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Lawrence Zellner

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this dissertation.

Susan Scheckel – Dissertation Advisor
Associate Professor of English, Stony Brook University

Andrew Newman - Chairperson of Defense
Associate Professor of English, Stony Brook University

Benedict Robinson, Associate Professor of English
Stony Brook University

David S. Reynolds, Distinguished Professor of English
The Graduate Center, City University of New York

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Charles Taber
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

"The Vortex of Enthusiasm": Religion and the Making of American Literature

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This dissertation explores how the concept of religious enthusiasm shaped American literature and culture from the Revolution through the Civil War. It traces a new narrative of the relation between literature, religion, and public life in this crucial moment of national formation, as languages and narratives of enthusiasm proliferated across a variety of sites and discourses. The ongoing confrontation between the legacy of Enlightenment and a culture being transformed by the experience of revolution and religious revivalism demanded reconsideration of previous conceptions of normative religious experience and the construction of civil society. In the writings of Charles Brockden Brown, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, I show how the intellectual roots and popular manifestations of the concept of religious enthusiasm that circulated in the Atlantic world impacted American literature, and were in turn reimagined and reshaped by that literature. Through an examination of Enlightenment historiography, romantic philosophy, movements of reform and revivalism, and their interaction with the developing literary culture of the new nation, I argue that enthusiasm was an important—if often controversial and ambiguous—concept that contributed to nineteenth-century conceptions of the relationship between religion, literature, and an emerging American public sphere.

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Introduction

In an 1812 letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams mentioned a study he claimed to be making of contemporary prophets and a discussion ensued about how, when President, both men had been tormented by what Jefferson called "the mass of the correspondencies of that crazy class, of whose complaints, and terrors, and mysticisms, the several presidents have been the regular depositories" (Cappon 299). The early American novelist Charles Brockden Brown might be seen as making a similar "study" in his 1798 romance *Wieland,* which describes a religious enthusiast who murders his family. While Brown did send a copy of *Wieland* to Jefferson, there is no indication that Adams was acquainted with *Wieland*; nevertheless, in their common concern with the role of religion in public life, Adams, Jefferson, and Brown were characteristic of their age.

The decades after the American Revolution were filled with manifestations of religious enthusiasm. In the new nation enthusiasm played a significant role in constituting and marking the changes that took place in the relationship of religion to public life during a time of religious disestablishment and increasing democratization. Between the American Revolution and the Civil War the semantic range and associations of enthusiasm allowed it to move across a variety of different discourses—including religion, literature, and politics. Throughout this period religious enthusiasm and literature were intertwined in complex ways. The intellectual roots and popular manifestations of the concept of religious enthusiasm that circulated in the Atlantic world influenced American literature and were in turn reimagined and reshaped by that literature. Through an examination of Enlightenment historiography, romantic philosophy, movements of reform and revivalism, and their interaction with the developing literary culture of the new nation, I argue that enthusiasm was an important—if often ambiguous and controversial—

concept that contributed to nineteenth century conceptions of the relationship between religion, literature, and an emerging American conception of public life.

1. Defining Enthusiasm

Studying enthusiasm emphasizes how the past may seem simultaneously familiar and frustratingly distant. Since the word enthusiasm was first introduced into English, its meanings have repeatedly shifted from its now obsolete senses—"Possession by a god, supernatural inspiration, prophetic or poetic frenzy" or "Poetical fervour, impassioned mood or tone"—to its modern sense of a "Rapturous intensity of feeling in favour of a person, principle, cause, etc.; passionate eagerness in any pursuit, proceeding from an intense conviction of the worthiness of the object" (OED). These shifts are critical to understanding why enthusiasm serves as such a promising point from which to examine the related shifts in mentality that occur in American culture between American Revolution and the Civil War.

In *Enthusiasm: A Study in Semantic Change*, Susie Tucker carefully delineates how the different meanings of enthusiasm depend on the etymology and history of both the term itself and its family of related words: enthusiast, enthusiastic, enthusiastical, enthusiastically. Enthusiasm derives from the Greek noun *ἐνθουσιασμός* and earlier adjective *ἔνθεος* (Tucker 2). In Ancient Greece it meant either "God possessing Man or Man caught up into God" (Tucker 3). It is found in English as early as 1603 in the form of the adjective enthusiastic and was first used as a technical term: "In the earlier English usage, *Enthusiasm* always referred to religious experience, whether of possession or ecstasy, and whether the deity was conceived as a false god, the Christian God, or—more often—the Christian God mistakenly worshipped" (Tucker 2, 3). According to Tucker, enthusiasm is generally used in three different ways. Although it began

in English as “a historical term for certain religious manifestations in the classical past,” throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries enthusiasm was generally used pejoratively to indicate false inspiration (4). An alternate sense, which could be used either negatively or positively, pertained to poetic inspiration. By the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century the term enthusiasm encompassed a wide range of meanings in English. In any of its various guises enthusiasm could be used either positively or negatively and include one or more of its other senses. Its modern meaning, which suggests excitement— albeit with an occasional hint of condescension— became widely apparent during the eighteenth century and continued to gain ground in the nineteenth century.

As Tucker examines the many meanings and gradations in meaning of enthusiasm, she underscores how understanding precisely what was meant by enthusiasm has never been simple and always depends on context. Tucker claims that, on one hand, “Even in the nineteenth Century the old technical meaning could survive, even if with an overlay of more modern connotation, and an extension to politics,” and on the other hand, by the early nineteenth century, “there is no necessary connection between religion of any sort and this word” (10,13). In its religious or its literary sense enthusiasm could be either true or false. However, by at least the nineteenth century, enthusiasm could also be used pejoratively in relation to politics (Tucker 10). While she goes on to say that enthusiasm may even retain some of its older meanings in the late twentieth century, Tucker’s repeated quotations from the second half of the eighteenth-century and the first half of the nineteenth-century emphasize that this was clearly a period of transition during which the semantic range of enthusiasm was on full display. Tucker concludes with the observation “that Enthusiasm and its congeners are a prime example of the ups and downs of

evaluative words: this study of semantic shift could almost equally well be subtitled 'semantic see-saw'" (165).

The etymological roots and semantic shifts that Tucker traces for enthusiasm indicate changing and historically contingent conceptions of inspiration or motivation that operate across the discourses of religion, politics, and literature. With the rise of the Enlightenment and its emphasis on reason these different and unstable conceptions became particularly significant. For many Enlightenment thinkers, Jan Goldstein argues, enthuiasm had special resonance as a "smear word" that "conjured up everything antithetical to, and rejected by, enlightened rationality" (29). Michael Heyd, in *Be Sober and Reasonable: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries*, emphasizes the religious aspects of the concept and examines how the meaning of enthusiasm and its validity as a concept was frequently contested. Heyd describes enthusiasm succinctly as "ecstasy, prophecy, and claims to direct divine inspiration" and argues that its critique "may provide us with important clues towards understanding many of the changes in the religious, scientific and cultural attitudes in European society on the eve of the Enlightenment" (vii, 3). He outlines the ways in which enthusiasm included "groups who allegedly claimed to have direct divine inspiration, whether millenarians, radical sectarians or various prophesiers, as well as alchemists, "empirics" and some contemplative philosophers" (2). While such a disparate group might seem to exceed the bounds of even so capacious a concept as enthusiasm, in his essay "Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment," J. G. A. Pocock argues that a more comprehensive Enlightenment definition of enthusiasm is "the mind's identification with the ideas in it, these in turn defined as correspondent or identical with the substance of reality" (26). This definition simultaneously emphasizes the authority of the autonomous individual and resembles a definition of

philosophical idealism. It also has the potential to create a "rationalist messianism" that sometimes made the radical elements of the Enlightenment more pronounced (26). Although, at least in England, the way in which "Enlightenment remained within a religious matrix" meant that these elements never produced a British equivalent to the Jacobins (26).

The particular meanings and relative significance of enthusiasm could vary significantly depending on the context in which it was used. For example, even during the Enlightenment, where Catholicism was dominant on the European continent, enthusiasm was not necessarily a pejorative term. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park argue that "the negative meanings of the English Protestant term 'enthusiasm' never took root in Catholic France. The cognate *enthousiasme* remained close to its classical meaning of poetic furor; the *Encylopédie* article on the subject went so far as to praise it as 'the masterpiece of reason,' with the aim of rescuing artists and poets from injurious associations with madmen" (Daston and Park 337). Daston and Park argue that French writers used superstition as a smear word instead (337). While Heyd notes that the Jansenists are a "notable exception" to this practice, he also emphasizes that, "In the Catholic camp, the confrontation with enthusiasm was less prevalent…since mystical experience, miracles, and spiritualist tendencies were more easily incorporated within mainstream orthodoxy" (2). In the Protestant and Anglophone world, however, enthusiasm was widely used in its pejorative sense.

Although in both Europe and America the specific meaning of enthusiasm usually depended on its context in which it was used, many of the different European senses were also a part of the American discourse surrounding enthusiasm. Through at least the first half of the nineteenth century, enthusiasm frequently served as the opposite of formalism. Ann Taves notes that "from the mid-seventeenth century at least, a 'formalist' was understood as one who had the

form of religion without the power, while an 'enthusiast' was understood as one who falsely claimed to be inspired" (16). She argues that these understandings are closely related to "the language of religious experience" (16) and gives the example of how "Puritans disparaged the absence of experience as 'formalism'" and "non-Puritans disparaged the 'inward sense and feeling,' that is the 'experience,' of the Puritans as 'enthusiasm'" (17). Taves also notes that "unlike formalism," enthusiasm was "additionally, and more precisely, a theoretically laden epithet that had the effect of recasting the theological claims of one's opponents as 'delusions' that could be explained in secular, scientific terms" (18).

If formalism and enthusiasm function as opposing concepts well into the nineteenth century, as a pejorative term formalism seems to have survived into the twentieth century in way that enthusiasm did not. For example, the evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, who disparaged "worldly formality," saw fanaticism rather than enthusiasm as the opposite of formalism: "So here we are. On the left hand—Formalism. On the right hand—Fanaticism. The Refrigerator or the Wild-fire, which will you choose?" (qtd. in Sutton 43, 44). Enthusiasm, in the sense of false inspiration, seems to disappear over the course of the nineteenth century. Or, if it does not entirely disappear, it dissolves into a vague and amorphous sense of religious ferment or what it means to have a religious experience or an authentic religious faith. As this transition occurs, no other word—not even fanaticism, which is McPherson's choice—quite seems to be an equivalent for enthusiasm.

The special historical resonance of enthusiasm becomes more clear when we look for a contemporary synonym for its obsolete meanings. A variety of words evoke different aspects of enthusiasm: fanaticism, fervor, madness, ecstasy, spirit possession, heresy, prophesy, visionary, zeal, charisma, ardor, trance, channeling, hallucination, mysticism, inspiration, and even perhaps

spiritualism or—in our contemporary sense of being spiritually inclined instead of religious—spiritual. Of these, perhaps only inspiration currently comes close to enthusiasm, but inspiration generally lacks the negative associations of enthusiasm and is not used to define and police boundaries in the way that enthusiasm was used. While fanatic does draw such boundaries, it indicates a similar degree of commitment, and may even incorporate the sense of a divine connection; yet it is less likely to be used positively and is usually restricted to only a religious sense.[1] None of the different possibilities capture the complex of meanings and associations that once fit under the umbrella of enthusiasm. No contemporary term functions as a precise synonym for enthusiasm with its semantic range and elaborate complex of associations that operated across a range of discourses that included religion, politics, and literature.

The lack of a precise contemporary synonym for enthusiasm indicates that a significant shift in mentality has taken place over the last couple of centuries. By looking at religious enthusiasm and how it was employed in the period between the American Revolution and the Civil War it may be possible to illuminate some of the hidden cultural jointwork that we no longer notice. To some extent, this is an examination of what the philosopher Charles Taylor refers to as the "immanent frame," which he defines as "the sensed context in which we develop our beliefs," and which operates as "an unchallenged framework, something we have trouble often thinking ourselves outside of, even as an imaginative exercise" (549). Taylor is interested in how changes in the "immanent frame" have led to a modern world in which "belief in God… is understood to be one option among others," which, he argues, is the defining characteristic of a secular society (3). More recently, John Lardas Modern calls secularism "a conceptual

[1] To some extent this distinction may be the result of a deliberate effort to emphasize the positive aspects of enthusiasm at the expense of fanaticism. According to John Mee, Coleridge engaged in "a process of desynonimization, shifting the negative connotations of enthusiasm onto the word 'fanaticism' (contrary to more general usage in the period)" (164).

environment—emergent since at least the Protestant Reformation and early Enlightenment—that has made 'religion' a recognizable and vital thing in the world" (7). He notes that examining this "conceptual environment" "requires a sensitivity to how individuals imagined and assumed their place within society" (8). The shifts I am tracing in how individuals employed enthusiasm—which gained particular prominence as Modern's "conceptual environment" developed through the period of the Enlightenment—may indicate that the Enlightenment critique of enthusiasm has been naturalized. It certainly reveals some of the "fundamental assumptions" which composed part of the "immanent frame" that Taylor claims defines our modern world[2]

My claim here is that a way of thinking about the world has changed as the available concepts through which to think about it have shifted. Between the American Revolution and the Civil War enthusiasm was one of these available concepts. The problem is not, as, for example, Karen King argues is the case with Gnosticism, "that a rhetorical term has been confused with a historical entity" (1). While Gnosticism was, like enthusiasm, frequently used to define the boundaries of acceptable religion, it was "a term invented in the early modern period" and anachronistically applied to diverse ancient phenomena in ways that do not accurately rerpresent the lived experience of individuals in the past (King 2). Enthusiasm, however, was a historical concept through which individuals in the past thought about the world. While the semantic changes of enthusiasm are essential to understanding the concept of enthusiasm, this dissertation

[2] I borrow the phrase "fundamental assumptions" comes from Alfred North Whitehead, who—almost one hundred years ago—offered the following advice in regard to studying intellectual history: "When you are criticising the philosophy of an epoch, do not chiefly direct your attention to those intellectual positions which its exponents feel it necessary to explicitly defend. There will be some fundamental assumptions which adherents of all the variant systems within the epoch unconsciously presuppose. Such assumptions appear so obvious that people do not know what they are assuming because no other way of putting things has ever occurred to them. With these assumptions a certain limited number of types of philosophic systems are possible, and this group of systems constitutes the philosophy of the epoch" (61).

is not intended as a study of semantic change but as an exploration of how enthusiasm worked as a concept.

To clearly see how enthusiasm works across a range of discourses and to appreciate the contingent and constructed nature of the relationship between religion and literature, enthusiasm cannot be defined too strictly. To do so would be to close off the very advantages that enthusiasm offers. A quick comparison may be helpful here. In her recent book *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (2010), Courtney Bender notes that "spirituality is bedeviled not by a lack of definitions but by an almost endless proliferation of them." Just as she observes that "the fuzziness, indistinctness, and multiplicity of definitions suggest that we have more to gain by observing how the term 'spirituality' is used," I hope to show that the same problem bedevils enthusiasm and that by following some of its various uses and permutations of meaning, it may be possible to illuminate some previously overlooked aspects of American literary and religious history. There is more to gain by examining how enthusiasm was used and contested during this period than there is in trying to define it too strictly. In doing so I hope to avoid anachronistically imposing contemporary definitions or distinctions—such as that between the religious and secular—on the past in ways that limit the complexity and messiness of lived experience. To do otherwise would be to inadvertently join in processes of regulation and restriction in which enthusiasm has played such a key role. And while this approach risks creating a tangle of interpretation, it also holds the promise of offering a richer account of the past that avoids teleological narratives of how literature replaced religion or how the secular replaced the religious.

2. The Promise of Enthusiasm

The period between the American Revolution and the Civil War saw the emergence of the United States as an independent nation, its expansion across the North American continent, and its splintering over the problem of slavery. It saw the emergence of American political insitutions, the development of a national economy, the arrival of new immigrant groups, two international wars, and the development of influential reform movements. A significant increase in the number and percentage of Americans who attended churches and the proliferation of a variety of new religious groups transformed the religious landscape of the new nation.[3] Simultaneously, the public sphere—which had its roots in the shifting structures of the eighteenth century—incorporated many different local and national groups helped to create a distinctive national identity.[4] Out of this dynamic environment arose a distinctively American

[3] For the increase in American religiosity see Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* and Finke and Starke, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. For the proliferation of religious groups see Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*.

[4] The classic account of the rise of the public sphere during the eighteenth century is that by Jürgen Habermas. Michael Warner, who builds on the work of Habermas and applies some of his insights to an American context, espouses a more limited view of the rise of the public sphere and emphasizes the role of print culture in this process focuses on 18th century but ends with an examination of Brown's novel *Arthur Mervyn*, which was published in two parts in 1799 and 1800. For how the Habermasian concept of the public sphere has been challenged and modified from a historical perspective see Brooke "Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere: Habermas and the Cultural Historians" and *Columbia Rising* (3-8). For a discussion of the limitations of Warner's concept of the public sphere, particularly as it applies to American literature see Gustafson. Taken together these critiques reinforce the importance of the period from the American Revolution to the Civil War for the development of a public sphere that is both capacious and distinctively American in a way that frequently complements the development of an American version of the secular discussed below.

literary culture that both reflected and contributed to the complex and shifting energies of the new nation.[5]

Many ideas that would subsequently shape the contours of American public life in regard to both religion and literature have their origins in this tumultuous period. The adoption of the Constitution explicitly prohibited "an establishment of religion" by the federal government and within the next several decades disestablishment of religion followed on a state level. The increasingly diverse religious culture led to the gradual tolerance of different faiths and the first step toward religious pluralism (Hutchison 6). This period also saw the beginning of a liberal religious tradition in America, originating "in the 1820s as a radical form of Protestant Christianity that then over the next few decades readily edged beyond Christianity itself" (Schmidt, *Restless Souls* 11). A developing romantic appreciation for natural scenery and the advent of tourism—closely associated with pilgrimage—meant that aspects of the American landscape "assumed some of the functions of sacred places in traditional societies" (Sears 5). Emerging from this variegated religious culture were also the ideas and conditions that made unbelief—the absence of belief in God—possible (Turner xiii).[6] Some of these shifts were clearly transatlantic developments. In Germany, during this period, Freidrich Schleiermacher developed the modern concept of religious experience—closely linked to religious emotion—as a specifically religious means of knowing that also functioned as a new form of apologetics (Proudfoot xii-xiii). In England George Holyoake invented the term secularism—in his 1854 book *Principles of Secularism*—as a way to positively describe the changes that were taking

[5] For representative studies see Waterman, *The Republic of Intellect*, Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, Arac, *The Emergence of American Literary Narrative, 1820-1860,* and Gura, *Truth's Ragged Edge*.

[6] Turner distinguishes the possiblity of unbelief from charges of atheism that arose inthe skeptical Enlightenment: "What the orthodox called 'atheism' usually amounted to nothing but a Deistic denial of revealed religion" (44).

place and which many found disorienting (Cady and Hurd 3). The role of religion in public life was clearly neither settled nor stable during this period.

The dynamic social, political, and religious environment and the intellectual ferment that characterized this period are integral to understanding the changing conceptions of religious enthusiasm in the new nation. They are also the fertile ground which nurtured a distinctively American literary culture that contributed to and reflected these complex and shifting energies. But there is not only a close relationship between literature and enthusiasm, tracing enthusiasm in literature offers a new understanding of the emergence of the American public sphere. Brown, Emerson, and Stowe are three authors whose work represents key points in the development of the a public sphere that, while ostensibly secular, was deeply informed by religious thought and feeling. Each author was a significant public figure whose work was concerned with defining the new nation, the nature of American public life, and the religious and moral development of individual citizens and the new nation. Tracing some of the ways in which they each employed and transformed the concept of enthusiasm demonstrates how enthusiasm is crucial to understanding the public purpose of literature during this period.

Literature allows the flexibility of enthusiasm as both a term and a concept to exert its power on both the mind and the emotions. In literature ideas can be put in play that allow enthusiasm to exhibit its full spectrum of possibilities without the need to pin down meaning in ways necessary in other discursive spheres such as theology or philosophy. Literature even allows us to see how we—as a narrative species—imagine and invent the world even as the particular culture or cultures in which we live provide a structure for how we experience the world. Or, as one contemporary critic puts it, literature is "an ideal place to begin thinking about religion precisely because it broached a process in which you simultaneously make yourself as

you are made up of invisible forces beyond your control" (Modern, "How to Read Literature" 200). However, while there is a vast literature on both religion and literature during this period, how religious enthusiasm is manifest in and shapes American literature remains relatively unexplored.

Literary scholars have often avoided the deep connections between literature and religion or approached this potentially fruitful intersection of disciplines with normative assumptions dismissive of religion. Jenny Franchot describes religion as an "invisible domain" in literary studies and argues that the absence of critical engagement with religion stems partly from the ways in which scholars are simply uncomfortable or unfamiliar with religious questions as a serious mode of inquiry (837).[7] Michael Kaufmann argues that this neglect stems from more than simply discomfort; it has its roots in the degree to which the secularization narrative is "one of the major assumptions" of literary studies as a professional discipline and the way in which that allows literary critics "to treat (or ignore) both the secular and the religious as if they were normative, fixed categories" (607, 609). Expressing a concern that literary studies of America may be at risk of scanting the importance of religion, Lawrence Buell notes that "literary history stands to profit from a closer engagement with religious studies" and promotes the possibilities of the "lived religion" approach to studying the overlaps between literature and religion (34). For Buell, this approach "may help literary studies guard against…limiting assumptions" "such as

[7]Although it is "nearly two decades" old, Dawn Coleman notes that Franchot's critique is "still-relevant" today (5). And Franchot notes: "We can all think of fine studies that include among their pages treatments of religion. But what is generally lacking is a willingness to engage intensively with religious questions of the topic at hand as *religious questions*" (839). Furthermore, she observes in regard to writers for whom religious concerns are primary—"figures like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Beecher Stowe, or James Agee, for example—it is especially unsatisfactory to approach their spirituality in terms of gender or race, categories which have been granted the status of interesting among us today—a status that frequently excuses frustratingly simple thinking" (840).

that a text's religious dimension must reside chiefly in some sort of thesis or idea structure, and/or that religious motives are to be decoded in terms of such secular motives as political resistance or cultural survival, whether on the view that these are the kinds of motives that *really* matter or on the view that there is no such thing as a religious motive" (35).[8] In other words, the study of lived religion engages religion on all levels of lived experience (including but transcending such problematic binaries as those between belief and practice) and takes religion seriously as a way of experiencing the world.[9] In spite of the example or encouragement of scholars like Franchot and Buell, Dawn Coleman notes that the impact on literary studies has been rather limited: "Despite a putative 'religious turn,' resistance to foregrounding religion, especially a mainstream white Protestantism associated with multiple forms of oppression and hegemony, can run deep among scholars of literature and culture" (4). Adopting elements of the lived religion approach Coleman sets out to partially redress this imbalance by focusing on preaching. Her subtle study of sermons recognizes that confining the influence of religion to the margins of literary studies not only runs the risk of ignoring the contemporary influence of

[8] For an explanation of the study of lived religion from one of the key proponents of the approach see Hall, Introduction.

[9] Two studies that adopt elements of the lived religion approach and have been particularly helpful for me in thinking about religion and the concept of enthusiasm are those by King and Taves. Throughout this study I have tried to take religion seriously and not reduce religious experience or religious motives to other factors without recognizing that to the subjects involved they were inherently religious. In this I have been influenced by my understanding of Proudfoot's historical exploration of the concept of *Religious Experience*. When describing the experience of a subject, he argues that, "the description must be one that can plausibly be ascribed to the subject. That is to say, it must employ only concepts in the subject's repertoire, and any background beliefs or desires presupposed by the attribution of the experience to the subject must be plausibly ascribed to the subject" (181). This helps to avoid distorting the way in which the subject understands reality: "It is important, however, to recognize that the concept of religious experience retains echoes of its origin in a theistic connect and of the assumptions that a religious experience is one that cannot be completely accounted for in naturalistic terms. We may want to alter that assumption, but we ought to recognize it" (189).

religion throughout our society, but also fails to do justice to the historical record as it is revealed in literary texts themselves.[10]

From the antinomian crisis to the American Revolution, historians and scholars of religion have long recognized the importance of religious enthusiasm in America. The most comprehensive survey, David Lovejoy's *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World: Heresy to Revolution*, which chronicles many of the diverse groups and individuals described as enthusiasts, emphasizes their European roots or influences. As the subtitle implies, Clarke Garrett's insightful study, *Origins of the Shakers: From the Old World to the New World*, makes simliar connections. However, by focusing "on the social and cultural contexts" in which manifestations of enthusiasm appeared and "what messages they communicated," Garrett offers a more nuanced view of the religious experience of the participants in this "sacred theater" (4, 5). He draws a distinction between different strands of religious enthusiasm represented by "the Camisards, the French Prophets, and the Community of True Inspiration" on the one hand and "the converts in the English, Scottish, and American Revivals"—including "Methodists and New Lights"—on the other. He argues they are "profoundly different" because the former groups emphasized "expressions of a shared religious reality, intended to communicate divine truths not only to the group but also the nation and the world," whereas the latter, while they "believed that they were participating in the climactic redemption of the world," understood the "collective drama of redemption" as something that was "performed individually by those who were undergoing conversion" (240). Garret emphasizes the way in which religious enthusiasm shaped how participants in all of these groups communicated with each other and understood reality,

[10] For another notable exception see Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction*. There are, of course, numerous examples of studies that engage with religion as secondary to other concerns.

but—as it was for Lovejoy—literature is beyond the scope of his study. And, in contrast to Lovejoy, Garrett does not connect enthusiasm specifically to the American Revolution.

Few studies of religious enthusiasm extend beyond the first few decades of the nineteenth century unless enthusiasm is defined so broadly as to include almost any form of religious ferment. For example, while he mentions enthusiasm in regard to accusations of enthusiasm as a means of slandering rivals, in *The Democratization of American Christianity*, Nathan Hatch does not treat enthusiasm as separate from popular religion (10). Ending studies of enthusiasm around the time of the American Revolution may relate to the desire to see connections between the revivalism and awakenings of the eighteenth century and the American Revolution.[11] Lovejoy, for example, as the subtitle of his study suggests, argues that "political ideas and actions with characteristics which strikingly resembled the extremist tendencies in enthusiasm and were repeatedly recognized as such…lent a radical strain to the Revolutionary movement" (3). He connects enthusiasm to a radical strain of the rebellion—manifest in groups like the Separate Baptists—that could not be accounted for by the "republican synthesis" that dominated the historiography of the Revolutionary period during the time he was writing (216). The interest in making this connection may also relate to the increased prominence of evangelicals in American political life at the end of the twentieth century and the concomitant rise of evangelical scholarship.[12] Another reason that examinations of enthusiasm in America end in the first few decades of the nineteenth century may be the close connection between enthusiasm and the Enlightenment. Henry May's seminal work *The Enlightenment in America*, for example, ends in

[11] See Philip Goff and Alan Heimert on the desire to link forms of religion that are often connected to early evangelicalism to "the democratic movement that resulted in the Revolution" and for the influence of Heimert's *Religion and the American Mind* on this process (698).
[12] Goff and Heimert emphasize the work of Mark Noll as representative of this movement (706-708).

1815.[13] But in this dissertation I show how different strands of enthusiasm not only have roots in the Enlightenment or even earlier—certainly, in some cases, long before the Revolution—but also are distinct and influential in American literature well into the middle of the nineteenth century.

The different varieties of enthusiasm and their influence in the nineteenth century reflects the growing recognition of the Enlightenment as diffuse, complex, and multi-faceted. For example, instead of talking about "the concept of 'The Enlightenment', as a unified phenomenon with a single history and definition," in *Barbarism and Religion*—his multi-volume study of Edward Gibbon—J. G. A. Pocock traces "*The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon*" (9). Dismantling the Enlightenment as one monolithic movement is a join endeavor made by a variety of scholars and one that has not gone unchallenged.[14] While it results in a diffuse movement that resists being clearly defined or bounded, it seems to have made it easier for scholars to develop a more nuanced understand the relationship between Enlightenment and religion. For example, David Sorkin argues for the importance of *The Religious Enlightenment*, which includes a challenge to what he describes as "a strong tendency among scholars to see the eighteenth-century public sphere as increasingly if not distinctly secular" (16). He argues that participants in the religious enlightenment "participated in the apparently secular aspects of the public sphere" and "discerned no barriers between these pursuits and their religious beliefs" (17).

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[13] In "Henry F. May and the Revival of the American Enlightenment: Problems and Possibilities for Social and Intellectual History," John M. Dixon discusses the influence and relevance of May's arguments and notes that "the heyday of big synthetic accounts of the American Enlightenment passed quickly" (259). He only lists two other examples, neither of which, as their titles indicate, extend beyond 1820: Ned C. Landsman's *From Colonials to Provincials: American Thought and Culture, 1680-176*0 and Robert A. Ferguson's *The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820* (259).

[14] For a discussion of some of the debates involved in this process see Sheehan, especially 1066-1072.

Nor did this position them on "a slippery slope" that ended in "deism or unbelief"—a metaphor which he argues supports "a linear notion of secularization" and "assumes that, aside from 'orthodoxy,' there were no viable theological positions"—instead these participants in the religious enlightenment were "sincere believers and apologists" who occupied a particular position on "an Enlightenment spectrum" (17, 19). In America, some of the different available positions on this spectrum have been charted by Sarah Rivett—who notes that the "perceived…split between reason and revelation, between Enlightenment elitism and an increasingly popular religious landscape of evangelicalism, obfuscates more deeply ingrained continuities" (272)—and Catherine Brekus—who argues for the importance of women in this process and claims that "once we recognize that there were multiple 'Enlightenments' that took place within Protestantism as well as against it, a more complicated picture emerges" (10).[15] Susan Juster, who ends her study of Anglo-American prophets in 1815, also builds on critiques of the Enlightenment when she proposes "that we stop seeing the enlightenment and religious enthusiasm as distinct and antagonistic forces" (viii). How we understand the Enlightenment clearly has significant implications for the way we understand and interpret religious enthusiasm in the early nineteenth century.

Even when religious enthusiasm has been acknowledged as a separate phenomenon in nineteenth century America it has not generally been the primary object of study. In his study *Hearing Things*, which extends into the middle of the century, Leigh Eric Schmidt notes that "the path of the Enlightenment proved treacherous, littered with blockages, switchbacks, and

[15] Although he is not generally mentioned in regard to the disruption of a unified Enlightenment, May divided *The Enlightenment in America* into four sections that each emphasized different aspects of Enlightenment thought: "The Moderate Enlightenment 1688-1787," "The Skeptical Enlightenment 1750-1789," "The Revolutionary Enlightenment 1776-1800," and "The Didactic Enlightenment 1800-1815."

outright reversals" (8). He attempts "to take the religious culture of the American Enlightenment seriously" as he examines how ways of disciplining the senses—especially hearing—helped "tame the endless effusions of religious enthusiasm" (5). Ann Taves also takes the concept of religious enthusiasm seriously during this period. In *Fits, Trances, and Visions* she traces how enthusiasm gradually transforms over the course of the nineteenth century in conjunction with the development of psychology. As she explores "the interplay between experiencing religion and explaining experience," Taves demonstrates how "the language of religious experience developed, not in isolation, but hand-in-hand with the language of enthusiasm and formalism" (16, 3). Althought these two works offer sophisticated approaches to examining religious enthusiasm, they both subordinate enthusiasm to their own larger concerns and, except for a few select cases, neither deals with the relationship between religious enthusiasm and literature. But both Schmidt and Taves emphasize the ubiquity and importance of enthusiasm during the first half of the nineteenth century in America.

The intersection of religious enthusiasm and literature has actually been more prominent in studies of Britain than in studies of America. Three works that are particularly relevant are Misty Anderson's *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief, and the Borders of the Self*, John Mee's *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period*, and Jaspar Cragwall's *Lake Methodism: Polite Literature and Popular Religion in England, 1780-1830*. Anderson builds on a series of works by scholars of Methodism and explores how Methodism "functioned in the British imagination" during the eighteenth century (2). She examines British literature to see how notions of "the modern secular self" as "ever skeptical and questioning" fared when that self was also susceptible "to enthusiasm or "revelation"" (7). In his study of Romantic poetry, Mee focuses on

"a more regulatory response developed to the problem of enthusiasm as a challenge to the modern subject" (7). But he allows that regulating enthusiasm was a bit of a Sisyphean task: "The attempt to separate poetic from religious enthusiasm remained haunted by the latter" (17). Cragwall employs the varied associations and "semantic vagrancy" of Methodism and enthusiasm to emphasize the importance of religion in British Romantic studies and reveal some surprising continuities between "the irregularities of tramping ministers and perambulating poets" (6). These studies are also concerned with how enthusiasm complicates the traditional secularization narrative. Anderson, for example, notes that focusing on Methodism "challenges a simple historical narrative of progressive secularization and the privatization of religious belief that is tantamount to religion's slow disappearance from the public sphere" (12). Cragwall makes the incisive observation that the concept of secularization may be "more familiar to the period's modern students than its inhabitants" (24). In this sense, these examinations of religious enthusiasm and literature in Britain help recover a lost world of lived experience.

The engagement with the nature of the secular has not yet been fully incorporated into American literary studies. The literary scholar Gauri Viswanathan argues that in the process of defining religion and the secular, many heterodox strains of religion have been defined out of both categories. By reconsidering the role of these different strains she claims we will not only reveal more about what constitutes orthodox religion, but also destabilize our notions of the secular. In a related fashion, Joanna Brooks argues for different narratives of American religious history that go beyond the trajectory Perry Miller outlined in his influential essay "From Edwards to Emerson" that Brooks claims has "served for almost seventy years as a centralizing architecture of American literary history"—at least when teaching undergraduates (439). Brooks wants scholars to look for "fractal paths of revelatory discontinuities and creative heterodoxies

plotted in the narrative" as a means of increasing "our toleration for apparently uninhabitable and impassable contradictions, breaks and dislocations" in "our American literary-religious genealogies" (449). Both Viswanathan and Brooks argue that the relationship between literature and religion looks more complex when we avoid the sort of teleological narrative that the secularization thesis offers and that the relationship between literature and religion needs to be reevaluated in light of the failure of that narrative. Examining the concept of religious enthusiasm—with its semantic range and varied associations that allow it to move across a variety of discourses in different ways—offers an opportunity to look anew at the relationship between literature and religion. John Lardas Modern notes that "at the intersection of American literatures and American religions lies the possibility of reconceiving the object one studies and reframing the stories one tells about it" ("How to Read Literature" 192).

Exploring the intersection between religion and literature offers new ways of thinking about the development of the secular in America. In *Culture and Redemption* Tracy Fessenden acknowledges the variety of different religious strands in American history even as she demonstrates "how particular forms of Protestantism emerged as an "unmarked category" in American religious and literary history" and reveals "how a particular strain of post-Protestant secularism, often blind to its own exclusions, became normative for understanding that history" (6). In a chapter on Stowe, for example, Fessenden shows how Stowe, who grew up steeped in anti-Catholicism, understood the whole world as linked to a Protestant view of reality and history.[16] In *Secularism in Antebellum America* Modern claims that "any viable description of the

[16] By noting that the concept of religion as it is frequently employed in academic discourse is itself an example of an unmarked Protestantism it is possible to extend this argument and apply it much more broadly. Brent Nongbri, for example, argues that, "in the cultures of the modern Western world…religion is anything that sufficiently resembles modern Protestant Christianity" (18).

nineteenth century must account for how one's identity becomes bound up with one's relationship to the religious" (3). He is "particularly interested in how spirituality emerged as an epistemic virtue—a means of accessing unfettered knowledge about the nature of the human, the nature of divinity, and the nature of nature itself" that contributed to constructing a particularly American version of the secular (13). These works help connect the study of American literature into relation with the growing body of scholarship on the nature of the secular—or the postsecular—that understands it, according to Fessenden, "as a historical formation, not a default position, a modus operandi, or a reliable account of the way things simply are" ("The Problem of the Postsecular" 155).

Studying religious enthusiasm offers another way to explore the connections between religion, literature, and the secular in America between the Revolution and the Civil War. The recent reevaluations of the Enlightenment combined with challenges to the secularization narrative set the stage for an examination of the concept of enthusiasm as integral to the transition to modern conceptions of the relationship between the religious and the secular and the position of literature in both facilitating and marking this momentous change. Embracing enthusiasm involves embracing previously spurned aspects of religion and transforming what counts as religiously valid or true. But, because of the shifting definition of enthusiasm, it has been easy to interpret enthusiasm according to its modern definition (as an excited emotion) and not recognize the semantic range and varied associations of the concept as employed by writers such as Brown, Emerson, and Stowe. Recapturing the ways in which these writers understood and employed enthusiasm may reveal some of the complex ways in which religion and literature were understood as compatible before literature came to be seen as replacing religion or began to be studied as primarily a secular activity. A contribution to the recent "revival of the disciplinary

borderland of religion and literature," this dissertation aims to reveal how three key writers use and transform the concept of religious enthusiasm and to illuminate how these influential writers see the role of literature in American public life (Modern, "How to Read Literature" 202). Enthusiasm navigates between the multiple enlightenments while bridging different discourses in ways that complicate and help shape the emerging secular. Understanding this process enhances our understanding of the conceptual world of early nineteenth century America.

3. Brown, Emerson, Stowe: Three Case Studies

This dissertation explores how enthusiasm works and its significance in the writings of Charles Brockden Brown, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Organizing the project as a series of case studies allows enthusiasm—best understood through its many and multifarious local uses and contexts—to be analyzed in the specific setting within which each writer works and to which their work, in turn, contributes. While they all share certain assumptions associated with enlightenment thought and transatlantic romanticism, Brown, Emerson, and Stowe each draw on different traditions of understanding enthusiasm. Taken together, these chapters demonstrate the sustained importance of enthusiasm in American culture through the onset of the Civil War and reveal how three distinct strands of enthusiasm are adapted and transformed in the literature of the new United States.

Charles Brockden Brown—who was raised in a Quaker family in colonial Pennsylvania—was significantly influenced in his understanding of enthusiasm by the Enlightenment historiography of David Hume and Edward Gibbon. Establishing the influence of Hume and Gibbon on Brown's thought not only reveals a previously unexplored part of his intellectual genealogy, but also has implications for how he thought about romance and the

development of the gothic in America. The close connections and overlaps that Brown saw between the writing of history and the writing of romance led him to consider the limits of knowledge and the effects of the unknown in his fiction. Both Hume and Gibbon understand enthusiasm as a natural phenomenon that was particularly likely to emerge in times of great fear and uncertainty and that is exactly the sort of atmosphere Brown conveys so effectively in his fictions. This is particularly evident in his most famous novel, *Wieland*, which features a religious enthusiast who murders his family.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was educated at Harvard College and began his career as minister of a congregation in Boston. Although drawn to the Unitarian wing of the Puritan tradition, he initially understood enthusiasm as the opposite of formalism and a marker of overly emotional and inauthentic religion. But he also drew on sources as diverse as the early English puritans, ancient Greek philosophy, and European romanticism. Through identifying selections from each as timeless utterances of a universal soul and generally ignoring historical context, Emerson transformed his understanding of enthusiasm. Eventually he came to understand enthusiasm as the opposite of skepticism and as a potentially regenerative force that might unite a country wrought by social, political, and religious divisions.

Harriet Beecher Stowe was born and raised in Connecticut and steeped in the Edwardsean Calvinism of her ministerial father Lyman Beecher. In her fiction, Stowe transforms enthusiasm from a marker of overly emotional and inauthentic religion into an indispensable component of authentic religion. Through her embrace of enthusiasm Stowe takes the New England ministerial tradition and turns it inside out. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Dred*, *The Minister's Wooing*, and *The Pearl of Orr's Island* Stowe gradually develops an egalitarian and ecumenical religious vision that embraces all people, regardless of their education, race, or gender. By

identifying enthusiasm with romance she provides the theoretical support for her rejection of patriarchal, theological authority and her embrace of a democratic religious vision. For Stowe fiction was the best vehicle for putting enthusiasm into action. Her distinctive religious and aesthetic project relies on enthusiasm as a catalyst for social change and national redemption. By the time she wrote *The Minister's Wooing* and *The Pearl of Orr's Island* she had developed her own understanding of romance that was inextricably entwined with and expressed through her own conception of religious enthusiasm.

Tracing religious enthusiasm through this literary and intellectual history reveals new ways in which religion and romance are closely connected in American culture. Romance is a genre that is characterized by the degree of play it offers to the imagination and that is energized by tensions similar to those being worked out in discourses around enthusiasm. The classic statement about romance in America has long been attributed to Nathaniel Hawthorne who, in the preface to *The Scarlet Letter*, defined it as a space "where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other" (149). Hawthorne distinguished the romance from the novel and there is a long-running critical debate concerning whether or not he invented that distinction.[17] The search for the origins of the American romance emphasizes how, since the mid-twentieth century, discussions of the romance as a possibly defining feature of American literature have occupied a prominent place in American literary studies.[18] Since

[17] For different representative positions see Nina Baym's "Concepts of the Romance in Hawthorne's America" and the extended rebuttal to Baym by Thompson and Link in *Neutral Ground: New Traditionalism and the American Romance Controversy*.

[18] For an explanation of the controversy surrounding claims for the romance as a defining feature of American literature see Winfried Fluck, "'The American Romance' and the Changing Functions of the Imaginary." G. R. Thompson and Eric Carl Link offer a book-length treatment of this topic in *Neutral Ground: New Traditionalism and the American Romance Controversy*. Both studies emphasize the importance of Richard Chase's 1957 study *The American Novel and its Tradition* to this debate. More recently, although he uses different terminology—speaking of

Hawthorne was notoriously skeptical of moments of transcendence or claims for religious authority, one effect of this emphasis on romance—which has been reinforced by the way in which the study of literature has been undertaken by scholars in a largely secular environment—has been to incidentally obscure the close connections between religion and romance. In taking this position I join Dawn Coleman in arguing for the importance of religion in American literature. But, in contrast to Coleman's attempt to replace the emphasis on romance with the sermon as what "works to distinguish between American and English novels of the nineteenth century," I argue that there are grounds for seeing the romance as closely related to religion in its own right (16).

When Brown and Stowe developed their own definitions of romance and considered the significance of romance as a mode of writing, they did so in a way that drew on how they each understood religious enthusiasm. While Brown has long been recognized as a significant early figure in the history of American romance, the influence of David Hume has not been seen as critical to that work. But Brown developed his definition of romance as a distinction between his own work and the work of Hume as a historian and some of Hume's ideas concerning religious enthusiasm contributed to how Brown thought about the gothic mode. I argue that Brown's sense of the gothic—at least as he employed it in his novel *Wieland*—sprung from a concern with religious enthusiasm as a response to uncertainty. This puts religion at the center of one of the key developments in American literary history in a new way that both challenges and

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American "literary narrative" instead of the American novel or American romance—Jonthan Arac still identifies Hawthorne's definition of romance and his practice of romance as a critical moment in the development of American literary narrative (121-143). However, Philip Gura, in Truth's Ragged Edge: The Rise of the American Novel—although his subtitle seems to echo the title of Chase's book, positions Hawthorne and the question of romance as only one (albeit significant) influence among a variety of different and relatively neglected literary strands.

complements more traditional critical concerns with topics such as race or the influence of the frontier.

Unlike Brown, Stowe has not generally been considered as an important figure in the development of romance. While almost every critic acknowledges the cultural importance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* few take Stowe seriously as a literary artist. For example, in their comprehensive analysis of the development of American romance Thompson and Link only mention her work at various points in passing and Jonathan Arac argues that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "claims the authority of truth, not of imagination" in his account of the rise of what he calls "literary narrative" (Arac 189). But most critics do not look beyond *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Stowe's next novel *Dred*. By examining some of her later work and some of her incidental writings it is possible to see how she grappled with the problem of religious enthusiasm over a period of more than a decade and how the way in which she thought about enthusiasm influenced the development of her own theory of romance, which she articulates in *The Minister's Wooing*. For Stowe, in contrast to Hawthorne, the merits of romance were closely tied to what she saw as its connection to the divine and its religious purpose.

As Brown, Emerson, and Stowe consecutively made claims on the national consciousness, they function as prisms through which critical elements of political and religious life pass and are changed in the passing. Even as they each come to understand enthusiasm in different ways, so they each present different challenges. Within each section I mix intellectual, cultural, and religious history with literary analysis. Carefully articulating connections between a range of primary texts—from novels and stories to essays and reviews to journals and letters—allows me to provide a nuanced understanding of how all three writers interact with some of the many discourses in which enthusiasm may be situated. This approach borrows from the study of

lived religion—defined as the actual practice of religion as it was understood and experienced by its range of adherents—partly because it takes into account the wide range of different elements that contribute to how individual historical subjects experience the world and remember and record those experiences. And, while each section deals with the respective author as part of the larger cultural milieu, I view the literary works not merely as set against a historical background, but as forming an integral part of the historical and religious context in their own right—a purpose aided by the well-known political interests and public intentions of Brown, Emerson, and Stowe.

Prologue: Varieties of American Enthusiasm

In order to suggest the range of ways in which enthusiasm was employed between the American Revolution and the Civil War this prologue offers a brief survey of its seemingly ubiquitous presence in American culture during this period. Between the American Revolution and the Civil War the concept of enthusiasm was used in America in ways that drew on its complex history in Europe. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries religious enthusiasm was frequently condemned in both England and her American colonies. Even as the Puritans fled Europe to find a place free from religious persecution, others fled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony to Rhode Island or the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam. When condemning Anne Hutchinson, Governor Winthrop noted that the case was an example of "the most desperate enthusiasm in the world" (qtd. in Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy* 342). Then the advent of the English Civil Wars, which led to a proliferation of new religious groups, emphasized the connection between enthusiasm and politics. For some the beheading of Charles I even made it seem that enthusiasts had come to rule England. And after the Restoration charges of enthusiasm continued unabated—the arrival of the French Prophets in England during the early eighteenth century was only the most notorious case. Enthusiasm—in a wide variety of guises—was a transatlantic phenomenon.

Since the Elizabethan settlement the established Church of England had included a broad range of views (Holmes 9). The Puritans and the Methodists—both sometimes vilified as enthusiasts—each had roots in a reforming impulse that was characteristic of Protestantism and frequently animated debates within the Anglican Church. Over time the search for a unifying national faith gradually turned into an experiment in religious toleration that accommodated varying degrees of dissent, but repeated outbreaks of religious enthusiasm presented a recurring

challenge to civil peace. During the British Enlightenment several key thinkers attempted to define religious enthusiasm and make sense of its role in relation to a stable civil society. This prologue briefly identifies their positions and some of the ways their formulations crossed the Atlantic, interacted with the American Enlightenment and the Great Awakening, and were transformed during the first half of the nineteenth century in America. This simultaneously provides crucial context for the detailed studies that follow and demonstrates the degree to which religious enthusiasm remained a widespread phenomenon in America through the onset of the Civil War.

With the Enlightenment search for a stable epistemological basis for human knowledge and political society, enthusiasm became especially prominent as a foil for rationalism. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* John Locke claimed that enthusiasm "takes away both Reason and Revelation, and substitutes in the room of it, the ungrounded Fancies of a Man's own Brain" (698). Employing metaphors of heat and extravagance, he argued that these "Conceits of a warmed or over-weening Brain" might work "more powerfully on the Perswasions or Actions of Men" than either "Reason" or "Divine Revelation" (699). For Locke enthusiasm was inherently false and potentially destablizing to the body politic. But while Locke's formulation was influential and encapuslated the central problem of enthusiasm for the Enlightenment—it was unreasonable—those who followed his lead often arrived at very different end points.

For Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, whose early education was supervised by Locke, enthusiasm was only a fleeting danger and the worst thing to do would be to take it seriously. In "A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm to My Lord *****," apparently sparked by the arrival of the French Prophets in England, he argues that enthusiasm and religion—which to him seem almost indistinguishable—are both forms of a "popular fury" that "may be called

panic" and thrives on persecution (13). The best solution is not political repression, but the remedy applied by the ancients—"to let people be fools as much as they pleased, and never to punish seriously what deserved only to be laughed at" (12). Shaftesbury relied on the cultivation of the moral faculties among the educated to counteract the passions of the lower classes and guide the nation through the potential danger caused by outbreaks of enthusiasm.

For David Hume—whose definition of acceptable religious experience or emotion was so narrow as to practically preclude its existence—enthusiasm, though false, might even have a positive effect on political society. While in his essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" Hume argues that both are unreasonable, he also claims "*that superstition is an enemy to civil liberty, and enthusiasm a friend to it*" (*Essays* 78). Whereas the former promotes deference to illegitimate authority and thus reinforces "the dominion of priests," the latter "is naturally accompanied with a spirit of liberty" (*Essays* 78). Hume argues that, over time, the intensity of enthusiasm wanes and its proponents—their tumultuous energies exhausted—will become useful guardians of individual liberties.

From the Puritans to the Quakers, from the Anabaptists to the Camisards to the French Prophets, from the Methodists to New Light Congregationalists to the Shakers, charges of enthusiasm were a frequent source of contention and those who wielded accusations of enthusiasm could easily be condemned as enthusiasts in their turn. The transatlantic series of revivals known as the Great Awakening and the authority of such key figures in the movements as George Whitefield and John Wesley were a particular source of contention. In 1744, for example, the Harvard faculty published a *Testimony against the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield and His Conduct* in which they neatly defined what they meant by enthusiasm: "First then, we charge him, with Enthusiasm…. we mean by an Enthusiast, one that acts, either according to

Dreams, or from sudden Impulses and Impressions upon his Mind, which he fondly imagines to be from the Spirit of God… tho' he hath no Proof that such Perswasions or Impressions are from the holy Spirit" (qtd. in Finke and Stark 62). Of course others, such as the carpenter and farmer Nathan Cole thought Whitefield "looked as if he was Cloathed with authority from the Great God" and felt that he received "a heart wound" from his preaching (qtd. in Crawford 93). The difference in Cole's social status relative to that of the Harvard faculty also suggests how accusations of enthusiasm could serve to help regulate behavior that was potentially disruptive.

Jonathan Edwards's famous writings in defense of the Great Awakening included a careful analysis of precisely what sorts of behavior constituted enthusiasm. Edwards developed his views through an exchange of pamphlets with the Boston minister Charles Chauncy, who thought the enthusiastic behavior of the revivalists was mainly a result of "itineracy and a preaching style appealing solely to the emotions rather than the intellect" (Griffin 82). For Edwards religious emotion was an essential product of divine grace. Even as Locke observed that in order to distinguish enthusiasm from revelation each individual "must bring this Guide of his *Light within* to the Tryal" (704), so Edwards—who drew on Locke's thought—argued that distinguishing genuine, divinely-sanctioned operations of the spirit from enthusiasm—a "spirit of delusion" based on "natural self-love"—was crucial ("The Distinguishing Marks" 257). In *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* Edwards explained that "The right way, is not to reject all affections, nor to approve all; but to distinguish between affections, approving some, and rejecting others" (121). For Edwards "the difference between spiritual understanding and all kinds and forms of enthusiasm" was that whereas the former were composed of "a divine sense and relish of the heart," the latter were composed of "impressions in the head" and "impressions on the imagination." He applied this distinction to a long list of groups from "the Essenes" and

"many of the ancient Gnostics" to "the many kinds of enthusiasts of the present day" (287). Although Edwards—like Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hume—believed enthusiasm was inherently false, he was very careful in how he distinguished enthusiasm from genuine religion. And, as someone who had been immersed in Enlightenment thought from a young age, he based those distinctions on what he understood as evidence.[19]

For Benjamin Franklin—a contemporary of Edwards who as a deist did not have the same investment in what constituted authentic religious experience—enthusiasm could be both a source of humor and a useful counterpoint to his own identification as a reasonable person. In his *Autobiography* he recalls how Samuel Keimer, who had only recently arrived in Philadelphia where he was the first to employ the friendless runaway Franklin, "had been one of the French Prophets and could act their enthusiastic Agitations" (22). Keimer no longer adheres to "any particular Religion" and Franklin finds "a good deal of the Knave in his Composition" (22). Franklin also notes that Keimer "retain'd a great deal of his old Enthusiasms" and "seriously propos'd" taking advantage of Franklin's ability to best him in arguments by asking him to participate "in a Project he had of setting up a new Sect. He was to preach the Doctrines, and I was to confound all Opponents" (28). Through his theatrical allusion when he describes how Keimer "could act their enthusiastic agitations" and through his proposal to invent his own religion, Franklin emphasizes that enthusiasm is just another form of deception. But for Franklin the fun really began when Keimer proposed instituting some arcane practices he found "somewhere in the Mosaic Law" and Franklin countered with reasonable dietary measures, which allowed him to torment the gluttonous Keimer until he eventually could no longer adhere to the rule of his own new religion (29). In the *Autobiography* Franklin presents Keimer as

[19] For a brief account of the influence of Enlightenment thought on Edwards see Marsden (7).

inconsistent and unreasonable and, through that portrayal, defines himself as precisely the opposite.

Although Franklin found enthusiasm distasteful, he recognized that it might be both convenient and constructive. Unlike the faculty of Harvard he could see potential virtues in enthusiasm and he balanced his mockery of Keimer with his praise of Whitefield. When he describes the visit of Whitefield to Philadelphia, he recounts in detail "the extraordinary Influence of his Oratory on his Hearers" and how it even sways his own resolve not to contribute to one of the evangelist's projects (87). And even as he takes care to distance himself from Whitefield's "Proselytes" and "their enthusiastic Admiration" for him, he remains fascinated by Whitefield's power to move people on behalf of civic projects (89, 91).

Like Franklin, John Adams had little patience for those he considered fools—as indicated by his biting dismissal of those enthusiasts who "assumed the Character of Ambassadors extraordinary from The Almighty" in his letter to Jefferson. But Adams, who had apparently read Shaftesbury, also tolerated enthusiasm and observed that, "it will be found universally true that no great enterprise for the honor or happiness of mankind was ever achieved without a large mixture of that noble infirmity" (qtd. in Lovejoy 228).[20] In a private letter he even described the American Revolution as having its roots in an "enthusiasm which went on increasing, till in 1775 it burst out in open violence, hostility and fury" (qtd. in Lovejoy 229). Among later writers who drew similar conclusions in regard to the relationship between enthusiasm and the American Revolution was George Bancroft—in his *History of the United States* he observed that, it was at this moment that, "the idea of freedom…for the first time…found a region and a race where it could be professed with the earnestness of an indwelling conviction and be defended with the

[20] Also see Lovejoy for the connection between Adams and Shaftesbury (228).

enthusiasm that had hitherto marked no wars but those for religion" (qtd. in Arac 30). For each of these writers there seems to have been a connection, however vague it may have been, between the motivations behind both religious and political convictions. And, over time, as Bancroft seems to imply, there might also be a degree to which a religious motivation gradually dissipated and was superseded by a political motivation. But, in spite of what individuals like Adams or Bancroft may have wished, manifestations of religious enthusiasm did not simply disappear after in the wake of the American Revolution.

As the American colonies became a country and began to develop new national traditions, disputes about whether or not enthusiasm contributed positively to society continued in the literature of the new nation. A few decades after Franklin wrote his *Autobiography*, Emerson described not only the ancillary effects of enthusiasm, but enthusiasm itself, as a positive good. In spite of his ministerial education, Emerson came to understand enthusiasm as the correspondence or communion of the soul with something greater than itself and, when in 1841 he publishes his *Essays*, he famously claims in "Circles" that "nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm" (*Essays and Lectures* 414). Of course, this reevaluation of enthusiasm was a transatlantic phenomenon and Emerson is here repeating verbatim the words of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who in *The Statesmen's Manual* calls the phrase an "aphorism of ancient wisdom" (27).

Emerson's embrace of enthusiasm would not go unchallenged. In *The Scarlet Letter* Nathaniel Hawthorne seems to directly repudiate Emerson's claims. He describes Hester Prynne's "freedom of speculation" as "enthusiasm" and, at several points in the novel, associates her closely with Anne Hutchinson (259). As in his early story "Mrs. Hutchinson"—in which he suggests it was Hutchinson's "strong imagination" that made her susceptible to "the enthusiasm

of the times"—he assumes that his nineteenth century audience was familiar with her and, in *The Scarlet Letter*, seems to assume they would make a connection between Hutchinson's religious views and Prynne's moral transgression (*Tales and Sketches* 19).[21] And in the forest when Prynne proposes to Arthur Dimmesdale that they leave and begin anew in a different land a light inside of him is "kindled by her enthusiasm" (289). But their sense of autonomy and renewed possibility does not last. When their hopes of escaping to start over again are dashed, it becomes clear that to Hawthorne enthusiasm is merely ephemeral, fleeting, and potentially deceptive.

Unlike Hawthorne, Robert Montgomery Bird does not seem to have taken enthusiasm as so significant a danger as to deserve a serious rebuttal. In *Sheppard Lee*, Bird's 1836 novel about metempsychosis, enthusiasm was simply ripe for mockery. The narrator initially describes Quakers as "mumbling and munching in a highly enthusiastic manner" (255). But before long his soul enters the body of an enthusiastic philanthropist and—playing on the association between enthusiasm and warmth—he records feeling a "burning in my breast… which burnt on until it became at last a general conflagration of philanthropy" and "a raging desire" to help others (257). His "brain took fire" and he announces, "yea, reader, yea, and verily, I was at last happy" (258). But he notes that, "if my virtue was somewhat excessive in degree, it proceeded from the sincerest promptings of the spirit" (272). Although others repeatedly call him "mad" and one person refers to his "*monomania*" (301), he is "suffered to obey the impulses of the spirit within" even if it leaves him not "exactly knowing what I was doing" (304). But even as a fire burns out so does Lee's enthusiasm.

In George Lippard's 1845 novel *The Quaker City*, there is a darker edge to enthusiasm. Lippard repeatedly describes the followers of "Ravoni the Sorcerer"—a misguided mesmerist,

[21] For Hawthorne's expectations of his audience and a discussion of "Mrs. Hutchinson" see Lang (1-4).

scientist, and prophet who hopes to found a new religion—as enthusiasts. To Lippard enthusiasm is connected with a loss of independent will that manifests itself in such phenomena as eyes "flashing with unnatural light" (444). He uses enthusiasm as a virtual synonym for fanaticism—at one point he describes Ravoni's audience: "The dark eyes of the twenty-four enthusiasts shone with the wild light of fanaticism" (446). And in a note Lippard makes it clear that he connects enthusiasm "to the doctrine of magnetic influence" that, at the time, were frequently associated with both electricity and mesmerism (447). Although Lippard is critical of the enthusiasts through this connection, his description of them is powerful and indicates how the concept of enthusiasm extended to include potentially natural and scientific phenomena as well.

Employed in either a positive or negative sense, enthusiasm could also be associated with race. Depending on the perspective of the writer it could be used to support prejudices akin to those of racial science, as a means of authorizing resistance to slavery, or as an expression of legitimate but otherwise inexpressible feeling. The ambivalent nature of the term is quite clear in *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. Thomas Gray, to whom the confessions were made, provides a commentary on Turner's remarks in which he refers to Turner as "a gloomy fanatic" whose mind was "dark, bewildered, and overwrought" (246). Gray indicates that Turner's race meant that there were natural limitations to his intellectual capacity that made him particularly susceptible to being deceived. For Gray this only heightened the potential horror of the situation and he describes how he recoiled when he looked at Turner and saw "the expression of his fiend-like face when excited by enthusiasm" (262). But if enthusiasm and fanaticism are synonymous for Gray—who did not believe that Turner had received divine authorization for his actions—Turner himself eschews fanaticism and simply refers to "that enthusiasm" by which he was motivated (249). He repeatedly claims to have communicated with "The Spirit that spoke to the prophets in

former days" and neither recants nor is remorseful (251). Frederick Douglass, however, who also uses enthusiasm in a positive fashion, does so in a more nuanced way. When describing how slave songs show the "dehumanizing character of slavery," he associates enthusiasm with humanity under immense pressure (290). The "peculiarly enthusiastic" slaves would sing "their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness" (289). Here enthusiasm captures a wildness and range of emotion that emphasizes the marginal situation and distressed condition of the slaves.

The passions of politics could also generate enthusiasm and intense partisanship could be evident in both politics and religion. *Sheppard Lee*, Bird's satiric portrayal of parties in the Early Republic, includes members of a crowd "crying out with great enthusiasm" in support of a speaker who denounces abolition and for the lynching of the enthusiastic, Quaker philanthropist in whose body Lee finds himself (324). While the politics of slavery might elicit accusations of enthusiasm, enthusiasm might also apply to events in the distant past. The relationship between religious enthusiasm and politics might shift depending on the situation and religious enthusiasm could be a positive force for political change. Oliver Cromwell, for example, went from being "*the* great example for the eighteenth century of the religio-political Enthusiast" to a model of sincere and principled resistance to tyranny for the nineteenth century (Tucker 95).[22] The sense of inspiration and purpose suggested by enthusiasm—even if both were left deliberately vague—was a potentially potent combination. Indeed, only a few lines after he wrote in "Circles" that "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm," Emerson looked to Cromwell for support: "'A man,' said Oliver Cromwell, 'never rises so high as when he knows not whither he is going'" (*Essays and Lectures* 414).

[22] For more on the rehabilitation of Cromwell's reputation during this period see Reynolds, *John Brown*, 230-232.

As the rehabilitation of Cromwell during the early nineteenth century suggests, enthusiasm might easily be associated with romantic heroism. In his 1843 *History of the Conquest of Mexico* William H. Prescott employed several different—and occasionally overlapping—varieties of enthusiasm. He described the Aztec warrior as "animated by a religious enthusiasm, like that of the early Saracen, or the Christian crusader" (40). But he also used related language to describe the Spaniards: Cortés, for example, was himself "roused to a generous enthusiasm" upon embarking on his expedition and was later "satisfied to find his own enthusiasm so largely shared by his followers" (180, 192). And after Prescott claims that the "life of the adventurer in the New World was romance put into action," he observes that it should not be surprising "if the Spaniard of that day, feeding his imagination with dreams of enchantment at home, and with its realities abroad, should have displayed a Quixotic enthusiasm,—a romantic exaltation of character, not to be comprehended by the colder spirits of other lands!" (388). This last quotation indicates both the semantic range of enthusiasm and the difficulty in disentangling one sense from another—the tropical, the heroic, and the literary are all associated with a term that still—through the imaginary and the enchanted—includes a religious element.

If enthusiasm was useful for Prescott in describing Cortés as the veritable incarnation of the romantic hero and his expedition as a heroic journey, it was no less useful for contemporaries who strove to achieve new feats. When recalling his hope to explore west of the Missouri River, John Charles Fremont wrote: "The thought of penetrating into the recesses of that wilderness region filled me with enthusiasm—I saw visions" (qtd. in Chaffin 86). And the past could easily set a standard for the present. When he first saw the Great Salt Lake Fremont observed that, "as we looked eagerly over the lake in the first emotions of excited pleasure, I am doubtful if the

followers of Balboa felt more enthusiasm when, from the heights of the Andes, they saw the great Western ocean" (qtd. in Chaffin 167).

But the romantic embrace of enthusiasm only extended so far and well into the nineteenth-century it was still possible to be vilified for what observers took to be manifestations of enthusiasm. When in 1830 Joseph Smith published the *Book of Mormon* his claims were derided as "enthusiasm" or "fanaticism" and he was accused of being a "charlatan" (Bushman 83). Critics claimed that early Mormons—whose behavior often resembled that of many other early nineteenth century revivalists—manifested the "wildest enthusiasm" during worship (qtd. in Fluhman 58). While the Mormon leaders tried to contain such behavior, others were willing to play with and exploit such charges. One of these was Emerson, whose prose was described by one contemporary as having "the fantastic incoherence of the 'God-intoxicated' man" (qtd. in Schmidt, *Restless Souls*). A transcendentalist, or so Emerson notes in his essay of that name, "believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and power; he believes in inspiration and in ecstasy" (196). In "New England Reformers" Emerson describes a group "composed of ultraists, of seekers, [and] of all the soul of the soldiery of dissent," that operates outside of traditional institutions, and that includes "the adepts of homœpathy, of hydropathy, of mesmerism, [and] of phrenology" (591, 592). He even proceeded to draw a connection between the many different manifestations of reform in his own time and earlier manifestations of enthusiasm: "the fertile forms of antinomianism among the elder puritans, seemed to have their match in the plenty of the new harvest of reform" (592). By connecting the reformers—with whom he was sometimes associated—to the antinomians of the seventeenth century, Emerson evokes the memory of Anne Hutchinson and emphasizes how echoes of the past often resounded in later centuries.

From the colonial period through at least the middle of the nineteenth-century, the story of enthusiasm in America is characterized by the remarkable variety of ways in which the concept of enthusiasm was employed. Enthusiasm encompassed a wide range of potential meanings and associations that included a spectrum of theories of inspiration, from the sense that an individual was inspired by the divine to the sense that the same individual's natural abilities were enhanced or inspired by an invisible power. Sometimes enthusiasm was radically democratic or even revolutionary in how it flouted established sources of authority and sometimes it entailed such a complete submission to authority that the self was almost entirely subsumed within the divine. And it was not just radical religious groups who might be accused of being enthusiasts in the new, turbulent, and increasingly democratic United States of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.[23] Writers, reformers, philanthropists, politicians, and those who followed their lead might be accused of enthusiasm or might embrace enthusiasm as essential. But, no matter why it was employed—whether for good or ill, for humor or for condemnation, for challenging authority or for invoking a higher authority—enthusiasm was ubiquitous in America culture between the Revolution and the Civil War. Strangely, however, most studies of religious enthusiasm end immediately after the Revolution. By examining enthusiasm more closely, in the work of Charles Brockden Brown, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, the chapters that follow demonstrate how—as the definition of enthusiasm changed to its modern meaning and no equivalent term replaced it—there was a change in the conceptual options available through which individuals could inhabit and make sense of the world around them.

[23] For a more extensive description of the different religious groups see Reynolds, *Waking Giant* 123-174.

Chapter One: Enthusiastic Repercussions: Charles Brockden Brown and the Challenge of David Hume

> [History's] chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature, by shewing men in all varieties of circumstances and situations, and furnishing us with materials, from which we may form our observations, and become acquainted with the regular springs of human action and behaviour. These records of wars, intrigues, factions, and revolutions, are so many collections of experiments, by which the politician or moral philosopher fixes the principles of his science; in the same manner as the physician or natural philosopher becomes acquainted with the nature of plants, minerals, and other external objects, by the experiments, which he forms concerning them.
>
> David Hume (*Enquiry* 60-61)

In February, 1800 the New York *Monthly Magazine*, edited at the time by Charles Brockden Brown, published a staged defense of the magazine's editorial practices. Written by Brown himself, it takes the form of a dialogue between two men, Edward and William, who both express their support for the "American production" but debate the contents and merits of the magazine (53).[24] William, whose criticisms repeatedly offer Edward the opportunity to defend the magazine, begins by expressing his disappointment and claims that, for amusement, the magazine falls far short of the standard set by "the London and Edinburgh Magazines" (53). Edward, although he expresses the wish that he knew the editor so that he could pass on William's "suggestions for improving his work," defends the "American production" and its editorial policy with great vigor:

> For my part, I think instruction of more importance than amusement. I am a grave man, and grave things suit me best. I read with far greater relish, a critique on Robertson or Hume, an essay on the culture of the potatoe—or an account of some valuable discovery, than ninetenths of the anecdotes, humorous compositions, or *jeu d'esprits* which I meet with. (53)

[24] "Dialogues of the Living, Dialogue II."

William responds that amusement must come first or "mankind…will never attend to you" (54). He then claims neither he, nor "one in fifty," reads articles "on *Walstein's School of History*—on *Astringency*—and on *American Population*" (54). Next William criticizes the magazine's reviews as "feeble, indecisive, worthless things" and complains they do "not tell us that a book is good or bad, at once, without more ado" (54). Edward responds that the reviewer's ability to see both the "faults" and "excellencies" of different works is actually a virtue and asks rhetorically, "Are not all human productions of a mixed kind?" (54). When William expresses the wish that the magazine paid more attention to politics, which would "give a pleasant seasoning to the work," but "are wholly excluded," Edward replies that politics can be a tricky subject when trying to appeal to a large audience and concludes: "I cannot help thinking that the Magazine had better be entirely free from theological and political polemics" (55).

The arguments Brown makes through the character of Edward demonstrate both his hopes for the *Monthly Magazine* and some of the values that guided his fictions. In the preface to his first novel, *Wieland*, Brown claims that he "aims at the illustration of some important branches of the moral constitution of man" and hopes his book will "be ranked with the few productions whose usefulness secures to them a lasting reputation" (3). Brown clearly hoped his fictions would transcend their own narrow regional and temporal contexts and offer his readers both amusement and instruction. But if his gripping stories make the amusement easy to appreciate, the specific sort of instruction he claims to offer is more difficult to decipher. Published in New York in 1798, *Wieland; or the Transformation* is a historical novel about a religious enthusiast named Wieland who, convinced that he has been commanded by God to murder his family, executes the command, is imprisoned, escapes several times, eventually discovers his sister Clara, and prepares to kill her before he is dissuaded by the voice of a

ventriloquist named Carwin—who may have caused much of the trouble to begin with—and kills himself instead. Set mostly in the countryside around Philadelphia, the story takes place "between the conclusion of the French and the beginning of the revolutionary war" and is told by Clara in two letters, which focus on how her previously peaceful world was disrupted by confusion, terror, and the extraordinary horror of the events she relates (3). The first gothic novel written in the United States, this extraordinary story was loosely based on real events in upstate New York and identified on the title page as "An American Tale."

At a crucial point in *Wieland*—just before the main character hears an unknown voice, which sets in motion a chain of events leading to the violence and terror which make the story so remarkable—one of the characters claims that "to make the picture of a single family a model from which to sketch the condition of a nation, was absurd" (29). But while the "discernment" of the character in whose mouth Brown places this comment is described as "acute," his "conceptions" are described as "ardent but ludicrous" and Brown proceeds to make the family a figure for the nation (23). After the publication of *Wieland*, he even sent a copy of his new novel to Thomas Jefferson—then Vice-President of the United States—whom he did not know personally. But if *Wieland* is clearly intended to have some sort of public purpose, Brown eschews didacticism; whatever instruction his novels offer is embedded in complex plots that dramatize human dilemmas and are narrated by characters, such as Wieland's sister Clara, who are implicated in the stories they relate. The stories told by Brown's unreliable narrators are prime examples of what Edward described as "human productions of a mixed kind" and most critics see his work as complex and challenging. As one recent critic notes, "no critical consensus has emerged on what to do with Brown and how to interpret his works" (Weinstock

6).[25] For example, while Roland Hagenbüchle claims Clara is the first example of an unreliable narrator in American literature and connects her unreliability to Brown's interest in larger epistemological questions, he is distinctly in the minority (Hagenbüchle 133).[26] Bryan Waterman observes that most critics generally eschew such larger philosophical or religious concerns in favor of examining "the quality and range of his engagements with early US culture—including sexuality, politics, nationalism, and race" ("Introduction: Reading Early American with Charles Brockden Brown" 236). Notably absent from Waterman's list is Brown's engagement with the problem of religion in the new nation. But the contentious issue of religious enthusiasm is at the center of Brown's first novel.

The dialogue between Edward and William contains an important clue to both how Brown thought about religious enthusiasm and what he was trying do in his fictions. Brown was fascinated by history and the "relish" with which Edward claims to read a critique on Hume

[25] In addition to Weinstock, who limns some of the different approaches to Brown in his introduction (4-11, 19-21), Waterman surveys some of the areas of disagreement among Brown scholars in "Introduction: Reading Early America with Charles Brockden Brown." He explains how recent criticism "tend[s] to take for granted that Brown's work adequately, deliberately, and often intelligently engages or represents a coherent early national culture" in a way that counters the work of an "older generation of critics…who wanted to see Brown as a prototypical Romantic author and framed his as writing *against* his culture rather than typifying it" (236). Furthermore, he notes that even "much recent criticism divides into two camps: one that reads Brown's work symptomatically, looking for evidence of early America's political unconscious or Brown's own political partisanship (at times confusing the two); and another camp that, thought it sometimes runs the risk of overdetermining Brown's political radicalism, reads him as a diagnostician of his culture more than a participant in its ideological or partisan conflicts" (236). Another critical divide—the "stalemate surrounding the radical/reactionary dichotomy in Brown scholarship"—is observed by W. M. Verhoeven, who also challenges it—arguing that "the division between a radical and a conservative Brown is no longer tenable" ("'This Blissful Period of Intellectual Liberty'" 9, 31).

[26] In seeing his work as complex and challenging most critics are following the lead of Norman Grabo, whose influential study, *The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown*, demonstrates that Brown's complex plots were the product of careful deliberation and not the result of carelessness or haste.

suggests the extent of Brown's own interest in the work of David Hume.[27] Indeed, not only is Hume's *History of England* the first book which Brown is known to have read, but he repeatedly mentions Hume in his essays and demonstrates a deep understanding of his work.[28] Since the *History of England* was written many years after Hume's main philosophical works and essays, it builds on much of Hume's earlier thought, including the views of religious enthusiasm which he developed in essays such as "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm." Brown also read closely *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon, whose views on religious enthusiasm were, according to the historian J. G. A. Pocock, derived directly from those of Hume and were crucial to how Gibbon understood history ("Superstition and Enthusiasm in Gibbon's History of Religion" 83-84). In both Hume and Gibbon Brown found an understanding of enthusiasm not as false inspiration, but as a natural phenomenon that had a long and complex history. Religious enthusiasm had played a crucial role in many previous conflicts—both religious and political in nature—and not only had a complicated relationship to the problem of maintaining a stable civil government, but was also particularly likely to emerge in times of great fear and uncertainty. In

[27] The interest in historical writing that Brown declared through the character of Edward is one that remained with him throughout his career as a writer and editor. During this period alone, examples include: a review of "A complete History of Connecticut" by Benjamin Trumbull in April, 1799; "Parallel between Hume, Robertson and Gibbon" and a review of "The History of America, Books IX and X" by William Robertson in May, 1799; a review of "The History of Pennsylvania" by Robert Proud in June, 1799; a two part essay called "Walstein's School of History. From the German of Krants of Gotha" from August to September, 1799; a review of "A Summary History of New-England" by Hannah Adams in September-December, 1799; a four part review of "A Brief History of Epidemic and Pestilential Diseases" by Noah Webster from January to April, 1800; and "The Difference between History and Romance" in April, 1800. For the works and dates mentioned here see Weber and Schäfer.

[28] I have found no direct evidence that Brown knew any of Hume's work beyond *The History of England*, but, as I demonstrate below, in order to become familiar with Hume's views on religious enthusiasm and key aspects of his philosophy, he did not need more than the Friendly Club and the *History of England*. It is, however, quite possible that Brown did know more of Hume's works. For two recent critics who have assumed that Brown was very familiar with Hume's thought see Hagenbüchle (124-125) and Luck (280-285).

Wieland, his own fictional, philosophical history, Brown explores some of these issues through a series of allusions that demonstrate how his reading of Hume and Gibbon prepared him for the events of his own times and provided a lens through which he would understand and interpret them. I emphasize that his reading of Hume also led Brown to develop a theory of romance that closely relates to how he understood history and which presents romance as moral philosophy in the guise of fiction. Brown's interest in the relationship between history and romance is well established and critics such as Mark Kamrath and Amanda Emerson have, respectively, explored what Brown's essays reveal about the study of history during this period and how that informs his novels. But, by looking at how Brown's views on the relationship between history and romance developed in both the light of his reading of Hume and how, drawing on the work of both Hume and Gibbon, he understood religious enthusiasm, it may be possible to connect his meditations on history and religion to his conception of the gothic.

Approaching Brown through Hume and Gibbon emphasizes that Brown and his writings were a product of the late eighteenth century. In placing Brown firmly within his own time, I counter criticism of Brown that—as Jeffrey Weinstock observes—often takes his work "as a point of origin rather than a destination" and is more concerned with his originality and his significant influence on future writers than how he fit into his historical context (1).[29] To me Brown's way of thinking about religious enthusiasm in *Wieland* is much closer to that of writers

[29] For an overview of some of the many different claims for Brown's originality see Weinstock (2-5). Instead of seeing Brown in light of his influence on later writers, Weinstock argues that "Brown represents a crucial transitional figure or 'hinge' between eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationality and nineteenth-century Romanticism" (6). This position has become increasingly prominent in Brown scholarship over the last couple of decades. See, for example, Kamrath (248) and Waterman ("Charles Brockden Brown and the Novels of the Early Republic" 53-54).

associated with the skeptical Enlightenment than writers associated with romanticism.[30] But, paradoxically, examining a new context for Brown that is rooted in the specific details of his own intellectual development reveals some of the ways in which Brown hoped *Wieland* would transcend the particular time and place of its origin. While *Wieland*, relative to the histories of Hume and Gibbon, employs a limited subjective perspective and temporal scope that I argue seem to define the gothic for Brown, it nevertheless seems to have a public purpose and demonstrates Brown's concern with enduring aspects of the human condition. I show how it is possible to both acknowledge the undeniable influence of his own time and, simultaneously, by seeing his work in light of eighteenth century Enlightenment historiography, imagine how he may have understood the events of his own time through the lens provided by his earlier reading, which revealed them as part of a much longer history.

By playing on some of the associations of enthusiasm with which he and many of his contemporaries were familiar and understanding them through the lens provided by the histories of Hume and Gibbon, Brown brings to bear the pressure of a much larger historical weight than has previously been acknowledged on a novel that he, perhaps playfully, identifies as "An American Tale." Bryan Waterman notes that "Brown's novels…have most often been treated by literary historians as indices of American character, political conflict, and nascent nationalism" and "take for granted Brown's status as representative of an incipient 'American novel' tradition and, at times, of the new nation's public sphere or literary culture as a whole" (Waterman, "Charles Brockden Brown and the Novels of the Early Republic" 51-52). In contrast, I explore

[30] The most famous account of the influence of the skeptical Enlightenment in America is in May (105-149). May, however, places Brown and other members of the Friendly Club in the category of the revolutionary Enlightenment (233-235). Particularly notable among critics of Brown who have noted his connection to the skeptical Enlightenment is W. M. Verhoeven, who situates it relative to numerous writers who participate in a range of transatlantic radicalism ("'This Blissful Period of Intellectual Liberty'" 31).

the idea that *Wieland* may not be best considered as distinctively American. Through his reading of Hume and Gibbon, Brown reaches into the past and situates the events in *Wieland* in a context that transcends the boundaries of the nation-state. This approach has some affinities with Wai Chee Dimock's notion of "deep time," which emphasizes the ties "binding continents and millennia" and notes that literature extends beyond "the official borders of the nation and against the fixed intervals of the clock" to include "thousands of years or thousands of miles" (3-4). And this offers an alternative to interpretations of *Wieland*—such as those of Ed White, who focuses on the figure of Carwin and backcountry politics, or Peter Kafer, who finds the roots of Brown's gothic vision in the political persecution of Quakers during the American Revolution—which have a more narrowly national focus.[31] Even though Brown meant for the family to represent the nation in *Wieland* and hoped that his work would be relevant to contemporaries such as Jefferson, his larger concerns with what constitutes a stable society are not only transnational, but also depend on a sense of history that extends more than a thousand years into the past.

Exploring how Brown may have understood religious enthusiasm through Hume and Gibbon not only expands the range of both Hume's influence and that of the skeptical enlightenment in the Early Republic, but also connects Hume and Gibbon and their interest in the limits of reason, to those gothic or "dark romantic" writers—like Poe and Hawthorne—who were influenced by Brown.[32] Although Brown is considered a crucial figure in the development of the American romance, I argue that—at least in his first novel *Wieland*—his understanding of romance and the gothic derive from concerns that are not distinctly national. The result is a new

[31] In contrast to my emphasis on Brown's interest in the histories of Hume and Gibbon, White builds his case for Brown's interest in backcountry insurrections through the influence of Robert Proud's *History of Pennsylvania* (41-43).
[32] For the influence of Hume in America see Spencer. The list of writers influenced by Brown also includes Percy Bysshe Shelley and George Lippard. For more on Brown's influence see Kafer (xvi-xxi).

story about the origins of the gothic that depends on the ways in which Brown thinks people respond to uncertainty and derives from how Hume figures religion—particularly religious enthusiasm—as a response to fear or uncertain political situations. In this light, *Wieland* sits at the intersection of the local and international events of the 1790s and the particularly American reception of enlightenment histories that deal with the relationship of religion to government over a period of almost two thousand years.

1. Brown and "The Standard English Historians"

As Brown wrote of one of his fictional characters, it is "the books which…when they are admitted into any plan of education, always possess the largest portion of influence" on an individual ("A Lesson on Sensibility" 106). Even as in *Wieland* Clara notes that her story will "exemplify the force of early impressions," so did Brown's early reading of Hume have a lasting effect on him (5). The first extant piece of writing by Brown is from 1783 when he was only twelve years old and demonstrates his early interest in both history and problems of religion and society.[33] Although mutilated and fragmentary, the essay deals with the nature of liberty and the source Brown cites in the fragment is Hume's *History of England*. Brown quotes Hume to the effect that even as the Protestant divines had overthrown a system to which they objected in part because of its tyrannical nature, they immediately set up another system and "could bear no contradiction with regard to it".[34] In the *History of England* this quote introduces a series of persecutions that followed the establishment of the reformation in England under Edward VI, the

[33] This unpublished fragment is identified as "Sample of Liberty to Conscience 1783."
[34] Brown may be quoting from memory as he is slightly inaccurate. Hume wrote: "Though the protestant divines had ventured to renounce opinions, deemed certain during many ages, they regarded, in their turn, the new system as so certain, that they would suffer no contradiction with regard to it; and they were ready to burn in the same flames, from which they themselves has so narrowly escaped, every one that had the assurance to differ from them" (III: 366).

successor to Henry VIII. To the degree that Brown's interests can be deciphered from the fragments that remain, they suggest affinities between Brown's youthful reading and his later work. His emphasis on how the persecuted become the persecutors shows an early appreciation for historical irony and his dramatic descriptions of the bloodshed and martyrdom during the wars of religion—he describes "Scaffolds recking in Holland," the "blood of many," and "victims offer'd upon the gloomy alter"—prefigure the scenes of violence and confusion that characterize his novels. The Scottish philosopher and historian and the future American novelist were equally fascinated by the relationship between religion and civil society and aware of the potential of religion to lead to violence.

Brown's early engagement with Hume's *History of England* reflects the prominent place it held in the transatlantic literary culture of the late eighteenth century. Although Hume is now known primarily as a philosopher, in his own time his reputation was based on his work as a historian. His six-volume *History of England* was published between 1754 and 1761 and reprinted in many editions, which were widely available in both Britain and her North American colonies.[35] Prior to Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* it was, according to Hume's biographer Ernest Mossner, "the most popular and best-selling history published in Britain" (223). In 1762, it was the *History of England* that led James Boswell to call Hume "the greatest writer in Britain" (qtd. in Mossner 223). And in an 1806-1807 review, Brown observed that Hume's *History of England* was still considered definitive: "The standard English historians, Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon, are occasionally republished, and widely circulated."[36] As part of New York's Friendly Club, Brown—with his close friends Elihu Hubbard Smith and William Dunlap—was situated at the center of the nascent American literary scene and club

[35] For the availability of Hume's *History of England* in America see Spencer 10-28, 302-463.
[36] "A Sketch of American Literature For 1806/7" 188.

meetings sometimes began with reading one of Hume's essays.[37] In their diaries, both Smith and Dunlap repeatedly mention reading from or about Hume and Gibbon.[38] Although Hume and Gibbon were sometimes decried for their skeptical religious views—which may have been part of their appeal for Smith and Dunlap, who like Brown were doubters—they were popular throughout America.[39]

As Brown read, wrote, and participated in discussions of the Friendly Club during the late 1790s, the historical accounts offered by Hume and Gibbon would have provided important perspectives from which to consider the tumultuous events of his own time. In a manner that recalls Hume's comment that the "chief use" of history was "only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature," Smith and his friends saw history as offering timeless lessons. On a Saturday evening in 1796, Smith noted that he "Pursued the reading of Gibbon, till breakfast. Brown breakfasted with us…" (239). Later in the same entry he writes:

> Club night—at our house—Johnson's night—Present, Alsop, Brown, Dunlap, Johnson, Kent, Smith, W. W. Woolsey. Johnson read us the History of the interior state of France, during the latter part of the reign of Robespierre, & for several months after his fall, written more than two thousand years ago, by Thucydides, but then predicated of Corcyra. Much conversation & lively…. (239)

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[37] For the Friendly Club and its role in American literary culture, see Bryan Waterman, *Republic of Intellect*. In his *Diary* Smith records at least two meetings of the Friendly Club that began with one of the members reading from some of Hume's essays as a prompt for discussion (92, 163).

[38] Smith frequently mentions Hume and in a letter he copied into his diary, Smith notes that he had read the "the literary & historical writings of Hume" (261). On another occasion, he notes a "Club night" which included "Conversation on the style of Hume" and on "the historical fidelity of Hume" (399). In a diary entry from 1797, William Dunlap, another participant in the Friendly Club and a good friend of Brown, notes purchasing a second copy of Hume's *History of England* and, demonstrating his familiarity with the text, observes that only one of the two editions includes a letter by Adam Smith (84). Much as Brown had read Hume's *History of England* as a young boy, so Dunlap read it with his own son; for a period of more than a year in 1797 and 1798, Dunlap's diary records their daily progress. Joseph Ellis remarks on Dunlap's predilection for Hume and attributes his growing interest in history to the discussions of the Friendly Club (114, 138).

[39] For the religious views of Brown, Smith, and Dunlap see Waterman, *Republic of Intellect* 51.

Even as participants in the meetings of the Friendly Club would read about the French Revolution in Thucydides, so Brown would read about the revolutions, conspiracies, fear, and enthusiasm of his own time in Hume and Gibbon.

In May, 1799, Brown published a critical review in *The Monthly Magazine* called "Parallel Between Hume, Robertson and Gibbon."[40] Brown sets out to consider "to which, when compared with each other, the pre-eminence is due" (14). Dividing his comparison into five categories, he considers each historian's "system of opinions," deductive ability, decency, style, and narrative skill (14). In regard to "that system of opinions which [each historian] has happened to adopt, and to the inculcation of which his performance is wholly or chiefly devoted" (14), Brown carefully endeavors to remain neutral between the "two sects" into which he divides his audience—"one of which is friendly, and the other hostile to religion" (15). Indeed, he notes that "the texture of that creed" which each reader has "previously embraced" will necessarily influence his or her opinion (15). However, despite allowing that "Hume was the enemy not of any particular form of religion, but of religion itself," Brown proceeds to defend him (15). One of the ways he does this is by castigating Gibbon for "the tricks and artifices of dispute, masked allusions, sarcastic hints, and ambiguous irony," through which he has tried to "undermine the sacred edifice" of religion (15). Relative to Gibbon, Hume "is, at least, open and explicit in the avowal of his sentiments" (15). Although Hume has "ample room for noting the effects of superstition and priestcraft," he may even, according to Brown, appeal to "a Christian reader" when he "condemns the abuses of enthusiasm and hypocrisy" (15). And "readers of a different kind," Brown observes—perhaps thinking of his own circle of friends—"will hasten to assign him the first place among sages and historians" (15).

[40] Although Brown mentions all three historians in other places, almost always in the same order, this is the only place where he investigates their work in depth.

If his views on religion could be one of the key obstacles to appreciating Hume, in the second category—"skill in deducing one event from another, and marking the influence of political transactions on the condition of those who are subject to that influence"—Brown argues that, "the sagacity and comprehensiveness of Hume is great beyond example. Compared with him, Gibbon and Robertson sink into inferiority" (16). And in terms of the third category, decency, Brown roundly condemns Gibbon for his "polluted taste and debauched imagination," but observes how "Robertson and Hume are totally exempt from this odious blemish" (16, 17).

Hume also excels his peers in terms of style and narrative skill. Gibbon's style follows no "known model," "is distinguished by a certain loftiness and uniformity, from which he never stoops or relaxes"—his "loftiness" has the added fault of being "artificial and obscure"—and "is difficult to understand" because of his "epigrammatic brevity and unnatural arrangement of his thoughts" (17). In sum, "Nothing is expressed in simple terms" (18). "Hume and Robertson," however, "accomplish the true end of writing, which is, to impart our meaning swiftly and clearly" (18). Brown compliments Hume in language that is all the more striking because it could so easily be applied to his own style: "It would not be easy to conceive a more powerful contrast to the obscurity and pomp of Gibbon, than the clear, flexible, and simple language of Hume" (18). And lastly, in terms of narrative skill, Brown writes that, "Hume excels all men in pourtraying the heroes of the scene. His narrative is coherent and luminous. It affords pleasure to the old and the young, and fiction itself is outdone in its power to command and delight attention by the seductions of his tale" (18). While throughout this article Brown's respect for Hume is tempered by his need to adopt a neutral pose and not offend readers who would find Hume's views on religion objectionable, it is clear that Brown regards Hume as the preeminent historian of the age.

If Brown was not interested in openly acknowledging Gibbon as an influence, he was nevertheless very familiar with Gibbon. When documenting Gibbon's indecencies he is sufficiently thorough as to indicate that he probably had a copy in front of him as he wrote.[41] But Brown's knowledge of Gibbon goes beyond his repeated quotations from *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in his review, Gibbon's influence is also clearly evident in a short story that he published in the same issue of the *Monthly Magazine* as "Parallel between Hume, Robertson and Gibbon." In "Thessalonica: A Roman Story," Brown draws directly on Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* for key components of the story and the two authors seem to share similar concerns with questions of historical causation and how an apparently peaceful civil society may become destabilized. And, although it was published a year later, "Thessalonica" shares an atmosphere of fear and terror with *Wieland* and shows how Brown drew specific examples from the histories he read and dramatized them.[42]

Like so many of Brown's fictions, "Thessalonica" is a story of fear and terror written in the first person by "a witness and partaker" in the events described—in this case, the chief magistrate of the city of Thessalonica during the reign of the Emperor Theodosius (51). In his selection of a narrator, Brown draws directly on Gibbon, who observes that the chief magistrate was in a privileged position to give a "faithful narrative" of what Gibbon calls "the inhuman massacre of the people of Thessalonica" by the soldiers whose job was to protect them (II: 52-53).[43] But the real point of Brown's tale seems to be the privileged glimpse the narrator purports

[41] Brown is probably more thorough in providing examples of Gibbon's indecency than in any other area.
[42] In this regard, Brown may have had a particular affinity for the work of Gibbon—see Barnard (330 n. 10).
[43] Gibbon juxtaposes the massacre with "the generous pardon of the citizens of Antioch" and Brown appears to draw on both of these descriptions for his fiction (II: 52). Specific aspects of Gibbon's account of Antioch, such as how "the governor of the province dispatched a faithful

to offer into the secret causes of this event. It is to this end that Brown invents a series of minor events or accidents that help explain these causes. And in delineating them, he appears to have been prompted by Gibbon's own comment on the paucity of information available about this event and the problem of identifying cause and effect in history: "There are few observers, who possess a clear and comprehensive view of the revolutions of society; and who are capable of discovering the nice and secret springs of action, which impel, in the same uniform direction, the blind and capricious passions of a multitude of individuals" (II: 69). Brown's urge to discover or invent such "nice and secret springs of action" is characteristic of his fiction and indicates his interest in historical causation.

In *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Brown found not only a source, but also a concern with the same mysteries—such as the "revolutions of society"—which he had made it his own mission to explore. For Gibbon, throughout his history, these mysterious revolutions are closely connected to the relationship between religion and the state. The massacre of the inhabitants of Thessalonica leads directly into the famous account of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, demanding penance from Theodosius and having his demands met—perhaps the paradigmatic example of the growing ascendancy of religious authority over civil authority in the late classical period. Gibbon glosses this account of Ambrose and Theodosius with a quote from the early Republican theorist Montesquieu, who along with Hume was so influential for James Madison, and then briefly expands on the dangers of having the "motions of the royal animal" depend on the whims of a "priest" (II: 60).[44] And Brown's chief magistrate even echoes a larger theme of

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narrative" of the events there and how "the guilty city was severely punished by a long and dreadful interval of suspense" while messages were sent to and fro, find direct echoes in Brown's story (II: 53, 54).

[44] For the influence of Montesquieu and Hume on Madison see Elkins and McKitrick 81-87, 105-106.

Gibbon's history when he sees in the massacre of the entire town a harbinger of "the destruction of the empire" (52). For that matter, in "Thessalonica" at least, Brown seems to acquiesce in another of Gibbon's judgments, from the same chapter, that "Accident is commonly the parent of disorder" (II: 22).[45]

Brown's "Parallel Between Hume, Robertson and Gibbon" and "Thessalonica" indicate how the histories of Hume and Gibbon loom large in the background of his development as a writer of romances. Brown's own comparison of the historians reveals both his formidable critical acumen and his understanding of historiographical nuance. It also shows that he was clearly familiar with Hume's religious views and understood how they pervade Hume's *History of England* and influence the way Gibbon employs enthusiasm in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

2. Hume on Enthusiasm

When Hume began to write his *History of England*, almost all of his major philosophical works were already behind him. He had been disappointed when his first work, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, while well-received in some quarters, failed to reach as broad an audience as he desired. And although he later recast elements of that work as an *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, he also began writing essays in order to reach the broad audience he desired (Mossner 139). However, instead of representing a turn away from philosophy, Hume's essays recast his philosophy in a form that he hoped would be more appealing—and lucrative—than that of a treatise (Mossner 140). It was Hume's eventual turn to history that was probably most

[45] In "Thessalonica" Brown creates a series of minor events or accidents that explain both the behavior of the mob which kills Botheric and the soldiers who massacre the inhabitants of the city.

significant for spreading his ideas. As Nicholas Phillipson has observed, Hume was "the most historically minded of philosophers and the most subtly and profoundly philosophical of historians" and his *History of England* "established Hume's intellectual reputation and was the most important contemporary vehicle for his thought" (4). How Hume thought about religious enthusiasm in his *History of England* drew directly on his earlier body of work.

In his essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" Hume identifies superstition and enthusiasm as "corruptions of true religion," which, "though both pernicious, are yet of a very different, and even of a contrary nature" (73).[46] Superstition is when a vague sense of dread stems from no identifiable source and, "where real objects of terror are wanting, the soul…finds imaginary ones, to whose power and malevolence it sets no limits" and which it then has "to appease" (73-74). It stems from a combination of "Weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance" (74). And he argues that a certain "state of mind" is particularly conducive to superstition: "The mind of man is subject to certain unaccountable terrors and apprehensions, proceeding either from the unhappy situation of private or public affairs, from ill health, from a gloomy and melancholy disposition, or from the concurrence of all these circumstances" (73). Enthusiasm, however, stems from a different "state of mind"—a combination of "Hope, pride, presumption, a warm imagination, together with ignorance" (74). In contrast to the "state of mind" conducive to superstition, Hume notes that, "the mind of man is also subject to an unaccountable elevation and presumption, arising from prosperous success, from luxuriant

[46] Like his *History of England*, Hume's *Essays* were also widely available in America—see Spencer 10-28, 302-423. "Of Supersition and Enthusiasm" was included in the first edition of Hume's two volume *Essays, Moral and Political* which was published in 1741 and 1742. Over the course of numerous editions the title changed to *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* and, while particular essays were included in some editions and not in others, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" was included in every edition from 1741 to 1777, the last edition that Hume corrected.

health, from strong spirits, or from a bold and confident disposition" (74). This leads the imagination to entertain "great, but confused conceptions," and, since nothing outward can match anything of such stature, these "raptures, transports, and surprising flights of fancy" are "attributed to the immediate inspiration of that Divine Being who is the object of devotion" (74). The individuals most prone to enthusiasm are those with apparently strong, but ill-regulated, characters: "the inspired person comes to regard himself as a distinguished favourite of the Divinity; and when this phrensy once takes place, which is the summit of enthusiasm, every whimsy is consecrated: human reason, and even morality, are rejected as fallacious guides; and the fanatic madman delivers himself over, blindly and without reserve, to the supposed illapses of the Spirit, and to inspiration from above" (74). Here Hume not only builds on the established medical critique of enthusiasm, but also, through his repeated use of "fanatic" and "madman," emphasizes the particular power and danger of the enthusiast.[47]

Hume argues that both enthusiasm and superstition have a direct "influence on government and society," but this influence operates in very different ways for each (75). Mainly because of what might be called the life-cycle of each, he claims, "*superstition is an enemy to civil liberty, and enthusiasm a friend to it*" (78). Superstition, which initially "seems inoffensive" because it is not particularly disruptive, becomes progressively more dangerous when "the priest," after slowly "establish[ing] his authority, becomes the tyrant and disturber of human society" (78). Enthusiasm, although initially disruptive, tends to become more moderate with time—Hume cites the example of the Quakers. Thus, in contrast to superstition, "enthusiasm is destructive of all ecclesiastical power" (78). This distinction relates directly back to the "state of mind" characteristic of each: "enthusiasm, being the infirmity of bold and ambitious tempers, is

[47] On enthusiasm and melancholy see Heyd (44-71).

naturally accompanied with a spirit of liberty; as superstition, on the contrary, renders men tame and abject, and fits them for slavery" (78). It is striking that, although this was written many years before Hume began his *History of England*, to justify this distinction Hume claims the support of "ENGLISH history" (78).

But Hume also suggests that the relationship between superstition and enthusiasm on one hand and "government and society" on the other, is more complicated than his neat divisions would seem to allow. In "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" he argues that superstition itself may be rooted in a felt unhappiness with either "private or public affairs" (73). Thus superstition may not only have public effects but also public causes. And, near the end of his influential essay "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth," Hume notes that enthusiasm, which in "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" he identified as "*a friend*" to civil liberty, may also be opposed to the public interest: "We know not to what length enthusiasm, or other extraordinary movements of the human mind, may transport men to the neglect of all order and public good" (*Essays* 528-529). When it comes to maintaining a stable and orderly civil society, Hume is suspicious of both superstition and enthusiasm.

For Hume, superstition and enthusiasm are not different examples of false religion, but different facets of religion that exist on a spectrum of religious behavior. For example, elements of superstition permeate all religions—even the most enthusiastic sects: "As superstition is a considerable ingredient in almost all religions, even the most fanatical; there being nothing but philosophy able entirely to conquer these unaccountable terrors; hence it proceeds, that in almost every sect of religion there are priests to be found: but the stronger mixture there is of superstition, the higher is the authority of the priesthood" (75). A crucial aspect of Hume's project is to offer natural explanations of religious behavior. Thus, even if the depths to which

the mind may sink on its way to superstition, or the heights to which it may rise on its way to enthusiasm are themselves "unaccountable," what may seem like divine inspiration must be explained through such natural causes as a different "state of mind" in each case.

When superstition and enthusiasm are understood as both contributing to the "mixture" of religious behavior, the distinctions between them fade relative to their common root in what Hume considers the foundation of all religion—fear. In "The Natural History of Religion" Hume attempts to provide, as the title suggests, an explanation of religion based on natural causes.[48] He argues that religion originally stemmed from "the ordinary affections of human life; the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst of revenge, the appetite for food and other necessaries," and "hopes and fears of this nature, especially the latter," in which primitive men "see the first obscure traces of divinity" (140). Although he allows that as societies grow more civilized an enlightened few might deduce theism from philosophy or natural theology, Hume emphasizes that since the beginning of human history the vast majority of mankind has derived their religious beliefs from an emotional and irrational response to that which is unknown and apparently inexplicable:

> Convulsions in nature, disorders, prodigies, miracles, though the most opposite to the plan of a wise superintendent, impress mankind with the strongest sentiments of religion; the causes of events seeming then the most unknown and unaccountable. Madness, fury, rage, and an inflamed imagination, though they sink men to the level of beasts, are, for a like reason, often supposed to be the only dispositions, in which we can have any immediate communication with the Deity. (154)

[48] This is the second of two key questions that Hume poses in this essay. After he briefly considers the question of whether or not religion has "its foundation in reason," Hume claims the answer is "obvious" and that "The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion" (134). However, it may be that these comments are merely pro forma because—when he describes superstition and enthusiasm as "corruptions of true religion"—Hume leaves only enough space between them to accommodate a version of true religion that is reasonable or philosophical.

Here Hume's choice of words recalls how he described enthusiasm in "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm"—except that he goes farther and employs vocabulary that associates it with the primitive or bestial.

In "The Natural History of Religion" it becomes clear that even if extreme forms of religion, such as superstition and enthusiasm, are particularly dangerous, Hume believes that all forms of religion are irrational and likely pernicious: "The primary religion of mankind arises chiefly from an anxious fear of future events" (176). When imagining an "invisible, unknown power," the imagination, acting upon any "image of vengeance, severity, cruelty, and malice," will then "augment the ghastliness and horror, which oppresses the amazed religionist," so that he "represents the specters of divinity under the most dreadful appearances imaginable" (176). While enthusiasm, because of how it tends to challenge authority, may be a lesser evil than superstition, they are each different facets of religion—and religion and terror are inextricably associated for Hume. In Hume's *History of England*, this terror is particularly evident during his account of the English Civil Wars.

3. An Atmosphere of Fear and Terror: The English Civil Wars, the 1790s, and Wieland

Brown claims that while *Wieland* exhibits "the latent springs and occasional perversions of the human mind" the events are based on "an authentic case, remarkably similar to that of Wieland" (3). In 1781 in upstate New York, James Yates murdered his family. This incident, which has long been acknowledged as the case to which Brown refers, was reported in several local papers at the time and, in July, 1796, was the subject of an article in *The New York Weekly Magazine; or Miscellaneous Repository*. This article has been a popular starting point for critics interested in Brown's treatment of religion and possible connections between different religious

groups and the murders in *Wieland*.[49] But, while Brown surely draws on the Yates murders in *Wieland*, how he thought about religious enthusiasm is more significant than details of the events themselves. Enthusiasm is closely connected to the atmosphere of fear and terror that pervades the novel and leads to the development of the American gothic, which may be Brown's most remarkable and influential achievement. The sources of this atmosphere of fear and terror have been sought in a variety of places. For example, Alan Axelrod sees them in the anxiety of living on a frontier (55, 57), Pamela Clemit emphasizes the influence of the Godwinian novel (137), Charles Bradshaw argues for the influence of the Illuminati conspiracy on *Wieland* (369-371), and Peter Kafer is convinced its roots lie in the treatment of Brown's Quaker forebears during the American Revolution (38-46).[50] Americans also closely followed the progress of the French Revolution—connected in the American imagination to the geographically closer Haitian Revolution with its unsettling racial element—which led to a conservative counter-reaction that included such political consequences as growing partisanship, the XYZ Affair, and the Alien and Sedition Acts. While most critics recognize that this environment must have contributed to his fictions, I argue that Brown thought about contemporary events partially through an understanding of the past that he derived from Hume.

[49] A few recent examples include Marshall Surratt, who sees the journal of the Calvinist David Brainerd as a potential source for Brown—especially in regard to the elder Wieland (316); Daniel Williams, whose article emphasizes the possible significance of another set of famous murders committed by a deist named Beadle; and Rowland Hughes, who argues that the Yates murders and thus *Wieland* need to be seen in light of "the history of Shakerism in the United States" (47).

[50] For Kafer the roots of Brown's gothic vision were in how the Quaker community, in which Brown was raised, was suspected of treason and persecuted during the American Revolution. Thus, although in "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" Hume identifies the Quakers as an example of how enthusiasm might cool into respectability, in America tensions between Quakers and non-Quakers were much more recent.

While Brown's vision probably drew on many different sources, the atmosphere of fear and terror and its close connection to religious enthusiasm bears a striking resemblance to how Hume described the English Civil Wars in his *History of England*. The events, the individuals, and the relationship between religion and partisanship during the extended political and military conflict demonstrate how enthusiasm was both the cause and effect of this atmosphere of fear. Thus the very period frequently identified as crucial to the foundation of English liberties—and which eventually served as an inspiration and even a rhetorical justification for the American Revolution—is for Hume not only a period of increasing democratization, but also a period of rupture and terror. Religious enthusiasm and civil liberties are inextricably intertwined in Hume's account—religious enthusiasm is both dangerous and yet can establish or sustain civil liberties during periods of absolutism. And, as he relates the events, Hume works to give his readers a sense of what it might have been like to live during the terror of the Civil Wars with exquisite narrative skill, precisely the aspect of his writing that Brown praised so highly.

Even more than in the rest of his *History of England*, Hume's discussion of the English Civil Wars draws directly on his earlier distinctions between superstition and enthusiasm.[51] In the first edition, Hume included two passages that, although he removed them in later editions, essentially set the terms of debate for the discussion of those disturbances.[52] In the first passage he lumped all of the "first reformers," from Luther on, together and noted that they "may safely be pronounced to have been universally inflamed with the highest enthusiasm" (I: xiv). Then,

[51] An example of how Hume uses these categories throughout his *History of England* may be found at the beginning of the chapter on the reformation, which the young Brown uses as a source in his first essay. Hume notes that the "an enthusiastic strain of devotion" marked many reformers and, "Wherever the reformation prevailed over the opposition of civil authority, this genius of religion appeared in its full extent, and was attended with consequences, which, though less durable, were, for some time, not less dangerous than those which were connected with the ancient superstition" (III: 339).

[52] For a discussion of Hume's decision to remove these two passages see Mossner 305-306.

employing enthusiasm and fanaticism as almost synonymous, he observed that, "These two species of religion, the superstitious and fanatical, stand in diametrical opposition to each other," and traced how the enthusiasm of the reformers gradually made its way into England (I: xiv). As the reformation spread to places where it was not "tempered" by a converted monarch but in opposition to authority, "the genius of fanaticism displayed itself in its full extent" and an "inflamed imagination…had full liberty to pour out itself, in wild, unpremeditated addresses to the Divinity" (I: xv). With the return of the Marian exiles under Elizabeth this "enthusiastic genius" was "imported… in its full force and virulence" into England (I: xv). This passage originally preceded Hume's description of the Hampton Court Conference, convened by James I, which failed to reconcile the "religious disputes between the church and the puritans" (V: 10). The second passage described the "blind submission… inculcated by all superstition" and explained how superstition is "very advantageous to civil as well as ecclesiastical authority" (I: xvii). This passage originally followed Hume's description of the Gunpowder Plot. In their respective situations near the beginning of the Volume V, these two passages closely linked enthusiasm and superstition to the roots of the English Civil Wars.

Hume's interpretation of enthusiasm and superstition was so intertwined with his explanations of historical events that it was effectively structural. In regard to enthusiasm, for example, he makes its connection with political liberty clear. He identifies "a violent turn towards republicanism, and a zealous attachment to civil liberty [as] principles nearly allied to that religious enthusiasm, with which they were actuated" (V: 10). But he is careful to note that enthusiasm functions as a double-edged sword:

> The spirit too of enthusiasm; bold, daring, and uncontroulled; strongly disposed their minds to adopt republican tenets; and inclined them to arrogate, in their actions and conduct, the same liberty, which they assumed, in their rapturous flights and ecstasies. Ever since the first origin of that sect, through the whole

> reign of Elizabeth as well as of James, puritanical principles had been understood in a double sense, and expressed the opinions favourable both to political and ecclesiastical liberty. (V: 559)[53]

Enthusiasm was both constitutive of political liberty and given to excesses that endangered the very liberty the enthusiasts presumed. In this regard, Hume observed that from "the first reformers" to "the Mahometans in Asia," "the doctrine of absolute decrees has ever been intimately connected with the enthusiastic spirit" (V: 131). This is a direct echo of his analysis of enthusiasm in "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm."

In his volume on the Civil Wars alone, Hume's multiple portraits of individual enthusiasts range from clever or duplicitous political leaders such as Cromwell or Henry Vane the Younger—who he describes as having an "enthusiastic genius" and being "extravagant in the ends which he pursued, sagacious and profound in the means which he employed; incited by the appearances of religion, negligent of the duties of morality"—to a pair of female prophetesses (V: 294).[54] Even in this company, the description of the "desperate enthusiast" Felton, who murdered Charles I's advisor Lord Buckingham, stands out as both representative and particularly significant (V: 203). Felton was motivated to murder through a combination of "an ardent, melancholic temper," an "unsociable mind," and—in the context of the "national discontent" that was in some unspecified manner "communicated" to him—a confusion between "private resentment" and a "national grievance" (V: 203). "Religious fanaticism farther inflamed [Felton's] vindictive reflections" and, after he was discovered as the killer, he "very sedately answered, *I am he*." During a time of political turmoil conspiracies were naturally suspected, but

[53] This quotation is from a passage that was in the text of the first edition and included as a note in later editions. It was not excised because of the topic—in fact Hume noted it "*contains views so important*" he did not want to cut it—but it was cut, Hume remarked, "in order to avoid, as much as possible, the style of dissertation in the body of his history" (V: 559).
[54] Hume identifies one as a "prophetess" and the other as "illuminated by prophetical visions" (V: 263, 533).

when queried in this regard Felton replied "that no man living had credit enough with him to have disposed him to such an action; that he had not even entrusted his purpose to any one; that the resolution proceeded only from himself, and the impulse of his own conscience" (V: 204-205). While enthusiasm clearly prompts Felton to commit murder, Hume's portrait of Felton recalls two of his earlier arguments, first that either enthusiasm or superstition might potentially be related to public affairs and second that the particular cause or causes of any specific case of enthusiasm would arise from internal causes that were "unaccountable."

Although the precise causes of Felton's enthusiasm may remain elusive to Hume, there are some striking similarities between Hume's portrait of Felton and Brown's description of Wieland. Felton's gloomy, melancholy tone, his composure when discovered, and his remarkable lack of remorse all find their counterpart in Wieland. Both Felton and Wieland are, like Yates, convinced that the divine will compels them to commit murder and both act on their conviction without any sense that they might have a responsibility to human authority.[55] So, while Yates, not Felton, is clearly the main model for Wieland, several key elements of Hume's description of Felton are quite similar to Brown's description of Wieland. Of course, since Brown clearly reworked the material on which he drew, neither the murder committed by Felton nor the murders committed by Yates, fits perfectly with the details of the murders committed by Wieland. But, as Brown adapted the account of the murders committed by Yates for his own purposes, Felton would have offered Brown an already established model of a notable enthusiast, whose actions were more clearly connected to politics than those of Yates. While Rowland Hughes sees a public purpose present in the 1796 magazine article about Yates, for him that

[55] In *Wieland* this attitude is what Clara's uncle claims was so chilling about Wieland's confession in court. According to him, Wieland spoke "with significance of gesture, and a tranquil majesty, which denoted less of humanity than god-head. Judges, advocates and auditors were panic-struck and breathless with attention" (151).

version is most revealing when it comes to the gender politics of the new nation (52). He argues that the significance of the article for interpreting *Wieland* "lies in the way this narrative has been skillfully constructed to suggest that masculine aggression can be restrained and contained by female agency" (56). In contrast, I argue that the political context is more significant in terms of what it reveals about the relationship of religion and politics. Certainly the political atmosphere of fear and terror that Hume described during the English Civil Wars may have resonated with Brown. The copy of *Wieland* that he sent to the Vice-President, Thomas Jefferson, suggests that he may have had some sort of public purpose in mind as well. Even as conspiracies were likely to be suspected during the English Civil Wars, so were conspiracies suspected in the United States in the late 1790s when Brown was writing *Wieland*.

The emerging Jeffersonian Democratic-Republican societies in the late 1790s helped make it a time of increasing, though much decried, partisanship in the United States and raised the specter of overturning traditional forms of political and social authority. For Hume the development of parties only aggravated the disruptive potential of enthusiasm, which could spread from one person to another as a sort of "social contagion" (V: 12). When describing how England was becoming progressively more partisan during the period of the English Civil Wars, Hume observes, "one furious enthusiast was able, by his active industry, to surmount the indolent efforts of many sober and reasonable antagonists" (V: 285). Eventually, "nothing farther was regarded than the affections and detachments of the parties" (V: 293).[56] Such a state constituted a democratic madness that "resounded with faction and fanaticism" and rhetoric noted for its "Noise and fury, cant and hypocrisy" (V: 294). And Hume observes that, "So

[56] For Hume—as he makes clear later on the same page—this partisanship was connected to a democratic form of government: "the government, without any seeming violence or disorder, being changed, in a moment, from a monarchy almost absolute, to a pure democracy" (V: 293).

violent was the democratical, enthusiastic spirit diffused throughout the nation, that a total confusion of all rank and order was justly to be apprehended" (V: 361). While writing *Wieland*, Brown might easily have made a connection between the "social contagion" of enthusiasm, increasing partisanship, and more democratic challenges to the traditional social order. Enthusiasm and politics were not clearly linked in the account of the Yates murders, but they were in Hume's "On Superstition and Enthusiasm" and in his volume on the English Civil Wars in his *History of England*.[57] And, according to Hume, the very bonds of society fell apart in the face of enthusiasm: "The fanatical spirit, let loose, confounded all regard to ease, safety, interest; and dissolved every moral and civil obligation" (V: 380). But if the danger of a more direct and boisterous democracy gaining political power was still only an unrealized and potential danger in the United States, foreign examples made it seem even more ominous.

Although Hume wrote years before the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution, he describes the rise of enthusiasts to position of civil authority in a way that presages the later event. After having been subject to the authority of the crown, the Commons "determined to fortify themselves likewise with terrors": they "disarmed the crown; they established the maxims of rigid law and liberty; and they spread the terror of their own authority" (V: 291). Hume's narrative picks up speed as the conflict nears—it is clear, forceful, and mimics the urgency he describes:

> Ship-money was declared illegal and arbitrary; the sentence against Hambden cancelled; the court of York abolished; compositions for knighthood stigmatized; the enlargement of the forests condemned; patents for monopolies annulled; and every late measure of administration treated with reproach and obloquy. To day, a sentence of the star-chamber was exclaimed against: To morrow, a decree of the high commission. (V: 297)

[57] See Juster for how enthusiasm and politics were much more closely associated during the English Civil Wars than during later periods (7).

As “To morrow” follows “To day,” the sudden shift to the narrative present is compounded by concerns about the future and what awful event will happen next. Whether disseminated through individuals or parties, through acts of murder or acts of legislation, enthusiasm could create an atmosphere of fear and terror. As Hume succinctly summarized the atmosphere during the English Civil Wars: “These sudden and violent revolutions held the whole nation in terror and astonishment” (V: 531).

Brown lived in an age of Revolution. He wrote *Wieland* as the French and Haitian Revolutions were winding down and the effects of each were being felt in America. He grew up in a country that had recently undergone one revolution and in which the peaceful transition of power had not yet been tested in a partisan environment. Having read Hume, who makes it clear the causes of the English Civil Wars were almost entirely religious and precipitated by the acts of enthusiasts raised to positions of civil authority, he might naturally be concerned about what role religious enthusiasm would play in the current situation.[58] And Hume describes the atmosphere of the English Civil Wars as pervaded by fear and terror, thus building on his earlier descriptions of not only superstition and enthusiasm, but also the roots of religion itself. Having “an anxious fear of future events” might have seemed to Brown not only natural but also prudent and this atmosphere permeates *Wieland* and many of Brown’s other writings from the time. And if the family in *Wieland* is “a model from which to sketch the condition of a nation,” some of his fictions, such as “Thessalonica,” even deal explicitly with the maintenance of civil peace.

[58] For more examples of the connections Hume drew between enthusiasm and the causes of the English Civil Wars see V: 303, 572.

4. A Latent Succession: Enthusiasm from the First Reformers to the Albigenses and Camisards to Wieland

Although *Wieland* is identified on the title page as "An American Tale," the story neither begins nor ends in America. The first two chapters provide Clara's account of her father and the father of the murderer, the elder Wieland. They recount his German ancestry, his apprenticeship in England, and his migration to Pennsylvania, where he established a family and died in a mysterious conflagration in a temple he had had built for his deity. In the last chapter, which serves as a postscript to and reflection on the earlier story, Clara writes the second of the two letters that comprise the novel from France three years after the first letter. This European frame suggests that the international context for *Wieland* may have been particularly significant for Brown and that, when he mentions in the "Advertisement" to *Wieland* that he "aims at the illustration of some important branches of the moral constitution of man," they are such that transcend the particulars of time and geography (3). *Wieland* even displays Brown's curiosity about how ideas are transmitted from one place or person to another over what Dimock calls "deep time." Although it may seem as if Brown's mention of the Albigenses and Camisards has been exhaustively explored—one critic refers to them as "obvious and overworked references"—understanding the context through which Brown understood the significance of the Albigenses and Camisards is key (Surratt 310). So, while Kafer establishes there was a rich history of radical Protestantism around Philadelphia and Brown may have known people with ties to the Albigenses and Camisards (113-119), Brown may also have understood these groups as representative because of how they had already been interpreted by Hume and Gibbon. When read in light of the histories of Hume and Gibbon, several references to the Albigenses and Camisards at the beginning of *Wieland* suggest both the immense weight of history that he brings

to bear on the events of the novel and the way in which he may have understood *Wieland* as an examination of how, after periods of dormancy, enthusiasm periodically erupts amidst moments of heightened conflict between religion and civil society.

The problem of enthusiasm is introduced near the beginning of *Wieland*. The elder Wieland spent his early years in Saxony—the same province where centuries earlier Martin Luther had started the Protestant Reformation—and, though descended from nobility, he was, after the death of both his parents, "apprenticed to a London trader, and passed seven years of mercantile servitude" (7). In this state—one he found unhappy—the elder Wieland "chanced to light upon a book written by one of the teachers of the Albigenses, or French Protestants" (7). It lay open "by some accident," his eyes "lighted at length upon the page," and he discovered that it "contained an exposition of the doctrine of the sect of Camissards" (7, 8). Guided only by "the writings of the Camissard apostle," the elder Wieland began to study the Bible and developed a sincere and idiosyncratic faith dependent on biblical interpretations Clara describes as "hasty," "formed on a narrow scale," and in which she observes that "Every thing was viewed in a disconnected position. One action and one precept were not employed to illustrate and restrict the meaning of another" (8). From the isolated study of books alone in his room to when he constructs a building for his personal use as a temple where his devotions "must be performed alone," the elder Wieland's faith is marked by its solitary nature (10).

Brown had apparently intended to situate the elder Wieland within the tradition of the Albigenses and Camisards from the beginning. Brown's "Outline" for Wieland includes his initial ideas for the elder Wieland:

> Wieland was of saxon origin. He was born 1700. He was apprenticed in London at the age of 15. He contracted a gloomy & religious spi[r]it, from the perusal of the works of the first reformers. He built up a system of his own. The

> Savoyard protestant faith was his. See Chambers Cyclopædia. At the age of 22. He retired to America, with a view to enjoy his tenets unmolested. [59]

While the "Outline" confirms that the elder Wieland's religious "system" really was "his own" and that his beliefs made him unwelcome in London, it differs slightly from the completed novel in that there the elder Wieland is already "morose and gloomy" before he reads any religious books (7). It also fails to clearly identify "the first reformers"—though it would seem to suggest they are related to the "Savoyard protestant faith" that the elder Wieland adopts. And, although in the "Outline" Brown identifies "Chambers Cyclopædia" as a possible source, as the critic Alan Axelrod notes, it offers no entry for "Savoyards" and only the entry on "Albigenses" might have helped Brown.[60] But this entry offers only limited information that does not fit with the details of how Brown describes the elder Wieland or Brown's interest in how enthusiasm is communicated from one generation to another and the circumstances in which this transmission takes place (Chambers; Chambers et al.).

The Albigenses lived in an area of southeastern France and were labeled as heretics and persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church during the Albigensian Crusade in the early thirteenth century (Tyerman 563-605). The boundaries of this area, which is sometimes called the

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[59] Although the title is not Brown's, the "Outline" was apparently composed by Brown prior to writing and contains lists of possible names for characters that indicate the significance he attached to names, as well as many of his thoughts about possible directions for the plot—some realized and some not. This transcription is that of Sydney Krause and S. W. Reid—the editors of the Kent State edition of *Wieland* (427). The brackets represent an apparent spelling correction in the original manuscript and I have followed the line breaks in their edition.

[60] Axelrod found no entry for "Savoyards" when he examined Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopædia*. Axelrod suggests Brown may have meant the Protestant sect of "Waldenses," who did appear in the *Cyclopædia*, except that he thinks that they were too "simple and mild" to be "a likely source for a 'gloomy,' let alone fanatical, religious spirit" (65). The Waldenses, he notes, were "often confused with their neighbors to the east, the Albigenses," and since the article on the Albigenses in the Cyclopædia "stresses the sect's Manicheanism," Axelrod believes this is a more likely source for Brown (65). Axelrod refers to the fifth edition published in London from 1741-1743 and the supplement, also published in London, from 1753 (184, n. 12).

Languedoc and may include the region of Savoy, have frequently been nebulous and political authority in the region has been contested for much of its history: it was sometimes independent and other times associated with the powers that ruled either southern France or northwestern Italy. In this region in 1702, not long after Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes which had established toleration of French Protestants in 1598, the Camisards—a group which mixed a desire for political independence with a Protestant tradition of spirit possession—revolted. When both the insurrection and the manifestations of enthusiasm were violently suppressed, several leaders of the movement found their way to London where several French Protestant churches already existed and where they were frequently known as the French Prophets.[61] The excitement created by their presence led to a controversy about toleration of religious expression in 1707—one product of which was "A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm to My Lord *****" by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, which famously argued for meeting enthusiasts with wit and humor instead of persecuting them. This "Letter" was included in Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*—a copy of which was acquired by Hume in 1726 (Mossner 31). And, according to Brown's "Outline," it would only have been eight years after this controversy that the elder Wieland would have arrived in London, where he eventually encountered "the writings of the Camissard apostle" which affected him so profoundly.

The Camisards and French Prophets were frequently seen as notorious enthusiasts in the eighteenth century; for example in "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," Hume mentions "the *camisars* in France" as an example of the "the violence" of enthusiasm. Hume uses the Albigenses again as an example in the first volume of his *History of England.* At the beginning

[61] For the Protestant tradition of spirit possession as it applies to the Camisards, and for the revolt of the Camisards see Garrett 13-34, for their influence in England see 35-58, and for the existing churches in London see 42.

of the thirteenth century, King John failed to maintain the independence of civil authority in the face of the growing power of the Roman pontiff. But Hume, who clearly believes the victory of the Pope inevitable under the circumstances, sees the conflict between John and the clergy as an attempt by John to "oppose *his* temporal to *their* spiritual terrors" (I: 426).[62] Hume suggests that had John been more astute he might have seen "the unbounded and uncontrouled power of the papacy" in the Albigensian Crusade (I: 428):

> He published a crusade against the Albigenses, a species of enthusiasts in the south of France, whom he denominated heretics; because, like other enthusiasts, they neglected the rites of the church, and opposed the power and influence of the clergy: The people from all parts of Europe, moved by their superstition and their passion for wars and adventures, flocked to his standard: Simon de Montfort, the general of the crusade, acquired to himself a sovereignty in these provinces: The count of Toulouse, who protected, or perhaps only tolerated the Albigenses, was stripped of his dominions: And these sectaries themselves, though the most innocent and inoffensive of mankind, were exterminated with all the circumstances of extreme violence and barbarity. (I: 429)

The conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and the Albigenses was a war between "a species of enthusiasts" and "people…moved by their superstition and their passion for wars and adventures"—in other words, a war between superstition and enthusiasm. But the consequences of this war are manifest mainly in the political realm not the spiritual realm—"the count of Toulouse…was stripped of his dominions"—and in the "extreme violence and barbarity" directed toward the enthusiasts.[63] Here Hume invokes the Albigenses and points out how their example may be widely applicable to other circumstances. And Hume's explanation of this conflict, which emphasizes the connection between enthusiasm and politics, may have been particularly significant for Brown. Consistent with the larger themes of his *History of England*,

[62] Hume prefers an independent civil authority and the success of John's father, King Henry II, in this regard, is part of why he earns Hume's praise as "the greatest prince of his time, for wisdom, virtue, and abilities" (I: 370).
[63] Hume's judgment of the situation fits with that of the historian Christopher Tyerman (566).

Hume particularly emphasizes how the Albigensian Crusade is one example of the dynamic relationship between religion and civil society. At this point in history, these "most innocent and inoffensive" enthusiasts are, after all, on the side of liberty. But if Hume uses the Albigenses as a salutary example, Gibbon situates them as part of a much larger history that has roots in an even earlier period.

In the fifth volume of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon investigates the origin of the Paulicians in the seventh century and their spread and persecution at the hands of the Orthodox Church.[64] Identifying them as enthusiasts and precursors of the Albigenses, he not only borrows Hume's distinctions between enthusiasm and superstition and situates the Albigenses as an example of the ongoing conflict between religion and civil society, but also identifies them as crucial to the transmission of enthusiasm across the ages and as precursors of the Protestant Reformation. According to Gibbon, the environment in which the Paulicians developed was a "long dream of superstition" that followed the elimination of other religious or political alternatives and which left the people subject to the Orthodox Church enervated and "passive" and deprived their "ecclesiastical rulers…of the pleasure, of persecution" (III: 423, 424). In this unlikely setting lay the germ of a far-reaching transformation: "About the middle of the seventh century, a branch of Manichæans was selected as the victims of spiritual tyranny: their patience was at length exasperated to despair and rebellion; and their exile has scattered over the West the seeds of reformation" (III: 424). Even the enlightenment might be included

[64] While his most famous treatment of the relationship between religion and society comes in chapters fifteen and sixteen at the end of the first volume of the *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon continued to explore this topic over the remaining twenty years it took to complete his history. Three chapters, fifty, fifty-one, and fifty-two, on the rise and spread of Islam form the center of the fifth volume. They are preceded by a chapter, forty-nine, that revisits Orthodox Christianity and the problem of superstition and are followed by a chapter that discusses sectarian Christian movements that resisted the power of the Orthodox Church.

among the fruit of this movement: "Yet the services of Luther and his rivals are solid and important; and the philosopher must own his obligations to these fearless enthusiasts" (III: 437). Given Brown's familiarity with *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the influence of the Albigenses and Camisards on the elder Wieland suggests that he too may have been one of these scattered seeds.

Carefully tracing some of the ways in which Gibbon describes how enthusiasm was connected over many centuries and across large geographical areas may help illuminate a larger context for how Brown employs enthusiasm in *Wieland*. Although Gibbon proposes that the Paulicians absorbed the "remnant of the Gnostic sects, and especially the Manichæans of Armenia"—thus giving them a direct lineage from early Christian groups labeled as unorthodox—he identifies their founder as a man named Constantine from the town of Samosata near the Euphrates River (III: 427).[65] Fortuitously provided with a copy of the New Testament, which "became the measure of his studies and the rule of his faith," Constantine developed a "peculiar devotion to the writings and character of St. Paul" (III: 425). His isolated, personal study—strikingly similar to that of the elder Wieland—is, as Gibbon notes, a quintessential example of the personal engagement with the Bible that characterizes much of the Protestant tradition. The Paulicians resisted the "spiritual tyranny" of the Orthodox Church, grew in

[65] Although he associates them with the Manichæans, Gibbon notes that the "Paulicians sincerely condemned the memory and opinions of the Manichæan sect, and complained of the injustice which impressed that invidious name on the simple votaries of St. Paul and of Christ" (III: 426). There is at least one place in *Wieland* that suggests Brown may have had a sort of Manichæan dualism in mind. After Wieland hears voices, Clara recalls how she tried to "investigate the state of his thoughts. After a pause, which he seemed in no wise inclined to interrupt, I spoke to him—'How almost palpable is this dark; yet a ray from above would dispel it.' 'Ay,' said Wieland, with fervor, 'not only physical, but moral night would be dispelled'" (34). The way the "almost palpable" dark is associated with "moral night" and both are contrasted with light might correspond to the Manichæan or gnostic war between a good creator god associated with light and an evil god associated with darkness, who dominates this world.

numbers, and eventually revolted in the ninth century (III: 424). In this war between superstition and enthusiasm, they found a ready ally among those other enthusiasts, the Muslims. While their resistance was eventually futile, Gibbon, as might be expected, associates them with "the spirit of independence" and then claims "their doctrine was introduced and diffused in Europe" (III: 432).

Gibbon is vague about precisely how the ideas of the Paulicians were transmitted from their eastern origins to Europe.[66] According to Peter Brown, such vague connections are not necessarily a weakness, but at least partly a result of the massive scale of Gibbon's project: "throughout the Decline and Fall, Gibbon's sense of the causes of the 'awful revolution' is marked by a sober respect for weighty and complex processes: the word 'insensibly', the image of 'poison' convey this sense throughout the narrative" ("In Gibbon's Shade" 57). According to Gibbon, the Paulicians migrated—a century before their revolt—from Armenia to Thrace and he notes that, "a minute scrutiny might prolong and perpetuate the chain of tradition" (III: 434). Since they were subject to persecution and thus given to secrecy, he suggests that perhaps "their opinions were silently propagated in Rome, Milan, and the kingdoms beyond the Alps" (III: 434). Certainly, by at least the thirteenth century, they had spread "into the heart of Europe" and, "It was in the country of the Albigeois, in the southern provinces of France, that the Paulicians were most deeply implanted" (III: 434, 435).

In spite of the many centuries and vast distances that separated the Paulicians and the Albigenses, Gibbon draws a structural connection between the two groups. He emphasizes the persecution each endured and how the Albigensian Crusade led directly to the founding of the inquisition:

[66] For a similarly vague connection see Tyerman (573-574).

> …the same vicissitudes of martyrdom and revenge which had been displayed in the neighbourhood of the Euphrates, were repeated in the thirteenth century on the banks of the Rhone. The laws of the Eastern emperors were revived by Frederic the second. The insurgents of Tephrice were represented by the barons and cities of Languedoc: Pope Innocent III. surpassed the sanguinary fame of Theodora. It was in cruelty alone that her soldiers could equal the heroes of the Crusades, and the cruelty of her priests was far excelled by the founders of the inquisition; an office more adapted to confirm, than to refute, the belief of an evil principle. (III: 435-436)

But, if the advent of the inquisition increased the degree of cruelty of the persecutions, Gibbon argued that the relationship between religious and civil authority continued to be contested and contained hidden seeds of change: "…the invincible spirit which they had kindled still lived and breathed in the Western world" (III: 436). It was passed on "In the state, in the church, and even in the cloister," through "a latent succession" and culminated in "Zuinglius, Luther, and Calvin" (III: 436). When combined with his claim that even enlightenment philosophers owed much to this tradition, Gibbon thus, with his inimitable irony, neatly turns Tertullian's claim that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" on its head.

The way in which Gibbon presented both the complex relationship between civil and religious authority as it developed and changed over vast periods of time and the founding of the inquisition as inextricably intertwined with the history of religious enthusiasm might have seemed particularly relevant to Brown in the late 1790s. After all, according to Gibbon, the events he described led directly to not only "the first reformers" Brown mentioned in his "Outline," but also, perhaps, even to people such as Brown's own circle of philosophically minded friends. Such connections certainly help explain how, in spite of their being separated by several centuries, Brown could see the Albigenses and Camisards as being virtually synonymous. How Gibbon describes the transmission of enthusiasm over many centuries and such vast

geographical areas suggests a parallel, albeit on a very different scale, with how Brown describes the transmission of enthusiasm in *Wieland*.

The teachings of the Albigenses or Camisards are clearly communicated to the elder Wieland through his own chance encounter with one of their books and his subsequent, solitary study of the Bible. Brown, who lived during a time when print culture was dramatically expanding, indicates that enthusiasm may be spread through texts alone. Even though the elder Wieland "entertained no relish for books," when he opens the book that "contained an exposition of the doctrine of the sect of the Camisards," it grips his mind and refuses to let him go (7, 8). In it the elder Wieland soon happens the famous injunction "Seek and ye shall find" and takes it to mean keep reading—a practice he soon extends to the Bible—"the sacred text" or "the fountain, beyond which it was unnecessary to trace the stream of religious truth; but it was his duty to trace it thus far" (8). When he immigrates to America he brings their doctrines with him—he moves because living in England had "become almost impossible, on account of his religious tenets" and because he intended "to disseminate the truths of the gospel among the unbelieving nations," beginning with the "North-American Indians" (9).[67] The former motivation associates the elder Wieland with the long history of persecution and resistance to tyranny that was, for Hume and Gibbon, inextricably bound to religious enthusiasm, while the latter motivation fits with what might be described as a more traditional way of transmitting enthusiasm. But his mysterious death happens while his children are still young—Clara was "a child of six"—and precisely how Wieland imbibes his own related ideas is more of a mystery (17).

To be sure, there is no single cause that enables the transmission of enthusiasm from one person or group to another. For both Brown and Hume melancholy was also associated with a

[67] That the elder Wieland's family originates in Saxony may even have been intended by Brown to associate him with Luther.

susceptibility to enthusiasm. In fact, Brown goes to great lengths to emphasize temperament as one of the contributing factors in the elder Wieland become an enthusiast. It is only after he "gradually contracted a habit of morose and gloomy reflection" that the elder Wieland becomes susceptible to enthusiasm and, when he happens upon a book written by one of the French Prophets, it is "this state of mind," not any predilection for literature or learning that makes him receptive to it (7, 8). During his isolated study of this book and the Bible he was "alternately agitated by fear and by ecstasy," his previously serious attitude turned "mournful and contemplative," and only after his doubts were gradually eliminated did the "intervals of despondency and doubt" follow (8-9). Clara repeatedly observes similar tendencies in her brother and remarks that he is notable for his "grave" and "melancholy" tendencies (21). Brown's comment about the elder Wieland—that he was in "a state peculiarly fitted for the reception of devotional sentiments"—clearly applies equally to his son (8).

While Wieland and his father are both notable for their melancholy temperaments, Wieland is more educated than his father and, by placing a bust of Cicero within the temple his father had constructed to his deity, he converts it from a temple of enthusiasm to a temple of reason (21). In regard to religion, and the strange voices he hears near that temple and which, in the end, turn out to have issued from Carwin the biloquist, he relies on examining "the ground of his belief," but is still susceptible to false dichotomies and twists reason into support of positions that may rely for support on his imagination as much as evidence (22). Clara observes "an obvious resemblance between him and my father," but "the mind of the son was enriched by science, and embellished with literature" (22). "Moral necessity and calvinistic inspiration" are what he relies on, but he enjoys the solitary study of Ciceronian texts—thus following the same impulse of his father with a different object (23). Immediately before he hears voices Wieland is

engaged in a dispute with a friend over the contents of a letter and only goes to the temple, where he left it, to procure and check the text.[68] At this point the connection between Wieland and his father is emphasized when the discussion among the group of friends leads to their drawing "A parallel" between "a waterfall on the Monongahela" in Pennsylvania and a "cataract… among the Alps of Glarus" in Switzerland" that emphasizes both the connection between Wieland and his father and that between the Old World and the New World (29). And immediately after the instance when Wieland hears the voices, Clara notes that she "could not fail to perceive a shadowy resemblance between it and my father's death" (33). She even repeats that Wieland "is of an ardent and melancholy character" and that he "is, in some respects, an enthusiast, but is fortified in his belief by innumerable arguments and subtilties" (33).

The differences in education and geographic location between the elder Wieland and his son are counteracted by the structural connections drawn between them at this crucial point of the novel. Although it could be communicated by what Hume had called "social contagion," according to Brown enthusiasm could also be communicated through the vehicle of a text. Enthusiasm could lie dormant until, in the natural course of events, the conditions were ripe for it to reappear. The conditions might—as Hume demonstrated in noting the political implications of the Albigensian Crusade—involve the shifting nature of the relationship between civil and religious authority. And—as Gibbon demonstrated in connecting the Paulicians to the Albigenses—the period of dormancy could even extend for centuries and might be transmitted almost insensibly. When someone whose isolation and temperament made him or her particularly susceptible to its influence happened upon a book, religious enthusiasm might erupt and threaten not only individuals, but even—and especially under certain conditions of political

[68] During this time Wieland also closely investigates "the Daemon of Socrates" (45). For how this may connect to the question of religious enthusiasm see Chapter Two.

uncertainty—society as a whole. Enthusiasm was certainly not restricted by geography. Although *Wieland* was advertised as "An American Tale," in the novel Brown emphasizes the transmission of enthusiasm across the Atlantic and the continuities between the Old World and the New World. *Wieland* is not a story about an isolated incident or a peculiarly American phenomenon. Instead, Brown emphasizes the connections between religious enthusiasm and political instability across "deep time." Thus, when the novel concludes with Clara's return to the city of Montpellier—located in the same region of southeastern France that gave rise to the Albigenses and the Camisards—the latent tradition seems set to continue and the connection between Europe and America comes full circle.

5. Distinguishing Romance from History: Brown's Theory of Romance

When Brown sent a copy of *Wieland* to then Vice-President Jefferson, he included a letter in which he attempted to explain the gift. Since he was unacquainted with Jefferson, Brown allows that he is not only "doubtful whether this letter will be opened or read, or, if read, whether its contents will not be instantly dismissed from your memory," but also "whether mere works of imagination and invention are not excluded from your notice." Brown admits that he is "a stranger…to the private occupations and modes of judging of the most illustrious of his fellow citizens," and he acknowledges "that this form of composition may be regarded by you with indifference or contempt, that social and intellectual theories, that the history of facts in the processes of nature and the operations of government may appear to you the only laudable pursuits; that fictitious narratives in their own nature or in the manner in which they have been hitherto conducted may be thought not to deserve notice." But Brown indicates that he offers Jefferson a new form of fiction—that what Jefferson may find objectionable about "fictitious

narratives" is how "they have been hitherto conducted." Instead Brown hopes to engage Jefferson through "an artful display of incidents, the powerful delineation of characters and the train of eloquent and judicious reasoning which may be combined in a fictitious work." Since artfully executed "incidents" and "characters" hardly seem like an innovation, it must be in "the train of eloquent and judicious reasoning" that Brown finds his own work to be original (qtd. in Clark 162).[69]

During the same period of about two years in which Brown composed and published his four most famous novels, Brown carefully considered the relationship between history and romance in a series of several essays. It is clear that Brown developed a definition of romance closely concerned with problems of causation. Brown identified romance by distinguishing the role of the romance writer from that of the historian and, as he worked through this definition, I argue that Brown naturally seems to have been influenced by the person he regarded as the preeminent historian of his age. In this I agree with Mark Kamrath who notes that Brown "located himself philosophically by commenting on why Hume excelled as a writer of history" (242). But Kamrath does not connect Brown's philosophical interest in Hume to Brown's fiction. Instead he is mainly interested in ways in which Brown anticipates contemporary concerns: "Brown not only reflects philosophical concerns of his time regarding historical representation but seems to exhibit an epistemological or historical self-consciousness that resembles elements of our modern inquiry into the nature and meaning of historical truth" (244). In contrast, Amanda Emerson "locate[s] Brown's exploration of history and romance *in*, not after, his novel-writing" (127). She points out that Brown saw fiction as "superior" to history as a "vehicle for *truth*," emphasizes that "*Wieland*, among other things, exemplifies early national commitments to

[69] The letter was dated December 15, 1798.

sincerity as unity of meaning, and reason as the bulwark against enthusiasm" (126). But she also notes that "Brown nearly sabotages the historiographical projects of *Wieland*" because of Clara's "struggle to rein in the excesses of possibility" (146). In this way Emerson indicates the way in which the gothic atmosphere of fear and terror dominates *Wieland*. I argue that that it is through the development of his gothic vision that Brown realizes in his fiction ideas he gleaned from Hume. By juxtaposing Brown's statements on romance with some of his observations on the works of Hume I outline the connection between Brown's conception of romance and his admiration for Hume's *History of England*. This not only sheds some light on how Brown saw *Wieland* as having a public purpose, but it also brings to the fore Brown's interest in historical causation—a concern he shared with Hume. An appreciation for how Brown thought about historical causation is crucial for understanding the connections between religious enthusiasm and the gothic, which I explore in the next section.

Brown elaborates on what he considers novel about his "fictitious narratives" in his essay "Walstein's School of History. From the German of Krants of Gotha," which was published in 1799. He does this through a discussion of different forms of history—couched in a comparison of two fictional figures. The first figure, Walstein, is not interested in "Abstract systems, and theoretical reasonings" or "Mere reasoning" but the "detail of actions" by which the "affections are engaged" and "the reason is won by incessant attacks" (35). Brown rejects this approach and also Walstein's fictional narratives of renowned figures, since as models they are only "reducible to practice by a small number" (35). But Brown notes that this brings him no farther than Samuel Richardson in his 1748 novel *Clarissa*. So against Walstein and Richardson, Brown holds up his second fictional figure—Walstein's pupil Engel. Engel writes "a tale, in which are powerful displays of fortitude and magnanimity; a work whose influence must be endlessly varied by

varieties of character and situation of the reader, but, from which, it is not possible for any one to rise without some degree of moral benefit, and much of that pleasure which always attends the emotions of curiosity and sympathy" (39). And against Richardson's character Clarissa, Brown places Engel's main character who attempts to take an active role in forming his world—what Brown called "a sphere of some dimensions, in which the influence of his actions and opinions is felt" (36). Whether or not his criticism of Richardson is fair, in Brown's eyes his new plan for "fictitious narratives" moves beyond the private sphere and influences or participates in the nascent public sphere.

Six months later, in April, 1800, Brown published an article called "The Difference Between History and Romance." Here Brown limits history to "what is known by the testimony of our senses" and "facts simply described" (85, 84). While this gives history the merit of certainty, it radically limits its scope and usefulness since, in this formulation, pure history eschews all attempt to link or explain facts and, when it comes to "that which is performed at a distance, either in time or place," it relies not on the senses but on the testimony of others and therefore quickly enters the realm of romance (85). Brown claims that "An action may be simply described, but such descriptions, though they alone are historical, are of no use as they stand singly and disjoined from tendencies and motives, in the page of the historian or the mind of the reader" (84). In short, Brown seems to want to show the necessity of "conjecture"—that is the word he repeatedly uses—in forming what he calls "Useful narratives" (85).[70] And Brown acknowledges that a writer who fails to explore the links between facts and events "is essentially defective" and can only "claim the merit of supplying the builder with materials" (84).[71] He

[70] Brown never uses the word imagination in this essay for this purpose.
[71] The terms Brown uses to describe a writer who is defective in this fashion indict, among others, his own teacher and author of the *History of Pennsylvania*, Robert Proud.

clearly envisions romancers, including himself, as builders and not just compilers of material. But by thus focusing on the importance of showing causation in histories, and by linking causation exclusively with romance, Brown has recast most of what we might commonly think of as history as romance. And while his definition of romance leaves out what his contemporaries might have called Natural History or Natural Philosophy—which relied more obviously on observed phenomena—it excludes little else. Brown recognized this. In a revealing choice of words he notes of his newly defined version of romance—it's "empire is absolute and undivided" (85).[72]

In his definition of romance Brown implicitly recognized that had he defined history so as to encompass explanations of causation and not simply facts, then any line that might divide history and romance would necessarily have been drawn arbitrarily. In a different fashion, Hume had recognized this long before. In his first work, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume attempted to re-establish philosophy as "experimental" and explore the limits of what might be known. As part of this larger discussion Hume commented on how two readers might experience the exact same book if the first reader was told it was a "romance" and the second reader was told it was a "true history":

> The latter has a more lively conception of all the incidents. He enters deeper into the concerns of the persons: represents to himself their actions, and characters, and friendships, and enmities: He even goes so far as to form a notion of their features, and air, and person. While the former, who gives no credit to the testimony of the author, has a more faint and languid conception of all these particulars; and except on account of the style and ingenuity of the composition, can receive little entertainment from it. (68-69)

[72] Brown's theory of romance probably also owes much to the discussions of the Friendly Club. Smith records much conversation about historical writing. For example, of one meeting at which Brown was not present, he notes discussing "the improvements made in Historical Writing, not as to Style, but Manner—Historical may comprehend almost all other knowlege" (371).

Although this apparently privileges "true history" over "romance," this distinction is striking because Hume appears to assume that there is not necessarily an intrinsic difference between "romance" and "true history." For a reader to be cognizant of a difference he or she must come to the text armed with prior knowledge.

While Brown may not have been familiar with this passage, his reasons for preferring Hume over his peers in "Parallel between Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon" suggest that Hume's *History of England* itself confounded any attempt to make a more specific distinction between history and romance than the one he ended up proposing. After all, he argues that Hume's "narrative is coherent and luminous" to so great a degree that 'fiction itself is outdone in its power to command and delight attention by the seductions of his tale" (18). But Brown goes further than this and notes that, in regard to "skill in deducing one event from another, and marking the influence of political transactions on the condition of those who are subject to that influence…the sagacity and comprehensiveness of Hume is great beyond example" (16). In other words, according to how Brown distinguishes between history and romance, the areas in which Hume's greatest strengths lie fall under the category of romance. In this manner, Brown casts himself into a category in which he includes historians such as Hume.

The way in which Brown seems to closely associate his own work with that of Hume emphasizes its public purpose. Hume in his *History of England*, like Robertson and Gibbon in their works, frequently considers such topics as what constitutes good government, the nature of authority, and the role of religion in society—not to mention Hume's powerful description of a nation torn by the conspiracies and internal dissent surrounding the English Civil Wars. As the "Advertisement" to Wieland makes clear, Brown hoped his own works would have the seriousness and usefulness of Hume's *History of England*. If Brown extends the empire of

romance to include what we commonly think of as history, it effectively separates his own more philosophical "fictitious narrative[s]"—including *Wieland* and his subsequent novels—from previous works of invention and aligns them more closely with the foremost history of the day. Whether it is Hume's "sagacity and comprehensiveness" in elucidating historical causation or his "coherent and luminous" narrative that surpasses fiction in "its power to command and delight attention," it is clear that the work of Hume is a standard by which Brown can measure not just the achievements of Robertson and Gibbon, but also his own works.

6. Religious Enthusiasm, the Limits of Knowledge, and the Origins of the American Gothic

Although Hume wrote history and Brown romance, both were concerned with problems of historical causation and how they relate to the stability of civil society.[73] Both were also concerned with the limits of human knowledge and both insisted on natural explanations for events. Hume is famous for emphasizing the limits of human reason, the importance of the passions, and the impossibility of the miraculous. Brown, who finished writing *Wieland* while living with other members of the Friendly Club with whom he had discussed Hume, was careful to note in the "Advertisement" that, while "The incidents related are extraordinary and rare," they are "not truly miraculous" and "the solution will be found to correspond with the known

[73] Hume was, of course, concerned with the limits of the cause and effect relationship in a philosophical sense and denied that human reason could establish a causal relationship: "In a word, then, every effect is a distinct event from its cause. It could not, therefore, be discovered in the cause; and the first invention or conception of it, a priori, must be entirely arbitrary" (*Enquiry* 21). But the question here is specifically one of historical causation and Hume did allow for a causal relationship to be established through experience.

principles of human nature" (3).[74] For Brown, even as it is for Hume, the relation of cause to effect is crucial. But while Hume examines this relation over a period of centuries, in his novels Brown, working with a compressed time period, only alludes to the larger context and primarily examines this relation over a period of weeks or months. The limited perspective employed by Brown's narrators transforms uncertainty concerning the causes of unexpected events into a source of confusion and terror and lays the foundation for the American gothic.[75]

Critics of Brown have found the sources of his gothic vision in a wide variety of places. Leslie Fiedler locates it in the psychological state associated with a repressed Calvinism. He sees Melville and Hawthorne as trying "to redeem the complex values of Puritanism from religion to art" and notes that in Brown "the novel of terror… is well on the way to becoming a Calvinist exposé of natural human corruption" (432, 160). Jay Fliegelman, although he eschews the label gothic when discussing *Wieland*, sees the uncertainty that Brown depicts so effectively as stemming from a crisis of authority in "a republic in which power had been redefined" (xxxv). Peter Kafer, who claims that "Brown invented the American gothic novel," argues that the roots of Brown's gothic vision are intensely local (xi). But, although Kafer traces Brown's sense of the gothic in his response to the persecution of the Quakers during the American Revolution, the connection Kafer makes between *Wieland* and the persecution of Quakers relies quite heavily on seeing the character Wieland as an extension of Brown himself (113-129). In marked contrast to Kafer's position, W. M. Verhoeven emphasizes the importance of seeing Brown's work in a

[74] For Brown's living staying with members of the Friendly Club during this time see Waterman 55.

[75] Sarah Burns offers a broad and useful definition of the gothic "as the art of haunting, using the term as a container for a constellation of themes and moods: horror, fear, mystery, strangeness, fantasy, perversion, monstrosity, insanity." She notes that, at least in painting, "the gothic is a mode of pictorial expression that critiques the Enlightenment vision of the rational American Republic as a place of liberty, balance, harmony, and progress" (xix).

transatlantic context and claims that, "Brown grafts an earlier, European branch of the Gothic narrative of the incredible and supernatural on to the New World/New England strand of the apparition tale" ("Gothic Logic" 91). Another, even more recent approach, is that of Jeffrey Weinstock, who complicates an already complex and contested scene by cleverly suggesting that Brown was a crucial figure in four different "Gothic traditions": "the Frontier Gothic, the Urban Gothic, the Psychological Gothic and the Female Gothic" (22). While this division is helpful and I am sympathetic to his claim that Brown is interested in "a form of radical skepticism," I find his conclusion—that "Wieland… functions as an anti-Enlightenment 'study in disjointed self-perception' demonstrating the extent to which all human beings are essentially dual in nature and motivated by unconscious forces"—less convincing (94, 105). Instead, I argue that—at least in *Wieland*, Brown's first gothic novel—the response to uncertainty and the horrific incidents that follow is crucial, may be connected to his reading of Hume, and seems more closely connected with the perils of religious enthusiasm.

Both Hume and Brown explain the origins of religious enthusiasm in similar ways. According to Hume, religion begins when people with certain states of mind, temperaments, or moods, confront something which is "unaccountable" and their fear or their imagination leads them to seek certainty. Their response may take the form of rituals which allay their fear or may lead to "raptures, transports, and surprising flights of fancy" which are "attributed to the immediate inspiration of that Divine Being who is the object of devotion." But, whether originating as superstition or enthusiasm, the roots of religion are in human projections caused by particular responses to what is inexplicable or uncertain. In his philosophical works, his essays, and his *History of England*, religion is, for Hume, not a means through which to access divine truth, but a natural phenomenon. Religious enthusiasm is not false inspiration but simply

an aspect of religious experience with particular causes and particular effects. Like Hume, Brown seems to understand religious enthusiasm as a natural phenomenon. And for Brown, too, religious enthusiasm is a response to uncertainty. In "A Lesson on Sensibility" he puts it succinctly: "In Brooding over what is imperfectly known and seldom seen, enthusiasm is apt to be awakened" (106).

To be sure, identifying the origins of the American gothic in how Brown dramatizes the response to fear and uncertainty as it is manifest in religious enthusiasm not only seems to run counter to claims made by later critics that Brown's vision of the gothic is distinctively American, but it also seems to run counter to claims made by Brown himself in the preface to *Edgar Huntly*. There Brown argued that "the field of investigation, opened to us by our own country, should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe" and that the American gothic should be distinct from the European tradition and its reliance on "Puerile superstitions and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras" (641). Instead he argued for employing distinctively American circumstances such as "incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness" (641). But *Edgar Huntly* was written a year after *Wieland* and, while in the "Advertisement" to *Wieland* Brown seems to indicate that the events of the novel were based on the Yates murders in upstate New York, in the story itself he repeatedly emphasizes the continuities between the old world and the new world. Beyond the geographical setting, there seem to be few, if any, unequivocally American attributes to *Wieland*. For example, the political instability that characterized the period in which Brown wrote *Wieland* was, as I have argued, prefigured by previous events such as the wars of religion and the English Civil Wars. And if there is anything uniquely American about the plot of *Wieland* it may reside in the sense of loss that Clara feels concerning her formerly peaceful and secure life in which "The future, like the

present, was serene" (20). But even through this sense of loss Brown emphasizes that America, like Clara's "dwelling which had hitherto been an inviolate asylum," no longer has a special status as and has become more similar to the Old World (56). While Brown was certainly interested in the suitability of American materials for romance, that came later in the preface to *Edgar Huntly*. And even there Brown's primary objection to the European gothic is that in America he finds the sense of gothic terror or haunting not in invented dangers, but in dangers that have their origins in real life. If Carwin is a native of America, he has spent much time in Europe and the circumstances which make Wieland susceptible to his influence and lead to the catastrophic climax of *Wieland* have their origins in the Old World and are presented by Brown as a local manifestation of a long-standing human phenomenon.

The primary source of the gothic in *Wieland* seems to be the atmosphere of fear that—against a background of political instability—stems from unusual and apparently inexplicable events and becomes manifest, through a natural process, in religious enthusiasm. When Wieland, whose temperament makes him prone to enthusiasm from the beginning, hears strange voices he seems inclined to think they stem directly from the divine. He desires moral clarity and divine guidance, but in his confession notes that his "knowledge has always stopped short of certainty" (153). He craves "direct communication" with the divine or "some unambiguous token" of the divine presence (154). And when he receives what he believes to be a revelation, he makes a deliberate effort "not to think" because he is afraid that thinking will lead him to disobey the command to murder his wife (157). Divine will is "the measure of truth" for Wieland and he castigates the "bounded views and halting reason" of any who would condemn him for his actions (163). When Wieland is "finally restored to the perception of truth" he is "transformed at once into the *man of sorrows*!" and kills himself (214).

Wieland's friend Pleyel—an intimate family friend and a likely match for Clara—assesses the inexplicable voices from a different perspective. Even as Wieland argues for "the probability of celestial interference," Pleyel—who "scrupled not to deny faith to any testimony but that of his senses"— ends up trapped by his conviction that his senses cannot be deceived and ignores other natural causes (69). When Pleyel overhears what seems to be an intimate conversation between Clara and Carwin he quickly leaps—he admits he "did not reason on the subject"—to the erroneous conclusion that Clara is intimately involved with Carwin (124). Pleyel only realizes that Carwin has cleverly imitated Clara's voice and that Clara is above reproach when, much later, as Clara relates in her second letter written three years after the main events of the story have concluded, her uncle arranges for him to meet Carwin. At a key moment Pleyel, like Wieland, abandons reason and his unjustified assumptions lead him into error.

Even the enigmatic Carwin is both a perpetrator of deceptions and a victim of the events that he helped set in motion but cannot control. He describes himself to Clara as only an "undesigning cause" (181). He acknowledges this when he mentions that he had "rashly set in motion a machine, over whose progress I had no controul" (199). That he claims his "purpose had not been evil" hardly exonerates him from blame and emphasizes the disjunction between cause and effect (188). The language in these examples even suggests that Brown intended for Carwin to serve as a pointed contrast to a deistic conception of a designing providence with vaguely beneficent intentions. Certainly the way in which Carwin justifies his actions echoes Clara's lament—"What is man, that knowledge is so sparingly conferred upon him!" (95).

Clara in particular is caught in the middle of these events and spends much of the novel in a state of confusion or panic or aghast at the horrific murders perpetrated by her brother. After she recounts the events that led to the death of her father, Clara notes that she is "anxious to

explain them" (18). She is especially concerned about the key question of whether "the Divine Ruler interferes in human affairs" or whether the strange events should be attributed to natural causes (18). She hears voices, engages in debates about their origin and how to interpret them, discovers the dead body of her sister in law, and is herself in direct danger of being murdered by her brother. The voices create "perplexity and doubt" in Clara and she struggles to explain what she has experienced (60). Her reason is insufficient in the moment: she "compared the cause with the effect, and they seemed disproportioned to each other" (64). Uncertainty plays upon her imagination and, when she claims to have been "tormented by phantoms of my own creation," it seems she might even share the family susceptibility to enthusiasm (77). In despair she notes "that whether Wieland was a maniac, a faithful servant of his God, the victim of hellish illusions, or the dupe of human imposture, was by no means certain" (174). All of her attempts to make sense of the strange events are frustrated and, instead of reaching reasoned conclusions based on sound observations, she is forced to respond to them based on partial information and with little or no time for reflection. According to Amanda Emerson Clara finds herself in an "epistemological nightmare" that takes place in "a chaotic world of disconnected and inexplicable incidents and conditions" (133). Clara even directs particular attention to the effects of her limited perspective: "What but ambiguities, abruptness, and dark transitions, can be expected from the historian who is, at the same time, the sufferer of these disasters?" (137).[76]

The narrative momentum of *Wieland* derives as much from Clara's attempts to make sense of the strange circumstances that envelop her as by the events themselves. And for much of the story Clara may not be in her right mind. Like the narrator of "Thessalonica," Clara is both "a

[76] As Clara gradually unravels the mystery of "the incomprehensible behavior of Carwin," there is a theatrical quality when she describes her home as "the stage on which that enemy of man shewed himself for a moment unmasked" (179).

witness to and partaker" in the events, some of which are even designed by Carwin to test her. Prompted by her servant's description of how she "held apparitions and goblins in contempt," he determined "to put this courage to the test" (187).[77] Although she initially seems to fail this test, in regard to "the assaults of blandishments or magic" all Clara claims she needs to strengthen her resolve are "opportunities of deliberation" (131). But Clara seems to be fully restored to her sanity and health only when—in the last chapter, written as a second letter three years after the main events—she gains a sufficient distance to be able to reflect on events. Then she observes that the awful events might have been avoided if only "Wieland had framed juster notions of moral duty, and of the divine attributes; or if I had been gifted with ordinary equanimity or foresight" (227). But this attempt at moralizing seems somewhat wishful. As Brown notes in the "Advertisement" for *Wieland*, biloquism, while "not truly miraculous," "must be acknowledged to be extremely rare" (3). When the extraordinary is possible, someone who possesses an "ordinary equanimity or foresight" will inevitably be susceptible to fear in the face of what remains unknown.

Wieland is a meditation on how people react to what is apparently inexplicable or unknown. Brown suggests that the sense of terror that derives from Clara's confusion is a natural response to extraordinary events in a politically unstable world that will never be entirely comprehensible. All of the main characters in *Wieland* are enmeshed in events beyond their control and Brown mercilessly exposes the limits of their ability to suspend judgment and avoid rash actions in the face of uncertainty.[78] But for Brown the gothic romance did more than simply

[77] Carwin's testing of Clara is balanced by Clara's opportunity to test Carwin's claim to be a biloquist: when her brother, in the grip of enthusiasm, threatens her and Carwin appears, she sees that the situation "afforded a test of his truth" (210).

[78] Only Clara's skeptical uncle, who never hears voices and is only tangentially affected by the events, retains a "more impartial" perspective (222). He exonerates Carwin from direct blame for

instill fear and trembling in readers. For him there was a public purpose in the limited perspective that Clara embodies and which gives *Wieland* its gothic character. As Gibbon observed in regard to the massacre of Thessalonica, to find "the nice and secret springs of action" which make it possible to link cause and effect in human affairs "a clear and comprehensive view" is both necessary and rare. By withholding crucial information until later in the novel—such as biloquism, the natural, if rare, cause that he offers for the voices in the shape of Carwin—Brown forces his readers to share in Clara's limited perspective and fear.[79] Brown's fictions provide an opportunity for each of his readers, like Clara, to be both "a witness and partaker" in the events. They gave his readers an opportunity to avoid the errors associated with hastily connecting cause and effect and to practice withholding judgment in the face of circumstances that appear extraordinary. As the historian William H. Prescott wrote in a short biography of Brown, *Wieland* displays a "philosophical method of dissecting passion and analyzing motives of action" (27).[80] *Wieland* is both a meditation on religious enthusiasm and an antidote for enthusiasm.

The sort of religion considered dangerous by Hume and Brown is not a philosophical or natural religion, such as deism, that might allow its adherents to acknowledge that some things are unknown or unknowable. Hume was not an atheist, but skeptical about any metaphysical

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Wieland's behavior and attributes it to Wieland's "maniacal illusion" and a "deplorable perversion of mind" (222).

[79] Even at the end of the novel some events—such as the spontaneous combustion of the elder Wieland—remain mysterious. But, overall, Brown seems to endorse natural explanations in *Wieland*. Other explanations are often indicated or expressed by unreliable characters. For example, Carwin—who in his first conversation with Clara obliquely refers to Hermes—employs his own voice as a sort of substitute for the mythical voice of the gods (48).

[80] Prescott also observes of Brown that, "He may be rather called a philosophical than a poetical writer; for, though he has that intensity of feeling which constitutes one of the distinguishing attributes of the latter, yet in his most tumultuous bursts of passion we frequently find him pausing to analyze and coolly speculate on the elements which have raised it" (38).

claims and Brown seems to allow room for a reasonable form of religion as a source of moral strength. In *Wieland*, Clara notes that in the midst of the peaceful domesticity that precedes the enthusiasm of Wieland, "It must not be supposed that we were without religion, but with us it was the product of lively feelings, excited by reflection on our own happiness, and by the grandeur of external nature" (21). In *Ormond*, written the following year, the character Constantia is vulnerable precisely because she was "unacquainted with religion": "She was unguarded in a point, where, if not her whole, yet, doubtless, her principal security and strongest bulwark would have existed" (132). This the narrator blames on Constantia's "father's system of education," which has left her to regard religion, "not with disbelief, but with absolute indifference" (133). But "absolute indifference" is preferable to any form of unwarranted certainty, which Brown equates with enthusiasm. The character Ormond even exhibits an enthusiastic atheism: "His disbelief was at once unchangeable and strenuous. The universe was to him, a series of events, connected by an undesigning and inscrutable necessity, and an assemblage of forms, to which no beginning or end can be conceived. Instead of transient views and vague ideas, his meditations, on religious points, had been intense. Enthusiasm was added to disbelief, and he not only dissented but abhorred" (133). While enthusiasm here may serve only to intensify his "disbelief," Brown also uses enthusiasm to describe Ormond in other places and suggests that any enthusiasm—even an enthusiastic materialism—could lead to violations of the social order. For Brown *any* response to uncertainty not founded on reasonable evidence could be potentially dangerous.

In *Wieland*, as her fear grows in response to the uncertain origins of the voices, Clara cries, "How had my ancient security vanished! That dwelling, which had hitherto been an inviolate asylum, was now beset with danger to my life" (56). If, as Brown hints, the family is a

figure for the country, then the country has changed and is in imminent danger—its inhabitants full of doubt and fear. *Wieland* unforgettably evokes this atmosphere and may even serve as a warning about the immediate consequences of uncertainty and political instability. To Brown the United States might have seemed particularly susceptible to this danger: in his discussion of the English Civil Wars, Hume remarks that "revolutions of government cannot be effected by the mere force of argument and reasoning" and acutely observes that "Governments, especially those of a mixed kind, are in continual fluctuation: The humors of the people change perpetually from one extreme to another" (V: 330, 353). When he wrote *Wieland*, Brown was near the center of American intellectual life and closely involved with friends who wanted to disseminate enlightenment values, but in the novel he represented America as a potentially fruitful breeding ground for a dangerous religious enthusiasm and gothic terrors. In "an age" that was, according to Yorick in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, "so full of light, that there is scarce a country or corner of Europe whose beams are not crossed and interchanged with others," the dark corners that remained—and were thus thrown into relief—could be terrifying (36).

Chapter Two: The Demands of the Spirit: Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Flexible Language of Enthusiasm

I have sometimes thought that in order to be a good minister it was necessary to leave the ministry. The profession is antiquated. In an altered age, we worship in the dead forms of our forefathers.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (*Selected Journals* 193)

Ralph Waldo Emerson stands near the end of a long line of New England preachers who grappled with the problem of enthusiasm. In the seventeenth century the early Puritans condemned Anne Hutchinson as an enthusiast and drove her away from Boston. In the eighteenth century, Charles Chauncy condemned the revivals of the Great Awakening as manifestations of enthusiasm and Jonathan Edwards defended the revivals as including many genuine religious experiences. Although they each drew the line in different places, both dismissed enthusiasm as false religion.[81] However, by the early nineteenth century, the primary meaning of enthusiasm was no longer false inspiration, as it had been earlier for writers such as Chauncy and Edwards, but was in the process of shifting to the contemporary sense of enthusiasm as an excited emotion. It may therefore be difficult to understand precisely what Emerson meant when he not only endorsed enthusiasm, but even claimed—as he did at the end of "Circles"—that "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm" (414).[82] This is even more difficult because, while Emerson was firmly rooted in traditions of the New England ministry, the ways in which he understood and employed enthusiasm drew on a wide variety of sources and exemplify the complexity of enthusiasm in early nineteenth century America.

[81] See the "Prologue" for a brief discussion of the exchange between Edwards and Chauncy.
[82] Throughout this chapter all citations from Emerson are, unless otherwise indicated, from the Library of America volume of his *Essays and Lectures*.

As he famously stated in *Nature*, Emerson's objective was to help each individual establish "an original relation with the universe" (7). To this end, he proposed an alternative to the enlightenment empiricism and the subsequent obsession with material progress that he thought characterized his age and left it spiritually bankrupt. Although he sometimes referred to his philosophy as idealism, idealism in its extreme form—which denies that the material world exists independently of the mind—was also inadequate for Emerson's purpose.[83] He succinctly explained the problem with idealism in *Nature*: "Yet, if it only deny the existence of matter, it does not satisfy the demands of the spirit. It leaves God out of me. It leaves me in the splendid labyrinth of my perceptions, to wander without end" (41). Neither a thoroughgoing empiricism nor a thoroughgoing idealism was sufficient for Emerson. A sufficient account of reality had to encompass both positions and, crucially, "satisfy the demands of the spirit."

When Emerson embarked on the Sisyphean task of describing "the demands of the spirit" and articulating what constitutes "proper inspiration," he relied heavily on the flexible language of enthusiasm (1148). For an audience of Emerson's time enthusiasm had a whiff of the eccentric, a hint of protest, and the potential to disrupt established conventions. It implicitly challenged enlightenment conceptions of the self and suggested the possibility of direct access to the divine, yet it sidestepped problems associated with agency. It had classical roots and associations, which Emerson exploited and which made it difficult to clearly distinguish, in regard to religion and literature, where either begins and the other ends. Even the way in which enthusiasm frequently served as a marker for the inferior allowed Emerson to offer his views as timeless and universal: if the knowledge he espoused was available to anyone through enthusiasm—whether or not they had an education or interest in "poetry and philosophy"—then

[83] Emerson includes a chapter titled "Idealism" in *Nature* and in "The Transcendentalist" he equates idealism and transcendentalism. I discuss this at more length below.

it might really be universal (1199). Enthusiasm helped him to avoid the false dichotomy of empiricism and idealism and imbue both with a sense of something more—a sense of excess or extravagance. It allowed him to bridge the gap between the particular and the contingent on one hand and the timeless and the universal on the other. Emerson's use of enthusiasm played on the tension between the New England ministerial tradition of condemning enthusiasm and alternative understandings and associations of enthusiasm. Combined, this tension and the flexible language of enthusiasm allowed Emerson to reinvigorate and transform this ministerial tradition.

In satisfying "the demands of the spirit," Emerson tried to make enthusiasm an essential aspect of daily life. Instead of rejecting enthusiasm as an improper display of emotion and treating it as mainly a pejorative term, Emerson makes it virtually synonymous with authentic religion itself. He claims that every person must embrace enthusiasm in order to fully realize his or her individuality and place in the world. Although his use of enthusiasm still retains the radical protestant emphasis on individual experience, the unified individual can not only bring enthusiasm into the public arena, but renovate that arena by doing so. Since defining enthusiasm too rigidly would be counterproductive, whenever Emerson does offer a definition it is usually situational or deliberately vague. The flexible language of enthusiasm helped Emerson transform what counts as authentic religion and become the key figure in establishing a tradition of religious liberalism in America.[84]

While Emerson employs the language of enthusiasm in a variety of ways, there is a discernible trajectory in how he understands enthusiasm. This chapter proceeds through an examination of Emerson's writings over roughly a decade—from the early 1830s, when he

[84] See Schmidt, *Restless Souls* 33-35.

resigned from the formal ministry, to the early 1840s, when he published *Essays*.[85] The range of different rhetorical forms—from public sermons or addresses to *Nature* and from his essays to private letters and journals—all indicate Emerson's ecumenical approach to sources of knowledge—an approach which extends forward and backward through history and views particular historical contingencies as a series of accidental contexts that do not add or subtract from the absolute value of the thoughts and experiences of any individual. At the beginning of this period, when he explained his reasons for leaving the ministry, Emerson used enthusiasm as the opposite of formalism. At the end of this period he used enthusiasm as the opposite of skepticism. This shift happened gradually—in fits and starts—rather than at any one clearly defined moment. So, while this chapter begins with enthusiasm as the opposite of formalism, it then follows Emerson as he plays with and exploits the many, multifarious, and even apparently contradictory associations of enthusiasm. Each contributes to what Emerson meant when he wrote that "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." Cumulatively, this network of associations enables Emersonian enthusiasm to transcend its relatively narrow beginnings in a regional religious dispute and become part of Emerson's prescription for uniting a society characterized by increasing religious pluralism and an emphasis on liberal individualism. Emersonian enthusiasm becomes a regenerative force that is essential to life in the modern world and virtually synonymous with authentic religion.

1. A Ministry of Forms

When in 1832 Emerson chose to leave his post as minister of Boston's Second Church, he delivered a sermon on "The Lord's Supper" to explain why his objections to that particular

[85] This later became *Essays: First Series* when he published his second volume of essays.

ordinance meant that he had to resign. He appealed to "individual experience" and argued that the Lord's Supper seemed "foreign and unsuited" to the contemporary situation (1137). But he relied as much on personal preference as on reasoned objections: he bluntly announced that, "This mode of commemorating Christ is not suitable to me. That is reason enough why I should abandon it" (1138). Then he added the succinct and cutting comment: "I am not interested in it" (1140).[86] But if his choice was simply a matter of preference, it was nevertheless a serious choice: by striking at this particular ordinance, Emerson was striking at the heart of contemporary orthodoxy and a journal entry from a few months prior—in which he observed that the Lord's Supper was "esteemed the most sacred of religious institutions" by his contemporaries—indicates he knew that (*Selected Journals* 195).[87] So when Emerson claimed that the Lord's Supper was so dessicated that it did not even count as religious and that he would prefer instead that "remembrances of [Jesus] should be pleasing, affecting, religious," he clearly meant to separate himself from the contemporary Christian church (1138). But his rejection of the Lord's Supper was not simply a matter of disinterest, it also stemmed from a personal frustration with rituals he found antiquated and hollow.

While Emerson never uses the term enthusiasm in his farewell sermon, his objections to the Lord's Supper are couched in language reminiscent of earlier debates over enthusiasm. This is partly evident in how his comments faintly recall Anne Hutchinson's antinomianism and the way in which he demonstrates how each individual has the ability to interpret the Bible for him or herself—so frequently characteristic of radical Protestants.[88] It is, more importantly, evident in

[86] Lawrence Buell points out the significance of this moment in *Emerson* 16-17.
[87] By this I mean contemporary liberal orthodoxy, but orthodoxy nonetheless.
[88] For evidence that Emerson himself observes a similarity between Hutchinson and his later position see his comment in "New England Reformers" that "fertile forms of antinomianism among the elder puritans seemed to have their match in the plenty of the new harvest of reform"

his employment of the term formalism as the dialectic opposite of enthusiasm. Whereas orthodox religion requires committed individuals to invest emotionally in the church as an institution, enthusiasts are inclined too quickly to accept the authority of individual experience as superseding the authority of the church and to manifest excessive emotion. However, if individuals slide too far to the opposite extreme, they become formalists and their beliefs and rituals are hollow. These twin dangers—enthusiasm on one side and formalism on the other—were the Scylla and Charybdis of orthodoxy in the eighteenth century and Emerson inherited this language.[89]

In "The Lord's Supper" Emerson only uses one pole of the dialectic between enthusiasm and formalism. He begins his attack on the Lord's Supper by using the methods of the new criticism to call the "authority of the rite" into question (1130).[90] Then, as he moves on to "the question of expediency" (1136)—whether or not the Lord's Supper is of practical use in his own time—he shifts to employ the language of formalism. While he cursorily acknowledges that "forms" have their uses, he is adamant that "to adhere to one form a moment after it is out-grown, is unreasonable, and it is alien to the spirit of Christ" (1138). An "out-grown" form is opposed to "reality" and the "deep interior life" which frees rather than imprisons an individual (1139). Alluding to the season in which he delivered this sermon, Emerson claims, "That form out of which the life and suitableness have departed, should be as worthless in its eyes as the

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(592) And, in "The Transcendentalists," he notes that the Transcendentalist "easily incurs the charge of antinomianism" (196).

[89] For the twin dangers of enthusiasm and formalism see Taves 16-17. Emerson employs this language repeatedly. In an August 18, 1832 journal entry Emerson notes, "The whole world holds on to formal Christianity, & nobody teaches the essential truth, the heart of Christianity for fear of shocking &c" (*Selected Journals* 197). And, in an April 26, 1834 journal entry, he expresses himself even more clearly: "A religion of forms is not for me" (*Selected Journals* 314).

[90] By the new criticism I mean what Robert Richardson calls the "new German historical criticism of the Bible" (*Emerson* 49-50).

dead leaves that are falling around us" (1139). Then, with a tone that suggests a sense of frustration with this whole line of argument, which he feels compelled to make "for the satisfaction of others," Emerson claims "it is time misspent" to argue about "any form" (1139). In so far succumbing to the desire of others and allowing them to set the terms of dispute, he says, "I seem to lose the substance in seeking the shadow" (1139).[91] The very purpose of Jesus and Paul was, according to Emerson, "to redeem us from a formal religion" at a time when Judaism and paganism were each "a religion of forms" and "had no life" (1139). He concludes that, "there is no other measure of the value of any one form than the measure of its use" (1140).

Several years after his criticism of formalism in "The Lord's Supper," Emerson employs similar language to related ends in his controversial 1838 "Address" to the Divinity School at Harvard. With a phrase that seems calculated to simultaneously condemn and inspire his listeners, he claims that "the need was never greater of new revelation than now" (83). The problem is not only apparent to the congregations shepherded by his audience, but also shortchanges them: "Whenever the pulpit is usurped by a formalist, then is the worshipper defrauded and disconsolate" (84). In resigning his earlier position, Emerson had refused to be that formalist and with this formulation he presents this as an altruistic act—he was, or so he indicates here, resigning out of concern for his congregation not himself.

That some of the same issues would surface in both "The Lord's Supper" and the Divinity School "Address" is not surprising. While the former explained his reasons for leaving the ministry, the latter offered advice to future ministers. Emerson himself realized how closely

[91] The term substance indicates how Emerson sometimes employed language that played upon how Roman Catholic theologians understood the sacrament of Communion in terms of substance and accidents. For example, in a letter to a friend and admirer on August 1, 1839, he alludes specifically to the Lord's Supper: "Man seems to me the one fact: the forms of the church & of society—the framework which he creates & casts aside day by day. The whole of duty seems to consist in purging off these accidents & obeying the aboriginal truth" (*Selected Letters* 196).

connected these two pieces were and, in the latter, he speaks pityingly of, "the unhappy man that is called to stand in the pulpit, and *not* give bread of life": "Will he invite them privately to the Lord's Supper? He dares not. If no heart warm this rite, the hollow, dry, creaking formality is too plain, than that he can face a man of wit and energy, and put the invitation without terror. In the street, what has he to say to the bold village blasphemer? The village blasphemer sees fear in the face, form, and gait of the minister" (86).[92] This passage not only suggests Emerson's own fear of being perceived as a hypocrite—compounded with a fear of public humiliation—but also plays with the difference between the formalist as someone who adheres to dead rituals and form as the physical body. This penchant for playing with words, which is manifest in the different meanings of form and formalism, anticipates how Emerson would elaborate and employ the full semantic range of enthusiasm as he worked toward his major essays.[93]

Even if he was willing to play with the different meanings of form and formalism, Emerson also seemed concerned that his critique of formalism might be misinterpreted as a critique of philosophical forms. In "The Lord's Supper" he makes a distinction between forms and formalism. He acknowledges that forms have uses—"I am not so foolish as to declaim against forms. Forms are as essential as bodies; but to exalt particular forms, to adhere to one form a moment after it is out-grown, is unreasonable, and it is alien to the spirit of Christ" (1138). In "The Over-Soul" he offers a useful clarification: "One mode of the divine teaching is the incarnation of the spirit in a form,—in forms, like my own" (390). Insofar as forms are

[92] When, a few pages later in the Divinity School "Address," Emerson refers to those such as, "The orators, the poets, [and] the commanders"—who are "open to the influx of the all-knowing Spirit"—as participating in "such high communion," he makes it clear that the traditional form of communion, the Lord's Supper, is merely a low communion (90).

[93] For an examination of the way in which Emerson plays with language see Lauter, who argues that "the very ambiguity of his language functions to transform his readers' suppositions and attitudes and thus to produce the experiences which are the consummation of his rhetoric" (68).

people—or at least the bodies of people—they are useful and not obstacles. As people, forms may even be malleable and flexible as each individual grows and changes. As people, forms can also function as nature—as living, breathing embodiments of an ever-changing spirit. In this last sense, Emerson claims, "these other souls, these separated selves, draw me as nothing else can" (390). They function as lenses through which to see a larger truth: "Persons themselves acquaint us with the impersonal" (390). But even as people can become static objects of worship, when forms grow into institutions or rituals without feeling they become obstacles. It is the latter sense that fits with the eighteenth-century New England dialectic between enthusiasm and formalism and that Emerson employs in both "The Lord's Supper" and the Divinity School "Address."

Emerson's critique of formalism anticipates his later critique of institutions to which he would repeatedly return. In "Self-Reliance," for example, he argues that "An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man" (267). However, in "The Lord's Supper" and the Divinity School "Address," Emerson never suggests that these forms should be abolished. In fact, in the Divinity School "Address" he ridicules "all attempts to project and establish a Cultus with new rites and forms," arguing instead that "faith makes its own forms" and that new life can breathe life into and "through the forms already existing" (91). But how could Emerson describe the mysterious process of faith making its own forms or breathing life into old forms? If Emerson's critique of formalism implicitly relies on the dialectic between formalism and enthusiasm—and perhaps even suggests a latent or restrained inclination to embrace enthusiasm and positions him to eventually do so—he still approaches enthusiasm sidelong and struggles with some of the alternatives before emphatically embracing and endorsing a term with so many controversial associations.

2. The Possibilities of Enthusiasm and the Problem with Prayer

With the publication of *Nature* in 1836, Emerson began to articulate a new way of thinking about man's place in the world. Without the responsibilities and constrictions of ministering to a congregation, but with the hope that he might still minister to anyone who might pick up his book, Emerson began to develop a new framework of his own devising to replace the outworn framework of orthodox Christianity. And, while *Nature* drew heavily on a variety of sources, in it he adopts a stance oriented almost exclusively toward the future. By reaching outside the confines of New England and borrowing important terms such as Reason and Understanding from German Romanticism, Emerson began to merge the religious with the philosophical.[94] But when, in *Nature*, Emerson identifies his problem in philosophical terms, he employs language with religious associations to articulate the solution. Emerson experiments with enthusiasm in an attempt to describe the moments of unity, communication, realization, or transcendence which language is ill-suited to describe.

For Emerson the problem with the world stems from a problem within each individual: "The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is, because man is disunited with himself" (47). In order to restore the world to "original and eternal beauty," man must fix himself (47). Emerson uses the terms Reason and Understanding to express the problem: "At present," he writes, "man applies to nature but half his force. He works on the world with his understanding alone" (46). What man needs is to be able to act "upon nature with his entire

[94] Drawing a clear distinction between philosophy and religion is—especially in the West where religion is used in a sense beyond its classical meaning—difficult or impossible. In spite of its limitations, I hold onto this distinction both because it is a useful shorthand and because Emerson himself employed this distinction. The distinction between religion and philosophy seems to become less important for Emerson as time passes, but—even if enthusiasm eventually becomes detached from these terms—it is important to see how enthusiasm works in light of them during this period.

force;—with reason as well as understanding" (46). In a letter from 1834—written two years before he published *Nature*—Emerson explained from whom he borrowed the terms Reason and Understanding and what he meant by them:

> Now that I have used the words, let me ask you do you draw the distinction of Milton Coleridge & the Germans between Reason & Understanding. I think it a philosophy itself. & like all truth very practical…. Reason is the highest faculty of the soul—what we mean often by the soul itself; it never *reasons*, never proves, it simply perceives; it is vision. The Understanding toils all the time, compares, contrives, adds, argues, near sighted but strong-sighted, dwelling in the present the expedient the customary. Beasts have some understanding but no Reason. Reason is potentially perfect in every man—Understanding in very different degrees of strength.[95] (*Selected Letters* 133)

To unite man and fix the world, each individual has to embrace both Reason and Understanding. Since man already "works on the world with his understanding," what this really means is that man needs to add the power of Reason to the limited power he derives from "his understanding alone." But if uniting Reason and Understanding is the obvious solution, Emerson struggles to express just what happens when someone experiences this unification.

In the same section of *Nature* in which Emerson outlines the problem, he casts about for a way to describe what might happen when someone becomes a unified person. A remarkable passage illustrates how, if the problem is best expressed in philosophical terms, the solution demands religious language and relies on examples of enthusiasm. Employing the ambiguous language of light and dark, Emerson describes how, "in the thick darkness, there are not wanting gleams of a better light,—occasional examples of the action of man upon nature with his entire force,—with reason as well as understanding" (46).[96] He then describes a variety of idiosyncratic and eclectic "gleams"—including under this heading events, actions, social or political

[95] I discuss the surprising inclusion of Milton on this list in the next section.
[96] The language of light and dark, while frequently used in a variety of religious traditions such as Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Christianity, and Islam, is of course not exclusively religious.

movements, individuals, and even entire categories of people. The list is mashed together in a way that gives no one item greater priority than any other and is only organized through a faint chronology:

> Such examples are; the traditions of miracles in the earliest antiquity of all nations; the history of Jesus Christ; the achievements of a principle, as in religious and political revolutions, and in the abolition of the Slave-trade; the miracles of enthusiasm, as those reported of Swedenborg, Hohenlohe, and the Shakers; many obscure and yet contested facts, now arranged under the name of Animal Magnetism; prayer; eloquence; self-healings; and the wisdom of children. (47)

Although "the miracles of enthusiasm" appear as only one item among many in this list, other items, such as the Shakers or abolitionists, are clearly connected to enthusiasm in either its religious or political varieties. Where this connection is less obvious, it still lies just beneath the surface. "Animal Magnetism," for example, is described in other texts from this time in the language of enthusiasm.[97] The "religious and political revolutions," though they are left undefined, may—given Emerson's New England heritage and his frequent references to Cromwell in other places —refer to the English Civil wars and the enthusiasm associated with the English Puritans.[98] Swedenborg would later become Emerson's example of a mystic in *Representative Men* and Hohenlohe refers to a German bishop with a reputation for performing miraculous cures. This list of unified individuals virtually constitutes an honor roll of enthusiasts.

Emerson's list of enthusiasts leads directly into an informal and provisional definition of enthusiasm that indicates why it will become such a useful and important term for him. A moment of enthusiasm is, here in *Nature*, a moment when Reason has priority over the Understanding: "These are examples of Reason's momentary grasp of the sceptre; the exertions

[97] See, for example, Robert Montgomery Bird's novel *Sheppard Lee* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Dred*, which is discussed in the next chapter.
[98] I discuss Emerson's frequent references to Cromwell and the prevalence of enthusiasm during the English Civil Wars below.

of a power which exists not in time or space, but an instantaneous in-streaming causing power" (47). Although the list preceding this claim primarily features religious enthusiasts, here Emerson defines enthusiasm in the philosophical terms he borrowed from German Romanticism. A moment of enthusiasm is a moment when a person can access both Reason and Understanding.

Enthusiasm enables Emerson to explain how a philosophical recognition can be experienced religiously. He rejects other terms that might seem to express the same phenomenon. In regard to prayer, he asks: "Is not prayer also a study of truth,—a sally of the soul into the unfound infinite?" (47). Instead of an "in-streaming," Emerson specifies that prayer is a movement outward from the individual and not a movement inward to an individual from a "power which exists not in time or space" (47). In his 1841 lecture "The Method of Nature" he acknowledges that prayer, in its usual sense, does not encompass a sufficient range of meaning: "Not thanks, not prayer seem quite the highest or truest name for our communication with the infinite,—but glad and conspiring reception,—reception that becomes giving in its turn, as the receiver is only the All-Giver in part and in infancy" (115). Eventually, in "Self-Reliance," he clarifies exactly why prayer is a problematic term: "But prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft. It supposes dualism and not unity in nature and consciousness. As soon as the man is at one with God, he will not beg. He will then see prayer in all action" (276). Part of the problem with simultaneously drawing on both philosophical and religious discourses is now apparent. In deference to its use as a religious term, the specifically religious sense of prayer necessitates qualification. Enthusiasm, which has different and less traditionally acceptable religious associations—in addition to a variety of other associations—expresses something that prayer cannot and requires no such qualification.

The semantic range and associations of enthusiasm enable Emerson to explain how a philosophical recognition can be experienced religiously. For Emerson in *Nature*, enthusiasm is what happens when someone accesses both Reason and Understanding and becomes a unified individual. Emerson's language suggests that each person will have a religious experience as a means of, or in the process of, discovering this philosophical unity. But even if Reason and Understanding provide a fruitful structure for elucidating the problem of society in *Nature*, they gradually seem to fade from prominence in Emerson's thought. The flexible language of enthusiasm does not.

3. Pre-Enlightenment Models for Emersonian Enthusiasm

Even if they were imperfectly communicated to him—and indeed selectively adopted or transformed by him—Emerson played a crucial role in popularizing the elements of European Romanticism and philosophical idealism he borrowed from "Coleridge & the Germans."[99] But Emerson applied these ideas in an America dominated by a version of Common Sense philosophy that had been inherited from the enlightenment and formed the intellectual backbone of the New England religious establishment in which he had been educated (May 337-357). Emerson seems to have felt an irreconcilable tension between these two strands of thought. In part, his solution was to identify British philosophical empiricism, to which Common Sense philosophy responded and out of which it grew, with the Understanding. This created space for Reason—another level of knowledge which, although he refers to it as philosophical, could only be validated by experience and, because of that appeal to experience, was safely beyond the

[99] For an explanation of these influences on Emerson see Harris. This influence extends to Emerson's famous claim—at the end of "Circles"—that "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." Emerson borrows this phrase directly from Samuel Taylor Coleridge (*The Statesmen's Manual* 27).

investigative reach of traditional empiricism.[100] It was this tension that facilitated his novel interpretation of enthusiasm as a way of describing how the resolution to this philosophical problem might be experienced religiously.

Although in adapting the ideas of "Coleridge & the Germans" to an American setting, Emerson rejected, as potential models, philosophers identified with or influenced by British Empiricism, he does not seem to have been comfortable forsaking the Anglo-American tradition in its entirety. Perhaps because of this apparent anxiety, he reaches back before the Enlightenment to find—or manufacture—models for his particular variety of enthusiasm. Because of how enthusiasm served as a counterpoint to the Enlightenment—the historian J. G. A. Pocock refers to it as "The Anti-Self of Enlightenment"—this facilitates Emerson's recovery of it as a positive term.[101] But reaching back before the Enlightenment for model also has consequences for how Emerson understands enthusiasm in relation to morality.

Emerson rejects his Anglo-American philosophical inheritance as merely a partial view of the world. He articulates this as early as *Nature* when German philosophy follows British empiricism as naturally as night follows day: "broad noon shall be my England of the senses and the understanding; the night shall be my Germany of mystic philosophy and dreams" (15). While British philosophers are suspicious of the imagination and castigate enthusiasm as merely a product of the imagination, Emerson embraces it: "The Imagination may be defined to be, the use which the Reason makes of the material world" (34). The imagination is not a source of error

[100] Wayne Proudfoot argues that the concept of religious experience began as a form of Christian apologetics in the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher—especially *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (xii-xiii). Emerson sometimes employed enthusiasm in a similar way and may also, in his own way, be seen as an apologist for a liberal Protestantism. For the influence of Schleiermacher on Emerson see Richardson, "Schleiermacher and the Transcendentalists" 131-132, 135-141.

[101] See Pocock, "Enthusiasm: The Anti-Self of Enlightenment."

for Emerson, but a particularly lively and useful fount of insight. Having "the original, authentic fire of the bard" is a crucial aspect of being a poet, and a poet is Emerson's representative man (1159). And even if Emerson's embrace of the imagination is partly due to his not sharply distinguishing between great philosophers and great poets, it still challenges a crucial characteristic of Enlightenment rationalism.

Emerson identifies British empiricism with John Locke and, although he was certainly not the first Anglo-American thinker to criticize Locke, his particular way of formulating his challenge owes much to his discovery and embrace of German "mystic philosophy." In "The Transcendentalist" Emerson places Kant in direct opposition to Locke—Kant "replied to the skeptical philosophy of Locke, which insisted that there was nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the experience of the senses" (198). Indeed, according to Emerson, Kant's reply to Locke is the source of the term Transcendental: "The extraordinary profoundness and precision of that man's thinking have given vogue to his nomenclature, in Europe and America, to that extent, that whatever belongs to the class of intuitive thought, is popularly called at the present day *Transcendental*" (198-199).[102]

The attraction of Kant—as the phrase "mystic philosophy" suggests—is partly how his philosophy justifies the sort of knowledge that Emerson describes in religious language.[103] In "The Over-Soul" Emerson makes this even more clear:

> The great distinction between teachers sacred or literary,—between poets like Herbert, and poets like Pope,—between philosophers like Spinoza, Kant, and Coleridge, and philosophers like Locke, Paley, Mackintosh, and Stewart,—between men of the world, who are reckoned accomplished talkers, and here and there a fervent mystic, prophesying, half insane under the infinitude of his

[102] Near the beginning of "The Transcendentalist" he notes: "What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism; Idealism as it appears in 1842" (193).
[103] This is not to imply that Locke did not think of his philosophy as justifying religion, but that later thinkers, working from some of his assumptions, did not think it worked in this regard.

> thought,—is, that one class speak *from within*, or from experience, as parties and possessors of the fact; and the other class, *from without*, as spectators merely, or perhaps as acquainted with the fact on the evidence of third persons…. (395)

For Emerson it is but a short step from a poet to a philosopher to a mystic. And if phrases such as "half insane," "the infinitude of his thought," and "as parties and possessors" all suggest the accusations of insanity or the sense of being possessed that was frequently associated with enthusiasm, the fundamental distinction here is between those who speak from experience and those who do not.[104] Those associated with British empiricism rely solely on knowledge gathered through the five senses and not knowledge gathered through the experience of Reason.

An early essay on John Milton demonstrates how Emerson reaches back before the Enlightenment for models of enthusiasm. In "The Poetical Works of John Milton," published in the May, 1838, edition of the *North American Review*, he presents Milton as a British alternative to the tradition of British empiricism. He imagines Milton as a model of his own enlightened enthusiasm and elevates him above all the "philosophers in England, France, and Germany"—"we think it impossible to recall one in those countries, who communicates the same vibration of hope, of self-reverence, of piety, of delight in beauty, which the name of Milton awakes" (60). If the inclusion of Germany on this list may be surprising, his reason for dismissing the Germans is superficial relative to his reasons for dismissing the others. "In Germany," he writes, "the greatest writers are still too recent to institute a comparison" (61). French philosophers he peremptorily dismisses as not entitled "to any rivalry in these lists" (61). It is only those in the Anglo-American tradition—Francis Bacon, Locke, and Benjamin Franklin—who Emerson takes

[104] Although Emerson's meaning is clear, if you arrange the different subjects into columns there is a strange transposition of categories part way through this passage. It goes from "sacred" (A) or "literary" (B) to "Spinoza, Kant, and Coleridge" (A) or "Locke, Paley, Mackintosh, and Stewart" (B), before suddenly switching to "men of the world" (B) and "a fervent mystic" (A). Then it switches back to the original sequence of A and then B with those who speak "*from within*" (A) or those who speak "*from without*" (B).

the time to specifically critique. Bacon's writings "are the portrait of an ambitious and profound calculator,—a great man of the vulgar sort" (60). In regard to the "upper world of man's being" they are insufficient (61). Locke's portrait of man suffers from a similar problem: "The man of Locke is virtuous without enthusiasm, and intelligent without poetry" (61). And similarly, though with a marked economic tinge, "Franklin's man is a frugal, inoffensive, thrifty citizen, but savours of nothing heroic" (61). Milton stands in stark contrast to all three. He is "inspired" by "the idea of a purer existence than any he saw around him" (61). For Emerson, Milton's works indicate a heroic mind that aspires to reach beyond the merely mechanical. Emerson defines Milton as much by the qualities that Bacon, Locke, and Franklin lack as by his own positive attributes. This helps makes sense of the surprising inclusion of Milton in the letter cited above—"the distinction of Milton Coleridge & the Germans between Reason & Understanding." And one of the qualities that Locke lacks, but Milton apparently does not, is enthusiasm.

Milton lived and wrote during the English Civil Wars and Emerson singles out this era of conflict as deserving especially high praise for the vitality of its thought. "No period," Emerson writes, "has surpassed that in the general activity of mind. It is said, that no opinion, no civil, religious, moral dogma can be produced, that was not broached in the fertile brain of that age" (68). Milton is somehow in this age and yet not of it. Indeed, there is something odd in the way this period is exemplary for Emerson and yet he still feels the need to present Milton as an exception to it. If many questions at the time were "decided by the sword," Milton stood apart as "gentle, learned, delicately bred in all the elegancy of art and learning" (68). For Emerson he was an odd fit in "the stern, almost fanatic, society of the Puritans" (68). In Milton Emerson finds or creates a figure who is exemplary because his own interconnected but distinct interests—"*civil* liberty," "*ecclesiastical* liberty," "*literary* liberty," and "*domestic* liberty"—so closely parallel

Emerson's own interests (69). Although he acknowledges that Milton, like so many of the "fanatic" Puritans, "sought absolute truth, not accommodating truth," Emerson's version of Milton transcends the seventeenth century and would have been right at home in early nineteenth century New England (69). But Milton is not the only person from this period who demonstrates the clarity of vision that Emerson admires.

Emerson's interest in pre-enlightenment models of enthusiasm extends beyond Milton and includes the less likely figure of Oliver Cromwell.[105] Although Emerson identifies Cromwell even more clearly as an enthusiast, his variety of enthusiasm is neither distinctly religious nor distinctly political but partakes of both. Just after his claim, near the end of "Circles," that "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm," Emerson observes that, "The great moments of history are the facilities of performance through the strength of ideas, as the works of genius and religion" (414). As support for this claim he quotes Cromwell, whose own life illustrates the point: "'A man,' said Oliver Cromwell, 'never rises so high as when he knows not whither he is going'" (414). While Cromwell's reputation with posterity was improving at the time, this statement is still notable for what it omits. Entirely absent from Emerson's brief reference to one of the "great moments of history" is any acknowledgment of the political disruption and bloodshed that many Enlightenment writers saw as the result of enthusiasm.[106] This absence, along with the gradual shift from philosophical concerns to political concerns

[105] For more on the rehabilitation of Cromwell's reputation during the nineteenth century see the brief discussion in the "Prologue" to this dissertation and Reynolds, *John Brown* 230-232.
[106] Hume, in his *History of England*, is an excellent example of this point of view. And Emerson, who recommends to one correspondent that she continue her reading of Hume, must have been aware of this. Although, perhaps significantly, he suggests that his correspondent supplement Hume with Shakespeare at appropriate points (*Selected Letters* 72). For more on Emerson and Hume see Richardson, *Emerson* 30-31.

indicated by invoking Cromwell, suggests Emerson's concern with the practical implications of his epistemological arguments.

Even as he challenged Enlightenment epistemology, Emerson challenges the foundations of Enlightenment morality. Unlike Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke and Franklin, Emerson allows for a moral absolutism not based on reason or sympathy but on enthusiasm. A passage in "Self-Reliance," for example, suggests that he doubts sympathy is a sufficient foundation for morality.[107] When "sympathy" does not immediately meliorate the suffering of another person he describes it as "base" and recommends moving on. In such a circumstance sympathy is no more than an "infirmity of will": "We come to them who weep foolishly, and sit down and cry for company, instead of imparting to them truth and health in rough electric shocks, putting them once more in communication with their own reason" (276). Presumably there is weeping that is not foolish and then sympathy may be effective. But here sympathy fails to address the real problem, which is that the other person is not a unified self. (And if sympathy is only effective between unified selves then it cannot be the foundation for morality—or, if it is, it is only a foundation for a version of morality that is impoverished because available to only a select few.) Instead the prescription for the sufferer is a "rough electric shock"—which suggests the action of an invisible force in language often associated with both mesmerism and enthusiasm. Putting the sufferer in touch with his or her "own reason" is unifying him or her through a process Emerson previously described in terms of enthusiasm. It is necessary to create unified individuals before each person can distinguish between genuine and foolish suffering. Enthusiasm thus becomes an indispensable foundation for morality.

[107] This interpretation takes Adam Smith's view in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* to be representative of all enlightenment philosophy—an oversimplification, to be sure.

In locating the foundation of morality in a sense of inner unity, Emerson diverges sharply from Enlightenment thinkers. In reaching back before the Enlightenment Emerson is also reaching back before the concomitant development of the public sphere and Emerson's foundation for morality, which he describes as enthusiasm, does not develop in a social context—unless that means a sort of communion of souls. In fact, to find the source of moral authority often involved a radically anti-social act for Emerson—as his famous dictum to go into the woods indicates.[108] But this source can also be found within. Thus, like Adam Smith before him, Emerson directs the attention inward. But he does so to a different end. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith relies on the imagination as a means of sympathizing with others and thus enabling individuals to engage in moral interactions with others. Emerson's interior look discovers an answer inside that does not depend on others: he believes in the universal applicability of what is found within. And here Milton joins Cromwell as an example of a unified individual who finds this source of authority within. Emerson says that Milton "stands erect, commanding, still visible as a man among men, and reads the laws of the moral sentiment to the newborn race" ("The Poetical Works of John Milton" 60). Milton does not gather these sentiments from acts of imaginative sympathy or his interactions with others, but is simply a more effective—and passive—conduit for these sentiments than other people were. Here intuition—or enthusiasm—offers a moral perspective that is apparently detached from any context. For Emerson enthusiasm becomes a universally available means through which to access knowledge that will determine the difference between right and wrong. Although his derivation of morality from a sense of inner unity may seem dangerously anti-social, Emerson

[108] Even as Emerson contributes to the written public sphere, he emphasizes individual actions. Thus instead of morality deriving from textual or social interchange in the public sphere, he locates the source of morality—even the very sense of a coherent self—outside of any social interchange.

believes that when individuals look inward they will all discover the same—perhaps preexisting, but at least complementary—answers.

In reaching back before the Enlightenment and identifying the English Civil Wars as an especially fruitful intellectual period and Milton and Cromwell as exemplary figures, another complication ensues: Emerson has to grapple with a Puritan heritage that he is reluctant to fully embrace. Indeed, when it comes to influences closer to home, he seems to hedge his bets and his ambivalent view of New England Puritanism emphasizes the extent to which Milton and Cromwell are either limited as models or exceptional. To one correspondent he describes his dilemma in powerful rhetoric:

> Great, grim, earnest men! I belong by natural affinity to other thoughts & schools than yours but my affection hovers respectfully about your retiring footprints, your unpainted churches, strict platforms & sad offices, the iron gray deacon and the wearisome prayer rich with the diction of ages. Well the new is only the seed of the old. What is this abolition and Nonresistance & Temperance but the continuation of Puritanism. (*Selected Letters* 261)

On one hand, Emerson sees his New England forebears as harsh and strict and he contrasts them with the softer, perhaps cheerier, reformers of his own time. On the other hand, he sees continuities across the ages, including the tendency of both his ancestors and his contemporaries to slide toward a variety of formalism. Emerson simultaneously rejects Puritanism, acknowledges its influence, and expresses admiration for the Puritans' moral certitude, which strikes him as a precursor to that evinced by reformers of his own time and was partially facilitated by Emerson's own appeal to a universally accessible source of morality. Although he may share in the causes of his contemporaries, Emerson dislikes any sort of movement or institution and wants to keep them at a healthy distance.[109] In the same letter, he warns that New

[109] In "The Transcendentalist" Emerson emphasizes the dangers that stem from any organization: "Each 'Cause,' as it is called,—say Abolition, Temperance, say Calvinism, or Unitarianism,—

England Puritans "have declined into ritualists" and notes that contemporary reform causes are "but the continuation of Puritanism" (*Selected Letters* 261). And in another letter, extolling the virtues of one of his recently deceased predecessors in the New England ministry—who he identified as a Puritan—he sharpens his criticism: "With extraordinary states of mind, with states of enthusiasm, or enlarged speculation, he had no sympathy and pretended to none" (*Selected Letters* 349). To Emerson, specific reforms were temporary manifestations or effects of a larger spectrum of possibilities he called enthusiasm and described as "enlarged speculation." A key spokesman for that more significant—albeit nebulous—movement, he held reformers at a calculated distance because of what he felt was his own higher calling.

When Emerson wrote *Nature* and his early essays, he was geographically and chronologically distant from significant political instability or violence. As he pushed against what he saw as a staid, orthodox establishment—marked by the empty formalism he had rejected when he left the ministry—and criticized the complacency of his contemporaries, the disruption enthusiasm could engender seemed an attractive alternative. So even as Emerson returns to a Europe embroiled in the wars of religion, he pays scant attention to the context in which Milton wrote or Cromwell fought and governed. But if the relative peace of his native New England may have contributed to Emerson's recuperation of the English Civil Wars as a period of fertile thought and clarity of moral vision, his later support for John Brown in the more fraught environment of the late 1850s indicates he was willing to embrace disruption even when it might lead to violence.[110] Certainly his rejection of enlightenment, embrace of Milton and Cromwell,

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becomes speedily a little shop, where the article, let it have been at first never so subtle and ethereal, is now made up into portable and convenient cakes, and retailed in small quantities to suit purchasers" (203).

[110] A contemporary who saw the position of Emerson as privileged and aloof from the consequences of potential violence was Mary Chesnut. In a diary entry from November 27,

and belief in a transcendent source of morality add a sharp edge to Emersonian enthusiasm. But, as he strove to reinvigorate society with the aid of a potentially volatile enthusiasm, neither Emerson nor his contemporaries could imagine the scale of disruption caused by the American Civil War.

4. "Pretty Oracles" and other Ancient Alternatives to Enthusiasm

In his search for new models Emerson not only reaches back past the Enlightenment to the period of the English Civil Wars, but he also reaches much further back into the past—to Ancient Greece. In doing so he deliberately imbues enthusiasm with a renewed sense of its Greek etymology and classical context. Enthusiasm is, of course, derived from the Greek noun ἐνθουσιασμός (Tucker 3). Its precise meaning in Greek is, however, less clear. Susie Tucker observes that the Greek meaning of enthusiasm is the subject of some disagreement among classicists, who "have argued whether ἔνθεος, the base word, refers to God possessing Man or Man caught up into God" (3). This ambiguity obscures specific questions of agency and makes enthusiasm particularly useful to Emerson as he seeks to describe a process in which ambiguity is a benefit (and a process which may finally stem from an incommunicable experience for Emerson). But enthusiasm is not the only term derived from Greek that Emerson employs. By examining the strengths and limitations of other terms with classical roots and associations, it is easier to appreciate the distinctive meaning of enthusiasm that Emerson draws upon.

1861, she envisioned, "Mrs. Stowe, Greeley, Thoreau, Emerson, Sumner, in nice New England homes—clean, clear, sweet-smelling—shut up in libraries, writing books which ease their hearts of their bitterness to us, or editing newspapers—all [of] which pays better than anything else in the world." And she even connected what she saw as their privilege to their support for John Brown: "What self-denial do they practice? It is the cheapest philanthropy trade in the world—easy. Easy as setting John Brown to come down here and cut our throats in Christ's name" (245).

Oracles, which occur throughout Greek literature, captivate Emerson and suggest to him connection between the soul and nature. In "The American Scholar" Emerson identifies the study of nature as the study of the universal soul—what he later calls the oversoul. Both nature and the soul are progressive: "when [the student] has learned to worship the soul, and to see that the natural philosophy that now is, is only the first gropings of its gigantic hand, he shall look forward to an ever expanding knowledge as to a becoming creator" (56). This radical correspondence between the external and the internal means that, when someone studies either one, he or she also studies the other: "Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind" (56). Emerson expresses this correspondence in terms that unite the message of the famed Delphic oracle and Enlightenment science: "in fine, the ancient precept, 'Know thyself,' and the modern precept, 'Study nature,' become at last one maxim" (56). But Emerson is not merely imitative in this regard. If he clearly knows the historical expression from Delphi, in "Self-Reliance" he modifies it and makes it his own. Instead of "Know thyself," he proposes his own oracular alternative which builds on the symbiotic relationship between each individual and nature—"Trust thyself" (260). A paragraph later he subtly reinforces his point by suggesting that "nature yields us"—nature is strikingly passive here—"pretty oracles" (260).

That oracles require interpretation—a process which obscures questions of agency—is also important for Emerson. In the ancient world oracles were spoken on behalf of a god and a presumably passive intermediary minimized the role of human intervention. But, after they were spoken, people had a clear role in interpreting those oracles. The several stages involved in this process make oracles an enigmatic solution to the problem of where to locate agency in the relationship between nature, the soul, and the individual. Unlike enthusiasm, oracles certainly do not offer unmediated access to the transcendent.

Emerson is also drawn to the Orphic tradition. In the last section of *Nature* Emerson includes an excerpt by an anonymous "certain poet" (45). The poet is, of course, Emerson himself, though here he has divided his literary self to disguise the authorship and, indeed, the authority of this passage. He introduces the passage as including "some traditions of man and nature…which as they have always been in the world, and perhaps reappear to every bard, may be both history and prophecy" (45). These introductory lines and the cloak of anonymity combine to give the passage the aura of a timeless utterance. This is reinforced when Emerson offers only the briefest of closing comments, "Thus my Orphic poet sang" (46). Even if he had to serve as his own Orphic poet, this tradition has an obvious appeal to Emerson. In a fashion strikingly similar to Emerson's own project of uniting the Understanding and the Reason, Orphic belief involved uniting an earthly and a heavenly nature, with the heavenly side being the part "that brings true life" if the soul is "delivered from its shackles" (Meyer 101, 65). Orphic tradition was simultaneously visionary and rooted in classical antecedents. And Emerson's description of the Orphic poet is closely connected to enthusiasm. The quote from the Orphic poet section of "Nature" immediately precedes Emerson's description of how "man applies to nature but half his force" (46), his list of "examples of the action of man upon nature with his entire force" (46), and his near definition of enthusiasm as "an instantaneous in-streaming causing power" (47). The Orphic poet becomes one more example of how enthusiasm functions to create a united individual.

The way Emerson uses "genius" also plays on its classical heritage. The Greek *γίγνεσθαι*, from which the English "genius" is derived, meant "to be born, come into being," (OED).[111] This closely parallels how Emerson uses the word when, at the beginning of "Self-Reliance," he

[111] Emerson frequently uses genius in this sense in "The Poet."

observes that "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius" (259). This construction also plays upon the religious sense of genius—in a Greek and Emersonian sense it is to be born (in some ways, to be born again). In "The Transcendentalist" Emerson says of the radical young idealists, "Let them obey the Genius then most when his impulse is wildest; then most when he seems to lead to uninhabitable desarts of thought and life; for the path which the hero travels alone is the highway of health and benefit to mankind" (208). The latter two clauses even exploit the ancient origins of the word by associating it with a hint of early asecticism and the deeds of classical heroes. In the same passage Emerson uses genius in away that evokes another classical meaning of the word as a "tutelary god or attendant spirit" (OED). In this sense, genius merges easily with yet another word with classical roots, daemon. In a journal entry from 1827 Emerson discusses Socrates's "daemon" and equates it to "an invisible Genius," "conscience," and "the voice of God" (*Selected Journals* 149).[112] But what is particularly striking in "Self-Reliance" is how Emerson both transforms genius into the idea that there is something universal in each individual's heart—which would seem to merge genius with the common moral sense, which is the basis for stability and the social glue of the enlightenment—and embraces the disruptive or antinomian impulse that an individual voice implies when he defends the virtues of this "impulse" at its "wildest."

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[112] A more complete version of this passage (from January 16, 1827) reads as follows:

> There was a citizen of Athens, the wisest certainly of all the pagans that preceded Christ—I mean Socrates—who taught his countrymen that he was always attended by an invisible Genius which governed his actions. This daemon, as he said, never urged him to the performance of any action but if at any time he proposed to do anything wrong gave him a customary signal to forbear. He said he was accustomed to obey these signals as if they were the voice of God….
>
> "I suppose that by this Daemon, Socrates designed to describe by a lively image the same judgment which we term conscience. We are all attended by this daemon. We are acquainted with that signal which is as the voice of God. (149)

Emerson's use of genius seems even more closely related to his use of enthusiasm than his allusions to and reinterpretations of oracles or his own pose as an anonymous orphic poet. Unlike interpreting an oracle—which, no matter the degree of correspondence between the external and the internal, still involves interpretation as an intermediate step—obeying our genius, in the way that Emerson uses the term, connects the individual to the universal without the need for any intermediate steps. But, if precisely how a genius functions remains usefully ambiguous for Emerson, a genius—or a daemon—is still an intermediary. Even as, during the nineteenth century, the word genius seems to be in a process of semantic shift similar to that of enthusiasm, and even though genius is probably as close as Emerson comes to an equivalent to enthusiasm, the etymological and cultural associations of genius still limit it in ways that do not apply to enthusiasm. An orphic poet has different limitations. If the orphic poet, who sings of unity, relies on no intermediary, Emerson is clear in other places that a true poet is remarkably rare in the current state of society.[113] Enthusiasm, however, in the sense Emerson's audience would have been familiar with it, was no respecter of persons and even sometimes considered contagious, which emphasizes its democratic appeal. And unlike genius, enthusiasm does not set up an intermediary between the individual and the universal; enthusiasm suggests direct, unmediated access.

Emerson's use of Greek terms—or English terms with their origins rooted in Greek—was subtle and self-aware. But, while he alludes to Greek models and makes them his own, Emerson still displays a distinct, characteristic ambivalence about relying on any models whatsoever—just as he did with the Puritans. For example, even as he alludes to the Delphic oracle near the

[113] My explanation may seem to merge Emerson's orphic poet with his description of "the Poet" in a more general sense. As this pertains to the current subject, I don't think the difference is material—after all, any true Emersonian poet must sing of unity. See *Nature* and "The Poet" for multiple examples of Emerson's emphasis on unity.

beginning of "Self-Reliance," a paragraph later he rejects copies of Greek architecture, "And why need we copy the Doric or the Gothic model?" (278). Or, when he condemns travelling as a means of self-discovery: "In Thebes, in Palmyra, his will and mind have become old and dilapidated as they. He carries ruins to ruins" (278). When he writes, "Insist on yourself; never imitate," he transforms his obsession with the dangers of imitating the past and setting up artificial models—instead of creating independent, individuals in touch with nature—into a maxim. Of course his vehement protests against imitation may appear mildly ironic in light of his evocative use of terminology with Greek antecedents to describe the process of inspiration. But whether tangentially related to a self-consciousness about language or to other factors, Emerson had a profound aversion to imitation in any form. One more thing that enthusiasm had going for it—in a way that genius and oracle did not—is that it drew on a wide range of sources and a peculiar tradition in English that had gradually diluted its Greek antecedents. Emerson was free to employ enthusiasm knowing he could draw on its classical tradition without being unduly restricted by that very tradition. Enthusiasm combined distant classical associations with almost unrestricted freedom.

5. Religious Enthusiasm and Literary Enthusiasm in a Fallen World

The Ancient world was more than just a vaguely useful past for Emerson. It seems to have represented a prelapsarian world in which religious enthusiasm and literary enthusiasm were closely related. Literary or poetic inspiration goes back at least as far as Ancient Greece and the Hebrew scriptures.[114] The earliest examples of enthusiasm in English include both senses

[114] For Ancient Greece see Tucker 77. For the Hebrew scriptures, see the complaint of the prophet Jeremiah, which illustrates this point: "Then I said, 'I will not make mention of him, nor

and enthusiasm retains the sense of poetic inspiration in English until at least the early nineteenth century (Tucker 77-93). Emerson plays with and exploits the overlap between religious enthusiasm and literary enthusiasm, which frequently overlap to such an extent that it is difficult or impossible to distinguish one from the other. Both religious enthusiasm and literary enthusiasm are separately ways to access the timeless and universal for Emerson, but he also associates the unity of these two (or places where the overlap is particularly strong) with a prelapsarian state. He even indicates enthusiasm remains a viable means of accessing this prelapsarian state—a means that is still available. But even as he explores the dynamic between religious enthusiasm, literary enthusiasm, and the possible ways in which enthusiasm allows access to a timeless and universal prelapsarian state, when one of his contemporaries presents his poetry as the product of that sort of enthusiasm, Emerson expresses some reservations about its literary merits. Emerson remains more comfortable with the unity of religious enthusiasm and literary enthusiasm in the abstract—as in his idealized figure of the poet.

In "Thoughts on Modern Literature," published in the October, 1840, edition of *The Dial*, Emerson equates literature with scripture. He opens this essay by juxtaposing the two terms in a manner that effectively conflates them:

> There is no better illustration of the laws by which the world is governed than Literature. There is no luck in it. It proceeds by Fate. Every scripture is given by the inspiration of God. (1147)

Insofar as it is fated and inspired, literature is scripture.[115] But literature is also a human production and remains in "some sort a creature of time," as Emerson acknowledges: "Always

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speak any more in his name'. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (KJV, Jer. 20:9).

[115] In spite of the broad definitions of literature current during this time—see Noah Webster's 1828 definition of literature for an illustration of the term's encompassing sweep—Emerson certainly does not mean to suggest that even all learned writing is scripture.

the oracular soul is the source of thought, but always the occasion is administered by the low mediations of circumstance" (1147). What is ultimately real endures only, "In proportion as it was not polluted by any wilfulness of the writer, but flowed from his mind after the divine order of cause and effect"—that is, to the degree that "it was not his but nature's, and shared sublimity of the sea and sky" (1147). In proportion as it might be polluted by the willfulness of a writer, it is artificial (in the Emersonian sense of something that mixes nature with man's artifice) and therefore bound to, or even corrupted by, a particular time.[116] Whether the source of inspired literature is "God" or "the oracular soul," the appropriate role of the human author is to get out of the way so that it can speak universal and timeless truths without impediment.

Although in principle this process seems relatively straightforward, explaining how it works is not. Throughout his oeuvre, Emerson repeatedly attempts to describe the actual process of inspiration and composition—both how one takes priority over the other and how we recognize the differing products that result. In one particularly remarkable passage from "Thoughts on Modern Literature," he evokes religious enthusiasm and literary enthusiasm simultaneously:

> All that gives currency still to any book, advertised in the morning's newspaper in London or Boston, is the remains of faith in the breast of men that not adroit book makers, but the inextinguishable soul of the universe reports of itself in articulate discourse to-day as of old. The ancients strongly expressed their sense of the unmanageableness of these words of the spirit by saying, that the God made his priest insane, took him hither and thither as leaves are whirled by the tempest. But we sing as we are bid. Our inspirations are very manageable and tame. Death and sin have whispered in the ear of the wild horse of Heaven, and he has become a dray and a hack. And step by step with the entrance of this era of ease and convenience, the belief in the proper Inspiration of man has departed. (1148)

Here Emerson seems to leave almost no role for an author at all. Instead of "adroit book makers" participating in the process, agency resides in "the inextinguishable soul of the universe."

[116] For Emerson's understanding of artificial see *Nature* (8).

Moreover, this is the way it always has been. With a phrase that recalls both the antiquity of enthusiasm and its associations with insanity, Emerson observes that, for the "ancients," actually understanding this process was beyond the capacity of man—"God made his priest insane."[117] The sense of possession recalls how enthusiasm once meant being possessed by the gods. And when Emerson writes that "we sing as we are bid," it is significantly unclear who is doing the singing and who is doing the bidding. This is both a question of agency and much more—the very ambiguity of the phrase effaces distinctions between the past and the present. The "we" who sing includes singers from all times. But who or what does the bidding is also unclear—it may be the gods or God in the past, the circumstances in the present, or some combination of both. Although the title of this essay indicates it is on modern literature it is really about all literature. Emerson does not clearly differentiate between the ancient and the modern any more than he differentiates between religious enthusiasm and literary enthusiasm. Both the "adroit book makers" of Emerson's own time and the ancient priests derive their inspiration from "the inextinguishable soul of the universe."

What does separate the inspirations of Emerson's own time from the inspirations of the "ancients" is a fall. But although his language evokes traditional Christian interpretations of Genesis, Emerson neatly avoids attributing the fall to anything or anyone specific. The ambiguity of the phrase "we sing as we are bid" obscures any direct attribution of causality, as does the suggestion that the fall stems from "Death and sin… whisper[ing] in the ear of the wild horse of

[117] Of course this anticipates Herman Melville's description of Pip's near drowning in *Moby-Dick* (321-322) and Emily Dickinson's lines about how, "The Truth must dazzle gradually / Or every man be blind – " (494).

Heaven."[118] The "wild horse of Heaven" might be something unknown and transcendent or someone inspired by that something unknown and transcendent and consequently rendered unmanageable or insane. Either way Emerson clearly divides an earlier world with a privileged access to the transcendent from the present. The prelapsarian, ancient world is characterized by wildness and insanity; the postlapsarian, contemporary world by "manageable and tame" inspirations.

In imagining a prelapsarian world, Emerson extends his criticism of contemporary society beyond the enlightenment to include human history since the classical age. And this time—in contrast to when he reached back before the enlightenment to Milton and Cromwell, both of whom, albeit in different ways, he claims transcend their historical setting and represent man's potential for power—he mostly eschews specific examples. To be sure, he mentions many figures in passing, such as Jesus, Zoroaster, Manu, Mohammed, and Confucius. And of course he refers to Socrates and Plato and includes Plato in *Representative Men*. But overall Emerson avoids elaborating on specific individuals as exemplary and instead identifies specific texts as exemplary. He claims the Bible is the fount of all literature and the "most original book in the world" because "it came out of a profounder depth of thought than any other book" (1148-1149).[119] Even Shakespeare, "the first literary genius of the world…leans on the Bible: his poetry supposes it" (1149).[120] However, Emerson's Bible is a catholic scripture that makes no exclusive

[118] Emerson does not see this fall as creating an impassable gulf that man cannot cross, but as limiting inspiration to a pale shadow of what had formerly been available—more "manageable and tame." Much to his detriment, man has now tamed inspiration.

[119] This provides yet another example of where Emerson the romanticist, enthralled as he is by enthusiasts who can access this "profounder depth of thought," is also an heir of the enlightenment—he deliberately makes this claim to oppose those who "imagine that the place, which the Bible holds in the world, it owes to miracles" (1149).

[120] Even if the Germans had not rediscovered this prelapsarian state, for Emerson they exemplify the important influence of literature on life. He claims that their insights derive almost entirely

claims for Christianity. No sooner has he singled out the Bible for praise than he proposes revising the canon to include "the kindred sacred writings of the Hindoos, Persians, and Greeks": Emerson's prelapsarian world—although it is especially associated with ancient Greek philosophers—derives from a variety of ancient societies (1149).[121]

A key characteristic of Emerson's prelapsarian world is that it existed before there was a clear distinction between religious enthusiasm and literary enthusiasm. It was a time when literature and religion were united even as man was united. Literature, according to Emerson, is no more substantive than any other scripture. It is "ephemeral" and Emerson is faithful to a "higher truth" (1150). Literature is a means to an end and books "can have no permanent value"—"The erect mind disparages all books" (1149). But for the moment, for those minds that are not erect, literature can "keep alive the memory and the hope of a better day" (1150). In lieu of more genuine experiences, literature can serve as a reminder of genuine experiences or a suggestion of "the higher truth" discovered through such experiences. In this context, Emerson mentions "reading poems" which have an influence above and beyond "their grammatical construction": "If I analyze the sentences, it eludes me, but is the genius and suggestion of the

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from the influence of Shakespeare: "…the prodigious growth and influence of the genius of Shakspeare…almost alone has called out the genius of the German nation into an activity, which spreading from the poetic into the scientific, religious, and philosophical domains, has made theirs now at last the paramount intellectual influence of the world, reacting with great energy on England and America" (1151-1152).

[121] To the extent that prelapsarian suggests an irrecoverable fall it is a misleading term. Emerson eschews Calvinist overtones and believes that united individuals can always transcend the limitations of their particular context. Throughout his works Emerson puts an emphasis on transcendental philosophers or philosophical religious figures and entirely neglects classical or popular religion. Sometimes, however, his lack of particular models suggests that all of the Ancient Greeks partook of this purer, more unified world and lived in states of enthusiasm. This idea has a clear parallel in his romantic fascination with the innocence and purity of children: in the ancient world all men were in a purer state even as youth is the purer state of each individual. After all, in *Nature* the whole reason Emerson suggests sending man into nature is to strip away the cultural accretions that circumscribe and limit each self and to rediscover the insights of "perpetual youth" (10).

whole. Over every true poem lingers a certain wild beauty, immeasurable" (1150). Both literature and scripture are akin to nature, which, when encountered in the right frame of mind, can serve as an oracle. Neither literature nor scripture is an end in itself, but a means to an end or a reminder of an end when not engaged in an actual moment of transcendence. They are artifacts left behind by an enthusiasm that transcends contemporary distinctions between literature and religion.

It was easier for Emerson to idealize models from the past as representative than it was to unequivocally embrace them in the present. Even as in "Thoughts on Modern Literature" he was extolling the virtues of a prelapsarian state in which religious enthusiasm and literary enthusiasm were merged, his views were being tested by Jones Very—one of his neighbors who believed he himself had attained such a state. In Very's case the connection between religious enthusiasm and literary enthusiasm is supported by the details of his biography. He did think himself inspired, lost his position as a tutor at Harvard College as a result, and was temporarily committed to an asylum (Deese xv-xix).

In 1839, with Emerson's help, Very published a collection of poems which he considered inspired. Although Emerson's 1841 review of Very's *Essays and Poems* was published less than a year after "Thoughts on Modern Literature," he does make a distinction between religious enthusiasm and literary enthusiasm. This distinction does not stem from any criticism of Very's religious enthusiasm—in fact, Emerson claims to have found a "sublime unity" in Very's book (1179). He called the poems "almost as pure as the sounds of Surrounding Nature" and praises the poems as products of enthusiasm (1179):

> The genius of this book is religious, and reaches an extraordinary depth of sentiment. The author, plainly a man of a pure and kindly temper, casts himself into the state of the high and transcendental obedience to the inward Spirit. He has apparently made up his mind to follow all its leadings, though he should be taxed

> with absurdity or even with insanity. In this enthusiasm he writes most of these verses, which rather flow through him than from him. (1178)

Just as required in Emerson's description of a prelapsarian state in "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Very has apparently been passive, obedient, and willing to be considered insane. He does not mix his own will with that of the "inward Spirit" that he channels. This description would seem to confirm the connection between this prelapsarian state and enthusiasm, which Emerson describes here as "the state of the high and transcendental obedience to the inward Spirit."

But Emerson is conflicted in regard to Very. Even as he refers to Very's poems as "pure," praises them as products of Very's enthusiasm, and extols enthusiasm itself as necessary for greatness, Emerson suggests that enthusiasm hinders Very in a literary sense. The works display no evidence of "composition, no elaboration, no artifice in the structure of rhyme, no variety in the imagery; in short, no pretension to literary merit, for this would be departure from his singleness, and followed by loss of insight" (1178). The absence of craft is a virtue because of how it exhibits an unmediated access to the divine, but in remarking on the poetry's lack of finish there is also something "mildly patronizing" or even apologetic in Emerson's tone (Deese xxii).[122] This becomes more obvious when Emerson elaborates on how, if Very's sentiment is prelapsarian, his form suggests he has not fully escaped what William James later called, "The trail of the human serpent" (515):

> They are as sincere a litany as the Hebrew songs of David or Isaiah, and only less than they, because indebted to the Hebrew muse for their tone and genius. This makes the singularity of the book, namely, that so pure an utterance of the most

[122] Helen Deese notes that, although it took him two years to notice them in print, Emerson selected the poems himself from a much larger collection in manuscript and edited them for publication—although there is no acknowledgment of Emerson's role as editor in the book itself. Very apparently objected strongly to any alterations, however minor, in the final form of the poems (xix-xxiii).

> domestic and primitive of all sentiments should in this age of revolt and experiment use once more the popular religious language, and so show itself secondary and morbid. (1178)

Emerson finds the "pure utterance" and "primitive" attributes engaging here and, in a letter he calls for "obeying the aboriginal truth" (*Selected Letters* 196). As literature, however, Very's poems are secondary and derivative. To have "pretension to literary merit" that truth must be crafted (*Selected Letters* 196). The word "morbid"—which echoes the "Death and sin" that marks the fall of man in "Thoughts on Modern Literature"—may even suggest that Very's poems, if not his experience, are somehow deficient from a religious perspective. Very's poems do not attain the status of scripture for Emerson—they are still products of a postlapsarian world.

It is in the figure of the poet, however, that Emerson more effectively and most famously merges the religious and literary. The idealized poet has a special ability to access the universal and timeless. In *Nature* Emerson speaks of this poet as one who "unfixes the land and the sea, makes them revolve around the axis of his primary thought, and disposes them anew" (34). But the poet is not the agent—or at least not simply an agent. He is someone who channels a higher power. In the very next sentence Emerson neatly excuses the poet from direct agency: the poet is "Possessed himself by a heroic passion" (34). In "The Over-Soul" Emerson repeats the same move in different language. After he describes "great poets," he adds, "But genius is religious. It is a larger imbibing of the common heart" (396). "This energy," he explains, "does not descend into individual life on any other condition than entire possession." (396). And in "The Poet" he asserts that "every intellectual man quickly learns, that beyond the energy of his possessed and conscious intellect, he is capable of a new energy (as of an intellect doubled on itself), by abandonment to the nature of things" (459). Through this strange sense of doubling, Emerson points inward and outward simultaneously—a fact which becomes more clear when, as each

phrase modifies the next when the sentence continues, he suggests "that, beside his privacy of power as an individual man, there is a great public power, on which he can draw, by unlocking, at all risks, his human doors, and suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him: then he is caught up into the life of the Universe, his speech is thunder, his thought is law, and his words are universally intelligible as the plants and animals" (459). Even as he seems ambivalent about the poet's agency, the poet's authority clearly comes from something beyond "his human doors." This causes the poet to speak "somewhat wildly"—it is as if the poet is "inflamed" or in the grip of something "like an insanity" (459, 462). It is, Emerson emphasizes—again evoking the Greek roots of enthusiasm—an ancient tradition: "the ancients were wont to express themselves, not with intellect alone, but the intellect inebriated by nectar" (459-460).[123] The poet's ambivalent agency and unequivocal claim to authority, the associations with heat and insanity, and the spectral Greeks lurking around every corner, make it plain that the poet is an enthusiast in all but name.

Literature, composed by the Emersonian poet, provides a vantage point outside the circle of the daily routine from which to observe or critique daily life and start to imagine a more perfect world. In "Circles" Emerson explains how literature fulfills this role at greater length. Employing the overarching metaphor indicated by the title of that essay, he argues that the true use of literature is to help a person transcend daily life: "Literature is a point outside of our hodiernal circle, through which a new one may be described. The use of literature is to afford us a platform whence we may command a view of our present life, a purchase by which we may move it" (408). It is because of the new perspectives which come from standing outside of daily life that "we value the poet," who speaks for a world that is completely unified (409). Of course

[123] This also posits a natural explanation for enthusiasm that Emerson develops more fully in "The Poet."

this is not to say that each Emersonian poet is universal and timeless. In "The Poet" Emerson writes that "the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet" (450). And he is careful to note, "I look in vain for the poet whom I describe" (465).

Even if literature seems to gain in stature when Emerson equates it with scripture—and even if Emerson looks forward to the advent of a new poet—it is still primary experience, not literature, which is authoritative. The "divine moments" of transcendence "when," as Emerson writes in "Circles," "these waves of God flow into me" are key (411). While both religious enthusiasm and literary enthusiasm remain, at least in the abstract, viable ways of accessing the timeless and universal, Emerson never really explains the relationship between them. When united they are associated with the prelapsarian state and the figure of the Emersonian poet. But, as the example of Jones Very suggests, in a postlapsarian world someone who combines religious enthusiasm and literary enthusiasm is not easy to come by. Both the preplapsarian world and the Emersonian poet may be primarily useful for Emerson as convenient fictions through which to critique the spiritual poverty of his own age.

6. Quakers, Enthusiasm, and Questions of Class

Of the many religious sects in Jacksonian America, Emerson regarded the Quakers with particular interest. He was well acquainted with both the Journal of George Fox and several pertinent histories (Richardson, *Emerson* 157-163). Like many of his contemporaries on both sides of the Atlantic, Emerson found much to admire in the Quakers. For example, just as Coleridge wrote of the *Journal* of John Woolman that he "should almost despair of that man who could peruse the life of John Woolman without an amelioration of heart," Emerson wrote that he

found “more wisdom in these pages than in any other book written since the days of the apostles” (qtd. in Moulton 3). He was especially intrigued by the Quakers’s doctrine of the inner light and found in it affinities with his own thought. But there was a strange ambivalence in Emerson’s interest in the Quakers that played on the latent associations of enthusiasm with the inferior and his own attempt to recapture enthusiasm as a crucial component of any great endeavor.

The Society of Friends was one of many groups that grew out of the religious upheaval surrounding the English Civil Wars. Their popular name indicates how their contemporaries thought their religious practices exhibited improper and extravagant emotion. In the seventeenth century they were clearly considered enthusiasts, but, by the time he published his essay “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm” in 1741, Hume could write that the Quakers were “the most egregious, though, at the same time, the most innocent enthusiasts that have yet been known” and an example of how, after “the first fire of enthusiasm is spent, men naturally… sink into the greatest remissness and coolness in sacred matters” (*Essays* 75, 77). By the early nineteenth century, although they were sometimes still loosely associated with the lower classes and occasionally the objects of suspicion or reviled because of their pacifism, Quakers had become even more respectable—indeed admired by many—for their devotion and their moral principles, particularly their steadfast opposition to slavery.[124]

On a visit to New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1834, Emerson made the acquaintance of the Quaker, Miss Rotch. After conversing with her he asked himself, incredulously, in his journal, “Can you believe, Waldo Emerson, that you may relieve yourself of this perpetual perplexity of choosing? & by putting your ear close to the soul, learn always the true way”

[124] For the increasing respectability of Quakers and their influence on abolition see Hamm 24-26, 33-36.

(*Selected Journals* 302). The inner light offered a solution to Emerson's intellectual dilemma and promised if not to resolve then at least to assuage the associated anxiety of choosing. Unlike the idea of moral sentiment, it was not rooted in a social dynamic that might mirror shifting cultural mores, but had an appealing, if inexplicable and potentially inexpressible, authority because of how it was rooted inside each individual.[125] And, as he seems to have understood it was practiced by the Quakers, the doctrine of the inner light involved being still and alone, which not only appealed to his penchant for going alone into nature, but also, as the Quaker opposition to slavery indicated, had the potential to serve as a foundation for social reform. And it was accessible to all people without regard to their level of education or degree of cultivation. After meeting Miss Rotch, Emerson even imagined the inner light as a modern, Anglo-American counterpart to the doctrines of the Greeks and Germans: "I cannot but remark how perfectly this agrees with the Daimon of Socrates, even in that story which I once thought anomalous, of the direction as to the choice of two roads. And with the grand Unalterableness of Fichte's morality" (302).

[125] Its foundations in Quakerism mean that the concept of the inner light was, at least to some extent, developed prior to the enlightenment. But it was not only earlier than the idea of moral sentiment, but fundamentally different than it—if perhaps less clearly targeted to an end. Nicole Eustace explains it thus: "Quakers believed that feelings could be one important manifestation of the light of Christ within, while New Light evangelicals believed—in tandem with Jonathan Edwards—in the importance of religious feeling and affections in the work of religious conversion" (483). Note that she argues that "in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania affections and feelings were both associated with moments of social, and often religious, connection" (483). See also the next page for an explanation of moral sentiment as slightly different because, going back to Adam Smith, it was understood as "a force for social good, the source of sympathetic identification between separate social actors" (484). If, as Eustace also indicates, sentiment—as it moved into the nineteenth century—became closer to feeling, it still retained some vestiges of this earlier difference. So for Emerson this feeling of oneness—of listening to the soul as Miss Rotch described it—is both indicative of the special importance of feeling and one step closer to understanding enthusiasm as simply an emotional state.

Almost a decade later, in his 1842 article on "Transcendentalism," Emerson returned to the subject of Quakerism. Although ostensibly about both Calvinism and Quakerism, the article, which was published in the January, 1842, edition of *The Dial*
and consists of only two letters and a brief commentary by Emerson, focuses almost entirely on the role and appeal of Quakerism. The first letter, from a Calvinist, describes how a tradition once associated with "the most fervid enthusiasm" had come to reject transcendentalists, or "even the purest and gentlest enthusiasm": the Calvinist tradition "fights for the letter of Orthodoxy, for usage, for custom, for tradition, against the Spirit" (1197). The author does not accuse transcendentalists of extravagance, but of being "too dim of sight, too feeble of grasp, too wanting in certainty" (1197). But, after transcribing this letter, Emerson never even alludes to it in his commentary.[126] Instead he directs all his attention to the second letter, which provided him an opportunity to reflect on the inner light and its implications.

The second letter, from a Quaker, describes how, when "stript of all that puritanism and sectarianism had heaped upon them," the "doctrines of the Quakers" had become "the foundation of an intellectual philosophy, that is illuminating the finest minds and reaches the wants of the of the least cultivated" (1198). In his commentary, Emerson draws particular attention to this passage and claims that "in proportion to the depth of the experience, will be its independence on time and circumstances" (1198). Then he makes two key observations. First, the experience is one of enthusiasm, and second, this "religious enthusiasm" corresponds in its effects to experiences in which Emerson finds pleasure on an intellectual level: "wherever the religious enthusiasm makes its appearance, it supplies the place of poetry and philosophy and of learned discipline, and inspires by itself the same vastness of thinking; so that in learning the religious

[126] Emerson may have considered the problem of formalism in the Calvinist tradition too obvious to need any explanation.

experiences of a strong but untaught mind, you seem to have suggested in turn all the sects of the philosophers" (1199).

This embrace of Quakerism would seem to be one of the clearest examples of how Emerson participates in the process of turning the eighteenth-century aversion to enthusiasm on its head. He doesn't shrink from the enthusiastic past of the Quakers, but draws from it what he thinks is useful for the contemporary world. Instead of claiming that enthusiasm was a marker of the inferior because of how it involved emotional excess, he claimed that it was an avenue for accessing the transcendent. But in a slight twist, Emerson observed that Quakerism was an avenue that appealed to people for whom German philosophy was still a mystery. Instead of reading Kant, these people could intuit Kant through listening to the light—or universal soul—within. While this position might seem to be simply affirming the value of the inner light, his use of the Quakers to make this point recalls older associations between Quakerism, enthusiasm, and the lower classes.

Emerson's subtle association of enthusiasm with the socially inferior stands in sharp contrast to his earlier emphasis on literature as an inspiration for philosophers. Taken together, "Thoughts on Modern Literature"—in which he draws a connection between Shakespeare and German philosophers—and "Transcendentalism" indicate that religion was useful for the lower classes as philosophy was for the higher classes. When examined more closely this even seems to suggest that the intellectual classes did not need the same sort of religious experience as the lower classes. In both the enthusiasm of the anonymous Quaker and in how he described that enthusiasm as "the foundation of an intellectual philosophy," Emerson recognized another avenue to the timeless and universal. Enthusiasm is the felt correlative or pre-linguistic experience that opens up a sense of connection that the "learned" may access in other ways. It

inspires, but may not lead to and is not equivalent to the "vastness of thinking" that Emerson holds as an ideal. Nevertheless, because it comes firsthand—and not secondhand through books—it is in some ways more authentic to Emerson. Indeed, he explains that, "the religious sentiment could exalt the thinking and purify the language of the most uneducated men" (1199). What is purifying for one group may be unnecessary for another whose thinking and language may be already pure or able to become pure in a more sophisticated way. But, in recognizing the importance of religious enthusiasm, Emerson also notes that, for those with education and time, "poetry and philosophy" can substitute for "religious experiences." The different avenues are each available for the appropriate class of people.[127] Enthusiasm is an insight into the universe that does not discriminate on the basis of education or social class and may raise the uncultivated to a moral plane above the level of their learning.

Even as Emerson draws on enthusiasm's historical role as a marker of the inferior, he suggests it has a key role to play in the new social world of Jacksonian America in which Republican virtue is inadequate to unite different classes. Where poetry, philosophy, and "learned discipline" appeal to the educated, religious enthusiasm democratizes the same insights. Although early Quakers were often condemned as enthusiasts by their contemporaries, Emerson identifies Quakerism and Transcendentalism as two complementary means of gaining insight into the world. And Emerson argued that the particular movement called Transcendentalism in New England was actually timeless and universal: "We have every day occasion to remark its perfect identity…with the liberal thought of all men of a religious and contemplative habit in

[127] Emerson's suggestion that, for the less educated, a version of religion that promises direct access to the divine may serve as a substitute for philosophy is not new. For example, Peter Brown observes, in regard to Christianity and other ancient religions, that during the Roman Empire "conversion" and "revelation" combined "opened a breach in the high wall of classical culture for the average man," who thus "gained a moral excellence which had previously been reserved for the classical Greek and Roman gentleman…" (*The World of Late Antiquity* 53).

other times and countries" (1196). Thus the enthusiasm that many New England preachers considered a threat to their community is redeemed for Emerson because of how it functions as a sort of social glue that bonds people of disparate backgrounds. Enthusiasm contributes to holding a community together through universal access to a common source of knowledge and morality in a way that corresponds to his own intellectual, philosophical, and religious predilections.

7. Enthusiasm as Critique: From the Opposite of Formalism to the Opposite of Skepticism

In many of his writings, Emerson demonstrates that he is closely attuned to the way in which institutional religion worked to support the emerging market economy.[128] In "The Conservative" he argues that "religious institutions" have "a market value as conservators of property" and that business interests would uphold them for their own purposes "if priest and church-member should fail" (186). These "religious institutions" are the same ones from which he had withdrawn and which he had criticized for their formalist tendencies. In words that clearly recall his earlier critique, Emerson argues that "religion in such hands loses its essence" and "men are misled into a reliance on institutions, which, the moment they cease to be the instantaneous creations of the devout sentiment, are worthless" (187). If enthusiasm regenerates people and society, the absence of enthusiasm leaves people as unfeeling machines with no source of value beyond the crass commercialism he saw all around him. Without enthusiasm men are merely machines and religion is merely a means to order a work force. Employing enthusiasm to disrupt more than just the established conventions of the New England ministerial

[128] For the connection between religion and the emerging market economy see Johnson, *The Shopkeeper's Millenium*.

establishment, Emerson offers a penetrating critique of American culture in a way that simultaneously dovetails with and extends his critique of formalism.

Emerson unequivocally condemns his countrymen for their myopic materialism. "Americans have no faith," he argues: "They rely on the power of a dollar; they are deaf to sentiment" (146). His use of "faith" indicates the distinction he draws between Americans, whom he describes as "unbelievers," and others who, as believers, are "transfigured and raised above themselves by the power of principles" (147). The transfiguration and elevation of the latter results from enthusiasm. "Every great and commanding moment in the annals of the world is the triumph of some enthusiasm," argues Emerson (147). The example he cites in support of this claim—which emphasizes the national aspect of his cultural critique even as it might have appealed to the expansionist inclinations of many of his contemporaries—is "The victories of the Arabs after Mahomet, who, in a few years, from a small and mean beginning, established a larger empire than that of Rome, is an example" (147).[129] While the oblique allusion to a national purpose provocatively suggests enthusiasm may be important for American aspirations on the world stage, Emerson's main point is clear: a life or philosophy that does not transcend the material is but a pale shadow of reality.

Emerson includes the reformers in his condemnation. In "The Transcendentalist," for example, he notes that, even among reformers who embrace causes such as "Abolition, Temperance, say Calvinism, or Unitarianism," "Few persons have any magnificence of nature to inspire enthusiasm, and the philanthropies and charities have a certain air of quackery" (203). Both these men and their causes seem shallow, unappealing, and disconnected from any larger

[129] David Reynolds argues that early American depictions of Islam often involved transferring sensitive religious issues into a foreign setting in which they could be more freely discussed (*Faith and Fiction* 13-20). Emerson's example seems like a distant variant of that practice.

purpose: they are characterized by "a spirit of cowardly compromise and seeming, which intimates a frightful skepticism, a life without love, and an activity without an aim" (204). Even if an individual's energy is directed toward social reform, skepticism—at least as Emerson initially articulates it—lends itself to a preoccupation with the material at the expense of the non-material, the universal soul, or the higher powers of man. Someone capable of inspiring enthusiasm, however, finds social reform, as an end in itself, limited and insufficient. A reformer may have either enthusiasm or skepticism, but not both—they are mutually exclusive. And only someone who has the loftier aims associated with enthusiasm is a transcendentalist.

In "Circles" Emerson extends the preoccupation with the material that he labels skepticism to include scientific reductionism. Aware of philosophical and scientific alternatives to religious explanations, Emerson is sure that they can never provide an adequate or final account of reality. He realizes that the sense of progress engendered by new theories and discoveries might be understood by many as presaging the obsolescence of traditional forms of religion and attempts to put religion on a safer, if not firmer, footing that is beyond the reach of material investigation. Envisioning knowledge as a "mysterious ladder" to be scaled "[s]tep by step," he argues that, if religion is grounded in the material, then new knowledge is an implicit challenge to its authority: "The new statement is always hated by the old, and, to those dwelling in the old, comes like an abyss of skepticism" (405). But, according to Emerson, this "fear" is misplaced: "Does the fact look crass and material, threatening to degrade thy theory of spirit? Resist it not, it goes to refine and raise thy theory of matter just as much" (405). For Emerson the material is imbricated in the immaterial. They are not in opposition, but part of a unified whole that, if reduced to just the material by the understanding, can only be misapprehended.

To refute this dangerous skepticism, Emerson mounts an "appeal to consciousness" augmented by enthusiasm (405). He argues that life, at least insofar as it is experienced by man, cannot be reduced to the material: "Every man supposes himself not to be fully understood; and if there is any truth in him, if he rests at last on the divine soul… The last chamber, the last closet, he must feel, was never opened; there is always a residuum unknown, unanalyzable" (405). Enthusiasm confounds unitary, bounded versions of the self and, near the end of this essay, Emerson writes that "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm" (414). But it is the few lines following this famous dictum which demonstrate how enthusiasm transcends the "abyss of skepticism" and the "crass and material": "The way of life is wonderful: it is by abandonment. The great moments of history are the facilities of performance through the strength of ideas, as the works of genius and religion" (414).

In less than a decade enthusiasm has transformed for Emerson from the opposite of formalism to the opposite of skepticism. In the former case enthusiasm is primarily a critique of ossified institutions and in the latter case it is primarily the "unknown, unanalyzable" aspects of consciousness and a means of accessing or unleashing great power. Of course enthusiasm remains unmistakably, if vaguely, religious. But it remains so in ways that—drawing on sources from the Greeks to the Quakers—resonate beyond the narrow bounds of New England religious disputes. Emersonian enthusiasm is not only an alternative to Enlightenment materialism, but also a way of defining and legitimizing—even perhaps naturalizing—religion itself: the two have become virtually synonymous.

8. Sanctification or Secularization?: Love, Ecstasy, and Enthusiasm and their Consequences

On May 29, 1837 Convers Francis, a minister from Watertown, Massachusetts, visited the Boston home of George Ripley to attend a meeting of the Transcendental Club. He had been acquainted with Emerson since at least 1819 and often moderated the meetings of the group (Myerson 20, 17). Francis recorded in his journal that in addition to "much social and philosophical talk" the eleven people assembled discussed the nature of religion. "R. W. Emerson," he noted, "defined religion to be "the emotion of shuddering delight and awe from the perception of the infinite""—a claim with which everyone assembled "pretty nearly agreed" (Myerson 24). This definition, which emphasizes religion as an individual experience in which emotion plays a crucial role, suggests just how close the connections between religion and enthusiasm are for Emerson.

Emerson understands individual experience as authoritative and both religion and enthusiasm as inescapably individual. Religion has the potential to regenerate society, but it does so for Emerson person by person. It works through the power of unified individuals who rely on "the emotion of shuddering delight and awe from the perception of the infinite" (or what Emerson refers to variously as "God," "Nature," "the oversoul," "the infinite"). When he writes in his journal that, "My own mind is the direct revelation which I have from God & far least liable to mistake in telling his will of any revelation," his individualism is near to what his New England ministerial predecessors would have called antinomianism (*Selected Journals* 184). Of course the individual nature of religious experience means that defining religion is like capturing truth, which Emerson notes "is such a flyaway, such a slyboots, so utransportable and

unbarrelable a commodity, that it is as bad to catch as light"—it always slips away into moments of particular authority and, like truth, "is gone before you can cry, Hold" (103).

Enthusiasm, because of its etymology, semantic range, and diverse historical associations, is for Emerson a particularly apt way to express the full range of a mysterious, individual experience. And Emersonian enthusiasm is unmistakably individual. Just as he generally ignores the negative connotations of enthusiasm and how it frequently served as a marker of the inferior for many of his predecessors, so Emerson ignores how enthusiasm was once considered socially infectious. For Emerson, enthusiasm cannot be communicated or passed on, just as religion experienced at secondhand slips into formalism. Because he initially thought of enthusiasm as the opposite of formalism, enthusiasm suggests for Emerson an experience or phenomenon less susceptible to institutional ossification than religion. Enthusiasm has become virtually synonymous with authentic religion.

For Emerson, enthusiasm and authentic religion—to the extent that they can be distinguished one from the other—both involve becoming a unified, complete person by recognizing aspects of reality greater than the self and its material surroundings. But even as enthusiasm directs the attention outward, it simultaneously turns the attention inward. This is a paradox central to Emerson's thought: while the only way to be inwardly unified is by looking outward, it is nevertheless something within the self which either connects to that which is beyond or is the place where that which is beyond is realized.[130] Emotions are experienced as internal phenomena and, as he shifts from understanding enthusiasm as the opposite of formalism to understanding it as the opposite of skepticism, Emerson describes enthusiasm in

[130] Of course this is a paradox central to the religious thought of many different traditions.

ways that are increasingly related to or congruent with certain—albeit religiously inflected—emotions.

Emerson often employs love and ecstasy in ways that closely resemble what he means by enthusiasm. An entry in his journal from October 27, 1831 suggests this even goes back to how he thought of love as another alternative to formalism: "But how little love is at the bottom of these great religious shows;—congregations and temples & sermons—how much sham! Love built them, be sure. Yea they were the heart's work; but the fervent generation that built them passed away, things went downward & the forms remain but the soul is well nigh gone" (*Selected Journals* 181).[131] Emerson especially emphasizes love near the end of "Man the Reformer"—right after he claims that "Every great and commanding moment in the annals of the world is the triumph of some enthusiasm" and then gives the example of "the Arabs after Mahomet" (147). In this case, Emerson's critique of materialism and commercialism blends into an invocation of love and ecstasy. He claims there is "one remedy for all ills, the panacea of nature. We must be lovers, and at once the impossible becomes possible" (148). If the "great, overgrown, dead Christendom" is sunk in the darkness of formalism, then "one day all men will be lovers; and every calamity will be dissolved in the universal sunshine" (149). It is thus that "man the reformer" becomes a "mediator between the spiritual and the actual world" and life is renewed through the "opening of the spiritual senses" (149, 150).

The "opening of the spiritual senses" can generate an overpowering feeling of ecstasy in the person whose senses are opened. At the beginning of "Man the Reformer" Emerson claims "every man should be open to ecstasy or a divine illumination" (135). In "The Method of

[131] See also Emerson's comment in his journal from April 26, 1834: "A religion of forms is not for me. I honor the Methodists who find like St John all Christianity in one word, Love" (*Selected Journals* 314).

Nature" Emerson explores the importance of ecstasy at greater length: "the power or genius of nature is ecstatic" and "ecstasy is the law and cause of nature" (126, 127). An individual's "health and greatness consist in his being the channel through which heaven flows to earth, in short, in the fullness in which an ecstatical state takes place in him" (125). This feeling of fullness or "ecstatical state" of the soul is synonymous with "the fact, that enthusiasm is organized therein" (125). Enthusiasm facilitates fusing the religious and the literary and Emerson notes that, "It was always the theory of literature, that the word of a poet was authoritative and final. He was supposed to be the mouth of a divine wisdom" (125).

But there is danger in being "the mouth of a divine wisdom." Divine wisdom may be channeled but not restrained. "What is Love," Emerson asks rhetorically," and why is it the chief good, but because it is an overpowering enthusiasm? Never self-possessed or prudent, it is all abandonment" (128). Emerson may occasionally seem uncertain about the degree to which this "opening of the spiritual senses" is disruptive. Emersonian enthusiasm is a tempered and mature variety of enthusiasm that, while still unsettling and potentially easily misunderstood, is revolutionary in a creative, not a destructive, sense. But it is a close call and precisely where to draw the line frequently needs clarification. Near the end of "Man the Reformer" when he emphasizes love, Emerson remarks—perhaps thinking of the course of the French Revolution—that, "It is better that joy should be spread over all the day in the form of strength, than that it should be concentrated into ecstasies, full of danger and followed by reactions" (150).[132]

Sometimes Emersonian enthusiasm comes perilously close to enthusiasm in its modern sense of an excited emotion. In fact enthusiasm—and in some places love and ecstasy—might easily be misconstrued by later readers as simply a feeling of joy. But enthusiasm is still distinct

[132] If this seems like a distant historical memory, it was nevertheless only a few years before, in 1837, that Thomas Carlyle had published his history of the French Revolution.

from a simple emotion. Emersonian enthusiasm is a religiously inflected solution to the problems of an increasingly pluralistic society and the growing faith in liberal individualism. Partly because it draws on such a wide range of associations, enthusiasm is particularly effective at conveying the vague, indefinable religiosity that Emerson hopes binds the different components of this shifting society together. According to his contemporary Henry James, Sr., Emerson took religion out of the confines of the "private bosom" and advocated "a rich, spontaneous public life, pervading the lowest places of our nature, animating, sanctifying every humblest possibility of our actual flesh and blood consciousness." Emerson successfully transforms enthusiasm from a marker of the uncivilized and excessive to a prerequisite for being a complete person in the modern world. But this innovative and rhetorically powerful strategy may have had unintended consequences. Over time, and as the definitions of enthusiasm continued to change so that it lost the particular resonances on which he played, Emerson's embrace of enthusiasm may have contributed as much to a secularizing movement as to a "sanctifying" one. That would have been far from his intent: Emersonian enthusiasm has distinctively religious overtones, which are crucial in allowing it to maintain a critical edge and the potential to transform or renovate the world one individual at a time.

Like the young idealists he describes in "The Transcendentalist," Emerson "believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and power; he believes in inspiration, and in ecstasy" (196). He proposes a religiously inflected idealism that attempts to establish mankind on "other principles than those of carpentry and chemistry" (41). And this is more than just a philosophical position—it is something that must be experienced. As his sometimes difficult and oracular style—in which each sentence only exists to be revised by

the next—suggests, Emerson seems to have felt that this was ultimately inexpressible.[133] But enthusiasm was about as close as he got to being able to express the inexpressible. Emersonian enthusiasm is a state of heightened awareness in which an individual becomes a channel for the divine. It is not only "enlarged speculation," but—as he puts it in *Nature*—it is when an individual's "intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food" (10). If it may sometimes be accompanied by a "wild delight," enthusiasm reaches its full creative potential when it becomes an inextricable part of daily life. And in "Thoughts on Modern Literature"—adopting a prophetic stance—he claims that this enthusiasm is irresistible: "What then shall hinder the Genius of the time from speaking its thought? It cannot be silent, if it would…. Religion will bind again these skeptics, self-seekers, into a joyful reverence for the circumambient Whole, and that which was ecstasy shall become daily bread" (1168).

[133] For Emerson's sense of endless revision see Poirier 27-29.

Chapter Three: The Vortex of Enthusiasm: Religious Enthusiasm and The Power of Fiction in Harriet Beecher Stowe

"I the author of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'? No, indeed. The Lord himself wrote it, and I was but the humblest of instruments in his hand. To him alone should be given all the praise."

Harriet Beecher Stowe (C. E. Stowe 156)

Near the end of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Harriet Beecher Stowe asks a question that is perhaps inevitably attached to any novel of social protest—"But, what can any individual do?" (515).[134] She eventually suggests a solution that calls for an internal response from her readers. Everyone "can see to it that they feel right" (515). Stowe's argument is especially relevant to those who did not hold positions of political power and had to rely on indirect means of wielding influence: "An atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being; and the man or woman who feels strongly, healthily and justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race" (515). Stowe even makes the model for the proposed feeling explicit: "See then to your sympathies in this matter! Are they in harmony with the sympathies of Christ? or are they swayed and perverted by the sophistries of worldly policy?" (515). For Stowe, correct feelings are akin to Christian feelings and an indispensable part of authentic religion. In each of her three antebellum novels—*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Dred*, and *The Minister's Wooing*—authentic religion is crucial both for each individual and as a means of inspiring individuals to address the crucial moral questions in their society.[135] But, while Stowe's concern

[134] Throughout this chapter all citations from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are, unless otherwise indicated, from the Library of America edition.

[135] In the opening scene of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Mr. Shelby—the Kentucky plantation owner who is considering selling Uncle Tom, his most trusted slave, because of financial embarrassments—makes a distinction between real and artificial religion. He claims that Tom, "got religion at a camp-meeting, four years ago; and I believe he really *did* get it" (12). A few lines later, he

with what constitutes authentic religion remains consistent in each of these novels, how she describes it changes in ways that are closely connected to how she employs the concept of religious enthusiasm.

In the New England religious tradition in which Stowe was raised, enthusiasm had long been used to mark the boundaries of acceptable religious experience. But Stowe gradually moved away from employing enthusiasm as a marker of excessively emotional or inauthentic religion and as the opposite of formalism to make it an indispensable component of authentic religion. The first half of the nineteenth century in which Stowe grew up was, as she observed in her 1878 autobiographical novel *Poganuc People*, "a transition period of society" (73). Tracing how she employs enthusiasm during the latter part of this "transition period" offers a chance to observe how Stowe repeatedly negotiates—or even attempts to make obsolete—the boundaries between enthusiasm and formalism, enthusiasm and sentiment, and literature and religion. But for Stowe, even as the concept of enthusiasm shifts from a pejorative term to a positive term, it does not lose its particularly religious associations and meaning. Instead, enthusiasm becomes essential to her own egalitarian and ecumenical religious vision that places a premium on the power of literature to redeem the world.

For Stowe, the power of fiction stems directly from the divine. According to one of her sons she used to deflect the praise she received for the success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by

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confirms this judgment: "Tom's got the real article, if ever a fellow had" (12). In *Dred*, Stowe's next novel, Nina Gordon—an outwardly carefree but morally serious young southern plantation owner who is troubled by slavery—observes of her stuffy, conventional, and outwardly religious aunt: "You'll never make me believe that Aunt Nesbit has got religion. I know there is such a thing as religion; but she hasn't got it. It isn't all being sober, and crackling old stiff religious newspapers, and boring with texts and hymns, that makes people religious" (71). And three years later in *The Minister's Wooing*, Stowe's third novel, the saintly heroine Mary Scudder says to the romantic but skeptical James Marvyn: "But after all, the great question is, 'Are we Christians ourselves?' Oh, James, if you only were a real, true, noble Christian!" (548).

claiming that it was a direct result of divine inspiration—"The Lord himself wrote it, and I was but the humblest of instruments in his hand" (C. E. Stowe 156). Describing herself as a passive instrument of the divine indicates that her most popular novel was the product of enthusiasm and suggests the close connections she saw between religion and literature. Strangely, however, critics have largely neglected the ways in which Stowe carefully considered the connection between religion and literature. As Dawn Coleman notes, literary scholarship exhibits a "general failure to attend to the details of Stowe's writing, especially in its religious aspects" (157). And, although there are some notable exceptions, even when literary critics discuss religion in Stowe's work they frequently subordinate it to other concerns such as race, gender, domesticity, and sentiment.[136] When religion has been emphasized in Stowe the two denominations that have commanded the most attention are Quakerism and Catholicism.[137] Methodism—the fastest

[136] Irene Visser observes, in regard to Uncle Tom, that "In literary criticism… his spirituality has been ignored or critiqued as an aspect of sentimental melodrama" (1). In her classic study *Sentimental Designs*, Jane Tompkins even argues that it is partly because of its religious attributes that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has not been taken seriously or treated as a classic work of literature by literary critics (126). In contrast, Tompkins points out that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "insists on religious conversion as the necessary precondition for sweeping social change" (132) and argues that it needs to be understood as "a jeremiad in the fullest and truest sense" (140). For a recent example of the importance of race in studies of Stowe, see Molly Farrell, who—in her discussion of the Puritan influence on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—writes that she is mainly concerned with "trac[ing] the origins of the racial imagination in Stowe's novel to Puritan stories about conversion and adoption" (244). For an example of the significance of domesticity in Stowe see Gillian Brown.

[137] For two examples of the importance of Quakerism for Stowe see Tompkins (141-146) and Gillian Brown (512-516). For Stowe's complicated relationship with Catholicism see Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome* (246-255). Also see the work of Tracy Fessenden, who traces how in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "a Protestant vocabulary of religious otherness become[s] a secular vocabulary of racial otherness" (*Culture and Redemption* 113), and Neil Meyer, who argues that, in *The Minister's Wooing*, Stowe employs "emotion as a means to bridge the gap between the old-time New England religion, its evangelical manifestations, and the progenitor of both, the Roman Catholic Church" (469). As Meyer suggests, the influence of Puritanism is also significant. This is especially true in regard to *The Minister's Wooing*, which—as Marianne Noble notes—"remains fundamentally a critique of Puritan Calvinism" (678).

growing denomination in America during the first half of the nineteenth century—has been almost entirely ignored by critics of Stowe.[138] In contrast, I argue that Stowe understood Methodism as closely connected to religious enthusiasm demonstrate how her many references to Methodism throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are critical for how she defines what counts as authentic religion in that novel. Then, in her later antebellum novels, I show how religious enthusiasm simultaneously played a central role in how Stowe thought about authentic religion and how she thought about the power of literature to represent and remake the world.

Stowe's interest in the connections between religion and literature has remained obscure partly because of the enormous attention paid to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at the expense of her other novels. For example, while Michael Gilmore argues that "The "magic of…real presence" is the ideal toward which all representation in Stowe's narrative strives," he focuses only on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (61). According to Gilmore, Stowe attempts to realize this "real presence" through language, so that the very story comes alive and functions in a way that recalls the sacrament of the Eucharist. But, while I agree it is likely that Stowe hopes her language communicates the "real presence" in both *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and her other works, by the times she writes *The Minister's Wooing* almost a decade later, she is clearly focused on literary romance as the critical means through which to connect her readers with the divine. Concentrating mainly on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* captures Stowe's thoughts during only one year of frantic writing instead of

[138] For example, Dawn Coleman only mentions Methodism only in passing, simply noting that, "Stowe's idealization of the inspired, uneducated religious speaker in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* flirts wit Methodism, Quakerism, and other forms of laity-empowering Protestantism" (170). This neglect among literary scholars is hardly surprising as it has only been within about the last twenty years that scholars in religious studies have begun to fully appreciate the crucial importance of Methodists in America. For some of the key works that have contributed to the growing recognition of Methodism's importance see Wigger, Taves, Finke and Stark, and Hempton. For the rapid growth of Methodism see Finke and Stark 57.

examining how her views developed and changed in the turbulent decade that followed.[139] Examining *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as one of a series of engagements with enthusiasm reveals that Stowe's views on religion and literature developed together. The Stowe who emerges from these pages is simultaneously committed to the divine, acutely sensitive to cultural shifts, and an original thinker ambitious to not only remake society through the power of fiction, but also to explain how fiction can work as an instrument of the divine.

The many different ways in which Stowe described enthusiasm emphasize the significance it had for her as she sought to come to grips with the shifting religious, political, and literary landscape in which—after the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—she was a leading figure. But, while Stowe eventually incorporates enthusiasm into her own distinctive religious vision, the process by which she arrives at that vision is halting and inconsistent. The ways in which she describes enthusiasm in one moment she discards in the next and the development of her thinking proceeds as much through abandonment as by modification. This chapter examines that process in her fiction during the decade before the Civil War. However, recognizing the significant influence of Stowe's family on both her religious views and her fiction, it begins by exploring some of the complex ways in which Stowe recalled her childhood in terms of enthusiasm. But while Stowe was raised to associate Methodists with enthusiastic excess, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* she simultaneously identifies enthusiasm with Methodism and transforms it

[139] Even when critics do explore Stowe's other works they often treat them each in isolation or, as is the case with many of her later novels, primarily as examples of American literary regionalism. Stowe's second novel *Dred*, which is also about slavery and was also very popular in the nineteenth century, has—as Elizabeth Duqette recently observed—received "little attention from critics" (4). Duquette attributes that to both its forbidding structure and to how it does not easily fit with "criticism about the sentimental novel," which she notes has dominated studies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (4-5). As James Cox notes, Stowe's third and fourth novels—*The Minister's Wooing* and *The Pearl of Orr's Island*—have often been considered mainly as "pioneering works of the local color movement" (464). For a more recent and expansive view of how regionalism works across all of Stowe's novels see Pryse.

into a crucial—albeit racially coded—component of authentic religion. Throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and her subsequent novel, *Dred*, Stowe displays an intimate familiarity with the culture of religious revivalism in America. But in *Dred* there is a turn away from identifying enthusiasm with Methodism and a turn toward mesmerism as she explores the epistemological potential of enthusiasm. Then Stowe abandons mesmerism too. In her next two novels, *The Minister's Wooing* and *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, she articulates how enthusiasm—a key component of romance—is essential to the religious and aesthetic vision that she makes the foundation of religious practice. Through this decade-long process, Stowe came to see romance as not only a vehicle for communicating and inciting the sort of religious enthusiasm she saw as an essential component of authentic religion, but also as a realization or embodiment of that enthusiasm.

1. Family Memories and Family Fictions: Enthusiasm and Action

A Congregationalist and Presbyterian minister and a key figure in the revivals known as the Second Great Awakening, Lyman Beecher was a dominating figure to his many children, through whom he had a significant influence on American religion and culture.[140] When, shortly after Beecher's death Leonard Bacon said that "This country is inhabited by saints, sinners and Beechers," he was referring to the descendants of Lyman Beecher (qtd. in Applegate 12). A native of Connecticut, Beecher saw himself as an heir of the Puritans and Catherine Beecher, Stowe's sister, proudly observed that "there was but a single link between our father… and the Puritan founders" (Beecher I: 36). Theologically Beecher was "a product of the Edwardean culture" and—although he eventually embraced many of the new methods of revivalism

[140] Barbara Cross writes that Beecher was part of a movement that "initiated and secured a revolution in American Protestant thought, action, and feeling" and "stood at the center of the transformation of American Protestantism between 1790 and 1845" (xxxvi).

associated with Charles Grandison Finney—he understood true religion to lie between the extremes of enthusiasm and formalism, both of which needed to be guarded against (Holifield 376). In a 1799 letter to Roxana Foote, his future wife and Stowe's mother, Beecher wrote an impassioned plea that he be used by God to save souls and then abruptly hesitated: "Don't think me enthusiastic. No, no. Eternity hangs on the present moment, and it is our stupidity that makes all energy enthusiasm" (Beecher I: 71). Here he makes a careful distinction between energy, which is natural and proper when eternal salvation or damnation hangs in the balance, and enthusiasm, which is excessive, unacceptable, and results from human frailty. That this sudden check comes in the middle of a private letter—as if the result of an inner monitor—emphasizes the degree to which the strictures against enthusiasm had been internalized and how for Beecher the theological and the personal were inextricably intertwined.[141] As Beecher's daughter, Stowe inherited the traditional New England ministerial distinction between enthusiasm and formalism. But even as she drew on her personal history as a crucial source for her fiction, she subtly reworked her memories of her father, her mother, and her stepmother in ways that suggest how she would eventually transform enthusiasm.

In a short autobiographical essay "Early Remembrances"—part of her contribution to the collection of autobiographical fragments, correspondence, interviews, and recollections by family and friends that would be published in 1864 as *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher*—Stowe included an anecdote in which she described her relationship with her father with an ambivalence about patriarchal authority that was closely tied to how she used the concept of enthusiasm. After first noting her regret at being left out of her father's "excursions with his boys

[141] Since Roxanna Foote was both less demonstrative than Beecher and had been raised in the more reserved Anglican tradition, he may also have intended to emphasize to her his moderation. He knew that she was well aware of their "religious differences" (Beecher I: 41).

into the forests about for fishing and hunting," Stowe recalls the peculiar nature of Lyman Beecher's energy: "My father was famous for his power of exciting family enthusiasm. Whenever he had a point to carry or work to be done, he would work the whole family up to a pitch of fervent zeal, in which the strength of each one seemed quadrupled" (Beecher I: 390). This description is particularly notable for the shifting registers on which enthusiasm plays. Although at first it seems to have mainly its modern sense of excited emotion, "fervent zeal" suggests a degree of commitment that goes beyond just excitement. And when Stowe continues to describe how each member of the family appears to gain a supernatural strength it becomes clear that for her enthusiasm suggests more than just an emotion—it is a sort of inspiration that is manifest physically in a way that blurs the boundaries between the spiritual and the physical.

Next Stowe describes one of the endeavors in which Beecher inspired his family—an annual wood-chopping. When it came time to move the chopped wood, her father's enthusiasm enveloped Stowe: "then I, sole little girl among so many boys, was sucked into the vortex of enthusiasm by father's well-pointed declaration that he 'wished Harriet was a boy, she would do more than any of them'" (Beecher I: 390). Stowe remembers entering into a distinctly masculine project through her father's "enthusiasm." She even suggests that her father co-opted her will and subsumed it in his own. Considering both Beecher's renowned powers of persuasion and how Stowe represents his aim, this may have been quite calculated on his part. Or his "well-pointed declaration" may be understood as only a catalyst that creates a chain reaction. Either way, the enthusiasm begins with Beecher and extends to his sons and Stowe, who remembers her younger self as both a part of the group and yet distinct from it too. And, when she recalls the physical details of the action, her language is similarly revealing: "I remember putting on a little black coat which I thought looked more like the boys, casting needle and thread to the wind, and

working almost like one possessed for a day and a half, till in the afternoon the wood was all in and piled, and the chips swept up" (Beecher I: 390). If, as her choice of "possessed" may indicate, Stowe means to allude to witchcraft, she does so in a carefully limited way. But "possessed" certainly captures the spell Beecher cast on his children and his infectious excitement: even as the chips were "swept up" the whole family was "swept up" in the moment.

In this anecdote, enthusiasm serves as simultaneously a point of connection between Beecher and his children and a marker of the differences between them. Stowe presents her and her siblings as passive, but even as enthusiasm enables Beecher to captivate his children and bend their wills to his wishes, she does not use it in a pejorative sense. Beecher's enthusiasm allows his children to be part of a greater, communal purpose and liberates them from their normal routine. The blurring of gender boundaries—illustrated by the young Harriet casting aside the implements of women's work and donning a boyish jacket—suggests how, for Stowe, enthusiasm describes something that has the potential to loosen established social structures. Furthermore, from the vantage point of almost half a century later, it is a moment of enthusiasm recalled: there is a disjunction between her remembered role as participant and her role as observed from a distance by the writer who describes the past and appears nostalgic for a specific moment in her youth even as she retrospectively analyzes distinctions that she indicates she sensed at the time. In the intervening years Stowe had developed a new understanding of enthusiasm and uses the term as more than just the opposite of formalism. Enthusiasm also functions as a point of connection to her father. While this fits with her developing interest in spiritualism, even writing this anecdote about her father's enthusiasm may also have served Stowe as a sort of posthumous connection with her father.[142]

[142] For how retelling or writing an experience can serve as a means of experiencing something

Although her mother, Roxana Foote Beecher, died when Stowe was only five years old, Stowe felt a strong connection with her and used her as a model in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Her memories of her mother, though dim, were powerful and, as her biographer Joan Hedrick notes, "susceptible to mythic reworkings" (Hedrick, *Stowe* 10). At least in part, this stemmed from how Lyman Beecher encouraged the veneration of Roxana for his own purposes. In "Filial Recollections"—another contribution to *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher*—Stowe remembered how, "In every scene of family joy or sorrow, or when father wished to make an appeal to our hearts which he knew we could not resist, he spoke of mother" (Beecher I: 226). According to Stowe, this tactic worked. She claimed her mother's "memory and example had more influence in moulding her family, in deterring from evil and exciting to good, than the living presence of many mothers" (Beecher I: 224):

> I think it will be the testimony of all her sons that her image stood between them and the temptations of youth as a sacred shield; that the hope of meeting her in heaven has sometimes been the last strand which did not part in hours of fierce temptation; and that the remembrance of her holy life and death was a solemn witness of the truth of religion, which repelled every assault of skepticism, and drew back the soul from every wandering to the faith in which she lived and died.
>
> The passage in 'Uncle Tom,' where Augustine St. Clair describes his mother's influence, is a simple reproduction of this mother's influence as it has always been in her family (Beecher I: 226).[143]

That the "image" of her mother was powerful is clear, but that it was in any way "simple" is not. While Stowe extols the role of her mother in her family and, through her, the potential power of women to influence society, in the way that she limits "the testimony" on behalf of her mother to "all her sons" Stowe neatly excepts herself from this influence. Nor does she simplify matters when she declines the possessive pronoun in favor of "this" to describe her mother and then

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again see the description of mystical experiences in Bender (70-81). For Stowe's developing interest in spiritualism see Reynolds, *Mightier than the Sword* 19.

[143] The misspelling of St. Clare is in Cross's edition of the *Autobiography*.

refers to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for authority—inviting readers to interpret elements of her own life through her fiction.

"The passage in 'Uncle Tom,' where Augustine St. Clair describes his mother's influence," is both undeniably sentimental and hagiographical:

> "… My mother," said St. Clare, getting up and walking to a picture at the end of the room, and gazing upward with a face fervent with veneration, "*she* was *divine*! Don't look at me so!—you know what I mean! She probably was of mortal birth; but, as far as ever I could observe, there was no trace of any human weakness or error about her; and everybody that lives to remember her, whether bond or free, servant, acquaintance, relation, all say the same. Why, cousin, that mother has been all that has stood between me and utter unbelief for years. She was a direct embodiment and personification of the New Testament,—a living fact, to be accounted for, and to be accounted for in no other way than by its truth. O, mother! mother!" said St. Clare, clasping his hands, in a sort of transport.... (263)

Here St. Clare enacts the same sequence that Stowe later ascribes to her brothers in "Filial Recollections." He points to the lasting—even "divine"—presence of his mother, in spite of her corporeal absence, and emphasizes her "image" in a way analogous to the Catholic vision of Mary.[144] In fact, when he turns to her image St. Clare even displays "a face fervent with veneration." And just as, when describing her own mother, Stowe holds up "the remembrance of her holy life and death" as the best evidence for "the truth of religion" when her brothers were under extreme duress, so she describes St. Clare as relying on the memories of his mother's life to fend off the temptations of skepticism. For St. Clare his mother is "a living fact" that personifies the "truth" of the gospel: for Stowe's brothers her mother is "a solemn witness of the truth of religion." And when, on his deathbed, St. Clare's countenance assumes a "beautiful

[144] The parallels with Mary are emphasized again not only when St. Clare describes how his mother "used to sit at her organ, playing fine old majestic music of the Catholic church, and singing with a voice more like an angel than a mortal woman," but also when he describes how his father would speak to his mother about not interfering with the slaves: "…he would have said it all the same to the virgin Mary herself, if she had come in the way of his system" (264, 266).

expression of peace" and his last word is "*Mother!*" he, like Stowe's brothers, has returned to his mother's faith (370). The parallel is even complete to the point that both mothers are only described in relation to sons: in her description of her brothers Stowe is mysteriously unaffected by her mother's influence and St. Clare has no sisters who might be influenced by his mother.

Next St. Clare turns from the image of his mother and attempts to explain to Ophelia how, in spite of his mother's influence, he finds himself a slaveowner and "in this state of sin and misery" (263). While his explanation employs the language of enthusiasm, it also leaves enthusiasm entangled with a complex mixture of music, art, sentiment, and religion that culminates in an invitation to, or the suggestion of, a transgressive physicality. When she would "sit at her organ, playing fine old majestic music of the Catholic church, and singing," St. Clare would be overcome by an excess of feeling: "and I would lay my head down on her lap, and cry, and dream, and feel,—oh, immeasurably!—things that I had no language to say!" (264). But invoking the irrational and ineffable hardly suffices as an explanation so he tries again—shifting senses this time from memories of her music to memories of her paintings:[145]

> "She had some fine old paintings; one, in particular, of Jesus healing a blind man. They were very fine, and used to impress me strongly. 'See there, Auguste,' she would say; 'the blind man was a beggar, poor and loathsome; therefore, he would not heal him *afar off*! He called him to him, and put *his hands on him*! Remember this, my boy.' If I had lived to grow up under her care, she might have stimulated me to I know not what of enthusiasm. I might have been a saint, reformer, martyr,—but, alas! I went from her when I was only thirteen, and I never saw her again." (267)

St. Clare's memories of his mother suggest a repository of unfulfilled possibility—the possibility of religious and moral reformation. While this possibility is expressed in terms of enthusiasm,

[145] That St. Clare is stymied when he tries to describe the influence of his mother also makes one wonder if Stowe's brothers actually said anything about their mother that resembled what she attributes to them—it puts her use of "think" in the earlier passage from *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher*—when she writes "I think it will be the testimony of all her sons…"—in a slightly different light.

Stowe emphasizes the sense of play in enthusiasm by how St. Clare at first disclaims any knowledge of specifics—"I know not what"—and the way in which enthusiasm is significantly left without a modifier to restrict its meaning. Although it is unclear whether or not the painting of Jesus touching a blind man makes an impression on St. Clare prior to his mother bringing it to his attention, it does depict a crucial social component of Jesus' ministry and Stowe's emphasis on the physical act of touching a social outcast draws a clear connection between St. Clare's feelings for his mother, art, and action.[146] Overall, for St. Clare, this sequence functions as a link to the divine through his mother.

The importance of "feeling right" that Stowe emphasizes at the end of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a religiously infused feeling that at this crucial point in the book—a moment of decision for St. Clare, whose indecision might even be a figure for that of the reader—is described in terms of enthusiasm. St. Clare recounts how he never became an enthusiast because his mother's death removed her influence before he could experience religion or be "stimulated" to enthusiasm. But the way in which his mother's life generated feelings in him that were immeasurable and the act of recalling her life that leaves him "in a sort of transport" suggest that he is temperamentally susceptible to enthusiasm. Such intense emotions are themselves almost a religious experience for St. Clare. And yet, through St. Clare's description of his mother, Stowe clearly distinguishes between enthusiasm and sentiment. Enthusiasm, for Stowe, has

[146] The allusion to the Biblical story emphasizes how intertwined the religious and the literary were for Stowe. In her account the central features of the story are how Jesus physically touched a blind man who was both a beggar and "poor and loathsome." But no one Biblical account supplies all of these elements. The story of the blind man who Jesus touches is in Mark 8:22-26, a blind beggar who Jesus does not touch is in Mark 10:46-52 (where he is identified as Bartimaeus) and also in Luke 8:35-43. Jesus does touch a blind man in the much more elaborate version found in John 9 and he touches two blind men each in Matthew, 9:27-31 and 20:29-34. But, when Stowe refers to the beggar as "poor and loathsome," she is actually quoting Shakespeare who, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, describes "a poor and loathsome beggar" (1.1.123).

connotations and associations that make it a more effective way to describe the ineffable than is possible through even the most powerful feeling. Enthusiasm functions positively for Stowe even when associated with excess emotion—at least as long as that emotion is directed toward a positive end. This is because she also associates enthusiasm with divine inspiration, which implies a moral certainty that, in this case, involves the evil nature of slavery that St. Clare has clearly not been able to shake in spite of his continued residence among and association with other slaveholders. And as airily sentimental as St. Clare's conjectures may seem, had he been willing to embrace this enthusiasm and personally transgress racial boundaries—even as Jesus physically touched the beggar—Stowe indicates his actions would have been balanced by physical consequences such as his potential martyrdom.[147]

Enthusiasm and action are also linked in other places in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Augustine St. Clare has a twin brother Alfred, whose aristocratic temperament leads him to embrace slavery. In contrast, Augustine's democratic and sensitive temperament lead him to abhor the human cost of his father's "system" and to adhere to his mother and her views (266). Even though he was not "stimulated" to enthusiasm by his mother, St. Clare is too closely tied to her apron strings for his brother's taste. His brother found St. Clare unsuitable as a business partner: "he told me that I was a womanish sentimentalist, and would never do for business life; and advised me to take the bank-stock and the New Orleans family mansion, and go to writing poetry, and let him manage the plantation" (271). St. Clare acquiesces to this proposal and their partnership dissolves leaving them each in spheres that may overlap socially, but not economically. As a "womanish sentimentalist" St. Clare takes his place in the home, while his

[147] A crucial moment in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is when Ophelia is eventually able to touch Topsy—just as St. Clare's mother suggests Jesus touched the blind beggar in this passage. This happens simultaneously with Ophelia's slow embrace of a sort of enthusiasm as she begins to attend Methodist meetings with Tom and Eva.

brother takes his in the commercial world. This almost leaves St. Clare in a state of limbo in which he is neither fully a part of, nor corrupted by, the economic systems and yet is not "stimulated" to the implicitly active enthusiasm necessary to buck the system.[148] This has its advantages for Stowe: while St. Clare's wife demonstrates how corruption can exist inside the home, as both a passive participant and a critical observer he, as indicated by his brother's suggestion that he "go to writing poetry," frequently serves as a vehicle for some of Stowe's own views. In his vehement frustration with how those who participate in the economic and political systems disregard reform grounded in either feminine or divine perspectives—the maternal and the divine are closely linked in Stowe's description—St. Clare becomes an example of how even a reformer of great feeling is impotent without enthusiasm. Just as enthusiasm was opposed to formalism—religious systems devoid of feeling—here Stowe represents a specifically feminized enthusiasm as opposed to the economic and political systems with which it is inextricably entangled and which have developed new teeth with the early nineteenth-century transformation to a market economy and the consequent expansion of slavery.[149]

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the link between enthusiasm and action continues even until death. When Eva dies her face displays a "triumphant brightness" and her last words are "O! love,—joy,—peace!" (346). When St. Clare dies the allusion to Eva's death is clear—his face

[148] One might argue that St. Clare implicitly challenges the system through his refusal to partake in economic life and his treatment of slaves, but both of these are ineffectual. The system shows no signs of weakness in spite of his prophecies and his slaves are—with the exception of Topsy who by that point is owned by Ophelia—sold into harsher conditions upon his death.

[149] The growing routinization of American life is a theme of many studies of this period. Frequently evangelical religion is considered to be a contributing factor in disciplining the nascent middle class as indicated by the temperance crusade—one of the early leaders of which was Lyman Beecher (Johnson 4-5, 83). But, as suggested here, radical Protestantism could also be a disruptive influence in its appeal to individual and divine authority (Reynolds, *Waking Giant* 125). This same sort of tension was manifest in regard to slavery and Christianity—indeed, after creating a passive hero in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe would go on to depict this tension through the more active figure of Dred in the eponymous novel.

has “a beautiful expression of peace, like that of a wearied child who sleeps” and, after his face shows “a sudden light, as of joy and recognition,” his last word is “*Mother!*” (370). The chapter is titled, significantly, “Reunion.” By so closely linking St. Clare’s account of his mother and his emotional recollection of his mother with the way in which she serves as almost a conduit for the divine, Stowe not only invokes the significant cultural authority of the maternal ideal, but also creates an experience for St. Clare that, when it turns out to be saving, can be clearly recognized as religious. On the one hand, this exalts the role of the mother—especially Stowe’s own mother—and situates her as a potential source of religious enthusiasm. On the other hand, St. Clare does not describe this moment in terms of enthusiasm. When seen in conjunction with how Stowe does not use enthusiasm to describe her mother’s influence on her brothers, this scene suggests that not all religious experiences rise to the level of enthusiasm (at least in the way she is using it here). For Stowe to describe a religious experience as enthusiasm it must lead to action and, while St. Clare’s salvation seems assured, his death precludes action.

Even as not all religious experiences lead to enthusiasm for Stowe, so not all women had the capacity to inspire others to enthusiasm. In stark contrast to Stowe’s fictionalized portrait of her mother is how she describes her stepmother, Harriet Porter, whom Lyman Beecher married a year after the death of his first wife. When she was first introduced to her stepmother, Stowe recalled feeling a sense of “awe.” But then she describes her in more detail:

> Had it not been that Doctor Payson [the minister through whom Beecher had met his new wife] had set up and kept before her a tender, human, loving Christ, she would have been only a conscientious bigot. This image, however, gave softness and warmth to her religious life, and I have since noticed how her Christ-enthusiasm has sprung up in the hearts of all her children. (C. E. Stowe 12)

This is a complicated compliment. While Stowe certainly acknowledges how important her stepmother was to her children, she only appears to have noticed this in retrospect. Even the way

this is phrased leaves ambiguous exactly who "her children" were—all of Lyman Beecher's large brood or just those for whom she was biologically their mother. And perhaps most significantly, Stowe describes her stepmother as temperamentally a formalist—naturally conscientious and cold. This description of her stands at odd with how she recalls her own mother and how she describes St. Clare's mother. In fact, it is closer to how she describes St. Clare's cousin Ophelia in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[150] Had she been limited by a more traditionally Calvinist and less evangelical vision, Stowe suggests her stepmother would have been a "conscientious bigot." It is only when her character is modified through the influence of this "Christ-enthusiasm"—and not through any natural womanly instincts—that she is fitted for her domestic role.

In describing her early memories—whether as part of her contributions to *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher* or as incorporated into her fiction—Stowe employs enthusiasm in a way that recalls the enduring influence of the theological juxtaposition between enthusiasm and formalism. As a figure for Roxana Foote Beecher, St. Clare's mother hardly needs words to inspire enthusiasm in her son because of the power of her exemplary life. And if St. Clare had fully succumbed to her influence, it would have motivated him to take direct action and might have led to his martyrdom. Similarly, when Stowe describes her stepmother as temperamentally cold and passive, she notes that the only reason she can fully inhabit the role of mother and play a constructive role in the family is due to her "Christ-enthusiasm." In these

[150] My argument here is slightly at odds with the view that in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Ophelia is a figure for the author (Baldwin 27). As the description of Stowe's stepmother indicates, there are other possible models for Ophelia. In fact, Stowe's stepmother was from Maine, much closer to Ophelia's Vermont than Stowe's own Connecticut (although Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Maine).

descriptions of her family memories what Stowe means by enthusiasm is a particular sort of energy that goes beyond excitement and leads to action.

2. The Radical Potential of Emotional Religion: Methodism and Enthusiasm in Uncle Tom's Cabin

> I cannot pretend that Seth and Dinah were anything else but Methodists—not indeed of that modern type which reads quarterly reviews and attends in chapels with pillared porticoes; but of a very old-fashioned kind. They believed in present miracles, in instantaneous conversions, in revelations by dreams and visions; they drew lots and sought for Divine guidance by opening the Bible at hazard; have a literal way of interpreting the Scriptures, which is not at all approved by modern commentators; and it is impossible for me to represent their diction as correct, or their instruction as liberal.
>
> George Eliot in *Adam Bede* (qtd. in Hempton 32)

Although Stowe grew up in a Presbyterian and Congregationalist home, it was other denominations, such as the Episcopalians, Catholics, and Methodists, which captured her aesthetic imagination. Roxana Foote had been a member of the Episcopal Church before she married Lyman Beecher and Stowe had fond memories of visits to her mother's home. When Stowe later fictionalized her youth in *Poganuc People* she repeatedly described the appeal of the poetry of the *Book of Common Prayer* and the appeal of the Episcopal Church all decked in greenery for Christmas. If her attraction was as much aesthetic as theological, it was nevertheless sufficiently powerful that later in life she began attending an Episcopal Church (Hedrick, *Stowe* 341). The Methodists, although they had begun as a reform movement within the Anglican Church, called up very different associations for Stowe and in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* she associates them with different aesthetic values. The Methodists, in the first half of the nineteenth century, were the fastest growing sect in America and like the Baptists, who were also growing quickly in remote areas of a country largely without roads, the Methodists were willing to embrace clergy with limited experience, little or no education, and without formal credentials (Ahlstrom 437-

438, 443). Theologically Methodists generally held to Arminian positions and, while many of their Calvinist rivals found the emphasis on individual will incompatible with the sovereignty of God, it fit neatly with the developing American ideology of the self-made man. But too much dependence on the authority of the individual could easily be castigated as enthusiasm.

Lyman Beecher, recalling his early years as a preacher on Long Island, described a Methodist preacher—"one Ames, then stationed in the western part of the county, and there regarded as a pure specimen of the roaring, ranting, shouting class of preachers, whose boast was that they did not premeditate what they should say, but spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance"—as an exemplary enthusiast (Beecher I: 120-121). Beecher's condescension suggests how early Methodism had a strong appeal among the lower classes: in fact, even by the middle of the nineteenth century when Methodists were clearly part of the respectable "religious mainstream" in America they were still haunted by their unruly past (Reynolds, *Waking Giant* 125). The historian David Hempton describes Methodism as, "more than a religious movement; it acted also as a metaphorical construction whereby intellectual superiors analyzed populist forms of religion of which they disapproved (33).

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Stowe too associates Methodism with the lower classes, slaves, and those lacking formal education. Throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin* different characters carry Methodist hymnbooks, sing Methodist songs, and attend Methodist meetings. During the episode in which George and Eliza fight Marks and Haley and their gang, Stowe describes an old, escaping slave woman as "groaning and praying, in her Methodist fashion, during all the encounter" (237). And when Ophelia cleans up Dinah's kitchen—an episode interspersed with her repeated judgment of "Shif'less"—she finds in one messy drawer "a Methodist hymnbook" (246). Later on Stowe describes a "mulatto woman" who "had an unenlightened but very sincere

spirit of piety" as "a member of the Methodist church" (397). And St. Clare's awful wife Marie refers derisively to, "those shouting Methodists?" (188). But if, as David Reynolds points out, Beecher "shrank from what he saw as the vulgarity of the revivals of the Methodists and Baptists," Stowe embraced Methodism, which she seems to have considered almost synonymous with enthusiasm (*Waking Giant* 144). While the ways in which Stowe uses Methodism in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* play on its negative associations, paradoxically, she also uses Methodism as an indicator of authentic religion. Instead of dismissing enthusiasm, she portrays it as necessary to regenerate a society that has lost touch with true Christianity. The confluence of Methodism and enthusiasm—and the complex associations that result—can best be traced through two figures: Tom and Ophelia.

From the first page of the novel Stowe emphasizes that Tom is an authentic Christian. In the opening scene Mr. Shelby raises the question of what constitutes authentic religious experience when he observes that Tom's religion seems authentic. His interlocutor Haley—a slave-trader prepared to help him raise cash—immediately recognizes the distinction: "Yes, I consider religion a valeyable thing in a nigger, when it's the genuine article, and no mistake" (12). But for Haley the "genuine article" produces a compliant slave—"quite gentle and quiet like"—and is valuable because it increases his profit. The first example who springs to his mind, "fetched [him] a good sum too" (12). Shelby, who is more circumspect and remorseful about his economic motivation in selling Tom—in short is a gentleman—claims that the best test of his religion is actually the degree to which Tom can be trusted:

> Well, Tom's got the real article, if ever a fellow had… Why, last fall, I let him go to Cincinnati alone, to do business for me, and bring home five hundred dollars. 'Tom,' says I to him, 'I trust you, because I think you're a Christian—I know you wouldn't cheat.' Tom comes back, sure enough; I knew he would. (12)

Tom himself recognizes the change that results from his conversion and asks Shelby, "have I ever broke word to you, or gone contrary to you, 'specially since I was a Christian?" (74). There is no evidence that Shelby trusts Tom because of any inherent moral characteristics or because he has made a habit of trusting his slaves. On the contrary he specifically notes that Tom is an exception to the norm, "an uncommon fellow," and his authentic Christian faith is the proof of this (12). While, for Stowe, Tom is an ideal Christian—a follower of Jesus, unconcerned with unimportant matters of denomination—she nevertheless repeatedly identifies him as a Methodist.[151]

Stowe describes Tom and his role within his community in a way that associates Methodism and enthusiasm with elements of the primitive and the extravagant. On the Shelby plantation in Kentucky, "Uncle Tom was a sort of patriarch in religious matters, in the neighborhood" (43). The religious meetings that take place under his guidance are characterized by a "touching simplicity" and "child-like earnestness" which deeply move his audience (43). Although describing Tom as a "patriarch" connects him to the ancient Israelites or the early church fathers and emphasizing the primitive simplicity of the slaves' religion makes it seem pure and undeveloped, Stowe's language suggests there is also an undercurrent of danger present in these meetings. The emotions generated were always on the verge of becoming extravagant and overwhelming the primitive simplicity of their faith: "his prayer" could be so moving "on the devotional feelings of his audiences, that there seemed often a danger that it would be lost altogether in the abundance of the responses which broke out everywhere around him" (43). But, if in her next novel *Dred*, Stowe creates a figure who embodies the more militant dimensions of Old Testament prophecy, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* she is more cautious. Only George, who runs

[151] Two of the figures who may have been models for Uncle Tom were Methodists (Reynolds, *Mightier than the Sword* 105, 108).

away from his master, openly resists his oppressors and he is half white and not a Christian until near the end of the novel. Tom, whose prayers can incite extravagant emotions, bears his harsh burdens with dignity and is a model of nonviolent resistance.

Many Methodists in antebellum America were unable to read—or, in the case of slaves, legally prohibited from being taught to read—and that is precisely how Stowe describes Tom and his fellow slaves. When Haley sells Tom to St. Clare, Stowe plays on the prevalence of lay preachers within Methodism when, while considering whether or not he should purchase him, St. Clare responds to Haley's suggestion that in Kentucky Tom had been "called a preacher" with gentle mockery: "Has he been examined by any synod or council? Come hand over your papers" (180). Tom's lack of sophistication is also evident when, through his interactions with the young Eva, Stowe portrays his faith as literally—and positively—childlike. When Eva identifies the sunset on the water of Lake Pontchartrain as the literal fulfillment of the biblical scriptures, Tom agrees instantaneously and sings a spiritual and then, at her request, a Methodist hymn (303-304).[152] And when she claims to have seen the figures described in the hymn Tom not only has "no doubt," but "it did not surprise him in the least" (304). Hymns were a particularly important component of worship among those who could not read and also, as when St. Clare observes to Ophelia that Tom's "songs and Methodist hymns are better than an opera" to Eva, elicited strong feelings among their hearers (211). Many of the hymns the slaves sing in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are associated with Methodism and serve a dual purpose—they simultaneously appeal to what Stowe describes as the emotional nature of the slaves and then help safely channel their ill-regulated and potentially dangerous enthusiasm into an ordered structure of verse and music.

[152] Jean Fagan Yellin identifies the first song as a spiritual in the notes to the Oxford World Classics edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (529). The second song is identified as a Methodist hymn in the text.

Stowe also associates enthusiasm with an intensity of feeling that gives anyone who has it a sense of absolute certainty in regard to the authenticity of divine inspiration. In the aftermath of Eva's death St. Clare, who wonders at the depth of Tom's feeling for him, asks Tom about the source of his faith: "How do you know there's any Christ, Tom? You never saw the Lord" (352). Tom replies: "Felt Him in my soul, Mas'r,—feel Him now!" (352). And in reply to a related question he repeats the importance of feeling: "Feels it in my soul. O, Mas'r! 'the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge'" (353). Tom indicates that his affection for St. Clare stems directly from his religious affections and thus establishes the priority of religious feeling as a basis for a moral response to a situation that is, by its very nature, immoral. The same enthusiasm helps give the runaway slave Eliza courage to escape. Just as she is about to cross into Canada, Stowe has her look "upward, while tears of hope and enthusiasm shone on her long, dark lashes" and tell the skeptical George: "I feel it in me, that God is going to bring us out of bondage, this very day" (449). While the sense of certainty associated with enthusiasm could easily make it disruptive or dangerous to her fictional slave owners and slave traders, for Stowe the enthusiasm which counters skepticism stems only from the divine and works only good.

The ultimate test of Tom's faith occurs when he is sold to Simon Legree and taken to his Red River plantation where he is repeatedly tested, tempted, and eventually tortured to death. Legree is particularly disturbed by Tom's religion and he too associates Methodism with shouting and ecstatic worship. Upon finding on Tom a "Methodist hymn-book," Legree claims that he will expunge Tom's faith: "'Well, I'll soon have *that* out of you. I have none o' yer bawling, praying, singing niggers on my place; so remember. Now, mind yourself,' he said, with a stamp and a fierce glance of his gray eye, directed at Tom, '*I'm* your church now!'" (392-393) Later, when Tom sings "a Methodist hymn" he prompts Legree to yell at him again and

denounce his "infernal old Methodism" (399). Part of what Legree finds annoying about Tom is his piety. Both the trials Tom undergoes at Legree's hands and the final scene of his death are reminiscent of the early Christian or Marian martyrs in addition to, as Stowe clearly intended and many critics have noted, drawing a connection between his death and the crucifixion of Jesus.[153]

It is through Tom's passion that Stowe associates slavery and the abolitionist movement with other episodes of persecution and struggle in Christian history and validates Tom's enthusiasm as indisputably authentic. Feeling, in the form of love—"nothing *but* love"—expands to become all-encompassing (486). The arrival of George, the son of the same Shelby who sold Tom "down the river" and has been searching for him to purchase his freedom, brings the story almost full circle. Although he only gets to witness Tom's last moments, as he is dying Tom says to him, "I loves every creatur' everywhar!—it's nothing *but* love! O, Mas'r George! what a thing 't is to be a Christian!" (486). Because he is a slaveholder, and because of the political role his gender allows him, George claims to be able to convert enthusiasm into action. His vow, "I will do *what one man can* to drive out this curse of slavery from my land!" stands in marked contrast to Stowe's advice to her readers that they can "feel right" (489). Depending on their circumstances they can not only feel right, but also act on those feelings. And when George returns to Kentucky and manumits his slaves the circular movement of Tom's story is complete—a moment marked by the newly freed slaves through a prayer and the singing of another Methodist hymn (509).

When St. Clare's cousin Ophelia from Vermont enters the story, she is described as the opposite of Tom in nearly every way. She has been educated, but with mixed results—while she

[153] For two of the many critics who note the connection between Tom and Jesus see Tompkins, who interprets it as an example of the typological imagination (134, 138), and Gilmore, who interprets it as an imitation of Christ (71).

has "a clear, strong, active mind" and thinks "with great strength," she only does so "within certain narrow limits" (190). Whereas Tom's religion gives him great hope, Ophelia has "a severe and somewhat gloomy cast to her religious character" (190). Instead of religious feelings she has "tenets:" "Her theological tenets were all made up, labeled in most positive and distinct forms, and put by…there were just so many of them, and there were never to be any more" (190). Ophelia is a formalist and her correct ideas are limited by a lack of feeling. Stowe describes "conscientiousness" as "the strongest principle of her being" and associates it especially with New England—"the granite formation, which lies deepest, and rises out, even to the tops of the highest mountains" (190). But when she first arrives in New Orleans, St. Clare points out that although Ophelia opposes slavery on principle, she is still personally prejudiced against African Americans. The story of Ophelia concerns the softening of her rigid character and, while this may appear to occur when she finally reaches out to touch the recalcitrant black slave Topsy, it is actually the culmination of a much longer process. The moment when it becomes clear that her views have begun to change happens earlier.[154]

Not long after Ophelia's arrival, St. Clare's wife Marie takes Eva and Ophelia to church. The sermon bolsters Marie in her support of slavery and she claims it "proved distinctly that the

[154] Although in some ways a rather minor character, Ophelia is particularly important. First, because she may—as Baldwin observes—be closer than any other character to a figure for the author (27). Second, because she undergoes the most dramatic change of anyone in the book. In fact, she changes more than any other character except perhaps the escaped slave George Harris. My argument that Ophelia changes in a significant fashion and that it is a key aspect of the book takes her change as more realistic than Jane Tompkins, in her remarks on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, claims: "Its characters, like the figures in an allegory, do not change or develop, but reveal themselves in response to the demands of a situation. They are not defined primarily by their mental and emotional characteristics—that is to say, psychologically—but soteriologically, according to whether they are saved or damned" (135). This is partly because Tompkins mainly discusses Ophelia in connection with the moment in which she announces her intention to try and love Topsy and I see that moment as the culmination of a longer process of intellectual and emotional change that is tied up with her encountering a new environment and new ways of imagining religion.

Bible was on our side, and supported all our institutions so convincingly" (216). But when they return home, St. Clare, who rejects her version of Christianity and the "dead sea of…respectable churches," suggests that if he was going to attend any church it would be one that his slaves attend (214). Marie responds not by objecting on racial or theological grounds but with the exclamation: "What! those shouting Methodists? Horrible!" (214). Marie associates the Methodists with enthusiastic excess and finds it repugnant that her white husband would consider such a thing. And, while St. Clare's attendance at a church service always remains hypothetical, on a subsequent Sunday, Ophelia acts on St. Clare's ideas: "Miss Ophelia, who, after some rummaging, had hunted up a small Methodist meeting within riding distance, had gone out, with Tom as driver, to attend it; and Eva had accompanied them" (327). Ophelia not only attended this meeting, but Stowe makes it clear that she had to search it out on her own. And while this moment precedes Ophelia's embrace of Topsy and indicates a clear shift for Ophelia, when the embrace does take place Stowe makes the triumph of enthusiastic emotion over formalist doctrine clear: "Miss Ophelia's voice was more than her words, and more than that were the honest tears that fell down her face" (349).

Ophelia's excursion to attend the Methodist meeting is one of the few moments in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* when the two narratives of Tom and Ophelia intersect and they are spoken of together. In this sense, it is a crucial point of transference. The dichotomy that Stowe establishes between passionate feeling and reason is resolved only when those who are only rational learn to embrace enthusiasm as if they were themselves Methodists. The more intellectual, elitist religion preached by pastors who support slavery and which, through Ophelia, Stowe associates particularly with New England, needs an injection of enthusiasm to be truly alive and

efficacious.[155] Stowe is radical not only in presenting Tom as a moral and religious example, but also in arguing that even the most correct whites need to absorb some of the peculiar enthusiasm that, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she associates with African American slaves.

But even as Stowe embraces the radical potential of religious enthusiasm to transform society, she backs away from endorsing any political position more radical than colonization. If she seems to advocate for a sort of religious mixing that crosses racial boundaries she still keeps the races separate in the end and, most clearly in the figure of George Harris, endorses colonization as the best solution. An escaped slave who denied God because of his experience as property, Harris makes a concerted attempt to please his wife Eliza and become a Christian—and he does so in terms of emotion: "I'll try to feel like a Christian" (220). After his escape to Canada and several years of education, Stowe announces: "George's feelings and views, as an educated man, may be best expressed in a letter to one of his friends" (501). His letter expresses not only a desire to go to Africa and help found or develop a nation, but also a desire for something more than nationalism: "as a Christian, I look for another era to arise. On its borders I trust we stand; and the throes that now convulse the nations are, to my hope, but the birth-pangs of an hour of universal peace and brotherhood" (503). But Harris too has become a Christian enthusiast and embraces Africa only because he believes "that the development of Africa is to be essentially a Christian one" (503). He acknowledges how unrealistic this dream might appear to his correspondent: "You will call me an enthusiast: you will tell me that I have not well considered what I am undertaking" (504). To this he replies that he is ready "to work *hard*; to

[155] While this dichotomy does not split entirely along racial lines—women and children are, after all, more likely to be enthusiastically inclined than men and adults—to the degree that it does, it indicates how Stowe could be simultaneously radical and, in the way that she depicted blacks as naturally more emotional and less rational than whites, still susceptible to what George Frederickson has called "romantic racialism" (97-129).

work against all sorts of difficulties and discouragement; and to work till I die" (504). As she does in the rest of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, when Stowe has Harris use the term enthusiasm, she does so in a way that shows she is aware of its negative association and yet is willing to counter them. Harris's defensiveness about being called "an enthusiast" effectively acknowledges that careful consideration is, for many, generally opposed to enthusiasm. His response indicates he is aware of the difficulties and is willing to work until death, thus anticipating and countering potential criticism. But this plays into other associations of enthusiasm and raises another potential problem for Stowe. If someone believes in something so completely that he or she will work until death, that virtually identifies enthusiasm with fanaticism. For Stowe, if that enthusiasm is genuine and therefore realized in behalf of the right cause, then death may be a glorious martyrdom leading to a victory in another world.

Through conflating enthusiasm and Methodism in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe effectively created a revival of emotion on her own. But Stowe's embrace of enthusiasm also encounters a problem because the African Americans with whom enthusiasm, Methodism, and emotional religion are associated throughout the book do not seem to have a place in her national vision. Partly this is because she was working toward a vision, only realized later, that would eventually transcend nationalism. And partly it may be due to Stowe's own reluctance to endorse equal political associations with African Americans. To be sure, she has George note in his letter that he and his race "*ought*, in particular, be allowed *here*," but then he immediately repudiates any desire for that to actually happen. To the extent that she advocates colonization, Stowe also advocates banishing from the United States the main source of the same enthusiasm she has willingly endorsed throughout the book. She can only do that because of the transfer that has taken place and is represented by Tom and Ophelia. In Ophelia correct inspiration and feeling

has fused with correct ideas and so now those who kept enthusiasm alive—whether because of their denomination, their education, their race, or their class—are no longer essential and can be excluded from polite company.

3. A Critique of Institutional Religion: Camp Meetings and the Culture of Revivalism in Uncle Tom's Cabin *and* Dred

The unexpected and unparalleled success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* gave Stowe the financial independence to become a professional writer, and her next novel, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, was "one of the most popular novels of the time, selling upwards of 200,000 copies during the nineteenth century" (Levine ix). Unlike *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which Stowe claimed burst from her head in a moment of inspiration, *Dred* shows a more mature artistic hand. It also offers a more nuanced account of slavery that reflects the research she did for the compendium of material on slavery that she published in 1853 as *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In *Dred* Stowe describes enthusiasm in different ways than she did in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, revealing some of the different cultural resonances associated with the language of enthusiasm. The very profusion of her formulations suggests a certain quandary about how to best express a connection with the divine and still write a novel that reflects the actual world. Through the phenomenon of the camp meeting she not only identifies enthusiasm closely with the culture of revivalism, but also decreases her emphasis on Methodism as a synonym for enthusiasm. Instead she is more critical of Methodism and mixes the language of enthusiasm with that of mesmerism. These shifts are especially prominent in the central chapter of *Dred*, in which she describes a camp meeting and in her descriptions of the black revolutionary and enthusiast Dred.

The series of revivals that spread throughout the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century—known as the Second Great Awakening—can be divided into two different strands; camp meetings were a staple of the frontier strand of revivals (Reynolds, *Waking Giant* 126). Although the famous meeting at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801 was under the leadership of the Presbyterian Barton Stone, the Methodists and Baptists were more often associated with camp meetings. Not long after Cane Ridge, Stone left the Presbyterians, who attempted to distance themselves from the manifestations of enthusiastic religion. The rapid growth of the Methodists and Baptists is partly attributable to their acceptance of such manifestations and the sometimes unruly behavior associated with camp meetings (Ahlstrom 436-437). Stowe was raised in the more orderly New England strand of the revivals, which was less tolerant of the enthusiastic behavior associated with the western strand and generally spread more through established churches than through camp meetings. The New England branch took off when Timothy Dwight gained the presidency of Yale College in 1795 and Lyman Beecher, who attended Yale under Dwight, was a leading figure in the spread of the New Haven Theology, which helped counter what he perceived as the prevailing spirit of deism and irreligion. While Beecher generally eschewed the experimentation characteristic of the frontier, he eventually moved his large family to Cincinnati to become president of Lane Theological Seminary because he thought the future of Christianity would be decided in the American west.[156]

Living in Cincinnati—a frontier city and the border between not only the free and slave states, but also the churched and unchurched—put Stowe in a particularly good position from

[156] Ahlstrom both points out that the revivals linked to the northeast during the Second Great Awakening "were without the hysteria and commotion that had brought the Great Awakening into disrepute in many quarters, and which would soon be arousing similar opposition to the tumultuous camp meetings in the West" and notes that this restraint was greeted with a sense of relief by the clergy (417).

which to observe the differences between the strands of revivalism which she would later incorporate into her fiction. When Nina Gordon, the heroine of *Dred*, returns from her stint as "a boarding-school girl in New York" to her North Carolina home, she is quick to observe both the evils of slavery and differences in religious practice between the two regions (32). And, when her heroine attends a camp meeting, Stowe notes that, "To Nina the scene was quite new, for a long residence in the Northern States had placed her out of the way of such things" (244). For Nina, the experience eventually becomes overwhelming and she asks to leave: "Do take me out,—it's dreadful!" (260). Stowe—although she staged debates about what constitutes genuine religion, the efficacy of camp meetings, and the authenticity of enthusiastic manifestations in her fictions—was less reluctant than her heroine to embrace the strand of revivalism associated not with the New England of her youth, but with the camp meetings and shoutings of the frontier.

Although camp meetings play a marginal role in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, they play a central one in *Dred*.[157] In the opening scene of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Shelby remarks Tom found his authentic faith "at a camp-meeting" and Stowe alludes to their boisterous reputation in her description of the evening meeting at Uncle Tom's cabin in which a series of songs includes snatches of song from both "the well known and common hymns sung in the churches about, and sometimes of a wilder, more indefinite character, picked up at camp-meetings" (41). And though the response of the small congregation to the songs and "exhortations" is emotional—"some laughed, and some cried, and some clapped hands, or shook hands rejoicingly with each other"—the gathering is relatively orderly and is clearly not a camp meeting (42). In *Dred*, however,

[157] It is possible that Stowe did not emphasize camp meeting in *Uncle Ton's Cabin* to shield her characters from potential criticism. Although Frederick Douglass mentions attending a camp meeting in his *Narrative*, like Stowe he does not describe it (353). The central role that camp meetings play in *Dred* may be one more way in which it is a more radical book than *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

camp meetings are more than the subject of a few passing references, instead a camp meeting is at the very heart of the novel. Not only does Stowe spend two chapters describing the preparations the main characters make for the camp meeting, but Chapter XXIII, "The Camp-Meeting," also comes at the end of the first of *Dred*'s two volumes and is double the length of any other chapter in the book. It includes a description of a camp meeting, a staged debate over different kinds of religious experience and their efficacy, and the moment when Dred—the denizen of the swamps who is based loosely on slave leader Nat Turner and who Stowe describes as descended from another black revolutionary Denmark Vesey—first declares his presence to surrounding whites.

The camp meeting in *Dred* allows Stowe to briefly sketch both the diversity of social roles and perspectives that composed her fictional slave society and to explore some of the different associations of enthusiasm.[158] The participants were drawn to the meeting by a variety of motives: "As in many other large assemblies of worship, there are those who go for all sorts of reason; some from a curiosity, some from love of excitement, some to turn a penny in a small way of trade, some to scoff, and a few to pray" (231). For example, the minor character Abijah Skinflint has two motives in attending; first, "to make money," as his name implies, and second, "to know whether his favorite preacher…handled the doctrine of election according to his views" (232). Some of the more dramatic manifestations of enthusiasm were exhibited by slaves: "A circle of men and women, interspersed with children, were sitting, with their eyes shut, and their heads thrown back, singing at the top of their voices. Occasionally, one or other would vary the exercises by clapping of hands, jumping up straight into the air, falling flat on the ground,

[158] Recognizing the novelty of the scene for many of her readers, Stowe explains that, "The camp-meeting is one leading feature in the American development of religion, peculiarly suited to the wide extent of country, and to the primitive habits which generally accompany a sparse population" (231).

screaming, dancing, and laughing" (244). But even though Clayton interprets this as a racial characteristic—"let the African scream, dance, and shout, and fall in trances"—enthusiasm is manifest in whites as well. Even Nina Gordon's uncle and guardian, John Gordon, who is unequivocally white, "gave himself up… to be swayed by the feeling of the hour" and "sung with enthusiasm" (251). Overall, the camp meeting in *Dred* is an event at which, as Stowe notes, "the whole population of a country are brought promiscuously together" (231). This includes black and white and slave and free.

Stowe describes the diverse and frenetic crowd that forms at the camp meeting as united by an enthusiasm that seems like a natural and irresistible force. It is a scene full of promise and potential danger:

> There is always something awful in the voice of the multitude. It would seem as if the breath that a crowd breathed out together, in moments of enthusiasm, carried with it a portion of the dread and mystery of their own immortal natures. The whole area before the pulpit, and in the distant aisles of the forest, became one vast, surging sea of sound, as negroes and whites, slaves and freemen, saints and sinners, slave-holders, slave-hunters, slave-traders, ministers, elders, and laymen, alike joined in the pulses of that mighty song. A flood of electrical excitement seemed to rise with it, as, with a voice of many waters, the rude chant went on… (250)

Here enthusiasm is linked to the immortal natures of the participants and helps unite individuals of different races and different social positions. The entire group breathes as one, responds equally to the "pulses" of the music, and converts the "aisles of the forest" into a church. But there is also a sense of danger present. While the "vast, surging sea" indicates the natural power of enthusiasm, when it becomes a rising "flood" of "many waters" it recalls the destructive power of the great flood in the Book of Genesis. This builds on an earlier passage in which Stowe employed another biblical allusion to describe how enthusiasm could become a force of nature—a "general whirlwind of screaming, shouting, and praying" (244). These sorts of

provocative descriptions work in at least two ways. Even if her intent is to show that divine power is natural and irresistible, by explaining enthusiasm through natural metaphors and as a natural phenomenon, Stowe suggests that enthusiasm works like any other aspect of nature. But, at the same time, her efforts to preserve the sanctity of the supernatural indicate that enthusiasm means a genuine connection to the divine and an indicator of an authentic religious experience.

A little later in the same scene, Stowe also acknowledges that enthusiasm may be particularly associated with the lower classes. When one of the main characters, who attends the camp meeting to observe, objects that "there is so much in the wild freedom of these meetings that shocks my taste and sense of propriety," she prompts her brother, Edward Clayton, to call her a "true, well-trained conventionalist" (254). Since conventionalist functions as a synonym for formalist—and since her social position is near the pinnacle of her society—this would seem to identify enthusiasm as a lower class phenomenon. But Clayton, who even though he is a southern slaveholder seems to speak for Stowe here, has a better sense of the volatile mixture and explains it differently. Drawing an analogy with the profuse growth of the surrounding forest, he observes:

> Just so it is with men. Unite any assembly of common men in a great enthusiasm,—work them up into an abandon, and let every one 'let go,' and speak as nature prompts,—and you will have brush, underwood, briers, and all grotesque growths; but, now and then, some thought or sentiment will be struck out with a freedom or power such as you cannot get in any other way. You cultivated people are much mistaken when you despise the enthusiasm of the masses. There is more truth than you think in the old 'vox populi, vox Dei.' (254)

For Clayton, "the enthusiasm of the masses" may be tangled and grotesque, but, as the metaphor suggests, it is a natural phenomenon. Even the most threatening aspect of enthusiasm in this description—how it necessitates an abandonment of the individual will and surrendering to the prompts of nature—is relatively benign because, for Stowe, the natural and the divine work

together in concert. If mass enthusiasm may be unruly in *Dred*, it may also lead to "some thought or sentiment" that "you cannot get in any other way."

While there is a slight suggestion of danger in "the enthusiasm of the masses," as an irresistible natural force that requires the abandonment of self, Stowe keeps the focus almost entirely on the positive effects of enthusiasm. Her ambivalent description of the crowd in *Dred* may simply reflect the danger associated with mobs in the nineteenth century. Stowe was personally familiar with how mob violence might threaten life and property from an 1836 episode in Cincinnati—shortly after the death of the abolitionist printer Elijah Lovejoy in Illinois—when the Beecher family had felt sufficiently threatened by an anti-abolitionist mob that they armed themselves and prepared to defend their home. Nevertheless, through Clayton's endorsement of the voice of the people as the voice of God, Stowe associates enthusiasm with a democratic political process. In this light, the way in which individuals lose their identity in a crowd is not threatening, but suggests a democratic flux between individual identity and the identity of the people as a political body. An inspired people may function as a channel for the divine.

Many of the participants in the camp meeting are Methodists and Stowe uses Methodism in *Dred* in some of the same ways she did in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. There are still Methodist hymns scattered throughout the book and many slaves are still clearly Methodists. One Methodist hymn the singer makes complete with "a whoop" and, in keeping with the aesthetic she associates with Methodists, Stowe notes its "tempestuous chorus" (48). A slave trader who attends the meeting takes the opportunity to advertise one of his slaves to a prospective buyer as, in words that echo Haley's description of Tom, "A sound, strong, hearty woman; a prudent, careful housekeeper; a real pious Methodist, a member of a class-meeting!" (257). But, while

Ophelia was the exception when she attended a Methodist meeting in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in *Dred* whites are Methodists too. In *Dred* both black slaves and poor whites find comfort, hope, and salvation through the Methodist faith. For some, such as the wife of a local slave hunter who is of the lowest social class, her faith indicates her sincerity: "She was greatly given to eating clay, clearning her teeth with snuff, and singing Methodist hymns, and had a very sincere concern for [her husband's] salvation" (234). But for others, Methodism works in a very different fashion.

Even though Methodism is more prominent in *Dred* than in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe's descriptions of Methodists are no longer nearly as positive as they were in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The camp meeting in *Dred* is "a union one of Presbyterians and Methodists, in which the ministers of both denominations took equal part; and it was an understood agreement among them, of course, that they were not to venture upon polemic ground, or attack each other's peculiarities of doctrine" (251). But their good intentions do not lead to harmony. At one point the meeting quickly devolves into mutual recriminations: a Presbyterian divine cannot avoid a "pointed exposition of scripture bearing on his favorite doctrine of election" and one of his Methodist counterparts responds with "a vehement tilt on the correlative doctrines of free grace, with a eulogy on John Wesley" (251). The divided crowd that cheers on a partisan basis stands in stark contrast to the moments when the masses are unified by enthusiasm. Of course these debates appeal to those like Skinflint who is a Presbyterian with "a turn for theology" and a taste for disputation (232). But Stowe paints him as a hypocrite and emphasizes that to be sincerely religious it is not enough to know "the five points of Calvinism" (232). And her critique of denominational squabbling gains extra force when she makes it through Uncle Tiff—a slave who closely resembles Uncle Tom and puts the problem in plain terms: "Dere's de Methodists, dey

cuts up de Presbyter'ans; and de Presbyter'ans pitches into de Methodists; and den both on 'em's down on de 'Piscopals…. And de Baptists think dey an't none on 'em right; and, while dey's all a blowing out at each other, dat ar way, I's a wondering whar's de way to Canaan" (227). Stowe condemns denominational rivalries and theological disputes as detrimental to the salvation of those who are least equipped to navigate such tangled thickets.

Stowe also condemns those who profess Christianity but endorse or defend the practice of slavery in *Dred*. The Methodists suffer most from her new emphasis and Stowe portrays many of their adherents as morally bankrupt. One slave observes: "I had a master in Virginny. He was a Methodist preacher. He sold my wife and two children to Orleans, and then sold me." (456). A slave owning preacher offers a more educated perspective during a debate about the biblical justification of slavery: "if the buying, selling, or holding, of a slave for the sake of gain, is, as you say, a sin, then three fourths of all the Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, in the slave states of the Union, are of the devil!" (248). Stowe's attack on religious slaveholders and the clergy is reminiscent of Frederick Douglass's emphasis in his *Narrative* on the hypocrisy of religion in the south and his biting observation that "of all slaveholders…religious slaveholders"—many of whom were Methodists—"are the worst" (334). While Stowe allows that some southerners could profess an authentic religious faith, in *Dred* she distinguishes between those—no matter what their race—who sing rough Methodist hymns with a sincere faith, the squabbling clergy, and the religious hypocrites who support slavery.

How Stowe employs Methodism in *Dred* also represents a shift in her thinking about religion. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* she employed Methodism as synonymous with enthusiasm and an important indicator of authentic religion. In *Dred* Stowe still leans heavily on enthusiasm as indicative of authentic religion and establishes the crucial division as that between enthusiasm

and institutional religion and not that between Methodism and other denominations. Although, as might be expected from her ministerial heritage, Stowe was theologically astute, her satirical descriptions of theological quarrels in *Dred* indicates she considered many of them foolish. And she recognized that denominations split for even less sophisticated reasons. In regard to the division of the Presbyterian church into Old and New School Presbyterians—a process in which her father played no insignificant part—she observes in *Dred* that: "the breach between the two sections was caused quite as much by the difference of feeling between the northern and southern branches on the subject of slavery, as by any differences in doctrine" (418). For Stowe, enthusiasm in *Dred* functioned as an important way of bypassing or transcending institutional religion and helping people return to a sincere and authentic religious faith. And she expects that the awakening of the emotions, the divine guidance, and the moral certainty with which she associates enthusiasm will lead every one who experiences such enthusiasm to feel a compassion for all people and thus reject slavery. But the way in which Stowe described enthusiasm in terms associated with mesmerism imbued it with a more philosophical significance too.

4. Mesmerism and Materialism in Dred

> Whether there be in the soul a yet undeveloped attribute, which is to be to the future what memory is to the past, or whether in some individuals an extremely high and perfect condition of the sensuous organization endows them with something of that certainty of instinctive discrimination which belongs to animals, are things which we shall not venture to decide upon.
>
> Harriet Beecher Stowe (*Dred* 274)

In the person of Dred—a revolutionary prophet and archetypal enthusiast—Stowe created a figure who represents the potential violence that hung over the slave states in antebellum America and reveals new dimensions of how she thought about enthusiasm. Dred lives in the middle of the Great Dismal Swamp, which spans the borders of tidewater Virginia and North

Carolina, where he has created a refuge for runaway slaves. Dred and his followers seem deliberately designed to suggest Toussaint Louverture and the famous maroons of Santo Domingo. As the son of Denmark Vesey, who led an 1822 slave rebellion in Charleston, South Carolina, Stowe's fictional Dred even has a revolutionary lineage.[159] The most direct model for Dred is Nat Turner, in whom Stowe discovered both a revolutionary and an enthusiast. Turner was apparently convinced of his divine inspiration and, when Stowe chose passages from *The Confessions of Nat Turner* to include in an appendix to *Dred*, she selected those that describe Turner's sense of his divine mission and how he developed "that enthusiasm which has terminated so fatally to many, both white and black" (553).[160] The rebellion that Dred's death prevents would have been animated by a desire for freedom; it would also have been deeply religious in nature. Dred is a radical figure not only because he embodies the potential for violence inherent in the institution of American slavery and which haunted antebellum southerners, but also because that is coupled with an enthusiasm—described in terms of mesmerism—that indicates his religious faith is authentic, and suggests that any violence would be a form of divine judgment.

Immediately after the camp meeting concludes, Stowe offers an analysis of Dred's enthusiasm. Her goal is to challenge what she sees as the epistemological supremacy of "modern

[159] For the religious dissenters see 210, for how Dred is intended to be an other Toussaint Louverture see 516, for Denmark Vesey see 208.

[160] Stowe also invokes instances of oppression based on religion that have nothing to do with slavery. For example, in regard to the Great Dismal Swamp she notes that, "What the mountains of Switzerland were to the persecuted Vaudois, this swampy belt has been to the American slave" (210). In "The Confessions of Nat Turner" Turner describes himself as subject to "enthusiasm" and Thomas Gray describes "the expression of his fiend-like face when excited by enthusiasm" (249, 262). Physically, however, Dred more closely resembles Turner in William Wells Brown's novel *Clotel* than Turner as Thomas Gray describes him in "The Confessions of Nat Turner"—suggesting another possible source for Stowe's new emphasis on African American agency.

materialism." Stowe rejects "modern materialism" because it erases the "twilight-ground between the boundaries of the sane and insane" and "exhales from the growth of our existence every dew-drop, which searches out and dries every rivulet of romance, which sends an unsparing beam into every cool grotto of poetic possibility" (273). Instead "modern materialism"—in particular "modern anthropology"—allows for only "the sane and the insane" (273). Stowe sees this as a false dichotomy and presents Dred, with his "strange and abnormal condition," as belonging to a different category altogether (273). Her language demonstrates that she was aware of how enthusiasm was frequently associated with insanity and that it might lie outside the realm of acceptable boundaries of behavior. And, while she hints at the connection between enthusiasm and romance or poetry, which she will develop in more detail in later novels, in *Dred* she focuses on how enthusiasm is key because it confounds distinctions of "modern materialism" and re-enchants the world.[161] Enthusiasm suggests that there is a world beyond the merely material and that a connection with "a supernatural presence" is possible (273). For Stowe rejecting enthusiasm is a symptom of a modern, skeptical condition that presents only a partial view of reality. To counter this view she employs enthusiasm to recover "those awful affinities which bind us to that unknown realm" and draws on the negative associations of enthusiasm only to invert them (374).

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[161] Stowe describes the "disenchanting powers" of personal catastrophes in a way that draws a direct connection between disenchantment and formalism, yet still leaves space for an authentic enthusiasm:

> Great afflictions—those which tear up the roots of the soul—are often succeeded, in the course of the man's history, by a period of scepticism. The fact is, such afflictions are disenchanting powers; they give to the soul an earnestness and a power of discrimination which no illusion can withstand. They teach us what we need, what we must have to rest upon; and, in consequence, thousands of little formalities, and empty shows, and dry religious conventionalities, are scattered by it like chaff. The soul rejects them, in her indignant anguish; and, finding so much that is insincere, and untrue, and unreliable, she has sometimes hours of doubting all things. (490)

For Stowe the sort of knowledge available through enthusiasm is indispensable to being a complete person in the modern world and she takes pains to establish enthusiasm as a real phenomenon. To this end she offers several examples of related phenomena, including "the old Greeks and Romans," "African sorcerers," and "Highland seers" (273, 274). Significantly, none of the examples she offers are from the Bible. This notable exception to the wide range of references suggests Stowe wants to ground this as a natural phenomenon that transcends a specific cultural context. While she eschews "modern materialism," she does not turn simply to revelation, but embraces objectivity. Stowe indicates that this is not an argument over the merits of rational, scientific investigation, but over what will be accepted as valid evidence for those investigations. But, while she is adamant that "modern materialism" provides an incomplete account of reality, she frequently seems reluctant to explain precisely how enthusiasm accounts for another dimension of reality. She calls it "a mysterious and singular gift" and claims that, "What this faculty may be, we shall not pretend to say" (274). Or she says she "shall not venture upon" the uncertain ground of judging different explanations of this phenomenon (275). But the way in which she describes enthusiasm in *Dred* seems to belie these claims and indicates how—at least for a period of time—she resolved these uncertainties.

Whereas in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Stowe had employed Methodism as almost synonymous with enthusiasm, in *Dred* she describes enthusiasm mainly through the varied and diffuse language of mesmerism and the eclectic set of overlapping reform movements—including animal magnetism, spiritualism, phrenology, and hydropathy—with which it was associated in mid-nineteenth century America.[162] This terminology offered a dual appeal to antebellum Americans. It retained a pretension to scientific knowledge while simultaneously offering, as

[162] For the overlapping connections between different reform movements, see the list of titles of period pamphlets in Reynolds, *Waking Giant* 234.

Ann Braude says of spiritualism, "a way to remain religious for those disaffected from Calvinisim or evangelicalism" (4). While mesmerism had its roots in the French enlightenment of the eighteenth century, in the nineteenth century it was especially associated with protestant revivalism and Arminianism.[163] States such as mesmeric trances and somnambulism challenged the notion of the rational, autonomous, and bounded self and opened the door to unseen influences. Electricity—an invisible yet demonstrable force—was an especially convenient metaphor for these nascent psychological investigations. It had long been associated with not only the energy of camp meetings, but also Methodism in particular—even John Wesley himself had been fascinated by electricity (Delbourgo 102-109, 133-134). Over time the terminology associated with these movements even came to augment and sometimes even displace the language of sentiment: by the mid-nineteenth century, according to Karen Halttunen, even interpersonal "influence was spoken of as a moral gravitation, a personal electricity, a cosmic vibration" (4). That Stowe adopted these traditions suggests how her ideas derived as much from her own engagement with popular culture as they did from her New England ministerial heritage or Scottish common sense philosophy.[164]

During the camp meeting in *Dred*, Stowe employs electricity to emphasize the excitement of the crowd. As the camp meeting approaches a climax there is a reciprocal exchange of energy as the preachers encourage the crowd and the crowd responds to their encouragement: "The electric shout of the multitude acted on the preacher again, as he went on, with a yet fiercer energy" (260). With the phrase "electric shout" Stowe captures the energy of the crowd and mixes the language of mesmerism with that of revivalism. Many in the crowd

[163] For more on mesmerism in America see Fuller and Ogden. For the connection between protestant revivalism and the shift from Calvinism to Arminianism see Fuller (Chapter 4, especially 79).
[164] See Camfield for the influence of Scottish Common Sense philosophy on Stowe.

came to the front with “groans and sobs” and “declared themselves converts, and were shouting loudly” (260, 262). But this energy also creates the potential for danger and delusion. When Dred—who at this point in the novel is well hidden in the branches of the trees—speaks, his voice has a particularly powerful impact: “The high state of electrical excitement under which they had been going on, predisposed them to a sort of revulsion of terror; and a vague, mysterious panic crept upon them, as the boding, mournful voice continued to peal from the trees” (263). Like enthusiasm, with which it is virtually synonymous for Stowe, this peculiar energy of the crowd has a darker side.

Dred himself is animated by an enthusiasm so powerful that Stowe compares it to an electrical storm. When he arrives at the camp meeting he is in “a state of highest ecstasy” and enthusiasm builds within him like an electrical charge: “The wanton murder of his associates seemed to flood his soul with an awful tide of emotion, as a thunder-cloud is filled and shaken by slow-gathering electricity” (275). Extending this metaphor, Stowe describes how after leaving the camp meeting Dred encountered an actual storm in which, “sharp arrows of lightning came glittering down among the darkness of the branches, as if sent from the bow of some warlike angel” (275). “An army of heavy clouds” follows, lightning strikes near Dred, and then he prophesies destruction on all who oppose him (275). Stowe encapsulates the overlap between electricity and enthusiasm in one powerful scene that, through the “warlike angel” and martial imagery of arrows and armies, links Dred’s enthusiasm to divine judgment. And through both the storm, which “had long been gathering,” and Dred’s role as a vehicle of divine vengeance, Stowe comments on the effects of slavery for the nation (275).

Although Dred frequently appears endowed with great power, Stowe sometimes employs mesmerism to describe Dred in ways that emphasize how his agency is limited. She was aware

how in antebellum America mesmerism was frequently associated with race: "The African race are said by mesmerists to possess, in the fullest degree, that peculiar temperament which fits them for the evolution of mesmeric phenomena" (274). As a channel for the divine Dred inhabits a paradox in that he both has great power and that power depends on his ability to be a passive instrument for a superior power. This is a paradox that Stowe understood well: she had watched as her father and his contemporaries struggled to reconcile the Calvinist emphasis on divine sovereignty with the democratic energies of Jacksonian America that emphasized individual ambition. To some degree she had lived this paradox because, in regard to mesmerism, gender carried many of the same implications as race in antebellum America.

While Stowe depends on the language of mesmerism to resolve the tension that results from this paradox, mesmerism could be a slippery term—one that sometimes gave her as much trouble as enthusiasm. For example, when Stowe describes how Dred appears during "a state of exaltation and trance," she almost reduces him to a caricature of the "African sorcerers" she had previously held up as a positive example of this phenomenon (273). At one point—in a fashion that evokes elements of the gothic, melodrama, and even minstrelsy—she explains how "his great black eye seemed to enlarge itself and roll with a glassy fulness, like that of a sleep-walker in a somnambulic dream" (242). But, at another point, his somnambulism seems to verify that when he speaks it is with the voice the divine —when with "his eye fixed before him on vacancy, the pupil swelling out in glassy fulness, with a fixed somnambulic stare…he spoke, in a hollow, altered voice, like that of a sleep-walker" (270). These examples show how the language of enthusiasm was so useful for Stowe and why, while it was crucially important that Dred's enthusiasm was acknowledged as a real phenomena, she was so hesitant to attempt an explanation of it.

If Dred's enthusiasm cannot be adequately explained, by the end of the book it is nevertheless clear that Stowe presents Dred as an archetypal enthusiast: "The perfectness of his own religious enthusiasm, his absolute certainty that he was inspired of God, as a leader and deliverer, gave him an ascendancy over the minds of those who followed him, which nothing but religious enthusiasm ever can give" (496). Not only does his enthusiasm give him immense influence over his peers, but enthusiasm is also the source of Dred's knowledge and power—he is "true to the enthusiastic impulses which guided him" and relies on divine signs for guidance (499). While Dred threatens violence in a way that recalls how enthusiasm could be associated with social disruption, he does so to correct an injustice and Stowe endorses him as a divine instrument.

While not as famous or protracted as those of Uncle Tom and Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Dred's death scene is crucial in establishing the credibility of his own belief "that he was the subject of visions and supernatural communications" (274). As the wounded Dred realizes he is dying he exclaims: "Peace… peace! It is enough! Behold, I go unto the witnesses who cry day and night!" (513). Then, as his shocked audience looks on, "his calm, large eyes filled with supernatural light" (513). Stowe continues to reinforce his links to the prophetic tradition when he cries out again "in the words of an ancient prophet" and she notes that to those who surround him at this moment—both white observers like Clayton, who might be more inclined to be skeptical and those outside of his immediate circle—"It was evident …that He who is mightier than the kings of the earth was there, and that that splendid frame, which had so long rejoiced in the exuberance of health and strength, was now to be resolved again into the eternal elements" (513). When he dies those around him believe Dred goes to heaven and through them Stowe

endorses his enthusiasm—and the connection with the divine that it indicates—as indisputably authentic.

In *Dred* Stowe uses the language of mesmerism as an alternative to the theological language of the hypocritical preachers she depicts as engaged in pointless disputes instead of actually helping people and saving souls. She advocates a reasonable enthusiasm that she describes as a natural phenomenon with divine origins. Stowe did not see a conflict between science and nature, but instead saw the Bible and nature as complementary revelations. Her use of mesmerism expresses confidence that reason and knowledge (enlightenment) were compatible with a capacity for enthusiasm (wonder) that went beyond what could be investigated by "modern materialism." Although Dred is a scary figure and the way he is clearly modeled on Old Testament prophets makes him a warning to his society, how Stowe employs enthusiasm and mesmerism in *Dred* shows her to be more attuned to problems of modern science than to denominational differences. But, overall, between *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Dred*, Stowe makes a remarkable shift from describing enthusiasm in terms of Methodism to describing it in terms associated with mesmerism. In her next novel Stowe would, in turn, abandon the language of mesmerism as an equivalent for enthusiasm.

5. The Power of Fiction: Enthusiasm and Romance in The Minister's Wooing and The Pearl of Orr's Island

In 1853 Harriet Beecher Stowe made a triumphal tour of Great Britain where *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had been even more successful than in America. As Stowe travelled through the small towns in the Scottish countryside she attracted large crowds and many of the people who came to see her wanted to give her money on behalf of the anti-slavery cause. A witness in

Dundee, Scotland, vividly recalled her visit: "Her appearance and reception here—that meek, plain woman, a year ago utterly unknown—gave me a thrill of sublime emotion I have seldom experienced in all my life. It seemed a minute of the Millenium sent before its time" (qtd. in Shepperson 40). Stowe perceived the effect she was having and, in one of her letters to her children at home, she wrote:

> This day has been a strange phenomenon to me. In the first place, I have seen in all these villages how universally the people read. I have seen how capable they are of a generous excitement and enthusiasm, and how much may be done by a work of fiction so written as to enlist those sympathies which are common to all classes. Certainly a great deal may be effected in this way, if God gives to any one the power, as I hope he will to many. The power of fictitious writing, for good as well as evil, is a thing which ought most seriously to be reflected on. No one can fail to see that in our day it is becoming a very great agency. (C. E. Stowe 216)

Over the decade following the success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe reflected carefully on this "power of fictitious writing." In two novels, *The Minister's Wooing* and *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, she developed and implemented her own theory of romance, which drew on her religious convictions, personal experiences, and which was adapted to the specific social and political challenges of her own "day."

Stowe's theory of romance encompasses romance in at least three distinct senses: romance as a literary genre, romance as an aspect of reality closely linked to the imagination, and romance as romantic love. These three senses overlap and combine to form a potent mixture that Stowe eventually relies on the language of enthusiasm to express. Although there are continuities with how she used enthusiasm in earlier works, by the time she wrote *The Minister's Wooing* and *The Pearl of Orr's Island* Stowe had come to understand enthusiasm as not only crucial for authentic religion, but also essential to realizing the "power of fictitious writing." This can be seen in how she describes the "strange phenomenon" in the Scottish villages as a demonstration

of a "generous excitement and enthusiasm." Although this phrase may at first seem to be a mere observation about the emotional range of which the villagers were capable, if a "generous excitement" is the same as "enthusiasm" then Stowe is simply repeating herself. Enthusiasm suggests that fiction can elicit something more from readers than simply excitement. In describing the potential power of fiction Stowe uses enthusiasm in a specifically religious sense. Through enthusiasm individuals from all "classes" can be united through a connection with the divine that goes beyond just excitement. When she creates her definition of romance Stowe employs enthusiasm to explain romance in a way that simultaneously draws on the historical associations of enthusiasm and transforms the concept so that it's identified with romance.

Although each is rooted in personal experience, the two novels in which Stowe articulates and realizes her theory of romance have very different compositional histories. *The Minister's Wooing*, published in 1859, was sparked by the death of Stowe's son Henry. A student at Dartmouth College, he had not made a full profession of faith when he drowned in 1857.[165] *The Minister's Wooing* thus directly addresses the Calvinist view that a loving god could damn the unregenerate for eternity—as Stowe wrote to a friend, she is troubled by "the awful burden of thinking that every person who does not believe certain things and is not regenerated in a certain way *in this life* is lost forever" (qtd. in Hedrick 283). *The Pearl of Orr's Island: A Story of the Coast of Maine*, although it was published in 1862 as Stowe's fourth novel, was actually begun nearly a decade before. After moving from Cincinnati to Brunswick, Maine for a year—during which she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—Stowe became enamored with the scenery and people of the rugged Maine coast. But the great demands entailed by her surprising celebrity and numerous

[165] *The Minister's Wooing* also draws on the experience of Stowe's sister, Catherine Beecher, whose fiancé drowned and left her with similar concerns about his eternal state (Hedrick, *Stowe* 276).

other writing projects meant that she repeatedly had to set it aside, unfinished.[166] The majority of the book was therefore not written until after she finished *The Minister's Wooing* and the two novels are, in many ways, strikingly similar.[167]

Both *The Minister's Wooing* and *The Pearl of Orr's Island* are historical romances set in New England during the eighteenth century and a dramatic departure from Stowe's novels about slavery. Both are concerned with the intersection of the divine world and the visible world and both challenge the dominance of theological systems and patriarchal authority. In *The Minister's Wooing* fictional characters interact with historical figures such as Samuel Hopkins, the Newport minister whose doctrine of "disinterested benevolence" took Calvinism to a logical end that Stowe argues places a particularly heavy burden on women, and Aaron Burr, the politically prominent grandson of Jonathan Edwards, whom Stowe represents as conflicted but charming. While *The Minister's Wooing* deals more directly with theological arguments, *The Pearl of Orr's Island*—which employs only fictional characters—complements it by embedding some of Stowe's theological concerns in the lived experience of the protagonists.[168] In fact both of these novels revolve around domestic and social scenes in which women played a crucial role, like the parts of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that focus on the exemplary Quaker Rachel Halliday. That Stowe

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[166] Stowe was even interrupted again after it had already begun to be published serially in the *Independent* in 1861. For the compositional and publication history of *The Pearl of Orr's Island* see Hedrick, Foreword (vii, xii-xiii) and Hedrick, *Stowe* (295-299, 301-302).

[167] The examples employed here are drawn almost entirely from the sections of the book written after Stowe had finished *The Minister's Wooing*.

[168] *The Pearl of Orr's Island* may also relate to the circumstances in which it was composed. Even if on the surface it seems to have little to do with the Civil War, it may be a response to the Civil War. While *The Minister's Wooing* leaves things split and unresolved in terms of the Hopkins, Burr dynamic. And Hopkins gracefully bows out. In *The Pearl of Orr's Island* everything comes together. Because of the different geographical affiliations of the characters, the book concludes with a wedding that may indicate the prospective union of the south and north. The third member of the triangle has the foresight to die and inspire those who remain. In this sense it may be Stowe's most trenchant response to the Civil War and an expression of her desire to see the nation reunited.

carefully sets those scenes—and the small, quiet New England villages in which they take place—against the international reach of New England maritime commerce suggests she sees the intertwined influence of women, religion, and romance as having a reach and significance much greater than the apparently provincial setting might at first indicate.

Stowe is consistent in how she employs enthusiasm in both *The Minister's Wooing* and *The Pearl of Orr's Island*. In neither novel does she employ Methodism as synonymous with enthusiasm and, while she still occasionally uses language associated with mesmerism, it is to a markedly lesser degree than in *Dred*. She identifies authentic religion, manifest through enthusiasm, closely with what she describes as the artistic temperament and aesthetic beauty. And while both plots involve a love triangle featuring an angelic woman who feels a divine presence and a romantic hero who requires the angelic woman to help him achieve salvation, the endings diverge. *The Minister's Wooing* concludes with Mary Scudder happily married to James Marvyn, while Hopkins, the unlikely third member of the triangle, gracefully bows out. In *The Pearl of Orr's Island* Mara Pennel dies beautifully and gives her blessing to the marriage between Moses Pennel and the third member of the love triangle—her good friend and willing substitute—Sally Kittridge. But in both cases this consummation is delayed by the hero's love of the sea and desire for distant adventures and in both novels the third party recognizes a divine hand behind the circumstances.

In the middle of *The Minister's Wooing*—in a chapter appropriately titled "Which Treats of Romance"—Stowe interrupts her story and makes a passionate "plea" for the significance of romance (601). Employing a characteristically conversational tone, she observes that, "There is no word in the English language more unceremoniously and indefinitely kicked and cuffed about, by what are called sensible people, than the word *romance*" (598). Such sensible people

dismiss anything beyond the "steady, daily grind" of life as romance (598). But for Stowe, an exclusive emphasis on the material world not only threatens to strangle and bury a person's "higher nature," but also demonstrates a fundamental misapprehension of reality (599). In *The Minister's Wooing* Stowe opposes romance to the material "*realities* of life" (the italics emphasizing the provisional nature of this definition) (599). And she unequivocally dismisses "what are called sensible people" as somehow deficient: "All prosaic, and all bitter, disenchanted people talk as if poets and novelists *made* romance. They do,—just as much as craters make volcanoes,—no more" (600). The volcano—a frequent metaphor for artistic creativity in the nineteenth century—emphasizes how Stowe believes romance to be an integral part of the natural world and not a human invention (Fuller, *From Battlefields Rising* 4-8). Like many others in the nineteenth century, Stowe understood the natural world as a revelation equivalent to the Bible and the volcano points to the divine as the true source of creativity.

Shifting seamlessly from the natural and artistic to the religious, Stowe emphasizes the need for establishing a Christian theory of romance. Noting that even Plato—"an old heathen, two thousand years ago"—recognized the reality of romance, Stowe expresses surprise "that in Christian lands we think in so pagan a way of it, and turn the whole care of it to ballad-makers, romancers, and opera-singers?" (600). To redeem romance for her respectable, middle-class, Christian audience, she proposes a new epistemology of romance:

> Let us look up in fear and reverence and say, "God is the great maker of romance. HE, from whose hand came man and woman,—HE , who strung the great harp of Existence with all its wild and wonderful and manifold chords, and attuned them to one another,—HE is the great Poet of life." Every impulse of beauty, of heroism, and every craving for purer love, fairer perfection, nobler type and style of being than that which closes like a prison-house around us, in the dim, daily walk of life, is God's breath, God's impulse, God's reminder to the soul that there is something higher, sweeter, purer, yet to be attained. (600)

For Stowe, every aspect of life, if seen clearly, is imbued with religious meaning. And even if moments of penetrating clarity may be fleeting, Stowe recommends not responding to them with "skepticism and bitterness," but instead recognizing "the revelations of those hours as prophecies and foreshadowings of something real and possible" and being thankful "that so divine a guest ever possessed your soul (600, 601). Even as Emerson claims in "The Over-Soul" that some moments of life have more authority than others, Stowe claims these are not moments when a poet or romancer dupes the unlicensed imagination, but moments which reveal something beyond the "prison-house around us."[169] And what is revealed is as real, if not more so, than the material world and charged with eternal significance. Romance offers an insight into the true nature of the world.

For Stowe both romance as an aspect of reality and romance in the literary sense begin with the idea of God as an author or poet. In describing God as "the great Poet of life" Stowe simultaneously speaks metaphorically and emphasizes how she understands life as a divine romance. The moments when an individual recognizes the divine hand at work make every aspect of life appear more significant: "By such experiences are we taught the pathos, the sacredness of life; and if we use them wisely, our eyes will ever after be anointed to see what poems, what romances, what sublime tragedies lie around us in the daily walk of life, 'written not with ink, but in flesh tables of the heart'" (601). Existence is a divine art and those who recognize it as such see through to a deeper reality that Stowe describes in distinctly literary terms: "The dullest street of the most prosaic town has matter in it for more smiles, more tears, more intense excitement, then ever were written in story or sung in poem; the reality is there, of which the romancer is the second-hand recorder" (601). When seen in this light, reality is itself

[169] For Emerson's claim see *Essays and Lectures* 385.

the greatest romance. The author—or "romancer"—functions as a sort of amanuensis for divine truth—a truth which may appear in the guise of an artistic creation. And at the core of what it means to be either an artist or a philosopher for Stowe is a certain absence of self. In *The Minister's Wooing* she argues that "No real artist or philosopher ever lived who has not at some hours risen to the height of utter self-abnegation for the glory of the invisible" (541). And this does not only apply to artists or philosophers of great renown: "Even persons of mere artistic sensibility are at times raised by music, painting, or poetry to a momentary trance of self-oblivion" (541).[170]

Stowe even includes romantic love in her attempt to recapture and redefine romance. Frequently she makes this connection indirectly, through a sort of substitution. For example, she claims "it is very seldom that the feeling of love, when once thoroughly aroused, bears any sort of relation to the reality of the object" (605). Just as she argued that romance was an aspect of reality as genuine as the material aspect, here Stowe argues that romantic love may be a genuine identification with the divine even if there is not a visible correlation between the divine and the object of affection. For Stowe, the person may serve as a substitute for the divine and to love a person is to recognize the divine in him or her: "It is commonly an enkindling of the whole power of the soul's love for whatever she considers highest and fairest; it is, in fact, the love of something divine and unearthly, which, by a sort of illusion, connects itself with a personality" (605). But this "sort of illusion" may occasionally be realized. In *The Minister's Wooing* Mary Scudder's "feeling of love" for James Marvyn, while beyond what he seems to merit, is an "enchantment" (605). If, according to Stowe, "there is but One true, eternal Object of all that the

[170] These claims echo the struggle to understand such sayings of Jesus as "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and that loseth his his life for my sake shall find it" (KJV, Matt. 10:39). This closely parallels the way an enthusiast may be both utterly self-confident and yet understand himself as merely a passive vehicle for divine inspiration.

mind conceives, in this trance of its exaltation," she suggests that someone may discover that "eternal Object" by seeing it realized in another person (605). While Stowe's repeated use of terms such as "enchantment," "trance," and "exaltation," evoke the religious meaning that lies behind this mundane romance, in *The Pearl of Orr's Island* Mara makes the implications of this clear to Moses Pennell when he asks her why she loves him: "'He sent you and gave you to me,' she answered, 'to be mine in time and eternity'" (327). And Stowe then connects this directly to enthusiasm: "The words were spoken in a kind of enthusiasm so different from the usual reserve of Mara, that they seemed like a prophecy" (327).

But it is in the figure of the soul-friend that the three senses of romance are most fully intertwined and also most fully realized. For Stowe a soul-friend is someone who is sent by God and recognizes "an ideal to every human being" (606). He or she is "a friend who loves in us, *not* a false imagining, an unreal character, but, looking through all the rubbish of our imperfections, loves in us the divine ideal of our nature,—loves, not the man that we are, but the angel that we may be" (606). That Stowe offers this as a justification for Mary Scudder's faith in James Marvyn connects this directly to romantic love. The way that Stowe describes this combination of Platonic idealism and Christian perfectionism as "*not* a false imagining" nor "an unreal character" but true and real emphasizes that a soul-friend has the ability to recognize a reality beyond the merely physical. Hence this is also romance in an epistemological sense. And these two senses of romance blend into that of romance as an aesthetic genre—the result of artistic perception. She compares soul-friends—those rare people "to whom God grants such perception"—to how "Michel Angelo saw through a block of marble, when he attacked it in a divine fervor, declaring that an angel was imprisoned within it" (606). Even as Michelangelo was the "friend that sets the angel free," so Stowe claims, "There be soul-artists who go through this

world, looking among their fellows with reverence, as one looks amid the dust and rubbish of old shops for hidden works of Titian and Leonardo, and… immediately recognize the divine original, and set themselves to cleanse and restore" (606). For Stowe romance is—in all three senses in which she employs it—a restoration of "the divine original" in each person.

Stowe concludes her disquisition on the nature of the soul-friend or soul-artist by identifying enthusiasm as intrinsic to his or her identity. Both the soul-friend and the soul-artist derive their authority directly from God: "Such be God's real priests, whose ordination and anointing are from the Holy Spirit; and he who hath not this enthusiasm is not ordained of God, though whole synods of bishops laid hands on him" (606). It is clearly enthusiasm that gives a person true authority in religious matters. By carefully selecting the masculine pronoun "he" and referring to the authority wielded by "whole synods of bishops"—composed exclusively of men—in a way that undermines the concept of apostolic authority, Stowe emphasizes that being a soul-friend or soul-artist is dependent mainly on enthusiasm and not on either gender or ecclesiastical education.

While Stowe bases her theory of romance and soul-friends or soul-artists on enthusiasm, she recognizes that clearly articulating the process through which romance works in any specific instance or person is ultimately impossible. When she compares it to describing the effect of music she both employs one more metaphor to suggest how it works and acknowledges the problem: "The greatest moral effects are like those of music,—not wrought out by sharp-sided intellectual propositions, but melted in by a divine fusion, by words that have mysterious indefinite fulness of meaning, made living by sweet voices, which seem to the out-throbbings of angelic hearts" (765). Although she experiments with other formulations—variously referring to this phenomenon as "enchantment," "trance," or "a sort of illusion"—they do not seem to

capture her meaning as well and she always returns to enthusiasm. Whether it is Mara speaking to Moses "in a kind of enthusiasm " (327) or Michelangelo's "divine fervor" (606), the language of enthusiasm is as close as Stowe can come to expressing the inexpressible. This process is fundamentally one of "divine fusion" and thus not susceptible to human language. It can only be expressed "by words that have mysterious indefinite fulness of meaning" and, even then, only when they are "made living" and not left to ossify into abstractions.

Stowe's emphasis on lived experience even plays a key role in the central contrast that she draws in *The Minister's Wooing*—that between Samuel Hopkins and Aaron Burr.[171] Perhaps because of his descent from Jonathan Edwards she imagines Burr as a sort of fallen angel or Byronic hero who is waiting to be redeemed.[172] She presents him as living entirely for sensation and clearly distinguishes between how "Burr assumed individual pleasure to be the great object of human existence" and how "Hopkins considered sacrifice as the foundation of all existence" (817). "Both," Stowe observes, "had a perfect *logic* of life, and guided themselves with an inflexible rigidity by it" (817). She notes, "It is but fair, then, to take their lives as the practical workings of their respective ethical creeds" (817). For Stowe, the ultimate measure of a person's life was to be found in how he or she lived and not in theological abstractions.

The new source of authority to which Stowe's theory of romance appeals—enthusiasm as it is manifest in lived experience—seems to completely dismiss the theological sophistication

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[171] Strangely, neither Marianne Noble nor Neil Meyer—although they each see Burr as important (Noble as an "empathic egotist" who lacks the correct sort of sympathy (680), and Meyer as "the novel's 'Lovelace,'" who "generat[es] an energy that is transmitted to other narrative scenes of the text" (482))—acknowledge this contrast.

[172] In *The Minister's Wooing* Stowe's version of Burr is of a man for whom, in spite of all his faults, "The New Testament was always under his pillow" and whose eternal fate is unknown" (872). And it may be no coincidence that in Stowe's description of the romantic heroes in *The Minister's Wooing* and *The Pearl of Orr's Island* their dark features and swept hair make them both resemble the iconic image of Lord Byron—during Stowe's youth Lyman Beecher had been fascinated by Byron (Hedrick, *Stowe* 21).

and patriarchal authority represented by the Newport minister Samuel Hopkins and his doctrine of "disinterested benevolence." According to Stowe, "disinterested benevolence" meant it was the "duty" of each individual to be "so wholly absorbed in the general good of the universe as even to acquiesce in their own final and eternal destruction, if the greater good of the whole might thereby be accomplished" (555). She has Mary criticize this doctrine in a letter to Hopkins: "The disinterested love to God, which you think is alone the genuine love, I see not how we can be certain we possess, when our love of happiness and our love of God are so inseparably connected" (704). And Stowe offers the gloss: "There are in this world two kind of natures,—those that have wings, and those that have feet,—the winged and the walking spirits. The walking are the logicians; the winged are the instinctive and poetic" (704). Later Stowe explains, "Mary was by nature of the class who never reason abstractly, whose intellections all begin in the heart which sends them colored with its warm life-tint to the brain" (732). That Stowe describes these as "warm" may even suggest a contrast between the heat of enthusiasm and a cold, formalist reason. Either way, it is clear that while Mary embodies disinterested benevolence, she realizes it through the divinely inspired mixture of poetry, feeling, and intuition that constitutes enthusiasm and not through logic.

If Mary Scudder appears as the very model of a soul-friend in *The Minister's Wooing*, Stowe also presents Hopkins as an admirable figure. Even as she rejects the systematic theology with which she grew up as unnecessarily rigid, abstract, and patriarchal, Stowe recuperates the authors of that theology—the "hard old New England divines" who developed these systems—as "the poets of metaphysical philosophy, who built systems in an artistic fervor, and felt self

exhale from beneath them as they rose into the higher regions of thought" (541).[173] She even claims "that there is as much romance burning under the snow-banks of cold Puritan preciseness as if Dr. Hopkins had been brought up to attend operas instead of metaphysical preaching, and Mary had been nourished on Byron's poetry instead of 'Edwards on the Affections'" (601). This correlation between Hopkins and Mary Scudder—who by the end of the novel has attained something very close to the status of a protestant saint—emphasizes the hidden depths within Hopkins. Stowe even remarks that, "he belongs to a class who lived romance, but never spoke it" (776). It is not enough, however, for Stowe that Hopkins have the potential to live romance unless it is realized in his actions.

Through two different scenarios—one public and one private—Stowe emphasizes that even as she rejects "disinterested benevolence" as an effective prescription for the ills of society, she embraces it as it is made living through enthusiasm and becomes part of the minister's lived experience. First, he opposes the slave trade even though one of his richest and most influential supporters warns him that "Ministers are the most unfit men in the world to talk on such subjects; it's departing from their sphere" and threatens to leave for a different congregation if Hopkins preaches on the subject (625). Hopkins, of course, rejects the suggestion that religion is restricted to a separate sphere and delivers his sermon as planned. For Stowe this is a principled stand and anticipates the movement to abolish slavery in her own time. Second, when Hopkins discovers that Mary loves James Marvyn, he immediately dissolves their engagement: "he made the sacrifice of himself to her happiness so wholly and thoroughly that there was not a moment

[173] In *The Minister's Wooing* Stowe notes that "where theorists and philosophers tread with sublime assurance, woman often follows with bleeding footsteps;—women are always turning from the abstract to the individual, and feeling where the philosopher only thinks" (541). For an excellent discussion of the novel with particular attention to questions of gender see Hedrick, *Stowe* 279-285.

of weak hesitation" (871). Stowe drives the point home when she remarks that, "As for our friend the Doctor, we trust our readers will appreciate the magnanimity with which he proved a real and disinterested love, in a point where so many men experience only the graspings of a selfish one" (871). Although Hopkins is primarily remembered as a theologian, by criticizing his theology and emphasizing his actions Stowe helps put all people on an equal footing when it comes to recognizing and realizing the divine romance that makes mundane reality significant. After all, it is through his realization of a true disinterested benevolence in his life that Hopkins is vindicated in *The Minister's Wooing*.

6. An Egalitarian and Ecumenical Vision

The remarkable reception given Stowe in Scotland may have led her to think seriously about the "power of fictitious writing," but the theory of romance she articulates in *The Minister's Wooing* also stems from the demands of adapting the Calvinism in which she was raised to a rapidly changing society. And, as her compassionate portrayal of Samuel Hopkins suggests, Stowe does not reject traditional New England religion so much as she emphasizes the aspects of it that she thinks are most relevant to her own time. Hopkins was part of an earlier generation and, even though she notes that he supported the American Revolution, Stowe claims that his views represent "habits of thought engendered by monarchical institutions" (540). In contrast, her own emphasis on romance and the key role of the soul-friend is better adapted to the more democratic political society that she both inhabited and helped to create. Throughout her fiction, but especially in *The Minister's Wooing* and *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, Stowe transforms what she called the "rigid theological discipline of New England" into a powerful and more accessible religious vision that is both egalitarian and ecumenical (540).

Stowe's vision is the culmination of a process that began before she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and was absorbed by the problem of slavery. It relies on the language of enthusiasm, which with its semantic vacillation between religious enthusiasm, artistic inspiration, and excited emotion, allows Stowe to create her own sort of spiritualized realism distinct from the theory of sentiments associated with Common Sense philosophy.[174] In "Feeling"—published in *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* in 1848—Stowe identifies feeling as an attribute of Jesus and claims: "The power of *feeling* is necessary for all that is noblest in man, yet involves the greatest risk." The main character in "Feeling,"—an isolated small boy—becomes an influential adult partly because of his ability to see a divine hand in natural beauty: "It is a splendid sunset, and yonder enthusiast meets if face to face as a friend. He is silent, wrapt, happy. He *feels* that poetry which *God* himself has created, he is touched by it as God meant that the soul should be touched; and this is because he can *feel*." The type of feeling Stowe advocates as essential is one that demonstrates a connection to the divine and—by describing the small boy as an "enthusiast"—Stowe anticipates her later identification of enthusiasm with romance. Enthusiasm, as Stowe deploys it, is clearly distinct from feeling. So, while I agree with Marianne Noble that the sort of sympathy Stowe advocates is distinct from anything in Puritanism, I think Stowe had in mind something beyond what Noble describes as the process of "projecting into the others' imaginations, identifying with their feelings, and warmly extending tenderness based upon that identification" (699, 700). In *The Minister's Wooing* Stowe claims that, "There is a ladder to

[174] Neil Meyer also sees Stowe as embracing "an ecumenical community of feeling" through reimagining enthusiasm in *The Ministers' Wooing* (475). However, he sees this as filtering through Stowe' embrace of Catholicism, which he claims had its roots in how the previous generation, "displac[ed] their rejection of religious enthusiasm onto the practices and spaces of the Catholic Church" (471). The implications of this position are, he argues, that "Stowe's way of dealing with the religious tensions of her era is to locate the universal truth of Christianity in a shared response to human suffering—prayer—which unites people of different faiths" (483).

heaven, whose base God has placed in human affections" (579). But if that ladder may be rooted in "human affections," it must somehow transcend them. In *The Minister's Wooing* enthusiasm is religious and stems from the Holy Spirit. Stowe does not draw clear lines between soul-artists and artists or philosophers. In regard to artists, she describes this state as "a momentary trance of self-oblivion"—thus suggesting how becoming a soul-friend or soul-artist involves something more than moral sentiment (541). It does not come from within the self, but instead consigns the self to oblivion and subsumes it within the divine. While the ability to feel is required to ascend the ladder, to reach heaven—to have a feeling "in harmony with the sympathies of Christ"—a religiously inflected enthusiasm is essential.

Beginning with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe expands the potential boundaries of her religious vision in one novel after another. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* this expansion proceeds through enthusiasm in the guise of Methodism and focuses on the ideal and nonviolent figure of the black slave Tom. St. Clare emphasizes this when—watching Eva embrace Tom as a companion—he says, "Your little child is your only true democrat" (211). Next, in *Dred*, this expansion proceeds through enthusiasm in the guise of mesmerism as Stowe embraces a more radical figure in the prophetically threatening and potentially violent escaped slave Dred. In that novel, through the figure of Clayton, Stowe associates enthusiasm with a democratic political process when she suggests that—while under the influence of enthusiasm—the voice of the people may function as the voice of god. Then, in *The Minister's Wooing* and *The Pearl of Orr's Island*—as Stowe turns to emphasize the key role that women play as a religious and moral force in the republic—the expansion of her religious vision proceeds through enthusiasm in the guise of romance and the soul-friend.

In both *The Minister's Wooing* and *The Pearl of Orr's Island* Stowe places particular emphasis on the role women can play in influencing men who are inclined to be skeptical of organized religion. Mary Scudder in *The Minister's Wooing* is the very embodiment of a soul-friend and serves as "a living gospel" to those around her (550). Her influence even works when she is not physically present. When she gives James Marvyn her Bible to take with him on a voyage, he does not read it with any great deliberation, but its very physical presence is important because of how it points to something beyond himself and his daily world: he holds it "as if it were some amulet charmed by the touch of a superior being" (608). Near the end of *The Pearl of Orr's Island* Stowe explains—in language that recalls Hopkins's doctrine of disinterested benevolence—how the influence of the soul-friend or soul artist can be realized through a sort of transference:

> The roughest and most matter-of-fact minds have a craving for the ideal somewhere; and often this craving, forbidden by uncomeliness and ungenial surroundings from having any personal history of its own, attaches itself to the fortune of some other one in a kind of strange disinterestedness. Some one young and beautiful is to live the life denied to them—to be the poem and the romance; it is the young mistress of the poor black slave—the pretty sister of the homely old spinster—or the clever son of the consciously ill-educated father. (360)

Here Stowe describes the role of the soul friend in terms of romance and emphasizes that life may be understood as a sort of divine art. In the "poor black slave," "the homely old spinster," and "the consciously ill-educated father," Stowe carefully includes African Americans, women, and lower-class, uneducated men. For Stowe, enthusiasm creates room for those who do not have access to the ballot box or the halls of power to influence society. Soul-friends or soul-artists may be any sort of person, without regard to their race, gender, or education, and it is enthusiasm that enables this radical democratic impulse because it is available to anyone.

As Stowe transformed enthusiasm from a marker of overly emotional religion to a crucial component of authentic religion, she employed it in the service of not only an egalitarian vision, but also an ecumenical vision. In this process enthusiasm shifts from being the opposite of formalism to a critique of institutional religion and, as this happens, specific religious forms become vestiges of old arguments. While in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* this is tempered by the emphasis on Methodism, in *Dred* she indicates that all protestant sects are susceptible to similar problems. Then, in *The Minister's Wooing* and *The Pearl of Orr's Island* she includes Catholics in her expanding vision. In *The Minister's Wooing*, a Roman Catholic character remarks that she "cannot help feeling that some are real Christians who are not in the True Church" and this strikes her interlocutor, Mary Scudder, as "a new view of the subject" (764). Stowe then describes "the Catholic and the Puritan" as "melting together" and "joined" (765).[175] In *The Pearl of Orr's Island* it is the Puritan minister himself who describes how, when he was tutor to a Roman Catholic girl, he "was glad to remember that the Romish Church, amid many corruptions, preserves all the essential beliefs necessary for our salvation, and that many holy souls have gone to heaven through its doors" (265-266). Then he notes that, "The earnestness of her nature would always have made any religious form a reality to her" (265).[176] Although Stowe always retains an identifiably Christian perspective, in *The Minister's Wooing* Mary Scudder

[175] Following this description, Mary turns to her Bible and reads a passage from John: "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions…" (765). After this happens, Stowe describes how, as "Mary read on through the chapter… her soul was lifted from earth by the words, and walked with Christ far above all things" (765).

[176] These fictional claims have biographical counterparts. Throughout *Poganuc People* Stowe suggests that even as a child she felt the aesthetic appeal of Anglicanism. It was only a year after the publication of *The Pearl of Orr's Island* that her brother, Henry Ward Beecher, noted in a letter to her that "I have *no* feeling in regard to denomination" (Hedrick 302). Around the same time—after Lyman Beecher was "too mentally infirm to object"—Stowe's three daughters and her sister Catherine joined the Episcopal church—her son Fred joined two years later (Gatta 423-424).

observes, in response to a challenge, that, "In every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him… and if there are better Christians than we are among the Mahometans, I am sure I'm glad of it" (548). What is key is not the forms but the degree of enthusiasm with which the forms are invigorated.

To realize her egalitarian and ecumenical vision, Stowe relies on the power of "fictitious writing." Novels, which describe the world and reach people who might otherwise remain estranged from the divine, are for Stowe inherently democratic and open doors to women. The power of "fictitious writing" lies in its ability to reach and move the feelings of a new audience, to allow that audience to recognize or tap into the divine, and through access to the divine understand the evils of slavery and the equality or value of all people, in spite of race, class, or gender. This position stands in stark contrast to the view—held by, among others, Lyman Beecher—that novels were a distraction from more serious concerns. Beecher worried that if people did not regularly engage with crucial "doctrinal discussions" from the pulpit, intellectual rigor would disappear and only "effeminate, religious-novel-reading Christians" would remain (326). In what almost seems like a direct response to her father's emphasis on sermons as a means of inculcating correct beliefs, Stowe claims in *The Minister's Wooing* that "one verse in the Bible read by a mother in some hour of tender prayer has a significance deeper and higher than the most elaborate of sermons, the most acute of arguments" (765). It seems Stowe even thought of writing fiction as an alternative sort of ministry in which women could participate and wield power and influence.

A key advantage to writing romances for Stowe was that they allowed her to avoid systematic exposition of doctrine and to focus instead on generating feeling in her readers. Through enthusiasm—and romance in all of its different senses—Stowe effectively establishes

the authenticity of religion and religious authority on a new foundation. Lived experience and living language are the true test of religion and religious authority is embodied in action and not in doctrine. Just as she describes her childhood opportunity to blur or transcend boundaries of gender in terms of enthusiasm, so she turns enthusiasm against the economic and political systems that are dominated by men and support slavery. She uses enthusiasm to try and loosen established social and political structures she found distasteful, repugnant, or immoral. Stowe employs enthusiasm as disruptive force and a threat to systems and institutions. And the "power of fictitious writing" that, after writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she observed as a social practice during her trip to Scotland eventually becomes a prescription for how to change society. As she wrote in *The Minister's Wooing*, Stowe understood enthusiasm as making even the mundane elements of reality meaningful: "So we go, dear reader,—so long as we have a body and a soul. Two worlds must mingle,—the great and the little, the solemn and the trivial, wreathing in and out, like the grotesque carvings on a Gothic shrine;—only, did we know it rightly, nothing is trivial; since the human soul, with its awful shadow, makes all things sacred" (650).

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