I

PERSPECTIVES

> He is isolated in an intense integrity toward nature, toward his own mind, and toward the unknown God.
>
> Witter Bynner (1931)[1]

TUCKERMAN'S isolation and his intense involvement with nature, as well as with his own mind and with God, were not unusual in the America of the middle years of the nineteenth century. But his integrity, which proved to be especially costly and moving as it revealed itself in his ability to develop and maintain clear distinctions between Nature, Self, and God, was unusual. It demanded an inner struggle unique

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[1] Witter Bynner, the young poet and critic who was most responsible for rescuing Tuckerman from oblivion, also gave us, in the few words used for this chapter's epigraph, perhaps the best short description of Tuckerman and his work and of the reasons for his unique and important contribution. They are from the "Introduction" to *The Sonnets of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman,* ed. Witter Bynner (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), 34. Bynner became interested when he came across an essay written by Walter Prichard Eaton on Tuckerman and his poems in the January 1909 issue of *Forum.* Eaton had seen two of Tuckerman's sonnets in the manuscript of an anthology of American poems that had been compiled by Louis How but had never been published. Eaton then, with some difficulty, found a copy of Tuckerman's one volume of *Poems,* last published in 1869, and wrote the essay published in *Forum.* Bynner was so impressed by the poetry Eaton liberally quoted that he, with Eaton's help, contacted Tuckerman's descendants in Amherst, Massachusetts. He discovered in their keeping the unpublished poems and in 1931 included in his edition all five series of the sonnets, only two of which were in the *Poems,* with an appreciative but discriminating introduction that gave good reasons for his ranking Tuckerman's sonnets among "the noblest in the language . . . not bettered in their kind by anyone of his time or since."

among the writers and thinkers of his time, and that struggle informed a remarkable body of poetry.

Though still largely unknown by many teachers and students of literature (neglected, I believe, partly because of the precociousness, historically, of his technique and the unexpectedness of his particular kind of achievement), Tuckerman's poetry stands as a challenging resolution to basic aesthetic and epistemological dilemmas posed by Romanticism and still haunting modern thought and experience. It is also a first-rate artistic achievement in its own right.

Tuckerman's isolation was not unlike that of Hawthorne or Melville or Dickinson: a conscious leave-taking, a way of insulation from certain aspects of popular American culture and values, a Romantic withdrawal into self, even a form of the moral alienation Hawthorne feared. It was a choice made by all four of these writers (who could usefully be grouped as the American "anti-Romantics") and made quite deliberately—after some experience with the shallow, sterile alternatives. Tuckerman's isolation was unusual in that for a time he shared it in an intensely profound relationship with his wife and children and in full and effective relationships with a few close friends and one famous poet, Tennyson. That isolation was also unusual, as Bynner says, in its "intense integrity" toward both nature and his own mind—to external and internal resources. He was able to take special advantage of the impulses and sensitivities the Romantic movement was bringing to America. He could also turn his precise, even scientific, apprehension of details in nature into a unique tool, both for self-understanding and for realization of some of the possibilities of meaning in the external world.

My purpose is to explore carefully Tuckerman's unusually fruitful isolation and integrity and their results in his poetry. This will require explication and also evaluation. Rather than survey all the poetry, I focus on a few of the characteristic and, I think, most brilliant achievements of thought and artistry. These achievements were ignored or misunderstood by many of Tuckerman's contemporaries, whose vision was obscured

by various Romantic, Transcendentalist, and Sentimentalist assumptions, and therefore he was left out of the canon of his time, the "Schoolroom Poets" and the "Genteel Tradition." The achievements have also been rejected or neglected by many twentieth-century readers and critics (even some who have appreciated certain of his strengths) because Tuckerman's work does not fit neatly into Modernist or anti-Modernist expectations—and thus he has been left out of the new canon that was formed in the 1930s and 1940s. Right now, when the canon is being reconsidered and expanded—and when much of the necessary work of editing and basic critical discussion has been done—it is time to consider carefully why he should be fully included.

I look first at certain crucial Romantic quests and commitments and then describe responses to those quests and commitments in Tuckerman's work, particularly the responses that reveal the continuing relevance of his poetry to the Romantic concerns which are, I am convinced, the great human ones. This process unavoidably requires some attention to Tuckerman's biography, but not because Samuel Golden is correct in his view that for Tuckerman "the biography and the work are inseparable."[2] A certain amount of biographical information and inference, much of it the fruit of my own research, is useful in explaining the major influences on the development of Tuckerman's thought and poetry. But the work reveals the mind and life more than the life the work.

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[2]Samuel A. Golden, *Frederick Goddard Tuckerman* (New York: Twayne, 1966), 8. Golden's book, the only one previous to this to appear on Tuckerman, though valuable for the overview it provides of the life and work, is marred, I think, by his stretching of the poetry to fit what understanding of Tuckerman's life he was able to gain at that time from other sources. I am indebted to Golden for his pioneering work (starting in 1948) with such direct biographical sources, but even with my additional related discoveries those sources remain particularly sparse in Tuckerman's case, and I am convinced that the more inferential work I have done to describe the influences on Tuckerman and the shape of his apprenticeship is more crucial than biographical "facts" to an understanding of the poetry.

Before looking directly at Tuckerman's poetry, I try to define some special perspectives for understanding that poetry, for seeing its importance. This requires that I first reexamine the philosophical, moral, and aesthetic principles that were Tuckerman's most immediate intellectual and emotional background, and then consider carefully an unusual way in which those principles can relate to the writing of great poetry.

TUCKERMAN was a Romantic. He was influenced by and participated in that major shift in Western culture, the implications of which we are still living out. He shared the high Romantic courage, which struggled with the possibility that the Ultimate is organic, living, related to man's mind and sensibility in the most fundamental way. He shared in the temptation and the attempt to deify nature and to naturalize deity, as well as to reduce everything to a two-term system—the ego and the nonego. He also yearned to bridge that ultimate void by an educative journey of the self back to a higher form of the primal unity with the divine essence from which the self had emanated.[3]

Tuckerman was also an anti-Romantic. He shared the high Romantic vision and hope; but a combination of his own qualities, his training, and his opportunities enabled him to avoid and in some cases resolve crucial Romantic dilemmas. He shared, for instance, the Romantic distrust of abstraction and of cognitive reasoning and the Romantic hope for spontaneous, divine insight; but his poetic practice avoided the

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[3]This view of the Romantic movement, comprehensively explored by M. H. Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), seems to me accurate and also enormously useful in stimulating thinking about Romanticism, but Abrams's essentially descriptive approach does not incline him to look analytically at the inherent *problems* in Romantic thought and artistic practice. I examine certain of those problems from time to time in this volume, as part of my argument, because of their particular relevance to Tuckerman's struggle and achievement.

Romantic tendency to discard proven resources of the human mind, particularly those associated with language, when new ones were discovered. He learned to use his rational capabilities, as well as his highly developed perceptiveness, to create imagery that is informed with moral and intellectual themes adequate to carry the weight of his direct feelings and illuminations. He early developed the Romantic sensitivity to nature, but more than most Romantic poets he carefully cultivated the ability to see with precision and honesty the details and contradictions of nature. He retained the clear vision and skill of allegorical thinking, which enabled him to understand his experience and to use images from nature to help express that understanding—but in combination with the other resources, not as a sufficient equivalent. In finding this particular combination of the hard-won gains from the whole tradition of English poetry he was almost by himself.

Certainly Emerson was of little help. He served effectively as an awakener and energizer for the young men of Tuckerman's generation and was the major transmitter of the Romantic "spirit of the age" into American literary culture. However, Emerson and some of his more ardent disciples down to the present have been guilty of perverting the hopes of the Romantic movement by heightening them (as in the expectation of complete merging with a "perfect" nature or of creating "pure" poetry) beyond what human nature and language could possibly fulfill. The pursuit of those goals by those of a more violent integrity to his ideas than Emerson himself possessed has been damaging, even destructive, to language, sensibility, and perhaps—in cases like that of Hart Crane—to life.

I have just expressed, of course, Yvor Winters's assessment of Emersonian Romanticism.[4] Time has, I think, proved to be on Winters's side. Despite the hostility with which his analyses

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[4]See Yvor Winters, *In Defense of Reason* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1947), particularly the essays "Jones Very and R. W. Emerson" and "The Significance of *The Bridge* by Hart Crane."

and judgments were greeted in the mid-1930s, much supportive work by others has been forthcoming. However, there has been little explicit recognition of Winters's influential perception of the continuing fundamental Romanticism of modern poetry, despite its contrary disclaimers, and his pioneering analysis of the inconsistencies and dangerous implications in Emerson's particular Romantic platform. Other critics of Romanticism have been more polite about their judgments, but they have been sufficiently influential that there have actually been some self-consciously revisionist attempts to rehabilitate Emerson.[5]

Winters took literature too seriously, and its effects too personally in a moral sense, to be polite, and he overstated his case, I think. His fidelity to good poetry and sensible ideas made it difficult for him to give sufficient credit to Emerson merely as a fertile sensibility and a motivating force or to see charitably the changes in thinking Emerson made later in his life. In addition, the isolation Winters felt in the American literary community and the harrowing nature of what was for him the almost physical seductiveness of Romanticism, which haunted him and gave lasting power to his best poetry and his only fiction, gave his criticism an offensive edge.[6]

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[5]See, for instance, F. O. Matthiessen in his *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941; reprint, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), and Perry Miller in various essays in his *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), where the sharpness of the implicit criticism—which does much to counter popular assumptions about the value of the poetry and the quality of the thought in Emerson and his disciple Whitman—is masked by the descriptive format. Especially Matthiessen's work on Emerson and Whitman participates in the too-common critical tendency to let mere bulk of explication imply substance and value. Hyatt H. Waggoner, in *American Poets from the Puritans to the Present,* rev. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), claims that Emerson's reputation had so much declined by 1968 that a major reconstruction effort was necessary to put him back at what Waggoner feels is his rightful place at the center of American poetry.

[6]See particularly the impatient, almost arrogant, tone in Winters's chapter on "The Sentimental-Romantic Decadence of the Eighteenth and Nine-

Tuckerman provides a strong vindication of Winters's basic position. The poems I examine in this volume demonstrate that Romantic idealism did not need to issue in the bland vagueness or the imprecise, mainly ornamental imagery and mechanical meters of much of Emerson's poetry. Tuckerman knew and appreciated Emerson and his work (and was helped by Emerson to publish his own poetry and get criticism of it), but Tuckerman also knew his Coleridge and Wordsworth, his Keats and Shelley—firsthand, not in Emerson's idealistic interpretation. In addition, Tuckerman achieved a knowledge of the details of nature and of language that Emerson, in his pantheistic concern for the large picture, never approached.

Tuckerman would not have agreed with Emerson that "the age is Swedenborg's." Tuckerman's experience and analysis made it impossible for him to surrender to the Swedenborgian notion of "correspondence"—that not only words but things are directly symbolic. His experience was that nature has its own independent reality, which is diverse, even contradictory—not merely "a metaphor of the human mind."[7] Tuckerman did not, like Emerson, claim too much for the poets ("liberating gods") nor for their alleged power to make anything on which their eyes might rest "obey the impulses of [their] moral nature."[8] Paradoxically, he was freed by such humility to use the powers of mind and language to form symbols that used the actual resources of nature as tools. He thereby developed a dependable, though limited, means of

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teenth Centuries" (and the dismissal of *any* discussion of Emerson, Thoreau, or Whitman) in his last and summary critical work, *Forms of Discovery: Critical and Historical Essays on the Forms of the Short Poem in English* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1967). For a chilling evidence of his horrified fascination with the Romantic dangers, see his only piece of published fiction, "The Brink of Darkness," originally in *Hound and Horn* 5 (1932): 547–61, with a revised version in *The Collected Poems of Yvor Winters,* ed. Donald Davie (Manchester, England: Carcanet New Press, 1978), 213–24.

[7] "Nature," in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson: Selected Prose and Poetry,* ed. Reginald Cook (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1950), 19.

[8] "The Poet," in ibid., 332, 336.

genuine connection between the mind and that which is outside it. Tuckerman saw what Swedenborg and Emerson did not, that the poet's precise vision and mastery of language are not simple givens but can be developed if encouraged and taught. The Transcendentalists' yearning for ultimate unity, and their hope that the poet would have unique power to reattach dispersed nature and the human soul, led them to ignore the process and the limitations attendant on such an ideal.

Emerson, for instance, seems not to have had anything like Tuckerman's understanding of the significance of the tension between meter and rhythm in affecting the quality of feeling in a poem (though a few of Emerson's poems, notably "Days," make intuitive use of that tension). Emerson seldom, if ever, saw with accuracy the details of nature or brought those perceptions into language in the actual, feasible process of relating the human to the nonhuman. Tuckerman often did.

THE ATTEMPT to bridge the gulf between what is self and what is outside self, between the fact out there and the idea in here, has been a perennial challenge to the human consciousness, particularly for the artist. That was the great Romantic cause, and, as Perry Miller has asked concerning Thoreau's commitment to it, "For what more sublime a cause, even if it be a questionable thesis, can a man expend himself?"[9] It is particularly in his intense integrity to that cause, which in fact is what led him to isolate himself, that Tuckerman is a Romantic.

Because Emerson saw the universe as merely an externalization of the soul, which made nature "a symbol in the whole and every part," he helped give poets access to all of nature and all of experience as a source for symbol-making. But his Neoplatonic emphasis on the Whole, on an undifferentiated Oversoul, kept him from being able to give adequate attention to the distinctions in nature and to the means necessary to

[9] Miller, *Nature's Nation*, 183.

bridge fact and idea. Thus, he never quite found the artistic form he needed. Thoreau was able to find his form—in prose—because he was, though also moved by Transcendentalist impulses, an expert in natural history and was able to give some detailed content to the Transcendentalist claim that the universe, as he expressed it, "constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions."[10] In this faith and the skill that supported it, Thoreau was like Tuckerman. Their achievement is connected in that both of them gave close attention to natural detail and each isolated himself from pernicious contemporary influences sufficiently long to create individual forms of language adequate to his ideals.

Thoreau made some flippant statements about his preference for packing boxes and newspapers over Europe's architectural and literary legacy, but those exaggerations must be seen in the context of his attention to detail in language and landscape and his clearly knowledgeable appreciation of our cultural past everywhere revealed in his work. They must also be recognized as an expression of Thoreau's central impulse toward simplicity, toward optimistic appreciation of American potential, toward rejecting the elitist pretensions and uncritically inherited forms of European culture. I think Matthiessen is right that Thoreau had the necessary integrity to resist being swamped by European forms (as Tuckerman had also, after his early work) or the use of form as mere decoration.[11] Thoreau, *more* than Emerson, successfully expressed the great Romantic impulse toward organic creation. He worked diligently with the possible forms of writing and, through close attention to language, gave that impulse shape as his work developed—from the journals to the final revisions of *Walden.*

Emerson was (as even Van Wyck Brooks could write, though he did not see the consequences) "a lover of nature who, as a

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[10] Quoted in ibid.

[11] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance,* 174.

matter of fact, scarcely knew a robin from a crow."[12] Thoreau did not have this handicap, nor was he indolent as a writer or self-indulgent as a thinker—not at least until after *Walden* was written. That careful attention to detail is crucial, and it protected Thoreau, as well as Tuckerman, from the "green wine" (Matthiessen's phrase) of Emerson. In their best work, at least, they did not violate nature by treating it as a mere extension of themselves, personifying it, pretending that it obeyed their impulses. They looked at it attentively and honored it as reality exterior to themselves. Nature was capable of being a source of understanding and feeling, but only as it was recreated through the symbol-making powers of human language. In the case of Tuckerman this involved a conscious refusal of the Romantic temptation, a refusal worked out in the poetry at first rather didactically but finally in powerfully integrated and moving symbolic forms that I examine later.

Tuckerman knew what it was to strive with all his awareness for meaning, to "tease the sunbreak and the cloud / For import," following those (a specific jab at Emerson?) "that go before the throng, / Reasoning from stone to star, and easily / Exampling this existence" (Sonnet I: 9, p. 7).[13] But, even from his youth, when he already "knew each bleached alder root" he had also stood

> In utter solitudes, where the cricket's cry
> Appals the heart, and fear takes visible shapes;
> And on Long Island's void and isolate capes
> Heard the sea break like iron bars. . . .
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> (Sonnet II: 30, p. 33)

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[12] Van Wyck Brooks, *The Flowering of New England: 1815–1865*, rev. ed. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1937), 291.

[13] All quotations of Tuckerman's poetry are, unless otherwise indicated, from N. Scott Momaday, ed., *The Complete Poems of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965); hereafter I merely indicate the title and page number in parentheses.

He knew he had thus "a deeper lesson learnt": The details of nature, clearly seen and taken in themselves, reveal no infallible good, no ultimate, divine Unity, such as an Oversoul. If we surrender to such a seductive possibility, "chasing false fire, we fare from bad to worse" ("As sometimes in a grove," p. 144). In mere landscape is not to be found our salvation: "Wind cometh and goeth, / But sorrows abide" ("When the dim day," p. 165). Emerson was simply mistaken in believing that "Nature never wears a mean appearance."[14] He was wrong in his feeling that the stars infallibly "awaken a certain reverence"[15] (Dickinson's "The Moon upon her fluent Route" and Tuckerman's ironically titled "Inspiration" show how they can be a source of overwhelming doubt, even despair). Emerson believed that "ethical character so penetrates the bone and marrow of nature, as to seem the end for which it was made" and that in that teaching, elevating capacity "all the endless variety of things make an identical impression."[16] Thoreau creates, though he seems only partially to understand, a refutation of this in reporting in *Walden* his visit to the hut of John Field, the Irish immigrant who learns absolutely nothing from that nature which is supposedly tutoring Thoreau. Emerson on the one hand was arrogant in finding the whole of nature merely an analogy for the human mind. On the other hand he demeaned the mind's capacities by exalting above them that supposedly primal phase of language in which there is simple one-to-one correspondence of words with things and events.

Emerson was wrong in a great cause. Responding to a yearning felt by many in Western culture, he seized upon and sometimes, especially at first, exaggerated or misinterpreted attractive notions and assertions of the early Romantics, particularly Coleridge. During the Enlightenment, faith was lost in the old three-storied universe, in which humans were at home in the center and were guaranteed, by their creaturely status as chil-

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[14] "Nature," in *Emerson: Selected Prose and Poetry*, 5.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 24.

dren of God, the possibility of genuine relation to the created universe around them. The failure of the French Revolution brought complete loss of hope in achieving a literal earthly paradise through political means; and young idealists all over Europe, and later America, focused their dreams on a spiritual millennium, a renewal of meaning for mankind through a union of mind and nature.[17]

Thoreau described one version of this new hope that is particularly relevant to an understanding of Tuckerman. He expected that he could find meaning by affirming the divinely created connections of the mind with what is outside itself and then by realizing and developing those connections in conscious art:

> The eyes were not made for such groveling uses as they are now put to and worn out by, but to behold beauty now invisible. May we not *see* God? Are we to be put off and amused in this life, as it were with a mere allegory? Is not Nature, rightly read, that of which she is commonly taken to be the symbol merely? When the common man looks into the sky, which he has not so much profaned, he thinks it less gross than the earth, and with reverence speaks of "the Heavens," but the seer will in the same sense speak of "the Earths," and his Father who is in them. "Did not he that made that which is *within* make that which is *without* also?" What is it, then, to educate but to develop these divine germs called the senses? For individuals and states to deal magnanimously with the rising generation, leading it not into temptation,—not teach the eye to squint, nor attune the ear to profanity. But where is the instructed teacher? Where are the *normal* schools?[18]

The desire for such a natural *connection* is common, but it is expressed here with uncommon force. In this sample, in a minor way, we see the beginning of that attention in Thoreau's work to *language*—its sources, potential, connections with the

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[17] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 65.

[18] Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1893), 504.

world through the mind, and effects—that would eventually make of *Walden* one of the finest realizations of the hope Thoreau had expressed in this earlier passage. Twenty years after *Walden* Tuckerman would, in "The Cricket," express and realize the hope for connection even more powerfully—and also movingly define some of the limits of that hope.

Thoreau was one of the first Americans to comprehend (and to feel the yearning to solve) the basic Romantic problem, defined by Perry Miller as that "of striking and maintaining the delicate balance between object and reflection, of fact and truth, of minute observation and generalized concept."[19] As Miller notes, Thoreau from the first had an insight that perennially escaped Emerson. Rather than positing a universal Oneness which would turn the poet into a mere "transparent eyeball,"[20] Thoreau conceived of a genuine relationship between two realities:

> [The Poet] must be something more than natural—even supernatural. Nature will not speak through but along with him. His voice will not proceed from her midst, but, breathing on her, will make her the expression of his thought. He then poetizes when he takes a fact out of nature into spirit. He speaks without reference to time or place. His thought is one world, hers another. He is another Nature,—Nature's brother. Kindly offices do they perform for one another. Each publishes the other's truth.[21]

With this precariously maintained stance, Thoreau was able in *Walden* to combine minute observation with generalized concept—to use precise observations, expressed in language fully informed by his knowledge of all its powers, both to particularize and to generalize. Thus he made his experience both moving and intelligible. Unlike Tuckerman, he did not persist

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[19] Miller, *Nature's Nation*, 177.

[20] "Nature," in *Emerson: Selected Prose and Poetry*, 6.

[21] From an entry on "The Poet," in Thoreau's journal, March 3, 1839; quoted in Miller, *Nature's Nation*, 177.

in that stance and late in life turned in almost the opposite direction. But he was able to shape the experience of his stay at Walden Pond into a structure of language with a particular kind of confidence that many of us who follow him have lost: "The universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions." The operative word is *answers,* not the Emersonian *corresponds.*

Unlike Emerson, Thoreau did not believe that such responsive "answering" from nature came easily or automatically, but only through a great effort that in fact finally became desperate for him. He began with the same simple assumption as Emerson and all the Romantics: between the moral law and the natural law there are analogies; natural facts, selected and expressed through human agency, can be made to flower into human truths (though with much more emphasis than Emerson on *made*). Thoreau thus transcended the Romantic fear of the pathetic fallacy: the Romantics had profound anxiety (despite the *claims* in their poetry and essays) that the feeling that their experience was typified in nature was only a delusion and that there was really no ontological connection between the mind and the world.

Apparently the source of Thoreau's faith in that connection, which was strong enough to move him to create examples and not just anxious claims, was his early conviction that the God of Christianity is not mere allegory, but a moral, personal, related being who had created man in his image and formed nature after the images in his mind—a mind to which man's mind is related.[22] At any rate, such a faith is a major source of Tuckerman's similar resolution of the Romantic dilemmas. That achievement, made at the personal conceptual level and

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[22] Miller quotes the following from Thoreau's journal: "When I walk in the woods, I am reminded that a wise purveyor has been there before me; my most delicate experience is typified there." Miller then comments, "If at one and the same time nature is closely inspected in microscopic detail and yet through the ancient system of typology makes experience intelligible, then Thoreau will have solved the Romantic riddle, have mastered the destructive Romantic irony" (*Nature's Nation,* 177).

realized powerfully in his finest poems, recommends him to us, both in our attempt to understand some of the great and enduring human concerns and in our need to be sustained by the achievement of poetry.

IN 1953 M. H. Abrams documented most effectively the central elements in that great sea change in human culture we call the Romantic movement. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* describes the shift in the eighteenth century away from seeing art as a mirror—an *imitation* of external nature to be judged by its effectiveness with an audience and its fidelity to a rational universe, including the work of art's own rationally defined nature. By the early nineteenth century there was, in theory and practice, nearly complete emphasis on art as *expression* of the artist, with his divine (or divinely given) power to illumine, even to transform, external nature. Art was to be judged by its passion, its intensity, its evidence of intuitive expression, of overflow unimpeded by rational control—or not even to be judged at all, because the artist, endowed by nature or God, is thus a hero, and his work stands in judgment on *us.*

In 1971, in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature,* Abrams documented the central impulse and myth of this movement. He shows that the early Romantics, in their desire to retain a sense of belonging and possible meaning in a universe that was being mechanized and divested of indwelling spirit and had lost the potential of a solution through social changes, turned their hopes to the powers inherent in human consciousness. They developed means to explore and express the possibility of a "circuitous journey" for the self (if not the world) back to its original unity. Through the journey the self could be transformed to a higher state by an organic process of growth that would allow it to reclaim its relation to the external world from which it was originally alienated. This was not the mere emanation and return of Neoplatonism, or the falling into sin and being reclaimed by God

of traditional Christianity. For the Romantics the original fall is fortunate: It makes possible a return to a higher state and a secularized redemption by means of progressive self-education based on perception and experience in *this* world.

In a review of Abrams's later book, Charles Rosen suggests that the myth of the circuitous journey is easily identified in much eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature precisely because it is *not* uniquely Romantic.[23] But Abrams is convincing in his catalog of the special forms the myth took in the Romantic period that were responsive to, first, the new ways of thinking and feeling and viewing the world that developed then, and second, to the particular crises of that time. The view of the world as a mechanism had gained in power, and with it came a growing sense that man was essentially alien and disconnected from the universe. The early Romantics felt and developed the intuition that intrinsically, or because of the nature of its Creator (himself a living, imagining, even, according to Schelling, *changing* being), the universe itself is still evolving according to organic laws, not merely *functioning* through mechanical ones.

A central early Romantic thinker and poet was Coleridge, who, as I show later, shared Tuckerman's Anglican religious tradition and influenced him both indirectly through the Transcendentalists and directly through the American publication of his *Aids to Reflection.* Coleridge became (at least for English-speakers) the crucial figure in changing the metaphor for the universe from a dead machine to a growing plant, a change that had enormous effect both in philosophy and in the theory, practice, and criticism of art. He found the Cartesian "Mechanico-corpuscular Philosophy" useful as a fiction of science but deadening to life and art when taken as a supposed fact. After a careful review he decided that the eighteenth-century "association" theory of poetic invention, though also useful, could not account for the vital *process* of creation in the

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[23] Charles Rosen, "Isn't It Romantic?" *New York Review of Books* 20, no. 10 (June 14, 1973): 12–18.

mind. He extended the organic analog so that, in his view, the universe is an ongoing, developing creation, expressing the organic nature of its Author (who is definitely not the Deists' watchmaker). The Creator's mind is imaged in man's, in both its perceptive and its recreative powers.[24]

For Romantics, then, the world is related, and amenable, to the human mind. Both the mind and the world have a fundamentally similar nature, which undergirds artistic creation by human beings. The distinctive Romantic emphasis was thus on becoming, not being; on celebration of life and growth; on organic forms in nature and looking to them to find images for both the form and the content of art. This, of course, led to that other distinctive Romantic quest, to bridge the gulf between our sense of the *reality* of external facts, including both nature and our sense experience, and our sense of their *meaning*. Such a desire then produced the concern to overcome the alienating power of analytic self-consciousness, which is the very source of our sense of that gulf between experience and understanding.

The concern was magnificent, and it and various forms of the Romantic wrestling with such angels remain with us as perhaps the major force in our literary experience, certainly since the ascendancy of post-structuralism.[25] Tuckerman felt that concern deeply and participated along with his contem-

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[24] See M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953; reprint, New York: Norton, 1958), 168–72, 280–83.

[25] René Wellek, "Romanticism Re-examined," in Northrop Frye, ed., *Romanticism Reconsidered* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), 107–33, provides additional documentation of the distinctive Romantic themes that emerged and reinforced each other throughout Western culture at the beginning of the nineteenth century, particularly the great Romantic ambition to reconcile art and nature, language and reality, subject and object. Robert Pinsky, in the first chapter of *The Situation of Poetry: Contemporary Poetry and Its Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), has most powerfully demonstrated the persistence of these ambitions and the resultant anxieties as well as their consequences for style in modern poetry, arguing persuasively that the best poets continue to be those who recognize their own modernist nominalism and use language carefully "to fence back the blind silence as little as possible" (p. 96). Joseph G. Kronick, in *American Poetics of*

poraries in many varieties of the struggle—particularly, of course, through the developing techniques and perspectives in his poetry, but he did so in ways that allowed him to create unique responses, in his life and art, to the dilemmas involved.

Tuckerman had the particular emotional sensibility that Wordsworth recommended in *The Prelude.* As Perry Miller points out, though *The Prelude* did not become available in America until 1850 and only then made explicit Wordsworth's great "Idea" that Emerson had been recommending, the essence of that idea was already abroad in the land: It was the disposition to let experience come to oneself, through the "feminine" trait of receptivity, rather than going out to conquer it like those in the eighteenth century did with their formal gardens and quest for the picturesque.[26] But Coleridge and other early Romantics saw the danger of such receptivity: The eye could enslave the mind to mere outward impressions.

To prevent such impressionism Wordsworth distinguished "nature" from that surface of the world we see with the unaided eye. He felt there must be an interplay, a balance in perception, "an ennobling interchange of action from within and from without," between the equal powers of the mind and outward sense.[27] Tuckerman was capable of standing nearly alone, in the intellectual climate of his time and place in America, for this kind of balance and genuine interchange. He found ways to use quite traditional but enlivened poetic conventions and rationally disciplined but impassioned language to share with us his finest perceptions and expressions. Thus he made available to us an unusual human sensibility, one fully responsive to intuition and passion yet able to give pow-

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History: From Emerson to the Moderns (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1984), reveals the disastrous results of completely giving in to the Romantic temptation toward pure nominalism in its modern form of post-structuralism. He concludes that "the poet is no longer the namer of nature, man, and spirit; instead, he is a reader of texts, at once the assembler and the dissembler of fragments."

[26] Miller, *Nature's Nation,* 176–79.

[27] Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism,* 369.

erfully structured form to the nonrational gestures of his body and mind as they responded to a reality outside his mind.

TUCKERMAN suffered from those special Romantic maladies, melancholia and hypersensitivity to sensual experience. He recognized them as in some sense endemic to his situation, his experience, his yearnings. In an early poem he imagined someone *not* like him and thus "Guiltless of grief, or high romantic love / Of natural beauty . . . " ("The Stranger," p. 120). But, on the evidence of his poetry, he continued to walk disconsolately forth to confront nature at all seasons of the year and hours of the day and night. His search was to know its "import," the ways it might help him work out the meaning of his own life and deal with its most profoundly influential event, the death of his young wife. At times he is one "unto whose feverish sense / The stars tick audibly, and the wind's low surge / In the pine, attended, tolls and throngs and grows / On the dread ear, a thunder too profound / For bearing, a Niagara of sound!" (Sonnet I: 17, p. 11). Sometimes his work approaches the preternatural sensitivity (like that of a convalescent from illness) that we associate with the French Symbolists—when, for instance, "as in a sick man's happy trance,"

> He rides at rest; while from the distant dam,
> Dim and far off as in a dream, he hears
> The pulsing hammer play, or the vague wind
> Rising and falling in the wayside willow,
> Or the faint rustling of the watch beneath his pillow.
> (Sonnet II: 28, p. 32)

The quest for "import" was, of course, a concern shared by many besides the Romantics; it was a perennial Platonic and Christian obsession, which was intensified even more in the New England Calvinists' spiritual life by their search for evidence of election and of God's providence. Tuckerman shared in this inheritance too. Like Hawthorne's, his resistance to the

Transcendentalist idealism that ignored the contradictions, even outright destructiveness, in nature, did not injure his art but rather gave variety, scope, and continuing authenticity to his created symbols. Emerson, in slipping toward pantheism, had to posit universal good and therefore resisted seeing the alien elements in nature; he thus missed its varieties, its details. Tuckerman was more in tune with the European Romantic anguish to create an adequate theodicy in the face of real pain and evil in the world; he needed to justify God's ways to man in forms appropriate to post-Miltonic beliefs.

It has seemed strange that Wordsworth and Coleridge (and other Romantics) wrote much about *dejection,* while celebrating *joy* as the precondition and end of art. However, that occurred precisely because the temptation to hopelessness, in the face of natural destructiveness and human evil and suffering, was a profoundly experienced challenge to their joy and creativity and had to be honestly faced in their art. Tuckerman's series of sonnets, as he finally shaped them, constitutes his own melancholy theodicy, an honest quest to justify his wife's death and to cope with his own pain and anguish. His poetry is both the means and the result of his facing up to the terror he experienced in nature and the life unaccountably given him to live. In this he stood with Melville.

The early Romantics naturalized the old Christian faith that there is a supernatural resolution to human suffering achieved through God's salvation of his elect. They sought a justification *within* human experience, and they found their answer in the qualified hope that individual growth could result from a self-educative journey through life's joy and pain. Tuckerman's sonnets and long ode "The Cricket" constitute such a journey, conducted with the same hope and qualified by full attentiveness to the genuine losses that come with experience, even with growth. He successfully worked his way through the dark night of his soul, a grief that obsessed him for years and brought him close to madness and suicide, and reached a position that can be both understood and felt in the poetry.

Tuckerman's theodicy was not a simple reconciliation either