian. But we should notice that it is perceived as funny only when the reader positions oneself in the place of someone who is naturally capable of reading English letters. If you stand in an illiterate person’s place, you might find Queequeg’s action quite understandable. It is not too difficult to imagine that many English speakers would do the same thing as Queequeg does if they took a voluminous book written in, say,

that I am producing in Paul, in virtue of some pre-established harmony, inner visions merely analogous to mine: I believe, on the contrary, that my gestures invade Paul’s world and guide his gaze. When I think of Paul . . . I . . . think . . . of someone who has a living experience of the same world as mine as well as the same history, and with whom I am in communication through that world and that history. . . . Paul and I ‘together’ see this landscape, we are jointly present in it, it is the same for both of us, not only as an intelligible significance, but as a certain accent of the world’s style, down to its very thisness. (*Phenomenology of Perception* 471-72)

When Queequeg and Ishmael are looking at the same landscape, the two perspectives do not perfectly overlap each other. One can have an influence on how the other sees the landscape, but one’s perspective does not entirely assimilate the other’s. Nor does one’s inner vision wholly occupy the other’s. The two persons look at the same landscape from slightly different perspectives, but the difference of angle does not call into question their intersubjective perception that they are looking at almost the same landscape, experiencing almost the same time, and living in almost the same *this world*. This “almost the same” experience gained from “different” perspectives—like “the two halves of an orange” (133)—is the nature of the communication between the two. For a phenomenological, though not necessarily Merleau-Pontian, reading of *Moby-Dick*, see Brodtkorb.

hieroglyphics or Chinese characters. Indeed, Ishmael also does the same thing when he looks at the tattoos on Queequeg's body. As Geoffrey Sanborn points out, Queequeg is responding to "the magnitude of the object," and his corporeal response to the materiality of the book and the letters printed on it gives Ishmael a clue to a "primary alternative to Ahab's obsession with interpretation" (124). Ishmael watches Queequeg reading English letters in his unique way. What he learns from Queequeg is the possibility of reading English as if it were not his own language in much the same way that English is a strange language for Queequeg. Through his mingling with Queequeg, Ishmael acquires a new perception that, when he attempts to translate words given in a different language into his own, his mother tongue is also transformed into a tongue that does not feel like his own. And we as readers also vicariously experience the moment of Ishmael's transformation through our reading of the novel. The text of *Moby-Dick*, originally written in English, tends to make itself look as if it were written in another language like Queequeg's tattoos.¹⁷ In "Des Tours de Babel," which I have already mentioned in the introduction, Derrida suggests that "a translation espouses the original when the two adjoined fragments, as different as they can be, complete each other so as to form a larger tongue in the course of a sur-vival that changes them both" (190-91). For Derrida, in an ideal translation "the native tongue of the translator" "is altered as well," and "the original becomes larger; it grows rather than reproduces itself . . . like a

¹⁷ In a vein close to Sanborn's above-mentioned argument, Rasmussen states: "Queequeg's coffin represents indigenous writing and its presence at the center of American literature. Even when such writing is undeciphered or no longer extant, it remains important, its transformative potential intact. In *Moby-Dick*, the alphabetic text and the indigenous narrative inscribed on the coffin are mutually interconnected and enabling" (137).

child” (191). Borrowing this trope, we might say that *Moby-Dick* is like a child born through the collaboration of Ishmael and Queequeg—and that of the author and the reader.

US Monolingualism and Melville after *Moby-Dick*

But Melville must have been well aware that in the actual world, such an egalitarian marriage as made by Ishmael and Queequeg is all too rare. In the above-mentioned *An American Dictionary*, Webster expresses his hope that “our language, within two centuries, will be spoken by more people in this country, than any other language on earth, except the Chinese, in Asia, and even that may not be an exception” (Preface). Such monolingual nationalism and linguistic expansionism as Webster conceived gradually took shape in the implementation of English-only policies in the rapidly expanding US territories over the nineteenth century. The period of his composition of his works from *Moby-Dick* onward saw the development of the English-only campaign in both present and future U.S. territories. In California, the California Land Act of 1851 was passed by the U.S. congress, which thereby “required all landowners to prove title to their holdings in English language courts” (Crawford 14). As a result, the Spanish-speaking landowners in California had to sell 40 percent of their lands “to pay the fees of English-speaking lawyers” (14). Against the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which “guaranteed certain civil, political, and religious rights to the Spanish-speaking colonists” (The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 58) who decided to stay in the territory ceded to the United States at the end of Mexican-American War, the new California constitution, rewritten in 1878 to 79, mandated that “[a]ll laws of the

State of California, and all official writings, and the executive, legislative, and judicial proceedings shall be conducted, preserved, and published in no other than the English language” (“Constitutional Debates” 52).

During the same period, authorities launched English-only campaigns for the assimilation of Native American languages and cultures. Excerpts from the 1868 report of Indian Peace Commission, quoted in the 1887 *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior*, elaborate on the benefits of implementing English-only schooling for Native American children:

The white and Indian must mingle together and jointly occupy the country, or one of them must abandon it. . . . What prevented their living together? . . . The difference in language, which in a great measure barred intercourse and a proper understanding each of the other’s motives and intentions. Now, by educating the children of these tribes in the English language these differences would have disappeared, and civilization would have followed at once. Nothing then would have been left but the antipathy of race, and that, too, is always softened in the beams of a higher civilization. . . . Through sameness of language is produced sameness of sentiment, and thought; customs and habits are moulded and assimilated in the same way, and thus in process of time the differences producing trouble would have been gradually obliterated. (20)

The report continues: “Schools should be established, which children should be required to attend; their barbarous dialect should be blotted out and the English language substituted” (20). Meanwhile, the U.S. government had already planned to put the English-only education policy into practice. The government “hired bounty hunters to

round up Indian children and pack them off to boarding schools far from home” (15), and this collective effort led to the establishment of “twenty-five boarding schools between 1879 and 1902” (Reyhner 43). At these schools, students were strictly forbidden to speak their native tongues, and those who broke the rules were harshly punished with “a stroke of a leather strap” (Reyhner 43). But contrary to the government’s expectation, most students upon graduation “returned to their reservations, where they found themselves ill-fitted to live in their tribal culture,” and those few remaining in the Anglo-dominant society faced racial discrimination, which excluded them from “all but the most menial jobs” (Reyhner 43).¹⁸

In Hawaii, English gradually predominated over Hawaiian languages over the nineteenth century. In the complex history of languages in the islands, as Albert Schütz shows, the indigenous people were not always forced to learn or use English in schools or in any other places. Early U.S. missionaries in Hawaii were instructed to translate the Bible into the Hawaiian language and were even discouraged from teaching English to Hawaiians—for fear that the literacy of English should give the native people knowledge that would serve to undermine Anglo-American settlers’ hegemony over them (Schütz 339-40). The missionary effort to compile the Bible in Hawaiian led to a high rate of literacy in that language (Schütz 341). It was Hawaiian kings and chiefs who were most eager to have their children educated to be able to read and speak English. On

¹⁸ Not all the indigenous children educated in these schools ended up being social outcasts. Lucy Maddox traces the wakes of several Native American intellectuals who learned English in those boarding schools and took advantage of their proficiency in both English and their native languages to stand up against racial discrimination and social oppression. See Maddox, *Citizen Indians*.

their request, the Chief's Children's school, later called the Royal school, was founded in 1839, which substantially contributed to the spread of English among the Hawaiian upper-classes (Schütz 342). Meanwhile, English was rapidly spreading among commoners working at seaports, where they spoke a sort of pidgin English for commercial use (Schütz 345).

It was around the 1890s that the English-only movement finally gained ground in Hawaii. The movement developed through the turmoil years of Hawaiian politics that ended in the annexation of Hawaii to the United States in 1898. At the time, the second-generation missionaries were feeling threatened by what they saw as the revival of the pagan culture and religion of the islands (Schütz 346-51). In much the same way as the above-cited Indian Peace Commission's report does, an article titled "Rev. Dr. McArthur on Hawaii" on the December 1895 issue of *The Friend*, a monthly Hawaiian newspaper, advocates the English-only provision in schools:

The English language will be taught in all the public schools. . . . The present generation will generally know English; the next generation will know little else. Here is an element of vast power in many ways. With this knowledge of English will go into the young American republican and Christian ideas; and as this knowledge goes in, kahunaism, fetishism and heathenism generally will largely go out. . . . The schools which have been established are raising up a new generation of educated young men and women. A new day is breaking; already the eastern sky is colored with its crimson and gold. (96)

In 1896, the law was finally passed that English be the medium of instruction in all public and private schools. From the time on, children were often physically punished

for speaking their native tongue on campus, and native Hawaiian-speaking teachers were “threatened with dismissal for singing Hawaiian in school” (Lucas 9). This de facto ban on using the Hawaiian language in schools caused a dramatic decline in the number of speakers of the indigenous language (Schütz 352-53). When Melville was composing his last story *Billy Budd* in the late 1880s to the early 1890s, he may have found that the day was, as he had predicted earlier, finally coming when, with their mother tongue taken away, the Hawaiian people would be “blotted out.”¹⁹

In the conclusion of the above-mentioned lecture “The South Seas,” Melville employs the rhetoric of Victorian Christian sentimentalism to express his wish “that adventurers from our soil and from the lands of Europe will abstain from those brutal and cruel vices which disgust even savages with our manners; while they turn an earthly paradise into a pandemonium” (W9: 420). “As a philanthropist in general, and a friend to the Polynesians in particular,” he hopes “that these Edens of the South Seas, blessed with fertile soils and peopled with happy natives, many being yet uncontaminated by the contact of civilization, will long remain unspoiled in their simplicity, beauty, and purity” (W9: 420). “And as for annexation,” he goes on to say, “I beg to offer up an earnest

¹⁹ While the languages of conquered peoples came under persecution in the nineteenth century, European languages other than English were relatively tolerated. Both private and public schools gave instruction to a variety of immigrant students in their vernacular tongues. It was in the 1880s that the situation began to change. Advocated by the American Protective Association, a secret anti-Catholic society, English-only instruction laws were passed in Wisconsin and Illinois. This legislation met with a strong opposition mainly from both German-speaking Lutherans and Catholics, which eventually led to Republican Party losses in most state and federal offices in the next election. The English-only laws were repealed, but the nativist sentiment against immigrants’ languages still remained (Crawford 20).

prayer—and I entreat all present and all Christians to join me in it—that the banns of that union should be forbidden until *we* have found for ourselves a civilization morally, mentally, and physically higher than one which has culminated in almshouses, prisons, and hospitals” (W9: 420). But, while observing the state of affairs on the borders of rapidly expanding US territory, he must have been fully conscious that his native soil was already “a pandemonium” “contaminated by the contact of civilization.” In contact zones, where the power relation between one culture and another is often imbalanced, such an equal relationship between two different languages as metaphorically represented in the happy marriage between Ishmael and Queequeg is practically nonexistent, and “the banns of that union” forcibly called.

In his works from *Moby-Dick* onward, Melville becomes increasingly attentive to the asymmetric relations between languages in colonial settings and more alert to ethnocentrism and imperialism inherent in the cosmopolitan universalism celebrated in the Goethean concept of world literature. When Melville earlier wrote in his essay “Hawthorne and His Mosses,” “Believe me, my friends, that men not very much inferior to Shakespeare, are this day being born on the banks of the Ohio” (W9: 245), he was actively participating in the nationalist cultural project of establishing great American literature through the cultural translation and the literary appropriation of world traditions.²⁰ His monolingualist affirmation of English hegemony occasionally

²⁰ Some scholars have complicated Melville’s commitment to the contemporary literary nationalism in “Hawthorne and His Mosses.” Dennis Berthold sees Melville’s “parodic intentions” in the overt celebration of Hawthorne and American literature in the essay (“Class Acts” 442). Ida Rothschild also reassesses the essay “as a submerged critique rather than a zealously nationalistic manifesto” (344).

manifests itself in the works before *Moby-Dick*. The narrator of *Redburn* sees a large group of German emigrants leaving the port of Liverpool for New York. He envisages those U.S. immigrants from over the world cultivating “the soil of Earth’s Paradise,” saying: “The seed is sown, and the harvest must come; our own children’s children, on the world’s jubilee morning, shall all go with their sickles to the reaping. Then shall the curse of Babel be revoked, a new Pentecost come, and the language they shall speak shall be the language of Britain” (W4: 169). But the next sentence complicates the monolingualist celebration of English ascendancy: “Frenchmen, and Danes, and Scots; and the dwellers on the shores of the Mediterranean, and in the regions round about; Italians, and Indians, and Moors; there shall appear unto them cloven tongues as of fire” (W4: 169). The passage above is an obvious adaptation from Acts. The original version in the Bible reads:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (*Official King James Bible*, Acts 2. 1-4)

In the Bible, the apostles become multilingual to begin their missionary work in foreign lands. But, as Marc Shell suggests, Acts “shunts aside the various down-to-earth ways of coping with those problems” of multilingualism “by means of a vastly effective perfect system of absolutely fluent simultaneous translation and murmur” and “would thus seem to overcome all ordinary and politically needful issues of translation in a

post-alphabetical Promised Land” (*Stutter* 133-4).²¹ In Melville’s version, on the other hand, people in the world become bilingual, starting to speak English along with their mother tongues.²² As I have already mentioned, early missionaries in now-US territories attempted translating their language into indigenous ones. But they gradually implemented English-only education for indigenous peoples in rapidly-expanding US territories over the nineteenth century. It is probable that Melville’s text reflects such change in the status of US language policies. But Melville’s adaptation of the Bible implies an even more complex question of language in a nation. In interpreting a sermon by Lancelot Andrewes, translator of the King James Bible, Rowan William points out that “[t]he tongue, says Andrewes, may be ‘cleft’ either by God or by the devil: the serpent in Eden is given a ‘forked tongue[.]’ ‘to speak that which was contrary to his knowledge and meaning’; but God also cleaves the tongue, because to ‘speak their mind’ to anyone except their own people the apostles need more than one language” (“‘Cloven Tongues’”). The ambiguous connotation of cloven tongues anticipates the characterization of Claggart in *Billy Budd*, allegedly a French-born Englishman “with a

²¹ Shell also points out that “Acts obscures the various problems posed by the stutterer barbarians of Babel” (*Stutter* 133).

²² See Hirsch, “Americanization and the Schools” 138-39. Hirsch is correct in pointing out that Melville inverted the passage in the Bible. But my argument significantly differs from Hirsch’s in that he sees in the above-cited passage only Melville’s hope for “the political jubilee morning,” which he claims should be brought by the monolingualization of America. Far from celebratory, as I have shown in this entire chapter, Melville’s view of a national language is often ambivalent, sometimes contradictory. Also, Hirsch’s reading ignores the international context of Melville’s text, focusing exclusively on a US context. Also, see Sanada 54. Sanada also finds Melville’s endorsement of monolingual nationalism and English linguistic imperialism in the same passage.

bit of accent in his speech” (314), who risks the naval discipline of the British battleship with his forked tongue. Melville’s nationalistic pride in American literature and the English language seems to have been rapidly overtaken by his growing suspicion of monolingual nationalism and imperialism during the composition of *Moby-Dick*. The writing of this new work, as Leo Bersani claims, became “for Melville an eerie process of dismissing the very ambitions that the novel also seeks so strenuously to realize” (*The Culture of Redemption* 140).

Melville’s writings after *Moby-Dick* indicate his continued trouble with the political and ethical question of translation. Many characters in his later fiction—including Isabel, Bartleby, Benito Cereno, Babo, Claggart, and Billy Budd, to name but a few—preserve the echoes of linguistic otherness in their voices, which wait to put the imagined monolingual community in confusion. Their alien tongues undermine the monolingual premise that people speaking a common national language must have a common understanding of any words uttered in the language, thus calling into question the supposedly self-evident identity of a nation based on a national language. If a national language is not a unified entity, but something amorphous and ever-changing—whose origin is obscure and, possibly, even non-human—and the meanings of words carried in the language widely vary, it can be a cause of social and political unrest for the nation whose foundation is supposed to be built on it. As Gilles Deleuze suggests, Melville illuminates the marks of “a foreign language that runs beneath English” that, as is manifested in Billy Budd’s stutters, “denatures language” (*Essays Critical and Clinical* 72).²³ I do not attempt here to locate every parallel

²³ Deleuze’s original comment about Melville is:

Melville invents a foreign language that runs beneath English and carries it off: it is the OUTLANDISH or Deterritorialized, the language of the Whale. Whence the interest of studies of *Moby-Dick* that are based on Numbers and Letters, and their cryptic meaning, to set free at least a skeleton of the inhuman or superhuman originary language. It is as if three operations were linked together: a certain treatment of language; the result of this treatment, which tends to constitute an original language within language; and the effect, which is to sweep up language in its entirety, sending it into flight, pushing it to its very limit in order to discover its Outside, silence or music. A great book is always the inverse of another book that could only be written in the soul, with silence and blood. This is the case not only with *Moby-Dick* but also with *Pierre*, in which Isabelle affects language with an incomprehensible murmur, a kind of *basso continuo* that carries the whole of language on the chords and tones of its guitar. And it is also the angelic or adamic Billy Budd, who suffers from a stuttering that denatures language but also gives rise to the musical and celestial Beyond of language as a whole. (*Essays Critical and Clinical* 72)

Deleuze stresses that Melville's written texts transform themselves into a sort of foreign language. While I mostly agree with Deleuze in considering that Melville's texts seek to express a foreign language within a language, I am not as sure if Melville's attempt to foreignize English is really successful. Obviously, Melville's style laden with heavy neologism is extraordinary and outlandish, but at the same time it still observes the basic rules of standard American English. My argument is rather deconstructive, focused on Melville's passages that highlight the impossibility of translating a foreign language into English. A foreign language within language, in my understanding, is something perceived only as a trace or a shadow that haunts the language. To consider this question, as Michael Jonik mentions, Jacques Rancière's critique of Deleuze's reading of Melville can be helpful (Jonik 36-42). Rancière's comment on Deleuze, which Jonik quotes, goes:

[Deleuze] insists on the idea, borrowed from Proust, that the writer creates, in his mother tongue, a foreign language whose effect entrains all of language and makes it swing over to its outer limits, which is silence or music. But how does he illustrate this? By evoking the 'painful squeaking' of the voice of Gregor metamorphosed. Or, in Melville's *Pierre, or, The Ambiguities*, the character of Isabelle [sic] who 'affects the language of an incomprehensible murmuring, like a

between numerous passages addressing the issues of translation in Melville's later works and actual historical events that can be relevant to them. But it seems productive to quickly overview some of Melville's stories along the line of argument I have drawn so far in reading *Moby-Dick*.

It is possible to read "Bartleby," for example, as a parable of a linguistic other alienated in a monolingual society. Bartleby's "flutelike tone" (15) in his voice produces an impression that his mother tongue is not proper English.²⁴ Like the tongue of wild

basso continuo that bears all of language in the chords and sounds of its guitar.' But Kafka's language gives us only the transcription of the words that Gregor emits, an observation about the strangeness of the timbre he experiences. The 'painful squeaking' creates no other language in language. The same is true for the incomprehensible murmuring or the basso continuo of Isabelle [sic]. In vain does the text say she cannot speak, in vain it speaks to us of the sounds of the guitar, it is in no way affected by this silence or this basso continuo. (qtd. in Jonik 36-7)

Drawing on Rancière and Jonik, I would argue that Melville's texts repeatedly foreground the strangers' inability to express themselves in words and the texts' insufficiency for describing their feelings in order to illuminate the traces of foreign languages within language.

²⁴ Lucy Maddox has pointed out that the character of Bartleby is likely to be modeled on a young Choctaw Indian educated in a Quaker School for Indians, who was employed, like Bartleby, as a copyist by Thomas McKenney, the first director of Bureau of Indian Affairs. While my argument does not intend to specify his racial identity, I am convinced by her argument that Bartleby is an avatar of racial, cultural, or linguistic otherness. See Maddox, *Removal* 68-76. Comparing Bartleby to Abraham, Derrida also suggests that just as Abraham "doesn't speak a human language" and "speaks in tongues or in a language that is foreign to every other human language," Bartleby's singular phrase "I would prefer not to" "reminds one of a nonlanguage or a secret language" "as if Bartleby were also speaking 'in tongues'" (*The Gift of Death* 74-5). But, as I suggests in this chapter, it is rather the lawyer who should be compared to Abraham, for he passively obeys the law and leads his metaphorical son Bartleby to death—in Derrida's

nature in *The Scarlet Letter*, his outlandish phrase—"I would prefer not to"—passes all the workers' mouths at the lawyer's office, disturbing the established order of the workplace. Homi Bhabha's analysis of the colonialist anxiety about linguistic others precisely applies to the lawyer's aggressive reactions to Bartleby's passive resistance. Bhabha suggests that "[t]he silent Other of gesture and failed speech becomes what Freud calls that 'haphazard member of the herd,' the Stranger, whose languageless presence evokes an archaic anxiety and aggressivity" (*The Location of Culture* 238). Considering the reinforcement of English-only policies in the second half of the century and the function of translation in the government campaign, we can review Bartleby's refusal to copy legal documents in English as his silent manifesto of the passive resistance against English monolingualism. The possibility of reading Bartleby as a linguistic other is also suggested by the lawyer's afterword. After Bartleby's death, the lawyer, who literally and figuratively represents the symbolic order of society, hears a rumor that he used to work at "the Dead Letter Office" in Washington. The lawyer says: "Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters and assorting them for the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned" (46). In this passage, we might find Melville's allusion to the "hopeless" situation of linguistic minorities who are forced to "burn" their indigenous "letters," the elimination of which ("dead letters") he believes is tantamount to the demise of those people ("dead men").

words, "a death given by the law, by a society that doesn't even know why it acts the way it does" (75).

The story of *Pierre* also includes a critique of the American literary industry, which contributes to the formation of national cultural identity as a self-evidently monolingual society. The marriage of Pierre, the legitimate heir to the heritage of the American Revolution, and his putative half-sister Isabel, a bastard child of the French Revolution, allegorizes the transatlantic and multilingual origins of the country. According to Isabel, she was left by her mother just after she was born, thus having lost her mother tongue. She was raised by some non-English-speaking old couple in a multilingual setting, where she learned to speak “two different childish languages; one of which waned” in her “as the other and latter,” English, “grew” (138-39). But in her love for playing the guitar, she finds “[a]ll the wonders that are unimaginable and unspeakable” in English “are translated in the mysterious melodiousness of the guitar,” which she says “knows all [her] past history” (150). Pierre strives “to condense her mysterious haze into some definite and comprehensible shape” (162), but his effort ends up with the feeling of “chapter upon chapter born of its wondrous suggestiveness . . . eternally incapable of being translated into words” (329). With “the secret monochord within his breast” touched by “the wonderful melodiousness of her grief” (205), he can no longer revert to the monolingual premises on which he “had written many a fugitive thing, which had brought him” the “applauses of the always intelligent, and extremely discriminating public” (286). Pierre’s failure of translating the untranslatable and his eventual suicide may well reflect at once the impasse in which Melville was placed in nineteenth-century popular publishing and the difficulty of composing something truly anti-monolingual and thus anti-national.²⁵

²⁵ Critics have seen *Pierre* as the double of the author beleaguered with the commercial

We can also reread the entire narrative of “Benito Cereno” as a parody of what Venuti calls domesticating translation and the Yankee captain Amasa Delano as a caricature of the bad translator. As Kate Huber has justly argued, “a pervasive trope of translation supports the tale’s argument for the unreliability of cross-cultural communication” (171).²⁶ Because of his “republican impartiality” (207), he mistranslates many signs and hints of the slave revolt on the *San Dominick*, “ignoring the symptoms” (203) of it. But it is not only his Yankee prejudice against Spaniards and Africans but also his lack of competence in translation that blinds him to the complexity of ongoing events. His inability to recognize the connotations of subtle expressions in any language is revealed at many occasions. When an old Spanish sailor throws a knot toward Delano, expecting him to notice the signs of the plot of the insurrection, and says “in broken English—the first heard in the shop—something to this effect: ‘Undo it, cut it, quick’,” he cannot “comprehend the meaning of such a knot” as “he had never seen in

failure of his works. See Howard and Parker, “Historical Note” in *Pierre, or the Ambiguity* 365-410.

²⁶ For a thorough analysis of the issues of translation in “Benito Cereno,” see Huber, *Transnational Translation* 165-80. The third chapter of the dissertation, which came out while I was revising this chapter, analyzes some of Melville’s works, including *Typee*, *Omoo*, *Mardi*, *Moby-Dick*, and “Benito Cereno,” from a perspective close to mine. My argument clearly overlaps with hers, though my focus is rather on *Moby-Dick* and later works. I have discussed the issues of translation in Melville’s works in my 2012 and 2013 articles that I wrote in Japanese, “‘All Interweavingly Working Together’”; and “Amerikan Runessansu to Hon’yaku,” which developed into early drafts of this chapter. Most recently, Furui Yoshiaki also discussed the same ethical and political problem of translation in “Benito Cereno” in the same vein as Huber and I did. But Furui, obviously a member of the small group of Melville scholars who understand the Japanese language, does not mention my papers at all in his 2014 article. See Furui 465-7.

America” (202) and misses all the point. Since all the dialogues between Delano and Benito Cereno, the captive Spanish captain of the ship, are written in English, it is not clear how proficient Delano is in Spanish. But the text also implies that, while Delano can possibly speak a little Spanish, his listening comprehension of it is not nearly adequate.²⁷ When Babo, the ringleader of the insurrection, is about to attack Delano, he is still slow to respond to Cereno’s cry for attention to the true assailant. Cereno’s “husky words” are “incoherent to all but” a “Portuguese oarman” (233), who is very likely much more proficient in Spanish than other members of his crew. At one point of the story, the relationship between Delano and Cereno is likened to that of “a childless married couple” (220). The metaphor of sterility, in marked contrast with the fertile relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg, also implies the failure of crosslingual communication between the two speakers of different languages. Near the end of the story, the narrator refers to some “extracts, translated from one of the official Spanish documents” about the “true history of the *San Dominick’s* voyage” (238). But Melville’s narrator does not forget to add that Babo’s deponent, which is said to exist in the original, is all “omitted” by the translator of the official documents on the ground that it is a “fictitious story” (248). This mention of the omission by the translator is one of Melville’s additions to the source of the story, Amasa Delano’s *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels*.²⁸ As Jean Fagan Yellin says, “Melville does not pretend to speak for the

²⁷ In Amasa Delano’s *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels*, from which Melville adapted the story, it is explicitly written that Delano “spoke in Spanish” (Delano 324).

²⁸ See Delano 318-53. Michal Boyden also points out Melville’s mention of the omission, though his argument is much more focused on the theoretical aspects of

Negro, but he dramatizes the perception that the voice of the black man has not been heard” (689). He calls attention to the invisible working of domesticating translation in a legalistic language, which under oath of truth excludes opposing voices from what its actual history may have been.

While Melville appears to have had a growing concern about the prevalence of ethically questionable translation in contact zones, however, he may well have had his share of anxiety about the babelic confusion of the society that might result from the lack of adequate translation. The curse of babel in the imagination of a monolingualist is described vividly in *Pierre*. When the eponymous protagonist enters a watch house located at the fringe of New York City, he is shocked at the sight of “a base congregation” of “frantic, diseased-looking men and women of all colors,” such as “negresses,” “yellow girls,” “deep-rogued white women,” and “pale, or whiskered, or haggard, or mustached fellows of all nations,” “who are in “indescribable disorder” “leaping, yelling, and cursing around him” (280-81). “On all sides,” he hears “drunken male and female voices, in English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese, interlarded now and then, with the foulest of all human lingo, that dialect of sin and death, known as the Cant language, or the Flash,” whose “words and phrases” are “unrepeatable in God’s sunlight, and whose very existence was utterly unknown, and undreamed of by tens of thousands of the decent people of the city” (281). This is the nightmare that haunts the minds of arch-monolingualists, such as Ahab, the lawyer in “Bartleby,” Captain Delano, and Captain Vere. They entreat or demand those speakers of alien tongues to “speak”

translations in and of *Benito Cereno* than the historical contexts in which Melville produced the narrative (“Voiceless ends” 266).

what they consider to be proper English. But those speakers of other languages have been already speaking in their own unique ways.

Billy Budd's speech impediment most manifestly symptomizes the marks of the untranslatable suppressed by the monolingual order of society. And his characterization as a stutterer allegorizes the precarious position of the speakers of foreign tongues in a monolingual society. In *Stutter*, the most comprehensive study of the descriptions of the speech impediment in literary works, Marc Shell says: "The ability to speak language in general is often taken to be a sign of membership in the group of 'human beings.'" Likewise, speaking a particular language properly is an important component of any given 'culture'; people cling to the notion of speaking properly as a 'necessary sign' of membership in their own 'tribe'" (50). "In this context," Shell continues to say, "'language tests' really matter. They are a matter of life and death. . . . If you fail the language test, you die" (50-1).²⁹ Billy Budd's case is a perfect match for Shell's definition of a failed student in the language test for full membership in human society. Billy Budd "was illiterate; he could not read, but he could sing, and like the illiterate nightingale was sometimes the composer of his own song. Of self-consciousness he seemed to have little or none, or about as much as we may reasonably impute to a dog of Saint Bernard's breed" (301). He also has "an occasional liability to a vocal defect" "like the beautiful woman in one of Hawthorne's minor tales" (302). As critics have suggested, it is most likely that Melville here refers to "The Birthmark," but "the beautiful woman" could also be Pearl (even though *The Scarlet Letter* is no doubt

²⁹ Although Shell only quickly mentions the musical nature of Billy Budd's speech (143), the entire book provides us with numerous insights that help us consider the relation of stuttering to the question of translation.

Hawthorne's major tale), who, as I discussed in the previous chapter, is also identified with a bird and fails in an exam in a Puritan catechism.³⁰ As Shell also suggests, "[t]he terms *stutterer* and *barbarian* both refer to 'those people who do not speak our language.' . . . *Barbarian*, in fact, often suggests 'a people whose language "we" do not understand' . . . or those whose language is not ours. The Latin *balbus* (*stammerer*) and its English cognates have much the same double meanings" (73). It is then appropriate that Billy Budd is repeatedly portrayed as "little more than a sort of upright barbarian" (301). As with Pearl, who is associated with an Indian Christian convert, Billy Budd is also identified with "those later barbarians, young men probably, and picked specimens among the earlier British converts to Christianity, at least nominally such, and taken to Rome (as to-day converts from lesser isles of the sea may be taken to London)" (372). The narrator also tells that a good Chaplain's efforts to "bring home to him the thought of salvation and a Saviour" is "futile," for as is possibly the case with Eliot's praying Indians, Billy Budd listens to his words "less out of awe or reverence perhaps than from a certain natural politeness" (373). During the investigation of the mutiny charge against Billy Budd, Captain Veer realizes his "liability to vocal impediment," "since vividly Billy's aspect recalled to him that of a bright young schoolmate of his whom he had once seen struck by much the same startling impotence in the act of eagerly rising in the class to be foremost in response to a testing question put to it by the master" (349-50). What is implied in all these passages is that the barbarian-stutterer Billy, who failed in the language test, is only "nominally" human.

³⁰ The arguments that identify "Hawthorne's minor tale" as "The Birthmark" include Parker, *Reading Billy Budd* 107; McCall 89; Smock 171; and Stuart, "Echoes of Hawthorne in Melville's *Billy Budd*."

Melville's monolingualists either unsuccessfully attempt to translate those unfamiliar words and sounds into their proper language or simply refuse to heed them. Otherwise, they simply suppress those strange words and sounds by force—like Pierre who with “an immense blow of his mailed fist” sends “the wretch humming” (281) at the watch house and Captain Vere who sentences Billy Budd to be hanged. But the echoes of the uncanny hubbub come back as a “murmur” “not easily to be verbally rendered” (378). Those monolingualists might temporarily succeed in suppressing the murmur by means of “whistles” (378) and “drum-beat” (379) as Captain Vere does, but the noise grows louder and louder, eventually getting out of their control. Melville's ambivalence seems to figure most prominently in the relationship between monolingualists and the speakers of alien tongues—such as Ahab and Pip; the lawyer and Bartleby; and Captain Vere and Billy Budd—which is often likened to that between a father and a son. It is no coincidence that these child characters are represented as the linguistic Other. As I have already discussed in Chapter 3, in the antebellum conception of citizenship, little children were often identified as linguistic, cultural, or racial others, and vice versa, for they were all considered to be, literally or figuratively, the citizens yet to fully enter into the symbolic order of society.³¹ Its adult members, who are supposed to be white male—must educate those children-others to become good citizens of the nation. For this purpose, the education of language, especially of a proper national

³¹ Weikle-Mills terms this early American cultural formation of citizenship “imaginary citizenship,” claiming that “[a]lthough imaginary citizenship was not limited to children—women, slaves, and sometimes even animals shared this status—this age group was even more frequently addressed by early American texts than other excluded groups and, when these others were addressed, it was often through the lens of childhood” (*Imaginary Citizens* 4).

language, had to be a top priority in a nationalist agenda through the nineteenth century. The pupil-like status of Melville's child characters is typically summed up in Billy Budd's fear of flogging, which is similar to the corporal punishment actually employed for the education of the indigenous children who violated the English-only rules in school. Those authoritative fathers attempt to discipline their sons to be able to enter the society structured by the symbolic order of language. But overly harsh discipline can bring about a separation between the two; even worse, it might smother the potentials for something new—which can be still amorphous or not even human yet—that might exist in their indistinct murmur. In these fathers' eyes, their sons fail the test for speaking a proper language.

It is tempting here to introduce some biographical information about Melville and his relationship with his fellow author Hawthorne. Much speculation has been made as to what happened in the two great American authors' legendary meetings in the Berkshires. Scholars have passionately discussed the homosexual, homosocial, or homoerotic aspects of their relationship.³² But we may have completely forgotten something important. Where are their children? When Melville and Hawthorne met each other, both authors were tremendously busy at work—writing and parenting at the same time. During Hawthorne's sojourn at a small red cottage in Lenox, his wife Sophia gave birth to their third child Rose. At each visit to Arrowhead, the Melville house in Pittsfield, Hawthorne brought one of his older children with him. When Melville dropped in at the small cottage, Hawthorne was tired from and of taking care of his son

³² For further discussion of the topic, see Argersinger and Person (eds.), *Hawthorne and Melville*. For the putatively homoerotic relationship between the two authors, see especially Milder, "The Ugly Socrates"; and Castiglia, "Alienated Affections."

Julian with Sophia and their daughters away from home. Compared with Hawthorne, Melville had relatively more women's hands with his sisters and mothers in the same household. While he was waiting for the arrival of his second child, however, his family life was no less busy with a lot of domestic dramas.³³ The two authors' famous wine and cigar parties in Melville's barn and in Hawthorne's sitting-room were brief refreshing breaks from their overwhelming workloads. It is worth considering how the questions of child-rearing, fathering, and child-education may have come up as important questions of work and life in their reportedly impassioned conversations and may come into play in their works written around the time.

Both authors' works written around this period indeed feature some complex father-child relations. As I have already discussed in detail in Chapter 3, Hawthorne's contemplation on the issues of fathering and child-education becomes clear in his creation of Arthur Dimmesdale, perhaps one of the most dysfunctional and least authoritative fathers in nineteenth-century American literature. Meanwhile, Melville was fiercely tackling his magnum opus *Moby-Dick*, in which he also created Ahab, the fearful dictator in a big household on the water. Bartleby's passive but stubborn resistance and the lawyer's serious but comical reaction to it can be seen as a commonplace event for many households that have small children.³⁴ As many

³³ For more information about the Hawthorne-Melville friendship in the Berkshires, see Turner, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* 212-21; Wineapple, *Hawthorne* 221-29; Robertson-Lorant, *Melville: A Biography* 257-73; Delbanco, *Melville* 124-27; and Parker, *Herman Melville* 1: 729-38.

³⁴ Derrida also suggests that "in saying nothing general or determinable, Bartleby doesn't say absolutely nothing. *I would prefer not to* looks like an incomplete sentence. . . . We don't know what he wants or means to say, or what he doesn't want to

biographers suggest, Melville did not hesitate to inflict corporal punishments on his children whenever he thought it was necessary.³⁵ In terms of parenting, Melville, known as “a strict disciplinarian, given to moodiness and irascibility that some of his relatives by marriage came to interpret as outright insanity” (Sealts, “Innocence and Infamy” 416), was rather on the side of severe Puritan fathers, which Hawthorne portrays in *The Scarlet Letter* and many other works. And it would be fair to see in the ambivalence of father-figures in Melville’s later works a reflection of the troubled relationship between the father and his son Malcolm, who is said to have committed suicide because of his suffering from his father’s abusive disciplining and domestic violence.³⁶ Melville’s pedagogy seems to have been violently oscillating between Ishmael’s almost unlimited acceptance of the otherness in Queequeg and Ahab’s monomaniac commitment to

do or say, but we are given to understand quite clearly that *he would prefer not to*” (*The Gift of Death* 75). This incomplete nature of Bartleby’s negative sentence seems to characterize exactly what a two-year-old child would say.

³⁵ For the best-organized argument that Melville physically and emotionally abused his wife and children, see Renker, “Herman Melville, Wife Beating, and the Written Page” 123-30.

³⁶ Shneidman claims that “[t]rained by his unconscious reactions to his own childhood, [Herman] in turn created the psychological climate for Malcolm’s suicide” (232), speculating that [t]he basic unconscious charge to the boy from his father was that Malcolm should not get in the way, should not grow up, should not live out his own life” (232). There is abundant circumstantial evidence that Malcolm’s death was a suicide. See Robertson-Lorant 513-14; and Delbanco 276-78.

According to Robertson-Lorant, observing Herman missing the absence of his baby boy Malcolm, his sister Augusta once wrote, “As for Malcolm—I almost tremble for him. Herman will fairly devour him” (262), which sounds, as Robertson-Lorant notes, “an ominous metaphor, in retrospect” (262). She also notes that Herman seems to have “spanked Malcolm” when he was a newly-born baby (n.22, 644).

disciplines. Melville's texts on varied occasions reveal the oscillation between monolingual order and babelic disorder. And, as is suggested in the depiction of the last moment of Captain Vere, in which he indistinctly "murmur[s] words inexplicable to his attendant: Billy Budd, Billy Budd" (382), no definitive answer is given to this conundrum of language in Melville's last work, even as the question is iterated with elevating intensity.³⁷

Then, should we eventually read the euphoric depiction of the perfect unity between the two speakers of different languages seemingly described in *Moby-Dick* as an escapist fantasy of a multicultural utopia, which the author does not believe to be politically practicable in the actual world? Is Ishmael's sympathy toward Queequeg eventually a false one, for the savage disappears from the text after one-fifth of the narrative as if the narrator had almost forgot the existence of his bosom friend? If we consider a literary text to be just a representation of the author's political ideology or only a reflection of the historical context in which he or she writes, the answers to these questions would be positive. But if we see a literary text as a potential site for trying out something new, something yet to come into this world, the answers would be different. In the chapter "The Mat-Maker," Queequeg and Ishmael are "mildly employed weaving what is called a sword-mat" (233):

There lay the fixed threads of the warp subject to but one single, ever returning,

³⁷ Some scholars have interpreted *Billy Budd* biographically. Larry Reynolds argues that "Billy's forgiveness of Vere should perhaps be read as a father's wishful fantasy about hearing his dead son speak" ("*Billy Budd* and American Labor Unrest" 39). Drawing on Reynolds, Delbanco also claims that the novella is an "eulogy" (278) to his son, saying that Melville "poured his heart into *Billy Budd*, the story of a beautiful boy whose last act is to bless the severe yet tender man who has ordered that he be put to death" (279).

unchanging vibration, and that vibration merely enough to admit of the crosswise interblending of other threads with its own. This warp seemed necessity; and here, thought I, with my own hand I ply my own shuttle and weave my own destiny into these unalterable threads. Meantime, *Queequeg's impulsive, indifferent sword*, sometimes hitting the woof slantingly, or crookedly, or strongly, or weakly, as the case might be; and by this difference in the concluding blow producing a corresponding contrast in the final aspect of the completed fabric; *this savage's sword, thought I, which thus finally shapes and fashions both warp and woof; this easy, indifferent sword must be chance—aye, chance, free will, and necessity—no wise incompatible—all interweavingly working together*. The straight warp of necessity, not to be swerved from its ultimate course—its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of necessity, and sideways in its motions directed by free will, though thus prescribed to by both, chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events. (233-34 Italics in original)

This extremely complex passage might be read as a phenomenological description of a miraculously happy event that rarely happens when one language encounters another. Like the warp and the woof, each of the two languages inclines to maintain its own logic, syntax, grammar, and vocabulary. Neither of the two changes its direction radically in its entanglement with the other. But the element of “chance,” or contingency, also comes into play. The “chance” manifests itself only in the well-regulated movements of the warp and the woof; and it never occurs unless a thread is interblended with another.

Nevertheless, this “chance” determines “the final aspect of the completed fabric” by “the last featuring blow.” This event does not always happen. Nor does it ever happen unless each of the two actors at least attempts interweaving one’s thread with the other’s. What I believe Melville illustrates in this deeply intricate passage is a phenomenological description of the birth of a temporary universal language, universal yet particular, at once global and local—something akin to a variation of what David Crystal tentatively calls “world Englishes,” a concept which he draws from Salman Rushdie and Chinua Achebe’s arguments about them—produced through a mingling of the two speakers of different languages, which neither linguistic nor ethnographical depiction avails to perfectly represent.³⁸ And this event, otherwise impossible to textualize, happening in the interaction of Ishmael and Queequeg is their experience of the intersubjectively gained perception that one’s language sounds strange to the other as the other’s language sounds strange to one: each of the two speakers finds something untranslatable in the other’s remark, but the untranslatability of each language does not obstruct their free and open exchange of ideas and feelings, and the common understanding of their mutual

³⁸ Crystal quotes Chinua Achebe’s observation of a new local English:

The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience . . . I feel that English will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings. (*English as a Global Language* 184)

misunderstanding rather develop their fascination with each other.³⁹

Of course, such a provisional universal language is not always valid in other situations; nor does it necessarily happen elsewhere. Also, in the actual scenes of crosslingual conversation, an egalitarian common language, which may have seemed a miracle when it was first generated, loses its wonder soon and, for many practical reasons, ends up as a jargon, a pidgin, or a national language, which will sooner or later become a barrier against those who do not speak it. The fact that both Ishmael and Queequeg were eventually entangled in Ahab's monomaniacal discourse betrays the fragility of this language. Indeed, the italicized passages suggest at once Ishmael's (and

³⁹ The "temporary universal language" that I conceive here might sound similar to Creole language, expounded in Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant's seminal essay "In Praise of Creoleness." They conceive Creoleness "as a function of acceptance and denial, therefore permanently questioning, always familiar with the most complex ambiguities, outside all forms of reduction, all forms of purity, all forms of impoverishment" (892). But I cannot dispel slight misgivings that the celebration of Creoleness might be based on the same identity politics that supports national languages. The conception of Creoleness entails an essentialist view of language and, in that sense, opposes Deleuze's (and Guattari's) concept of minor language. To minorize a language in Deleuze's (and Guattari's) idea is not to establish an alternative identity of a minor language on the ontological level, but to change a major language from within it. To minorize a language, you need to be really fluent, smooth, and proficient in the language so that when someone reads or hears what you write or say in the language, he or she does not notice that you are indeed writing or speaking in a slightly different language. It seeps and sneaks into the normal usage of a major language and adds minor changes to it without being noticed.

My argument about a temporary universal language here is rather close to Étienne Balibar's concept, "the ideal universality," which "in a very deep sense . . . is multiple by nature, not in the sense of being 'relative,' less than unconditional, bound to compromising, but rather in the sense of being always already beyond any simple or 'absolute' unity, therefore a source of conflicts forever" ("Ambiguous Universality" 72).

perhaps Melville's) strong desire for the perfect communion of different languages "*all interweavingly working together*" and his awareness that such intersubjective experience of universality and egalitarianism might be just a solipsistic dream on his part, since, as he repeatedly emphasizes, Queequeg seems utterly "*indifferent*" to what he thinks and feels from beginning to end. This indifference to others marks a stark contrast with Ahab's obsession with the white whale. Sigmund Freud's famous definition of paranoia serves as a precise explanation of Ahab's monomania. Freud argues:

They [the paranoid] cannot regard anything in other people as indifferent, and they, too, take up minute indications with which these other, unknown, people present them, and use them in their "delusions of reference." The meaning of their delusions of reference is that they expect from all strangers something like love. But these people show them nothing of the kind; they laugh to themselves, flourish their sticks, even spit on the ground as they go by—and one really does not do such things while a person in whom one takes a friendly interest is near. One does them only when one feels quite indifferent to the passer-by, when one can treat him like air; and, considering, too, the fundamental kinship of the concepts of "stranger" and "enemy," the paranoid is not so far wrong in regarding this indifference as hate, in contrast to his claim for love. ("Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality" 226)⁴⁰

Eventually, the white whale is just a mammal, and it is hard to believe that he or she cares about Ahab as much as the captain does about the sea creature. Nor is it probable

⁴⁰ In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha quotes this passage in his analysis of the typical colonialist mindset (132).

that Ahab can translate the language of the whale, and vice versa. In this sense, Ishmael might not be different from Ahab, for he is likewise preoccupied with translating Queequeg's incomprehensible words. But when Ishmael, having survived on Queequeg's coffin with his illegible tattoos carved on it, recalls the days on the whaling ship, he finds the remainders of untranslatable events haunting here and there in his memory. Each of those events happens and vanishes in a fleeting moment. But they seem all the more precious for their ephemerality. The same event might never occur, but a different but similar coincidence might happen again. Only the dream of translating the untranslatable urges him to attempt further translation. He might find himself monolingual again. But at the same time he will find that his only language no longer sounds like his own, but like a foreign language.

In a famous letter Melville sent to Hawthorne during the composition of *Moby-Dick* in 1851, he refers to Goethe, satirically saying: "Goethe's sayings, so worshipped by his votaries, I came across this, '*Live in the all.*' That is to say, your separate identity is but a wretched one, —good; but get out of yourself, spread and expand yourself, and bring to yourself the tinglings of life that are felt in the flowers and the woods, that are felt in the planets Saturn and Venus, and the Fixed Stars. What nonsense" (W14: 193)!⁴¹ This passage might be read as Melville's reservations about

⁴¹ Christopher Castiglia cites this passage to argue that "Melville's universalism connects not only men of genius but the animate and inanimate worlds as well" ("Alienated Affections" 334), but somehow he omits the last (and the most important) sentence—"What nonsense"! But, as I have suggested, Melville's contemplation on the universal is rather inclined to anti-universalism, and that is perhaps why he calls this Goethe's saying "nonsense." Castiglia also contends that "[t]he potential benefits of translating imperialism into universalism become clear in Sanborn's analysis of how

Goethe (or, more precisely, Carlyle and the New England transcendentalists who introduced the German author), who he believes envisages a cosmopolitan utopia in which different languages and cultures readily transcend their boundaries and get interblended with each other. At the bottom of the letter, he writes: “N.B. This ‘all’ feeling, though, there is some truth in. You must often have felt it, lying on the grass on a warm summer’s day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head. This is the *all* feeling” (W14: 94). “But what plays the mischief with the truth is,” he adds, “that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion” (W14: 94).⁴² What *Moby-Dick* calls for is the contract of endless translation between its text and us, which, every time we reread it, produces a new language, opening us up for ever-changing thoughts and feelings.

Melville avoids the pitfalls of imperial appropriation in *Moby-Dick* by introducing separation and equilibrium into the relationship of Queequeg and Ishamel” (334). I also draw on Sanborn in my argument, but my reading of Sanborn differs from that of Castiglia, for I rather see the separation of Ishmael and Queequeg, which Sanborn considers the turning point of the story, as evidence of Melville’s reservation about universalism.

⁴² In reading this passage, Dagovitz argues that Melville seems to suggest that “Goethe’s feeling of the ‘all’ might be fine for the philosophy student lying in the grass, but talking of the all to a fellow with a raging toothache is to be oblivious to the urgency of the matter at hand, ignore the fellow’s perspective, and thus engage in bad philosophy” (334).

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

In this dissertation, I have examined the crucial role that translation played in the formation of classic American literature. The authors of the American Renaissance, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville, were all well-learned in foreign languages and literatures, engaged in the cultural task of translation. This study clarified the following points. First, translation functioned as an important agency in the domestication of foreign languages, literatures, and cultures and in the building of the American language, literature, and culture. Second, the concept of translation as a means for domesticating foreign influences in antebellum American culture was itself a translation of an European idea of translation since the Renaissance and, more specifically, of the modern German idea of it. Third, translation sometimes problematized the identity-formation process of the nation and its national culture. American writers worked in the complex international matrix of translation in the age of world literature, a nationalist-cosmopolitan concept that Goethe and other German writers developed in the early nineteenth century. The American Renaissance authors' texts often participate in and sometimes stand against the violence of translation, which tends to eliminate the traces of otherness in foreign languages and cultures. To elucidate these points, this dissertation focused chiefly on the works of Emerson, Hawthorne, and Melville.

In Chapter I, I outlined the historical background on the place of translation in antebellum American literary culture. I also detailed the problems of traditionally

monolingual American literary studies. At the same time, I pointed out the ethical and political problems possibly inherent in the recent upsurge of transnational literary studies and world literature, which risk obliterating the otherness in other cultures, literatures, and languages.

In Chapter II, I examined Emerson's texts, including both published works and private journals, extensively. Translation in multiple ways plays a central role in Emerson's writing process. Emerson's numerous texts are structured by the German concept of translation as a means of transcendence, marked by its tendency to transcend all the linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries between one and the others. Emerson's idea of translation supports his nationalist historical consciousness that situates America at once as a particularly original nation and as a leader of universal world democracy. But, as I concluded, Emerson's texts also illuminate the remains of the untranslatable, personal or national, which are suppressed or erased in the complex process of translation, all the more dramatically for the intensity with which he strives to translate and transcend the influences of others.

In Chapter III, I discussed Hawthorne's works addressing the issues of translation. Hawthorne's works often illuminate the marks of the untranslatable in a nationalist narrative or in a national language, thus delineating the limits of the antebellum US monolingualist ideology that the author allegedly endorses. His works dealing with the questions of translation, such as *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Blithedale Romance*, and *Septimius Felton*—all of which are based on the myth of the Puritan translator John Eliot—complicate incipient US monolingual nationalism and destabilize American national identity. In those works, the symbolic order of society is always and already

tainted with the marks of the untranslatable. I concluded that the failures of the protagonists' attempts to translate actual events into coherent narratives should be read as an allegory of the impossible national desire to identify one's language, culture, and nation as a fixed and unified entity.

In Chapter IV, I investigated Melville's works, such as *Moby-Dick*, *Pierre*, "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," and "Billy Budd." In dramatizing many scenes of crosslingual communication in those works, Melville foregrounds the ethics of translation, which calls attention to the existence of the untranslatable in other languages, cultures, and peoples, while still seeking for a mutual understanding between one and the other. Although Melville meditates on the possibility of egalitarian consortium of peoples in the world, his texts also reveal that such a cosmopolitan utopia would be hard to realize in the actual scenes of colonial encounter. Melville's texts violently oscillate between the possibility and the impossibility of translation and never settle down on either position, but by highlighting the aporia of translation, they also urge the reader to engage in the same question of translation.

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