Mystical Elements in Emerson's Thought

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MYSTICAL ELEMENTS IN EMERSON'S THOUGHT

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By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For many years critics and biographers have used the terms "mystic," "mystical," and "mysticism" with reference to Emerson or his writings. Dillaway has written that "he [Emerson] was a mystic . . . ."¹ Rusk states that Emerson "endowed the Greek philosopher [Plato] with a degree of mysticism much like his own,"² and Maulsby writes that "in some degree . . . Emerson was a mystic."³ O. W. Firkins refers to him as a "scholar-mystic,"⁴ and Christy states emphatically that "Emersonian thought was a matter of almost pure mysticism";⁵ Goddard writes that "in Emerson this [mystical] element was considerable, but . . . more in a tendency to

¹Newton Dillaway, Prophet of America (Boston, 1936), p. 324.
³David Lee Maulsby, Emerson: His Contribution to Literature (Tufts College, 1911), pp. 74–75.
excess of contemplation than to rapture."\(^6\) Patrick Quinn denies that Emerson was in any sense a mystic.\(^7\) Though many authors refer to Emerson's mysticism, the only work which has been devoted entirely to the subject is a dissertation by Lyron F. Wicke entitled "Emerson's Mysticism."\(^8\) Treatment of the subject remains vague and unsettled, however, for no generally acceptable definition of terms has been agreed on. "Mysticism," Spurgeon writes, "is a term so irresponsibly applied in English that it has become the first duty of those who use it to explain what they mean by it."\(^9\) As a preliminary step it is necessary to define mysticism in the light of recent publications—that is, those which have appeared since the late nineteenth century. Modern authorities have arrived at a generally usable definition of mysticism by eliminating the meaning of the word in its occasional use and retaining the meaning in its popular use.


\(^7\) Patrick F. Quinn, "Emerson and Mysticism," *American Literature*, XXI (June, 1950), 397-414.

\(^8\) Lyron F. Wicke, "Emerson's Mysticism," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of English, Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, 1941.

The dictionary definition of "mystic" is.

... one who maintains the validity and the supreme importance of mystical theology. Hence, in extended application: One who, whether Christian or non-Christian, seeks by contemplation and self-surrender to obtain union with or absorption into the Deity, or who believes in the possibility of the spiritual apprehension of truths that are inaccessible to the understanding.  

The second step in defining the terms will be the limiting of elements to those which are the essence of mysticism or to the common characteristics.

Evelyn Underhill's detailed coverage of the subject in her recent study, Mysticism, is most valuable in defining the common characteristics. William James's excellent book entitled The Varieties of Religious Experience will be used as a basic text along with W. T. Stace's two books: Mysticism and Philosophy and Mysticism and Human Reason. For a comparative analysis of the nature of mysticism, Rudolf Otto's Mysticism East and West is the chief source.

As the critics and biographers suggest, it seems obvious that there is some connection between mysticism and Emerson's writings. A close and objective investigation, therefore, would be of value and of interest to Emersonian scholars. It is the main purpose of this thesis to ascertain just to what extent Emerson's writings do contain mystical elements.

The primary sources used are the *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes; and the *Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Because much of Emerson's thought is revealed through letters written to his friends, the *Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Ralph L. Rusk, is of value to this study. *Young Emerson Speaks*, edited by Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Jr., a collection of sermons Emerson delivered while a Unitarian minister, indicates the trends of his early thinking. Three other collections of lectures and writings are used: *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Stephen E. Whicher and Robert M. Spiller; *Uncollected Writings*, published by the Lamb Publishing Company; and *Uncollected Lectures*, edited by Clarence Gohdes. One of the earliest and best references is *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by James Elliot Cabot, literary executor and family friend.

The biographical information is, for the most part, from Ralph L. Rusk's *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* and from O. W. Firkins' *Ralph Waldo Emerson*.

There have been mystics in all ages and in all countries, some within one of the numerous world religions, and some not connected with any formal religion as such. Some of the greatest thinkers and writers of all times have been mystics or exhibit mystical elements in their works: Plato,
Heraclitus, Plotinus, Eckhart, Spinoza, Goethe, Hegel, Blake, Shelley, Keats,11 Boehme, St. Augustine, Sankara, Buddha, and many others. All mystics agree that mysticism is concerned with one essential experience: the union of man with the One, the Absolute, or the Infinite. Through the mystical experience the mystic achieves many things. He comes into contact with a reality not accessible in any other way. Through the contact, he attains a heightened sense of awareness, a satisfying comprehension of man's place in the scheme of things, and an unusual insight into the laws of the Infinite; to him, the laws are beautiful, eternal and immutable. He perceives the relationships among men, between man and the Infinite, and between man and nature. Man's greatest joy is experienced at the point of achievement, which is a state of ecstasy. These states of ecstasy are sustained for very short periods, probably from a few minutes to a half hour, never more than an hour or two. After a mystical experience, the person involved is never able fully to describe it; it is an experience that is beyond words and defies any logical description he can give. Nonetheless, the mystic is convinced of the profound truths he has experienced, truths that influence the remainder of his life. However doubtful his associates may be concerning the validity of his mystical experience, the mystic's new knowledge is satisfying.

11 Spurgeon, pp. 2, 17, 34.
and fulfilling to himself. He is sublimely happy; he is never dissatisfied with life.12

Because mystics have been highly individualistic, the interpretations of their mystical perceptions often vary. Stace writes that each mystic seems to put "upon his experiences the intellectual interpretations which he has derived from the peculiarities of his own culture."13 The psychological make-up or the emotional temper of the mystic affects the interpretation of the mystical experience; however, there is one point on which they all seem to agree: that unity underlies diversity. Spurgeon, on this point, states:

The true mystic then, in the full sense of the term, is one who knows there is unity under diversity at the centre of all existence, and he knows it by the most perfect of all tests for the person concerned, because he has felt it.14

It is generally believed by mystics themselves and by those who study mysticism that the mystical ability "is latent in all men but is in most men submerged below the surface of consciousness."15 Rufus Jones states that:

... the number of persons who are subject to the mystical experiences ... is much larger than we usually suppose. We know only the mystics who

12 Ibid., p. 2.
14 Spurgeon, p. 11.
15 Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, p. 343.
were dowered with a literary gift and who could tell in impressive language what had come to them, but of the multitude of those who have felt and seen and who yet were unable to tell in words about their experience, of these we are ignorant.16

Progress toward the mystical experience depends upon the extent to which the mystical ability is present in the individual and the extent to which it is developed.

William James believes "that personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness . . . ."17 and Stace echoes this by saying that "mysticism is ultimately the source and essence of all religions . . . ."18 Mysticism is found in Persia in connection with Sufism; "in China, in connection with Taoism";19 in India, in connection with Buddhism;20 and in the West, in connection with Christianity and Judaism.21

The Eastern and Western mystics have been different with respect to activity: the Eastern mystic is static, while the Western mystic is dynamic. The Eastern mystic

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18Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, p. 343.


21Stace, Mysticism and Human Reason, p. 9.
seeks union with Brahman or seeks Nirvana; "he leaves all activity and reposes in oneness."\textsuperscript{22} His life is characterized more by contemplation and communication than by vital action. However, the Western mystic's life is characterized both by contemplation and communication, and by vital action. The Western mystics have been great reformers, philosophers, and literary figures. Underhill writes that "in the mystics of the West, the highest forms of . . . Union impel the self to some sort of active, rather than of passive life . . ."\textsuperscript{23} Inge quotes Eckhart as saying that "there is . . . no contradiction between the active and the contemplative life; the former belongs to the faculties of the soul, the latter to its essence."\textsuperscript{24} The Eastern mystics perform active duties by teaching those about them; therefore, both Eastern and Western mystics are dynamic in their own characteristic ways.

However different the emotional temperament of the individual mystic, the culture in which he lives, the age in which he is born, and the extent to which his mystical ability is developed, there are certain common characteristics which recur in accounts of mystical experiences. Unusual characteristics may appear occasionally because of


individual differences, but the common characteristics always appear consistently.

For example, the individual mystic has an unusual yearning for a greater reality than the senses present to him. He longs for a deeper and greater meaning in life than is revealed through his physical contact with it. Things, to him, must be more significant than surface consciousness is able to discern. He has an inner apprehension of something greater than himself. Because of this apprehension his entire being is drawn toward the greater reality for which he seeks.

Another characteristic which the individual possesses is an inherent impulse toward moral perfection. He obeys the moral laws not only because he feels they are right, but because he "loves" them; they attract him like a magnet. With the apprehension of a greater reality and an impulse for moral perfection, he is well prepared for the mystical quest of union with the Absolute.

This search, generally lifelong, is seen by most authorities on mysticism as divided into steps or stages. Evelyn Underhill discusses five basic stages which adequately cover the pleasure and pain states of the mystic. They are: awakening, purgation, illumination, the dark night of the soul.

\[25\text{Underhill, pp. 5-6.}\]

\[26\text{Ibid., p. 90.}\]
and union. Though such divisions of stages are made for purposes of analysis, actually they are not divided but overlap with signs of one stage occurring in both that preceding it and the one following it.

After the initial awakening experience, the mystic accomplishes the progression from one stage to the other only with great effort. The pain states, purgation and the dark night of the soul, are those difficult periods during which he purges himself of materialistic desires, sensuous appetites, and the constant reference in his thoughts to I, me, and mine. Rufus Jones, Quaker interpreter of mysticism, states: "The important mystics are men and women who have washed their souls clean of the hedonistic taint."²⁷ The wall which separates him from a higher consciousness of greater reality than he is able to achieve in his generally materialistic condition is selfishness and egocentrism. It is the impulse for moral perfection which comes into action, directing his progress and guiding him eventually out of the stages of pain into the pleasure states of illumination and union.

The mystical experience is primarily a process of becoming aware of the greater reality. The usual method by which the mystic progresses is known as contemplation. To achieve the greater reality which he has already apprehended, he must develop a heightened consciousness which

²⁷Jones, p. 145.
transcends the surface consciousness of the so-called "normal" man. Contemplation may be regarded as the yearning of the soul for what it feels is a greater reality. It consists in a stilling of that part of the mind which attends to material things, a calling in of all diverse interests, a giving of oneself entirely to this one activity, without consciousness of self or reflective thought. Contemplation is progressive as the mystic purifies himself and more easily focuses his attention on reality. The mystic's uncommon yearning for absolute truth serves him in striving toward a higher consciousness through contemplation.

The quest of the mystic is not all difficulty, pain, and struggle; there are rewards along the way. These rewards are in the form of moments when he achieves the higher consciousness and catches a glimpse, however brief it may be, of Reality, or of the Absolute. These moments occur intermittently throughout the mystic's progression and constitute the pleasure states of his life. At the moment, or at the point of achievement, it is a temporary state of involuntary ecstasy. Although the experience is brief, the power of it cannot be overestimated. William James quotes R. H. Bucke's description of his own ecstastical state. He says

28 Underhill, p. 306.
29 Ibid., p. 302.
that after having spent an evening with friends discussing philosophy and poetry, as he was returning home:

"All at once, without warning of any kind, I found myself wrapped in a flame-colored cloud. For an instant I thought of fire, an immense conflagration somewhere close by in that great city; the next, I knew that the fire was within myself. Directly afterward there came upon me a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe. Among other things, I did not merely come to believe, but I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is . . . a living Presence; I became conscious in myself of eternal life. It was not a conviction that I would have eternal life, but a consciousness that I possessed eternal life then . . . that the cosmic order is such that . . . all things work together for the good of each and all . . . ."30

The descriptions of ecstasy are never exactly the same, but intellectual illumination of unity and order in matter and in mind is always present.

The effects of the experience of ecstasy on the mystic are astounding, Stace writes. To him, the experience has objective reality.

. . . the mystic feels an intense and burning conviction that his experience is not a mere dream—a something which is shut up entirely inside his own consciousness. He feels that it transcends his own petty personality, that it is vastly greater than himself, that it in some sense passes out beyond his individuality into the infinite.31


Stace further explains: "Now the fact that self-transcendence is a part of the experience itself is the reason why the mystic is absolutely certain of its truth beyond all possibility of arguing him out of it."\(^\text{32}\)

As a result of the mystic's contact with Reality, he attains a heightened sense of awareness, an assurance of the existence of the greater Reality for which he yearns, a greater understanding of man's place in the scheme of things, an optimism beyond that of other men, a joy which is inexpressible, and a definite conviction that what is perceived is divine.

But ecstasy is not the end of the mystical quest. At this stage one could easily be led into what Underhill refers to as "spiritual gluttony" except for the final state of pain known as the dark night of the soul. In this stage, all selfishness, which has gone unnoticed in the corners of the soul, is finally and permanently removed,\(^\text{33}\) and the mystic emerges at last out of the dark night into union, the final stage of the lifelong quest. In union, or the unitive life, the interests of the mystic are completely absorbed in the interests of the Infinite, or the Absolute. The mystic has a conscious sharing of the strength and authority of the Infinite, and he becomes "a centre of energy, an actual

\(^{32}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 154.}\) \(^{33}\text{Underhill, pp. 395-397.}\)
parent of spiritual vitality in other men." Few men have reached the unitive life, but these few have produced works which speak of their inner assurance of a greater Reality and of their love for the world and the creatures who inhabit it.

34 Ibid., p. 416.
CHAPTER II

PREREQUISITES

Emersonian thought has so penetrated the minds of Americans that it seems to belong wholly to them. It did not, however, spring entirely from nineteenth-century New England soil but has its roots in world literature. Emerson's religious faith and optimistic outlook belonged to puritan New England and pioneer America, but his optimism was derived partially from the ancient East, and his faith from the religions of all the world. The mystical writings of the ancient East were important sources for Emerson's thought. That Emerson had an inexhaustible interest in them from the late 1830's onward is well known, but that he read oriental translations throughout his youth has only recently come to light. He is known to have read extensively from the supreme devotional scripture of India, the Bhagavad-Gita; another Hindu scripture, the Vishnu-Purana; the earliest known Indian scripture, the Vedas; and a later part of the


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Vedic literature, the Upanishads. Many lengthy quotations from oriental books are found in Emerson's early unpublished journals. The literature of the near East had its influence, too. The mystical Persian poetry of Hafiz and Saadi is quoted intermittently in the published Journals, and Emerson's own poetry was enriched by them. Other Asian literature also drew Emerson's attention; the Koran, an Arabic scripture, and the ancient Chinese wisdom of Confucius were focal points in his studies.

Besides the mystical literature of the ancient East, Emerson was, of course, influenced by the literature of ancient Greece and Rome. During his early years in the Boston Latin School, and later at Harvard College, Emerson studied Greek literature, sometimes in the original, and at the age of sixteen, Emerson recorded several lines from Plato in the Journals. At twenty-one, he wrote a "Letter to Plato" in the Journals comparing modern moral and religious problems to those of Plato's day. His deep regard for the mystical elements in Platonic philosophy stayed with him.

1Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, pp. 106-120.
2Carpenter, Emerson Handbook, p. 211.
3Ibid., p. 212.
4Ibid., p. 213.
6Ibid., pp. 380-388.
throughout his lifetime. The Neo-Platonists captivated his interests, especially the writings of Plotinus, Proclus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus.10

Among the early Protestant mystics who caught the attention of Emerson were Jacob Boehme and Meister Eckhart.11 He also read the more recent mystical writings of the German poet and dramatist, Johann von Goethe; the Swedish scientist, philosopher, and theologian, Emanuel Swedenborg; and the English religious leader and founder of the Society of Friends, George Fox.

Being reared in a minister's home and family of clerical tradition, Emerson was naturally influenced by the Christian Bible. He himself was a Unitarian minister of the Second Church in Boston from March, 1829, to September, 1832. His published Works refer to the Bible rarely, not that he ceased to value its teachings, but because he could better communicate his ideas, better command the attention of his readers, without the use of traditional biblical terms. The Bible, especially the mystical portions, remains, however, one of the major influences on the thought and expression in the published writings of Emerson.

Emerson, then, was well acquainted with the ancient Eastern and Western mystical writings, the works of medieval

11 Ibid., p. 115.
Protestant mystics, as well as the more modern mystics of Europe.

In her study of mysticism Evelyn Underhill states that one does not become a mystic without the possession of certain vital characteristics. One of these characteristics is an unusual yearning for absolute truth, or for a greater reality.\(^{12}\) At some time in their lives, all men have felt a yearning in themselves for a greater reality, something more than their physical senses can represent to them.\(^{13}\) Man lives locked up in a physical body depending entirely upon the mechanical equipment of his senses, sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch, to tell him what the real world is like. If his organs of sense were maladjusted, if they were arranged in a different way, or if he possessed only a part of them, his inner reception of the outer world would be vastly different from what he normally receives. It is the particular arrangement of man's senses, the limited function of them, and man's interpretation of the messages he receives from them which represent the outer world to man. Sometimes man has a feeling that there must be a deeper meaning to life than is portrayed in his seemingly inadequate picture of it; he has a vague sense that he is missing something, that he never truly lives. For the majority of men, the desire may be a fleeting one, occurring only occasionally.

\(^{12}\)Underhill, p. 24. \(^{13}\)Ibid., pp. 4-5.
Although the yearning for reality is present in all men, in the mystic it is present to an unusual degree; it becomes a ruling passion. He longs for, not partial truth, but absolute truth. He cannot accept reports of truth; he must know it within himself.

The man who has an intense yearning for reality and an impulse for moral perfection is well prepared for engaging in the mystical life. His life is primarily a process of becoming aware of the greater reality. Such unusual characteristics are necessary to him in the remaking of his consciousness, an essential part of the mystical process. Progress in the development of the higher consciousness is noted by stages in the mystical life. The initial stage is that of awakening, followed by purgation, illumination, despair or the dark night of the soul, and final union with the Absolute.

The first stage of the mystical life, the awakening of the self to the reality of the Infinite, may come suddenly or gradually, but it comes with astonishing clarity. The individual is no longer aware of the physical world only, but through the awakening he perceives the reality also of the spiritual world. He is now more intensely aware of both spiritual and physical reality. In the Christian religion such a stage may be compared to conversion. This conversion

14 Ibid., pp. 3-4.  
15 Ibid., pp. 33, 45-46.
is not a surface experience in the conventional sense; it is an experience within the individual which changes his entire outlook on life. Underhill says that "the awakening of the self is to a new and more active plane of being, new and more personal relations with Reality; hence to a new and more real work which it must do."\[16\]

Such an awakening apparently occurred at an early age in Emerson's life. At eighteen, in his Journal for January 12, 1822, he reveals an awareness of spiritual reality. Religion, he feels, is "essential to the Universe. You seek in vain to contemplate the order of things apart from its existence. You can no more banish this than you can separate from yourself the notions of Space and Duration."\[17\] Whether or not the awakening comes gradually or suddenly is not evident, but, at this point, it is clear that the awakening has occurred. There is a marked certainty of belief in the existence of something greater than the physical world, as commonly regarded by the surface senses.

After the awakening of the self to Divine Reality, the self becomes aware of divine perfection and beauty; it realizes its own imperfection and corruption, and the tremendous separation between it and the Divine. It then attempts to eliminate all that stands in the way of its progress.

\[16\]Ibid., p. 197.
\[17\]Emerson, Journals, I, 98.
toward union with God. This must be accomplished through discipline which constitutes the second stage, the state of pain and effort known as purgation.\textsuperscript{18}

The first step in purgation of the self is detachment. The self strives to become detached from finite things in order to attain the infinite. It practices poverty, chastity, and obedience: poverty, by a disregard for material and immaterial wealth; chastity, by cleansing the soul of personal desire; and obedience, by the denial of selfhood or by self-abandonment. The sum of these three practices helps to make the subject think of himself as a part of the order of things, important only as a part of the whole.\textsuperscript{19}

The second step in purgation is discipline, the remaking of the permanent elements of the character. The old self with its desires and attachments must be abandoned; from the death of the old comes the birth of the new. The dying of the old self is often a bitter battle within the soul; during the struggle it is not uncommon for one to reach a state of higher consciousness, only to be plunged again into despair.\textsuperscript{20}

Knowing that there is no clear demarcation between the stages of the mystical life, it is not usually possible for one to say that a specific stage occurs precisely at a given time. It seems indicative of some such stage, however,

\textsuperscript{18}Underhill, p. 169.  
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., pp. 205-216.  
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., pp. 216-227.
that in the *Journal* of that year, 1825, Emerson, at twenty-two, considers retiring into solitude and giving himself to prayer, reading, and "barren meditation," and that he commends the pursuit of virtue and knowledge over the satisfaction of appetites for worldly things.

During Emerson's service at the Second Church, he became aware of what, to him, were new truths which conflicted with the Unitarian principles. His sermon on "Trifles" may have been an outward expression of his own situation:

If you busy the natural eye too exclusively on minute objects, it gradually loses its powers of distant vision; and more surely will the eye of the mind grow dull and incapable of great contemplation which is daily disregarded to little studies. If you are careful about many small things, you cannot fix your thoughts upon the one thing needful.

Emerson apparently found himself distracted at this time by the duties necessary to his position. Some of his unrest was suggested to his congregation in a sermon of October 18, 1829: "Let us not offend the man within the breast. Let it be remembered that in all our talk, truth is the end and aim." That he may have been offending the man within himself was apparently a source of concern to him.

In a sermon of April 4, 1830, he admits to his audience: "I

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believe none who hears me can be more sensible of their own faults than I am."

He apparently began to feel that his own presence in the ministry was due to the expectations and precedent of his family and was not a result of his own convictions. On December 3, 1830, he confided his uncertainty to his congregation: "I am afraid of the great evil done to so sacred a property as a man's own soul by an imitation arising out of an unthinking admiration of others." Emerson's White Mountain retreat was foreshadowed in the same sermon when he said:

Let this strange and awful being that we possess have that reverence that is due from us. Let us leave this immoderate regard for meats and drinks, to dress and pleasure and to unfounded praise, and let us go alone and converse with ourselves, and the word of God in us."

Emerson appears to have recognized that he was unable to live according to his conscience and remain within the principles of the Unitarian Church. Because of this, he went to the White Mountains in order to be alone and make up his mind what to do. It was a hard decision for him to make, and most of his relatives were against it, but, at last, in September of 1832, he resigned the pastorate. The specific reason he gave for his resignation was only a part of the many reasons which he felt made it impossible for

25Ibid., p. 71.  
26Ibid., p. 106.  
27Ibid., p. 111.
him to continue as minister. The objection he chose to express was his being required to officiate at the Lord's Supper which he no longer believed to be a necessary church sacrament established for all time.

A notable period of despair appeared directly before and after Emerson's decision to resign. Afterward, in January of 1833, on his way to Italy, he records in the Journal: "We feel sometimes as if the sweet and awful melodies we have once heard would never return . . . and fear we shall not again aspire to the glory of a moral life . . . ."28 Emerson's trip abroad, he thought, might help him to forget his past uncomfortable situation at home. In Malta he feels that "wherever we go, whatever we do, self is the sole subject we study and learn."29 He further states that "myself is much more than I know, and yet I know nothing else."30 Study of self would be "sneakingly mean" if used in a low sense, but, he writes, "as self means Devil, so it means God."31

It is likely that Emerson had in mind the sensual or surface self as the Diabolical, and the spiritual or deeper self as the Divine. He was studying then both at this time, and he may well have been in the process of remaking the self: the discarding of the old and developing of the new.

28 Emerson, Journals, III, 20. 29 Ibid., p. 28.
30 Ibid. 31 Ibid., pp. 28-29.
While returning home from England, he entered on October 8, 1833, a prayer in his Journal:

May I resist the evil that is without by the good that is within. . . . May I rejoice in the Divine Power and be humble. Oh that I might show forth thy gift to me by purity, by love, by unshrinking industry and unsinking hope, and by unconquerable courage. May I be more thing, and so more truly myself every day I live.\textsuperscript{32}

Emerson's prayer appears to express a marked yearning for the Absolute, a possible direction of purpose, and a hope of drawing nearer to Reality.

The third stage of the mystical life is that of illumination. When the self reaches this stage, the major struggle ceases. From the despair of purgation the subject emerges with the ability to see beyond the material world. This is not union with the Absolute, but an apprehension of the One. The self still realizes itself to be a separate entity, but it is filled with a joyous seeing or understanding of Reality. There is also an added intensity of perception in regard to the natural world. The self is able to discern the significance of the beauty and purity in natural objects. Underhill, in describing the stage of illumination, writes:

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., pp. 219-220.  
\textsuperscript{33}Underhill, p. 246.
In illumination, the ecstatic experience often occurs, and the self perceives Reality.

After Emerson's return from Europe in 1833, he appears to have had a sense of direction concerning his future life. He no longer lacked freedom for thinking, speaking, and acting according to his principles. Exercising his own courageous instincts by speaking truth as he saw it, he strengthened these impulses for future use, and the new stage of illumination may well be indicated by ideas which he expressed. Soon after his return from Europe in 1833, he spoke again to his old audience of the Second Church. Some of the answers he may have received from his search for absolute truth appear in what is seemingly the results of an ecstatic experience:

"But now . . . man begins to hear a voice that fills the heavens and the earth, saying that God is within him; that there is the celestial host. I find this amazing revelation of my immediate relation to God a solution to all the doubts that oppressed me."34

The availability of a new energy is affirmed by Emerson at the same time:

"I recognize the distinction of the outer and inner self; the double consciousness that, within this erring, passionate, mortal self, sits a supreme, calm, immortal mind, whose powers I do not know, but it is stronger than I; it is wiser than I; it never approved me in any wrong; I

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seek council of it in my doubts; I repair to it in my doubts; I repair to it in my dangers; I pray to it in my undertakings."35

That ecstasy is a solution to the soul's questions, an enlightening experience, and a temporary perception of Reality, is affirmed by Underhill. On November 2, 1833, Emerson, enters in the *Journal* a passage which reveals his belief in his added insight: "To an instructed eye the universe is transparent. The light of higher laws than its own shines through it."36

Apprehension of the Absolute is often connected with a musical element which the mystics express in several ways: sometimes as a melody, sometimes as rhythm, and at other times as music or song. The mystical music or melody which accompanies ecstasy has very little resemblance to earthly music, hence comes the mystic's problem of describing it. The closer the self comes to Reality, the more likely the musical element is to appear and the more profound is its effect on the mystic. Early in April the next year, Emerson's *Journal* indicates, his life's purpose was coming, at last, from the outer periphery, into focus, and he again heard the melody:

... I woke to a strain of highest melody. I saw that it was not for me to complain of obscurity, of being misunderstood; it was not for me, even in the filthy rags of my unrighteousness, to despond of what I might do and learn.37

35Ibid.  
36Emerson, *Journals*, III, 228.  
37Ibid., p. 274.
Emerson saw the light of higher laws and evidently intended to follow it without worrying about the fact that his own ideas conflicted with those of others or that he might likely go unnoticed. Thus freed from his inner conflict, he apparently made use of the new knowledge and strength which he had discovered.

Emerson did occasional preaching and lecturing after his return from Europe, but by May 31, 1834, he moved with his mother to Concord. Soon afterward the period of literary production began and did not cease for many years.

The fourth stage of the mystical life, known as despair or the dark night of the soul, is a final and more intense purgative stage appearing directly before the unitive life. It is the final battle between the surface senses and the higher consciousness. The self feels cut off so completely from Reality that only the memory of the pleasure states, when Reality had appeared near, keeps it from physical destruction. At the end of the dark night, the self is, at last, purified and ready for union with the Absolute. Nowhere in Emerson's writings does it appear that he reached such a depth of despair so great as to be indicative of this stage.

The fifth and last stage of the mystic's life is that of union. Union is not merely perceived as in illumination but enjoyed as one with the Absolute. The mystic's interests
are completely absorbed in those of the Infinite; he has a conscious sharing of its strength and authority resulting in a freedom and serenity which seems astounding to other men. The mystic is usually urged to some heroic effort or creative work and becomes "an actual parent of spiritual vitality in other men." Underhill states that union "ends with the coming forth of divine humanity, never again to leave us: living in us, and with us, a pilgrim, a worker, a guest at our table, a sharer at all hazards in life." It does not appear that Emerson's interests were ever completely dissolved in those of the Infinite. He continued to maintain his family, his home, and his private affairs throughout his lifetime.

The mystic's yearning for Reality is used to remake the consciousness in order that he may become aware of the greater Reality. The stages are marks of the progress of the consciousness toward higher levels. The means by which the mystic remakes the consciousness is known as contemplation. By a strict discipline of sensual appetites, a removal of all distracting images from the mind, and a concentrating of attention on the Absolute, the unification of consciousness is achieved and man is thus prepared for perception of the Reality he seeks.

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38 Underhill, p. 416.  
40 Ibid., p. 298.  
39 Ibid., p. 450.  
41 Ibid., p. 328.
Although suggestions of the contemplative method appear several times in the journals and sermons, a summation of Emerson's means of seeking truth is best explained in "Literary Ethics":

... is it not, that, by this discipline, the usurpation of the senses is overcome, and the lower faculties of man are subdued to docility; through which as an unobstructed channel the soul now easily and gladly flows.\(^4^2\)

The results of such a discipline in the mystical life can be described in similar terms. It is believed by mystics that through neglect of the subconscious the conscious mind holds an unnaturally prior place; that through detachment from personal desires and concentration on Reality the subconscious and conscious mental activities become united. Such an integration of the surface self and the deeper self is prerequisite for union with the Absolute.

CHAPTER III

MYSTICAL ELEMENTS IN EMERSON'S THOUGHT

The procedure of the mystic is a clearing of the mind of all distractions, a concentration of attention, and a discipline or control of the bodily appetites. This method of seeking Reality is known as contemplation. In the contemplative state, thought, emotions, and will become a unity; feeling and perception fuse, and there occurs a joyous sense of communing with Reality or the Absolute. Consciousness of self and the senses disappears; there remains only a consciousness of being in immediate relation with the Absolute, "of participating in Divinity."¹ The experience itself is usually transitory, but it is no less real to the mystic. This brief, ineffable moment of the contemplative state is known as ecstasy.

Although there are several places in Emerson’s early Journals which suggest the ecstatic experience, the most complete account first appears in an entry made on March 19, 1835, when Emerson was thirty-one years old.² In its final poetic expression it is found in "Nature," an account which resembles that experience of ecstasy described by

¹Underhill, p. 330. ²Emerson, Journals, III, 451-452.
R. M. Bucke. Emerson writes that:

In the woods we return to reason and faith . . . .
Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and parcel of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental . . . .
I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty.

A return to faith is understandable, but Emerson's use of the word "reason" has not the meaning of its usual sense.

In a letter to his brother, Edward, dated May 31, 1834, he explains his own meaning of the word: "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." His definition appears to denote that latent faculty or ability which the mystics believe to be in all men.

In June, 1835, Emerson further explains his definition of reason: "It is in all men, even the worst . . . . In bad men it is dormant, in the good efficient; but it is perfect and identical in all . . . ." But perhaps his fullest elucidation of the word is in "Nature": "Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life . . . . This universal soul he calls Reason; it is not

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3See Introduction, p. 12, footnote No. 30.
5Emerson, Letters, I, 412-413.
6Cabot, I, 246-247.
mine, or thine, or his, but we are its; we are its property and men."\(^7\) Reason, as Emerson defines it, appears to refer to that intuitive faculty latent in all men, which, if purged and purified, may become efficient enough for perception.

Effective communication of the experience of ecstasy depends upon the particular gift of the individual: the poet, the artist, and the musician are able to translate spiritual truth into earthly beauty, but others have not been as successful. Though all mystics agree that the ecstatic experience is ineffable, nonetheless most of them spend their lives trying to communicate it to others.

The problem of communication was one of which Emerson was well aware. On November 19, 1833, he writes in the Journal: "Wise moments are years, and light the countenance ever . . . . They refuse to be recorded."\(^8\) And in a Journal entry made in June, 1835, Emerson recognizes that "the aim of the author is not to tell truth--that he cannot do, but to suggest it[;] . . . he uses many words, hoping that one, if not the other, will bring you as near to the fact as he is."\(^9\) Even as late as October, 1848, Emerson seemed still to be dissatisfied with his failure to express fully his

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\(^7\)Emerson, "Nature," Works, I, 27.

\(^8\)Emerson, Journals, III, 231.

\(^9\)Ibid., pp. 491-492.
meaning. Many of his best essays had already been published, but he asks himself in the Journal: "Do you think ecstasy is ever communicable?"  

According to most authorities, the mystical procedure is one of becoming aware of the greater Reality by achieving an integration or unification of the surface self and the deeper self, or of the conscious and subconscious activities of the mind. A common belief is that man's two selves have not always been disunited and that man's souls are immortal, that they "no more came into existence when we were born than they will cease to exist when our bodies disintegrate."  

For this reason it has often been thought that in youth the consciousness is more unified than in later life when the surface senses become greatly occupied with physical things of the world.

It would appear that Emerson is aware also of the need for adjustment of the senses, or the unification of the deeper self and the surface self, before the contemplative moment can occur, when, immediately preceding the "eyeball" passage, he states that few adults ever really see nature, but "the lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood.

10 Ibid., VII, 522.  
11 Spurgeon, p. 5.  
It is, of course, not a perceiving by the physical eye that Emerson refers to when he says that few adults "can see nature." The true act of seeing is a much deeper perception which he can only suggest by saying, "I see all." When this adjustment is made and man can see nature, he finds that, Emerson writes, "the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind. The laws of moral nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass."\(^{13}\) All men can know this relation between mind and matter.\(^{14}\)

Readers of Emerson's writings are familiar with his belief that nature is symbolic, a common characteristic of mysticism. Spurgeon writes that "the essence of mysticism is to believe that everything we see and know is symbolic of something greater . . .,"\(^{15}\) that one truth is only the thread which unravels greater truths.\(^{16}\) The mystics see nature as the revelation of the Absolute. An ecstatic experience described to Stace by an acquaintance, whose name he did not disclose, reveals somewhat the mystic's insight. The subject was looking out a window into a littered back yard of a tenement when:

"Suddenly every object in my field of vision took on a curious and intense kind of existence of its own; that is, everything appeared to have an 'inside'—to exist as I existed, having inwardness, a kind of individual life, and every object, seen under this aspect, appeared exceedingly

\(^{13}\)Ibid., pp. 32-33. \(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 34. 
\(^{15}\)Spurgeon, p. 12. \(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 9.
beautiful. There was a cat out there, with its head lifted, effortlessly watching a wasp that moved without moving just above its head. Everything was urgent with life... which was the same in the cat, the wasp, the broken bottles, and merely manifested itself differently in these individuals (which did not therefore cease to be individuals however). All things seemed to glow with a light that came from within them."

Emerson believes that "the world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man." Man is, he states, the superior creation, but nature differs from man in that it is not "subjected to the human will. Its serene order is inviolable by us." Nature represents the divine order, the mind of the Absolute; nature also represents the mind of man. Nature is the "organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it." Emerson uses nature in a broader sense than is common in its general usage. It is everything which is "not-me"; the universe. Between nature and man there is a very close relation, according to Emerson, and, immediately following the "eyeball" passage in what is evidently an

17Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, pp. 71-72.
18Emerson, "Nature," Works, I, 64.
19Ibid., p. 65. 20Ibid., p. 62.
extended description, he sees, he says, the "occult relation
between man and the vegetable."

Emerson explains, seeks out in nature the
identity and relationships of plants, animals, and phenomena
which lead it to detect unity in nature. Unity and order
suggest the aspect of intelligence manifested in nature.
From detection of intelligence, man is led to wonder about
causes. From cause the mind of man is led to the Absolute,
or, as the mystics refer to it, the "Cause of causes." Emerson
affirms that man may trust in the permanence of such natural
laws.

The physical world and the relation of its parts are
the keys to the spiritual world. Emerson finds ethical laws
in the axioms of physics: "the whole is greater than its
part: reaction is equal to action; the smallest weight may
be made to lift the greatest, the difference of weight being
compensated by time."

The axioms are not only applicable
for technical use, but are equally valuable when applied as
ethical laws in human life.

In Emerson's view, as has been shown, the physical laws
in nature correspond exactly to the moral laws within the
mind of man. When man can see nature truly, he recognizes
within it the beautifully necessary and eternal laws of the

22 Emerson, "Nature;" Works, I, 10.
23 Ibid., p. 47. 24 Ibid., p. 48. 25 Ibid., p. 33.
Absolute, of which he also, as a part of nature, is a manifestation. Such an educative process—his recognition of the immutable laws of nature reflecting his own moral instincts—becomes a discipline for him. Knowledge of these absolute laws is accessible to all, but not all avail themselves of it. "Yet all men are capable of being raised by piety or by passion, into their region," Emerson writes, a statement which suggests the awkening and remaking of the life and consciousness of the mystic.

When man sees nothing in nature, it is because he is "disunited with himself." Emerson explains that if man is to see nature truly he must satisfy "the demands of the spirit." The demands are perception and love; but neither is perfect without the other. If man is "disunited within himself," his surface self and inner self are not integrated or unified. Emerson's comment that the spirit demands both perception and love is suggestive of the fusion of the two which occurs in the mystic's contemplative state. An experience such as that described by Stace reveals man's relation to all things. He sees the same light as that in his own being manifested in other objects and animals. When the "relation between the mind and matter" becomes apparent to man, Emerson writes, he "doubts if at all other times he

26bid., p. 57.  
27bid., p. 74.  
28bid.  
29bid.
is not blind and deaf . . . [;] For the universe becomes transparent, and the light of higher laws than its own shines through it.\textsuperscript{30}

Just as man can use the physical laws of nature for his own benefit when he knows them and puts himself into a position to use their force and power, so can he also acquire the force of the moral laws of the Absolute when he knows their truth and aligns himself with them to use their power. Emerson explains.

Once inhale the upper \textit{air}, being admitted to behold the absolute natures of justice and truth, and we learn that man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the creator in the finite.\textsuperscript{31}

The power of man is illimitable when he knows absolute truth; hence, Emerson asks, "he can set bounds to the possibilities of man."\textsuperscript{32}

What nature meant to Emerson, evidently, was more than appears to the oye at first glance, but the mystics have been perceiving similar meaning in nature throughout the ages. Emerson's poetic power helped him articulate in his writings that other men have apprehended not have not often been able to communicate: the whole of nature is a macrocosm of the mind of man; the mind of man is the microcosm of the whole of nature; both are manifestations of the Absolute, of the

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 34. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 64.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid.}.
Universal 'ide. As physical laws are known, "the world becomes at last only a realized will,—the double of man."33

"Trust thyself" may be little more than a trite phrase without the reading of the most popular essay Emerson ever wrote, "Self-Reliance." The appeal is to those who would achieve true maturity, young or old.34 It is when men try to pattern himself after others, when he listens to the advice of men instead of the direction from his inner guide that he "scatters his force," for, "who would be a man, must be a nonconformist."35 Institutions and the communications of other men do not have absolute truth; these sources are secondary and have picked up impurities. It is only by being a channel through which the Divine flows that man can truly be himself, the unique agent of the whole, performing his own vital function. Emerson says: "We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity. When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams."36

Emerson does not believe that man should accept this knowledge, or direction, from other men; like mystics in

33Ibid., p. 40.
34Carpenter, Emerson Handbook, p. 59.
36Ibid., p. 64.
every age, he feels it is necessary for the individual to receive primary truths, because, as he declares, "The relations of the soul to the divine spirit are so pure that it is profane to seek to interpose helps."37 It is interesting to note, incidentally, that St. Teresa, the great Spanish mystic of the sixteenth century, also said that man is incapable of understanding the "utter transformation of the soul in God," but, she adds, "I know it by experience."38 To know truth "by experience," the mystic feels, is to perceive it directly in an immediate relation of the soul with the Infinite; it is not to believe someone else's account of his relation. The climactic experience of the soul is brought about by contemplation. When Emerson writes that men "can and must detach themselves . . .,"39 he may well be referring to the detachment of the self through poverty which occurs in the purgative stage of the mystical life. The poverty of the mystic consists of detaching himself from all "immaterial as well as material wealth, a complete detachment from all finite things."40 Something of the same nature appears to be what Emerson has in mind

37 Ibid., p. 65.
40 Underhill, p. 205.
when he writes that "reliance on Property, including the reliance on governments which protect it, is the want of self-reliance," and, he adds, "a cultivated man becomes ashamed of his property . . . ." Even the prayer of the mystic must reflect no personal or earthly attachments. Emerson is likely of the same opinion when he states that "prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft." It is because of the soul's need for freedom that it must be detached from finite things. Underhill explains: "Divide the world into 'nine' and 'not nine,' and unreal standards are set up, claims and cravings begin to fret the mind. We are slaves of our own property. We drag with us not a treasure, but a chain."

Through poverty of the senses the self will of the mystic is obliterated. He desires nothing and has nothing. According to the mystics, such a state gives one a sense of freedom unknown by other men. Through poverty and through obedience to the moral laws, the self will of the mystic is replaced by the will of the Infinite. The obedience of the mystic is not just a strict surface conformance; it is so great a love for the moral laws that he desires nothing else.

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42 Ibid., pp. 87-88.
43 Underhill, p. 306.
45 Underhill, pp. 206-207.
but their fulfillment in his own life and, naturally, their fulfillment in the entire universe. The "fretting" of the mind which is still driven by self-will appears to be a weakness which Emerson recognizes. "Discontent . . .," he writes, "is infirmity of will." He criticizes the usual prayer as a petition for individual benefit; such "prayers are a disease of the will . . . ." The transformation of the will is an inner process, and from it, the mystic gains freedom. When he is no longer tied by physical things he has new strength. Emerson shows awareness of the added energy through transformation when he says:

He who knows that power is inborn, that he is weak because he has looked for good out of him and elsewhere, and, so perceiving, throws himself unhesitatingly on his thought, instantly rights himself, stands in the erect position, commands his limbs, works miracles; just as a man who stands on his feet is stronger than a man who stands on his head.

The mystics declare that the will of the Absolute is man's rightful will, that it is a will more fitting and natural to man than his own self-will. Such perception seems to be what Emerson means by writing that "if we live truly, we shall see truly." Until man realizes that the Eternal will is his own, he does not nor can he know his

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47 Ibid., p. 79.
48 Ibid., p. 89.
49 Ibid., p. 68.
true nature. According to Underhill, part of the realization comes through concentrating on Reality. Emerson is very likely suggesting this method when he writes that man "must go alone,"50 and adds that such "isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation."51 Emerson cautions against the danger of man's concerning himself with trifles which are always demanding his attention: "At times the whole world seems to be in conspiracy to imp ortune you with emphatic trifles . . . . But keep thy state; come not into their confusion."52 Mystic concentration through elimination of all other concern appears, obviously, to be implied.

When through the whole act of contemplation the mystic has transformed his will into the Eternal will and has unified his senses for illumination, ecstasy occurs. Emerson may be referring to the intellectual perceptions of unity in mind and matter, always present in the contemplative moment, when he states that "the soul raised over passion beholds identity and eternal causation, perceives the self-existence of Truth and Right, and calms itself with knowing that all things go well."53 Emerson brings out the same illuminations which the mystics have always achieved through the ecstatic experience:

50Ibid., p. 71.  
51Ibid., p. 72.  
52Ibid.  
53Ibid., p. 69.
that "all things go well." The mystic sees that a rose and a blade of grass exist in the present in perfect beauty and fulfillment; his insight reveals that he must do the same. Emerson believes, also, that man "cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time."\(^5^4\)

It is through the ecstatic experience that the mystic learns that the present is part of eternity, and, as such, requires his utmost participation and Divine direction. Because of this revelation, the all-important present is designated as the *Eternal Now*. Emerson seems aware of the mystics' *Eternal Now* when he affirms that "whenever a mind is simple and receives a divine wisdom . . . it lives now, and absorbs past and future into the present hour."\(^5^5\)

The reason for self-reliance is therefore obvious; it is reliance upon God within. The unified self is the channel through which God acts and speaks. Thus, with the reason, assurance, and authority of the mystics of every age, may Emerson declare:

\[ \text{... the only right is what is after my own constitution; the only wrong what is against it.}\]

Like the man of action, the scholar also must be a self-reliant man. Referring to an old fable which, he says, is "ever new and sublime . . .,"\(^5^7\) Emerson relates that man

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\(^5^4\)Ibid., p. 67.  \(^5^5\)Ibid., p. 66.  \(^5^6\)Ibid., p. 50.

\(^5^7\)Emerson, "The American Scholar," Works, I, 82.
was divided into men in order to "be more helpful to himself; just as the hand was divided into fingers, the better to answer its end."58 The One Man is only partially present in each man, and it takes "the whole society to find the whole man."59 Each man, in order "to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers."60 Emerson thus implies that the scholar must remember his identity with all other men, that all are united in the One Man.

The most important influence upon the mind of the scholar is nature,61 for it provides the raw material on which his mind may work. Like that of the mystic, the mind of the scholar must possess a strong unifying instinct. "To the young mind," Emerson says, "everything is individual . . . ."62 But as it grows older "it finds how to join two things and see in them one nature; then three, then three thousand . . . ."63 The unifying instinct of the scholar continues to join things, "discovering roots running under ground whereby contrary and remote things cohere and flower out from one stem."64 He finds that classification has been going on since the beginning of time, and Emerson asks, "what is classification but the perceiving that these objects are not

58 ibid.  
59 ibid.  
60 ibid., p. 83.  
61 ibid., p. 84.  
62 ibid., p. 85.  
63 ibid.  
64 ibid.
chaotic, and are not foreign, but have a law which is also the law of the human mind." The scholar then sees, somewhat as the subject saw in the ecstatic moment described by Stace, that "he and it [nature] proceed from one root . . . ." The root, Emerson writes, is "the soul of his soul." Knowing that the laws of nature are the same as those of his own mind, the scholar measures his attainment by nature: "So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess."  

Although nature is the primary source of vision, books are the scholar's instruments for his "idle times." Books, Emerson believes, must be used in such a way that the scholar maintains the integrity of his own mind while recognizing the truths of other minds. And when Emerson writes that the best books "impress us with the conviction that one nature wrote and the same reads," he apparently recognizes, as the mystics do, that all minds are united in the Universal Mind. The mystic's knowledge of the connection is perceived through ecstasy, and Emerson seemingly believes that the scholar and the best authors receive insight in a comparable manner. The scholar, he says, will know "that as the seer's hour of vision is short and rare . . . [3] so is its record . . . ."
which strongly suggests the brevity of the contemplative moment. The perceptive scholar recognizes the absolute truth when it appears in his reading because it is the truth of his own mind, and he will, Emerson explains, "read . . . only that least part,—only the authentic utterances of the oracle;--all the rest he rejects . . . ." A strict belief in everything found in even the best of books is a grave error according to Emerson: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." A strict belief in everything found in even the best of books is a grave error according to Emerson: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." A strict belief in everything found in even the best of books is a grave error according to Emerson: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." A strict belief in everything found in even the best of books is a grave error according to Emerson: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." A strict belief in everything found in even the best of books is a grave error according to Emerson: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." A strict belief in everything found in even the best of books is a grave error according to Emerson: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." A strict belief in everything found in even the best of books is a grave error according to Emerson: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." A strict belief in everything found in even the best of books is a grave error according to Emerson: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." A strict belief in everything found in even the best of books is a grave error according to Emerson: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." A strict belief in everything found in even the best of books is a grave error according to Emerson: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." A strict belief in everything found in even the best of books is a grave error according to Emerson: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." A strict belief in everything found in even the best of books is a grave error according to Emerson: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system."
can never ripen into truth."  

Every kind of action in which he can participate is useful to the scholar. "It is pearls and rubies to his discourse." Action furnishes him with language, and "it is the raw material out of which the intellect moulds her splendid products."  

"The mind," Emerson says, "now thinks, now acts, and each fit reproduces the other." Thinking is a partial act; if the scholar lacks ability to impart his truths, he can still live them; the combination of both constitutes a total act. Emerson believes that the one thing of value in the world is "the active soul": "This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates." The active soul is that which is in the process of becoming aware of the greater Reality. All men, the mystics believe, have within them the seed of the Divine, the latent ability to achieve union with the Absolute. When Emerson writes that the active soul is "obstructed and as yet unborn," he implies, seemingly, that it must be awakened. The obstruction may be caused by the surface senses which have become all important and thereby prevent the deeper self or the seed from emerging into consciousness. The active soul,

78 Ibid., p. 94.  
79 Ibid., p. 95.  
80 Ibid., pp. 95-96.  
81 Ibid., p. 99.  
82 Ibid.  
83 Ibid., p. 90.
awakened, sees absolute truth through a deeper perception; he utters and enacts truth because he must, although he feels it to be ineffable.

If the active soul is he who yearns always for Reality, it is logical that Emerson would describe the duty of the scholar as showing men "facts amidst appearances."\(^8^4\) Emerson affirms that "the world is his who can see through its pretension."\(^8^5\) But, he warns, the task of the scholar is not an easy one. His method requires that he be "one who raises himself from private considerations and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts."\(^8^6\) Whether or not Emerson intended it to be so, the scholar's method resembles that of the mystics. In order to detach himself from personal desires, the mystic accepts poverty, and when Emerson declares that the scholar "must accept--how often!--poverty and solitude,"\(^8^7\) it is suggestive of the purgative stage.

That Emerson expects the scholar to progress into the stage of illumination is implied by this statement: "whatsoever oracles the human heart, in all emergencies, in all solemn hours, has uttered as its commentary on the world of actions,--these he shall receive and impart."\(^8^8\)

Like the self-reliant man, the scholar must trust himself completely. He must, Emerson explains, "defer never

\(^{8^4}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 100.}\)
\(^{8^5}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 104.}\)
\(^{8^6}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 101.}\)
\(^{8^7}\text{Ibid.}\)
\(^{8^8}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 102.}\)
to the popular cry. He says that "in yourself is the law of all nature . . . [i] in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all." After putting the responsibility directly upon the scholar for realizing his own potential, Emerson declares that he can learn as much at home as he can by traveling to other lands. "The near explains the far," he affirms, and "one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench." Emerson's discounting the value of travel and the value of learning from secondary sources appears to be an effort to unite past and future into the Eternal Now of the mystics. The results are well expressed by Emerson: "Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds."

If the scholar fulfills the requirements which Emerson has set forth, he becomes not a mere thinker, but Man Thinking. He attains absolute truth through his own experience, not by listening to the ideas of the multitude but to his own heart. He then finds, Emerson affirms, "that in going down into the secrets of his own mind he has descended into the secrets of all minds." Whether one refers to contemplation as a going inward or a going outward, it is the same mystical process, and Emerson's expression appears as

89Ibid. 90Ibid., p. 111. 91Ibid., p. 112. 92Ibid. 93Ibid., p. 111. 94Ibid., p. 103. 95Underhill, pp. 97, 99.
to be the inward mystical procedure. If the scholar is true to his own mind, his truth is recognized by that part of the Universal mind present in all other men. Emerson explains: "It is one soul which animates all men." 96

If the scholar as a representative of the Universal Soul is Man Thinking, then the poet is Man Saying. He is the man who can both receive and communicate truth. "For all men live by truth and stand in need of expression," 97 Emerson explains, but few men can impart their truth to others. A "man is only half himself, the other half is his expression," 98 Emerson affirms, and the poet "stands among partial men for the complete man . . . ." 99 Emerson views poetry as something not created by man's skill, for, he feels,

... poetry was all written before time was, and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings and attempt to write them down, but we lose ever and anon a word or a verse and substitute something of our own, and thus miswrite the poem. 100

The mystics have frequently noted the musical aspect of ecstasy. 101 St. Francis of Assisi, Italian mystic of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, heard

98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., p. 8.
101 Underhill, p. 76.
During the ecstatic moment a "heavenly melody, intolerably sweet." When the poet "penetrates into the region where the air is music," he comes into contact with absolute truth, and having an ear delicate enough to catch the melody, he expresses it in the earthly beauty of poetry. The thought and the form are heard by the poet; the form and rhythm are part of the truth. As Emerson explains, "... it is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem..."

The poet learns, as do all intellectual men, that there is a greater energy available to him. Emerson declares "that beyond the energy of his possessed and conscious intellect he is capable of a new energy..." This new power may be obtained, Emerson explains, "by abandonment to the nature of things..." by unlocking, at all risks, his human doors, and suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him..." Emerson appears to be referring to the abandonment of the mystic, who, after the awakening, leaves all personal desires. The human doors which need unlocking are probably indicative of the mystical unification of senses which is necessary before the ecstatic moment may occur in contemplation. Emerson writes also that "the sublime vision comes to the pure and simple soul in a clean and chaste..."
body,"106 a statement which suggests the mystical process of purgation and perception which occurs in the stage of illumination.

Underhill states that many artists and poets come to the threshold of Reality, or experience ecstasy, but they cannot remain in the unitive life as the mystics often do. "But the artist cannot act thus. On him has been laid the duty of expressing something of that which he perceives. He is bound to tell his love."107 He cannot rest until he does. Similarly, according to Emerson, the poet says, "It is in me, and shall out."108 The artist, Underhill writes, "is the mediator between his brethren and the divine, for art is the link between appearances and reality."109 Somewhat the same idea is affirmed by Emerson: "... we love the poet ... who ... has yielded us a new thought. He unlocks our chains and admits us to a new scene."110 Emerson believes that the poet communicates truth which momentarily releases man's mind from physical obscurities, allowing him a glimpse of something Real. The poet, Emerson asserts, holds man "steady to a truth until he has made it his own."111

106Ibid., p. 28. 107Underhill, p. 75.
109Underhill, p. 75.
111Ibid., p. 11.
Emerson declares that "the Universe is the exteriorization of the soul,"\textsuperscript{112} and that the poet must study it as such. Nature is symbolic of the Universal Mind, and, if rightly seen, reveals absolute laws of matter and mind. "... Nature is," states Emerson, "a symbol, in the whole, and in every part,"\textsuperscript{113} and, he adds, "there is no fact in nature which does not carry the whole sense of nature..."\textsuperscript{114} When the poet applies thought to nature or events, when they are used as symbols, all common distinctions between high and low, or honest and base, disappear. "Thought makes everything fit for use,"\textsuperscript{115} Emerson writes. He believes that the poet, apparently through the ecstatic experience, finds all things contained in the Absolute and that within any of them may be found truth, beauty, and goodness.

Emerson's theory of history seems also to have sprung from mystical apprehension. According to Emerson's view, nature reveals a few basic laws repeated infinitely. The laws proceed from the Universal Mind, and history is the record of Mind as manifested in the evolution of civilized man. Man is the conscious, thinking part of creation, and through his actions the Universal Mind is manifested. Emerson believes that "there is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all

\textsuperscript{112}ibid., p. 14. \quad \textsuperscript{113}ibid., p. 13. \quad \textsuperscript{114}ibid., p. 17. \quad \textsuperscript{115}ibid.
Therefore, each man "is a party to all that is or can be done . . . ."\(^{117}\)

Mind, or thought, is always prior to fact. Each fact in history exists first in the mind of man as law; "each law in turn is made by circumstances predominant, and the limits of nature give power to but one at a time."\(^{118}\)

Emerson explains that "a man is the whole encyclopaedia of facts,"\(^{119}\) just as "the creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn . . . ."\(^{120}\) Thus the history of one man as seen by Emerson is the microcosm, and the history of all men is the macrocosm.

Emerson's belief in the ultimate value of immediate apprehension of truth made him "very suspicious of the deceptions of the element of time."\(^{121}\) He thought history "less important than 'psychology'. . . ."\(^{122}\) History, he believed, might "be explained from individual experience. There is a relation between the hours of our life and the centuries of time."\(^{123}\) Since ontogeny repeats phylogeny, the whole of history can be brought into the experience

\(^{116}\)Emerson, "History," Works, II, 3. \(^{117}\)Ibid.

\(^{118}\)Ibid. \(^{119}\)Ibid. \(^{120}\)Ibid., pp. 3-4.

\(^{121}\)Emerson, "Experience," Works, III, 85.

\(^{122}\)Carpenter, Emerson Handbook, pp. 119-120.

\(^{123}\)Emerson, "History," Works, II, 4.
of the individual man.\textsuperscript{124} Emerson brings out as a basic factor the importance of individual progression, a point also stressed by mystics. "The world exists for the education of each man,"\textsuperscript{125} he says. Men's education is evidently seen as a deeper experience than it is commonly regarded to be. He simplifies the concept of education to mean the basic experiences of each individual: "Every mind must know the whole lesson for itself,—must go over the whole ground. What it does not see, what it does not live, it will not know."\textsuperscript{126}

The history of man consists of an infinite variety of facts, but all stem from a few fundamental causes\textsuperscript{127} which originate within the mind of man. Because of the unity of all minds within the Universal Mind, man is able to relate the acts of other men to himself. To interpret history as Emerson sees it may require a mystical perception of unity in order to bring the various facts together. "The progress of the intellect is to a clearer vision of causes, which neglects surface differences,"\textsuperscript{128} Emerson affirms. As a reason for the neglect he explains that "the eye is fastened on the life, and slights the circumstance."\textsuperscript{129} Men cannot acquire easily the ability to pierce the fact to its

\textsuperscript{124}Carpenter, \textit{Emerson Handbook}, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{125}Emerson, "History," \textit{Works}, II, 8.
\textsuperscript{126}Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{127}Ibid., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{128}Ibid., p. 12.
\textsuperscript{129}Ibid.
origination, but "as they come to revere their intuitions and aspire to live holily, their own piety explains every fact . . .,"130 Emerson believes. Cabot, Emerson's personal friend, says that "reverence for intuitions meant to Emerson resistance to the sleep that is apt to come over our spiritual faculties . . .,"131 a resistance which "consists in obedience, unobstructed reception."132 When the mystic receives insight through intuition he is united with the Infinite and has access to the knowledge and power of the Absolute. Emerson is seemingly aware of the results when he asserts: "He that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman to the whole estate."133 The moment of ecstasy is seemingly man's admission to the "right of reason." From the added insight of the contemplative moment, man's understanding of other minds and his knowledge of his relation to them is greatly increased, according to the mystics. Emerson also affirms that: "Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done . . . ."134

Apparently through mystical perception, man finds that "there is properly no history, only biography,"135 and that

130 Ibid., p. 28.  
131 Cabot, I, 252.  
132 Ibid., p. 253.  
133 Emerson, "History," Works, II, 3.  
134 Ibid.  
135 Ibid., p. 10.
he "can live all history in his own person."\textsuperscript{136} When man perceives his unity with other men he is able to read history as Emerson suggests: "... all public facts are to be individualized, all private facts are to be generalized."\textsuperscript{137}

Man's life, Emerson writes, is "an endless flight of winged facts and events,"\textsuperscript{138} all of them creating problems which he must solve, and, he says: "Those men who cannot answer by a superior wisdom these facts or questions of time, serve them."\textsuperscript{139} Emerson thinks, obviously, that it is through higher knowledge that man can solve his numerous problems, through perception that he can understand the history of man. Emerson's description of the means and results of man's understanding resembles those of the mystics: "But if the man is true to his better instincts ... as one that comes of a higher race; remains fast by the soul and sees the principle, then the facts fall aptly and supple [sic] into their places ... ."\textsuperscript{140}

It is the application of history to the present and to the individual that makes it useful, according to Emerson. His tendency to epitomize all history into the experience of the individual man results in a concentration on the present which strongly suggests the Eternal Now of the

nystics. The part history should play in the life of
man is expressed by Emerson's declaration that "history
is an impertinence and an injury if it be any thing more
than a cheerful apologue or parable of my being and be-
coming."141

The mystics have stressed the importance not only of
the present as a type of the eternal but also the progress
of the individual toward union with the Absolute. From
ecstasy the mystic knows Reality, but what Reality may be
is not easily told by the mystic nor grasped by his audi-
ence. According to Underhill, the mystic returns from this
brief moment declaring that by his participation in Divinity,
he learned "the meaning of existence . . ."142 In the
third century Plotinus said that "if a man could preserve
the memory of what he was when he mingled with the Divine,
he would have within himself an image of God . . . ."143

If Emerson through contemplation ever experienced
mystical insight into the nature of God, that concept is
best expressed in "The Over-Soul." In this essay, Emerson
owes much to Eastern thought and the idea of the world soul,
but he owes even more to Plotinus and his theory of

142 Underhill, p. 371.
143 Plotinus, The Enneads, VI, 9, cited in Underhill, p.
372.
Emerson used both as vehicles to carry his own concept of the Absolute.

Mystics have always been reluctant to assign definite qualities to what they feel to be ineffable. Consequently, they have been impelled to use all-inclusive, negative, or neutral terms to express the idea of Reality or God. Emerson's choice of Over-Soul resembles the solution of the mystics to a problem in semantics.

The mystics have declared throughout the ages that "all is God." A concept of the Absolute for the mystics always includes two aspects: unity and diversity. The aspect of unity is derived from a feeling of the mystic's connection with the Deity; from an apprehension of love, permanence and dependability, the unchanging qualities which he feels belong to the Infinite. Emerson imputes a definite connection between man and the Absolute when he writes that the source of his own body and of nature is "the soul of his soul."\(^{145}\) The everlasting quality is obviously what Emerson means when he refers to the Deity as "the eternal One."\(^{146}\) Probably because the word "love" is overused by most Christian denominations, Emerson avoids it; nonetheless, he refers subtly to the same quality in the Absolute.

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\(^{144}\) Carpenter, Emerson Handbook, p. 212.
\(^{145}\) Emerson, "The American Scholar," Works, I, 86.
\(^{146}\) Emerson, "The Over-Soul," Works, II, 269.
Over-Soul is, he writes, "that great nature in which we
rest as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmos-
phere . . . ."147 It is apparent, too, that Emerson
perceived the same unity which the mystic always sees when
he describes the Absolute as "that Unity, that Over-Soul,
within which every man's particular being is contained and
made one with all other . . . ."148

The second aspect in the mystic's concept of the
Infinite is diversity, which might be thought of as the
countless outward manifestations which are ultimately joined
by and contained within the unity. From the mystic's appre-
hension of power and energy, of progress and growth, he
derives the concept of an active, changing Reality. Through
an experience such as that related by Stace the mystic sees
that the same light is in all created matter. Emerson finds
nature an unconscious manifestation of the Absolute; he finds
man the conscious manifestation.149 Nature exactly represents
the moral laws of man's mind and exhibits a perfect obe-
dience, but man can choose to obey or disobey these laws.150
The light in man appears, according to Emerson, to be the
moral sentiment which grows ever brighter as it is obeyed,
lighting his own life and giving light to those about him.

147Ibid., p. 268.  148Ibid.
150Ibid., p. 65.
The mystical process is the achieving of this illumination. The mystics feel that man's purpose is to pursue the light, that in doing so he fulfills his own part as a member of the ever-changing, progressing manifestations of the One.

That Emerson recognizes the active guidance of the Divine in the life of man is evident in his statement that the soul is "the perceiver and revealer of truth." The mystic's preparation for reception is a detachment from finite things; Emerson advocates the same approach when he states that truth "comes to whomsoever will put off what is foreign and proud . . . ." After detachment, the next step in mystical contemplation is an excessive yearning for Reality and a deliberate concentration on the Absolute. Emerson apparently refers to this process when he says: "... I desire and look up and put myself in an attitude of reception . . . ." A unified state of consciousness accomplished through removal of sensual distractions from the mind is attained when in contemplation the emotions, will, and perception fuse. Emerson seems to explain a like fusion: "In these communications the power to see is not separated from the will to do, but the insight proceeds from obedience, and the obedience proceeds from a joyful

151 Emerson, "The Over-Soul," Works, II, 279.
152 Ibid., p. 289.  
153 Ibid., p. 268.
perception."154 At the point of fusion ecstasy occurs, and the joy which inevitably attends the contemplative moment is apparently what Emerson is describing when he says that "every distinct apprehension of this central commandment agitates men with awe and delight. A thrill passes through all men at the reception of new truth . . . "155 Accompanying the joy of ecstasy is the feeling the mystic has that his apprehension is divine. Such a feeling is recognized by Emerson in his statement that revelations "are always attended by the emotion of the sublime."156 The union of man with the Infinite, which occurs in ecstasy, is obviously the experience Emerson has in mind when he declares that "the simplest person who in his integrity worships God, becomes God . . . ."157 Eckhart, Plotinus, St. Catherine of Genoa, and many other mystics have said essentially the same thing: that man and the Absolute are one. The mystics find that from man's participation in Divinity he receives truth, knows Reality, and Emerson affirms that "the nature of these revelations is the same; they are perceptions of the absolute law,"158 and, he adds, "They are solutions to the soul's own questions."159

It is the hunger of the heart and intellect for ultimate truth which causes a person to seek through the stages leading

154 Ibid., p. 281. 155 Ibid. 156 Ibid.
157 Ibid., p. 292. 158 Ibid., p. 282. 159 Ibid.
to the mystical experience the answers to his questions. The revelation of truth is not given to the mystic by a stated "definition" during ecstasy, but by a knowing from having experienced the immediate apprehension of the thing itself. Logic has nothing to do with it. Reception of primary truths is affirmed also by Emerson: "The soul answers never by words, but by the thing itself that is inquired after." The subject knows beyond any doubt the validity of what he perceives, but the expression is difficult. A lack of sufficient words for expression of the contemplative moment is obviously what Emerson feels when he writes. "Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul."

The combination of all the diversified aspects of the Absolute culminates in what the mystics embrace as the idea of progression. Mystics feel that the progression includes not only the soul of man but also the entire universe. This idea comes more from immediate apprehension than from any theory which has been worked out. That the universe is a "living Presence" was perceived by R. H. Bucke in an ecstatic moment, and in a description of a state of ecstasy which Stace relates, the light of life is seen as vital in the broken bottle as in the cat and the wasp. Emerson also

160 Ibid.
161 Ibid., p. 292.
expresses the same idea:

The soul looketh steadily forwards, creating a world before her, leaving worlds behind her. She has no dates, nor rites, nor persons, nor specialties nor men. The soul knows only the soul; the web of events is the flowing robe in which she is clothed.162

"The soul's advances," Emerson says, are made by "ascension of state, such as can be represented by metamorphosis,—from the egg to the worm, from the worm to the fly."163 Emerson seems to have accepted an early concept of evolution before the Origin of the Species appeared in print. There is a higher end in nature than "in the production of new individuals . . .," he states in his essay on the poet, and this end is ascension, "or the passage of the soul into higher forms."164

R. M. Bucke believed that the mystical ability, or as he expressed it, the "cosmic consciousness," was not to be looked upon as supernatural, or as anything more than natural development, and he maintained that such consciousness was emerging in the process of evolution, according to the normal principles of evolution, and that it was destined at some later date "to become the psychological condition of a majority of the human race."165 Mystics see the soul of man, the world, and all created matter as progressive. The world

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162 Ibid., p. 274.  
163 Ibid.  
is not dead matter; it is in every particle alive and ascending.

Bucke perceived in his ecstatic experience that "all things work together for the good of each and all." Because of the reception of such knowledge, the mystic, with perfect assurance, intrusts all particular riddles to the progression of the soul. A man receives from the soul's communication, according to Emerson, "an infallible trust. He has not the conviction, but the sight, that the best is the true . . . . He is sure that his welfare is dear to the heart of being."

Then he may easily dismiss all personal uncertainties and fears and trust completely in time to the solving of particular problems.

Through the diversified aspect of the Infinite and the progression of both man and nature, man, the mystics affirm, derives some idea as to the meaning of his own life. If Emerson ever attained insight into the meaning of existence, as the mystics have done, a concise attempt to explain the personal meaning of such perception occurs in the conclusion of "The Over-Soul":

... I am born into the great, the universal mind. I, the imperfect, adore my own Perfect. I am somehow receptive of the great soul, and thereby I do overlook the sun and stars and feel them to be the fair accidents and effects which

166Emerson, "The Over-Soul," Works, II, 293.
167Ibid.
change and pass. More and more the surges of everlasting nature enter into me, and I become public and human in my regards and actions. So come I to live in thoughts and act with energies which are immortal. 168

Emerson's thoughts, which spring from the Universal Mind, are not subject to time and space, but transcend his own mortality. Being a part of the one mind, he shares also its energies and its authority. Emerson says that he sees "that the world is the perennial miracle which the soul worketh . . . ); that all history is sacred; that the universe is represented in an atom, in a moment of time." 169

In the ecstatic experience the unified self pierces the barriers of the sensual world and goes beyond, or transcends. 170 Underhill explains it by saying that "in this experience the departmental activities of thought and feeling, the consciousness of I-ness, of space and time . . . are suspended." 171 Emerson's own place in the world appears to have been suspended in the eyeball passage when he writes, "I am nothing." Then he is "uplifted into infinite space," he obviously goes beyond the sensual world. Emerson's description of the transcendence which occurs during an "announcement of the soul" is expressed in "The Over-Soul": "Before the revelations of the soul, Time, Space, and Nature shrink away." 172

168 Ibid., p. 296. 169 Ibid., p. 297.
170 Underhill, p. 366. 171 Ibid., p. 367.
Mystics agree in their affirmation that they participate in eternity and, like R. H. Bucke, feel immortal. It is not an immortality as it is usually interpreted, that is, a personal survival after death; it is the momentary insight into eternity when the self participates in Divinity. Emerson seems to be explaining such a moment when he writes that "with each divine impulse the mind rends the thin rinds of the visible and finite, and comes out into eternity, and inspires and expires its air."\textsuperscript{173}

The Eternal Now of which the mystics speak is the urgent present with which the soul is concerned. It is not given to man to know what happened before he became a living soul; it is not given to man to know what happens after death; he knows through the ecstatic experience that he is part of the Eternal Being, that his business is with this bit of life granted him in the world, and that his purpose is the manifestation of the Absolute in his own being. From this knowledge, he feels immortal.

Such a sense of immortality appears also to have been one which Emerson had felt. In a Journal entry of October 30, 1841, he writes:

If you are sure of your truth, if you are sure of yourself, you ascend now into eternity; you have already arrived at that, and that takes place with you which other men promise themselves.\textsuperscript{174}

\textsuperscript{173}Ibid., p. 275.

\textsuperscript{174}Emerson, Journals, VI, 117-118.
And Husk has noted a comment by Emerson resembling his journal meditations in which Emerson uses "the true or right state of the soul" interchangeably with the "kingdom of heaven." 175

The mystic is invariable in his affirmation that the experience has objective reality. Stace asserts: "Objectivity is not for him an opinion but an experienced certainty." 176 One of the common characteristics of mysticism is the disregard for the usually accepted laws of logic. 177 If only a few of the mystics had insisted upon the objectivity of the ecstatic moment, their statements might be overlooked, but Stace notes, "it attaches to a certain kind of experience whoever has the experience." 178 It is an experience which is not inclosed in the mystic's own mind but something which occurs outside his being, beyond his physical or mental control at that moment.

The objective reality of such a moment seems to be what Emerson was attempting to express when he wrote:

Every man discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due. He may err in the expression of them, but he knows that these things are so, like day and night, not to be disputed . . . . For my perception of it is as much a fact as the sun. 179

175 Husk, Life of H.E., p. 111.
176 Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, p. 68.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid., p. 153.
That the thought of Emerson tended always toward the concept of unity is evident in his writings. The whole universe, as he sees it, is epitomized in one man, for all the physical laws and all spiritual laws are present in each individual. With a mind ever cognizant ofunities and harmonies, Emerson writes in the Journal of December 21, 1834: "Blessed is the day when youth discovers that Within and Above are synonyms."1 Because man represents the Absolute in little and is a part of the eternal, time and space are united in his experience. Man is, as it were, the microcosm; the Absolute, the macrocosm.

Because of Emerson's concept of the relationship between man and the Absolute, he "concentrated on the present as a type of the eternal."2 Emerson is known to have instructed his children to "finish every day and be done with it."3 They should forget the errors of yesterday and live each day to the best of their abilities, always concentrating

1 Emerson, Journals, III, 399.
2 Firkins, p. 370.
3 Cabot, II, 489.
Because truth is ever being disclosed, Emerson thought that man should speak and live by the truth each day as he sees it, even if it should contradict his truth of yesterday. Past ideas of truth should not obstruct man's vision of the ever-revealing laws of the Absolute. In Emerson's estimation it is "fitter to account every moment . . . as a new Creation, and all as a revelation proceeding each moment from the Divinity . . . ." The uniting of time and space in the here and now, the unfolding of new truth, and man's dependence upon the immediacy of the inner guide for direction appear to be central in most of Emerson's thought. The overall effect is a concentration on the present. Emerson feels that it is "the quality of the moment . . . [;] the depth at which we live and not at all the surface extension that imports." The scholar, the poet, and the self-reliant

1Ibid.  
2Emerson, Letters, I, 174.  
man have access to the Universal Mind, not to a part, but to all of it. The need for instruction from minds of the past is secondary; the primary need is to "read God directly" from nature and experience, Emerson believes. To receive truths which the soul reveals, man must prepare himself through thoughts and actions; it is the present, the Eternal Now which is seen as important to him.

Emerson views historical accounts of religious denominations or sects as interesting in themselves, but never should such creeds become a barrier between man and the Deity. He believes that too much emphasis has been put upon historical religion and not enough upon the living, vital words which speak to the soul of man. These words, he writes, "can only be interpreted by the same spirit that uttered them." Man, by studying the histories of his own religious sect, puts his mind too much in the past, thereby arriving at a concept of the Deity as something outside his own experience, vaguely familiar but with no direct connection to the present. The Deity, says Emerson, is not dead and inaccessible but exists today and is as accessible and closely related to man and life as his own being. He declares that "God exists . . .," and that "God communicates

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8 Emerson, Journals, III, 225.
with the thoughts of men . . . . " Overemphasis on past revelations has put time and space between man and the Absolute. But, Emerson explains, religion is a living experience, natural, vital, and beneficent to the soul of man. Man can communicate with the Deity, he affirms, yet "the community in which we live will hardly bear to be told that every man should be open to ecstasy or a divine illumination, and his daily walk elevated by intercourse with the spiritual world."  

From Emerson's view of the immediacy of the Absolute, his ideas on the acquiring of knowledge naturally follow. The reading of books is less important than immediate apprehension of knowledge. All knowledge is, in a sense, variations or related applications of the physical laws of the universe or of the spiritual laws. Man, whether he realizes it or not, is on the road to absolute truth when he learns anything. Emerson explains how the knowledge of natural laws leads man, ultimately, if he prepares himself to see it, into knowledge of the spiritual laws.  

What a man may learn from reading the accounts of other men's knowledge is only those truths which he himself can recognize as such. They must apply and relate to his own life, his own being.

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Man appears to contain within himself a pattern for which he selects bits of truth to fit, the end of which is a meaningful design, just as one might select bits of glass or stone to fit the plans for a colorful mosaic. It is because of man's inner pattern that he knows the pieces which fit. He recognizes them in his reading; he sees them in nature; he receives them through the soul's communication, Emerson explains, and he discovers them in his actions. Through careful selection man recognizes his truth, and by the use of it he builds toward the completion of the plan. However many pieces he perceives and puts to use will determine the extent to which the design is realized. The education of man is a progression, just as is man's knowledge of God. Possibilities for either are unlimited. Again, Emerson shows that what has happened before and what may happen afterward are not man's concern; it is the present which must command his attention.

Not only in learning and religion but also in life itself man must accentuate the present. Emerson believes that what happened yesterday is past, what happens tomorrow depends upon today; therefore, the present is all important. Nature and man are miraculous manifestations of the Absolute, and each day is another opportunity to complete as much of the inner design as man may make possible to himself. The moral
sentiment, "that mysterious fountain," directs the building process, and Emerson adds: "here or nowhere resides unbounded energy, unbounded power." Many of Emerson's ideas correlate with mysticism. That the religious life of the mystic is a process of becoming aware of the greater Reality seems to be expressed in Emerson's theories of learning and religion. The possibility of union with God, which is the essence of mysticism, is one in which Emerson believes. He himself becomes part and parcel of God, and what is true for him is true for all men, he affirms. He recognizes in all men, as do the mystics, that latent ability to find union with Reality, for the mystics have always attested, and Emerson adds his affirmation, that through the contemplative moment spiritual truths are apprehended.

To discern the unities or harmonies of things, one must first recognize the differences. A heightened sense of awareness of things is an ability which the mystic inevitably develops. He becomes more keenly aware of all things, thereby noting diversities which dissolve into unities. Underhill states that mystics see a sacramental meaning in every manifestation of life; they see "a loveliness, a wonder , a

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14 Ibid.
heightened significance, which is hidden from other men.\textsuperscript{16} O. W. Firkins writes that Emerson's tracing of the unities and harmonies "became the keenest of intellectual pleasures: it combined the solemnity of worship with the zest of sport."\textsuperscript{17} An interesting description of Emerson's alertness is recalled by John Burroughs, who saw him at West Point after President Lincoln had appointed Emerson a member of the Board of Visitors. Burroughs explains:

"My attention was attracted to this eager, alert, inquisitive farmer, as I took him to be. Evidently, I thought, this is a new thing to him; he feels the honor that has been conferred upon him, and he means to do his duty and let no fact or word or thing escape him. When the rest of the Board looked dull or fatigued or perfunctory, he was all eagerness and attention."\textsuperscript{18}

Because of the mystic's assurance of his truth he will express it without concern even though it may be controversial or contradictory. Firkins noted that Emerson was "disinclined to logic . . . ."\textsuperscript{19} After the "Divinity School Address" of 1838, and the severe criticism it evoked, Henry Ware, Emerson's former colleague at Second Church, wrote Emerson asking for a logical argument defending the points he had made. Emerson's answer was: "I . . . I do not know what arguments mean in reference to any expression of a thought."\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16}Underhill, p. 36.  
\textsuperscript{17}Firkins, p. 342.  
\textsuperscript{18}Cabot, II, 613.  
\textsuperscript{19}Firkins, p. 299.  
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., pp. 299-300.
Because the mystics ignore the usual procedures of logic, they have been accused of taking the point of view of the Deity. When something is revealed to them through union with the Absolute, they state it with authority. The same viewpoint is used by Emerson in much of his writings. Some of his expressions may be humorous and colloquially epigrammatic, but when he sets forth a truth he does so with forthrightness; for example: "Good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute; it is like cold, which is the privation of heat." However controversial his statement may be, he says it positively and simply.

That Emerson was not overly concerned with evil has led to some criticism of his ideas. Apparently, due to man's inability to find cause or meaning in the evil which he sees, it seems to him that Emerson has not faced the reality of man's problems. But the avoidance of evil in thought and action was part of Emerson's religion. He did not wholly ignore evil, for he saw its place in the scheme of things; but he dwelt on what was more important in the life of man. He saw this as being the possibility of man's virtue, evil being only the lack of it. The relativity of good and evil is a common belief of the mystic, for he sees the part which

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evil plays in the world. Through contemplative insight the mystic is absolutely certain that all things ultimately work for the benefit of the universe. With this assurance he does not spend as much time in resisting evil as he does in promoting good.

However, Emerson cannot be accused of ignoring the evils of his day. He was always interested in national affairs and took an active part in them. Two specific instances are the removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia and the Civil War. Emerson wrote a letter to President Martin Van Buren on April 23, 1836, voicing protest for the outrageous treatment of the Indians and asking that he stop their removal from their homeland.\(^{23}\) Emerson was vitally interested in the anti-slavery conflict.\(^{24}\) He never ceased to urge freedom for the slaves until their final release. He spoke against slavery many times and was not sorry to see the beginning of the Civil War.\(^{25}\) Emerson had always stressed the importance of individual freedom, and it was unthinkable to him that any man should be deprived of his freedom.

When a mystic fights evil, he fights it with confidence and fortitude. To the depths of his being, he knows that good will prevail and that his help is merely an aid to the eternal law; in fact, he is assured that all truth and right

\(^{23}\) Cabot, II, 697-702.  
\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 574.  
\(^{25}\) Ibid., pp. 600-601.
lend their power to the struggle. Partly for this reason mystics are noted for their serenity and optimism. The self-possession and dignity of Emerson after the "Divinity School Address" and its ensuing consequences Lidian Emerson describes in a letter she wrote to her sister:

"But you want to know how much of a cloud these mists of prejudice have formed over his light—by none at all. I do not know that he has felt a moment's uneasiness . . . ."26

The obloquy from many sources with which Emerson had to contend he either ignored or, if it were necessary, he answered with an inner dignity befitting the truth which he purposed to represent. Theodore Parker, one of the Transcendentalists, describes Emerson's characteristics:

Boldly he faces every fact, never retreating behind an institution or a great man. In God his trust is complete; with the severest scrutiny he joins the highest reverence.

Hence comes his calmness and serenity . . . .
A more tranquil spirit cannot be found in literature. Nothing seems to fret or jar him, and all the tossings of the literary world never jostle him into anger or impatience.27

From Emerson's perfect faith in the validity of his own thoughts came his courage in expressing them. Through the same faith he remained serene when his ideas aroused all manner of controversy. Trusting always in his own best instincts, he read for what he called "lustres," for those

26Rusk, Life of H.L., p. 270.
27Theodore Parker, The American Scholar (Boston, 1907), pp. 91-95.
passages which harmonised with his own inner feelings. Emerson may well have been describing himself when he wrote "The American Scholar," in which he was perhaps trying in some way to explain the purpose and value of his own actions. If Emerson were a mystic, as many critics and biographers have felt, from the mystical elements which are present in Emerson's writings and from the accounts of his personal characteristics, it can be surmised that he perhaps reached the stage of illumination and that his method was generally that of contemplation. He may even have attained ecstasy a few times in his life but never, apparently, the final union with the Absolute which the true mystics have achieved. For in the unitive life, the Western mystic leaves all personal concerns and works exclusively for the good of humanity.

Of course, Emerson also worked for the benefit of humanity in many ways, but he maintained his home and family, working in the mornings, going for walks in the afternoons, and enjoying his family and friends in the evenings.28 His mysticism was, apparently, like that of the poet who through the contemplative moment achieves temporary union with the Absolute and because of his literary ability is able to communicate part of what he apprehends. Emerson thought himself a poet, as he expresses in a letter to Lidian

28 Cabot, I, 287.
immediately before their marriage:

I am born a poet, of a low class without doubt yet a poet . . . [i] a poet in the sense of a perceiver & dear lover of the harmonies that are in the soul & in matter . . . .29

Although Emerson's mysticism has been an issue on which his biographers and critics vary, it has been recognized by most of them. George Santayana says that Emerson "belonged by nature to that mystical company of devout souls that recognize no particular home and are dispersed throughout history . . . ."30 He considers Emerson a "Puritan mystic with a poetic fancy . . . ."31 Maulsby thinks that "in some degree . . . Emerson was a mystic. But his mysticism was compatible with life on a high plane of conduct . . . ."32 Goddard does not doubt "the existence of genuine mysticism in Emerson's nature "33 and states that Emerson had the unique ability or "power to be at once 'standing on the earth' and 'rapt above the pale.'"34

Three authors unreservedly consider Emerson a mystic. "Emerson," says Wicke, "is fundamentally a mystic, and only

29Emerson, Letters, I, 1435.


31Ibid., p. 37.

32Maulsby, pp. 74-75.

33Goddard, p. 126.

34Ibid., p. 176.
in terms of mysticism does his basic thought become intelligible." Dillaway writes that "Emerson was assuredly a mystic. One can pick up almost any essay he ever wrote and see his mysticism. It is a healthy and universal mysticism." Christy affirms that "Emersonian thought was a matter of almost pure mysticism."

That Emerson used his mysticism for practical ends appears to be recognized by several critics. The most generally acceptable evaluation is probably that made by Bliss Perry, who says that Emerson belonged to the "healthy-minded" mystics as William James has labeled and defined them. Emerson was obviously influenced by both Eastern and Western mystics, but in the final analysis Emerson appears, because of his active participation and interest in life, to belong to that group of mystics from the East who have actively used their mysticism for the benefit of mankind.

35 Dicle, p. 291.  
36 Dillaway, p. 106.  
37 Christy, p. 266.  
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

After the 1840's when the Transcendentalists caused such a stir in New England, their popularity increased for many years. Emerson's popularity has declined, however, in the past few decades. Although his mysticism is mentioned by numerous authors, many students are inclined to ignore it or consider it merely another word to add to those which they use to describe Emerson. A thorough study of the mystical elements in his thought, however, clearly shows that they are essential to an understanding of his most important ideas. The apparent gap between today's scholars and Emersonian thought might be bridged through a comprehension of the mystical elements which help to illuminate Emerson's still vital ideas.

Through a study of the mystical elements present in his writings, Emerson's expositions of man's three most important relationships can best be understood. The relationships are those between man and nature, between man and his inner self, and between man and the Deity. The significance of nature to man becomes apparent when its symbolic and moral meanings are penetrated. When man can "see nature truly," he observes
that the same moral laws existing in his own mind are exhibited in nature. By man's deeper insight into his relationship with nature, he learns to love and accept her laws. Through the combination of love and obedience, he achieves harmony with nature and learns to use the energy which comes from his alignment with natural laws. But without a mystical background for the understanding of "Nature," many students feel it to be more of a poetic tranquilizer than an enlightening essay.

The second vital relationship is that between man and his inner self; with inner harmony, he is a useful and happy member of society; without it, he is neither useful nor happy. The achieving of a self-reliance, such as Emerson advocates, is an inner process similar to mystical progression. As man obeys his inner guide, its direction becomes ever stronger until ultimately his surface self and his deeper self become united. Man must place his reliance upon his own moral instincts, not on the accepted morality of others or on what books or institutions say of morality. He can accept only primary truths. Through man's own experience and through his own thought, he can recognize absolute truth. Through inner harmony man becomes self-reliant; he becomes a joyful, beneficial part of his own society.
Emerson's concept of the relationship between man and the Deity is more easily understood if viewed in the light of the mystical elements. This relationship is a living, thriving, working part of man's existence; without knowledge of Reality, man is deprived of his greatest source of truth and energy; with knowledge of it, he obtains essential power and guidance. Knowledge of the Absolute is gained by means of a progression similar to that of the mystics. Man must detach himself from finite things, obey his own conscience, and concentrate his attention upon the Infinite. By such a method he achieves union with the Deity; he perceives absolute truth.

The Eternal Now of the mystics is paralleled by Emerson when he discounts the past and disregards the future in favor of an intense concentration on the present. To the interpretation of history, religion, learning, and to life itself, he makes a vital contribution by stressing the value of the individual and the value of his freedom. Freedom from institutions and conventions of the past and freedom from worries projected into the future are prerequisites for a vital and rewarding life. The ring of individual freedom has always been and will ever be a joyful sound to the ears of man. Although the frontier of America is no more and man is seemingly inclosed on all sides by restrictions, there is a new liberty available to all. It is through the mind of man that new frontiers are opened, that liberation is
obtained. By penetrating the laws of nature man has ventured into outer space. If he penetrates the spiritual laws which are equal to and more powerful than the physical laws, who can predict the potential of man? If Emerson is right in his assertion that the understanding of physical laws leads eventually into the understanding of spiritual laws, it may be that man has a future revelation in store which far surpasses all others. The method for unlocking new truth is carefully explained by Emerson and needs only to be used by man. Emerson's own life is an example of the accomplishments possible when one man obeys the light which is his and in so doing lights the paths of those around him, and of the world.
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