

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-41339-8 - *The Tenth Muse: The Psyche of the American Poet*

Albert Gelpi

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The Tenth Muse has been enormously well-received since its initial publication in 1975 and has become a classic study of the American poetic tradition. It has been out of print for several years now and this is the first paperback edition. Albert Gelpi asks the hard questions about how poetry can assume the problems of shaping American identities and he argues that the conditions of American culture have pushed our major poets into a debate between intellect and passion that generates distinctive poetic voices and forms.

Specifically, *The Tenth Muse* focuses on the evolution of American Romanticism out of and against American Puritanism. Through and around detailed discussions of Edward Taylor, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson, this study presents a historical and critical reading of the development of American poetry from Anne Bradstreet to such contemporaries as Adrienne Rich, Robert Duncan, and William Everson. Gelpi's companion volume, *A Coherent Splendor*, also available from Cambridge University Press, elaborates the argument for twentieth-century poetry, focusing on American Modernism as it evolved out of and against American Romanticism and anticipated the Postmodernism of the present time.

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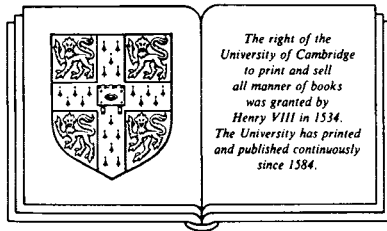
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THE TENTH MUSE

The Psyche of the American Poet

ALBERT GELPI

Stanford University



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Preface

The Muse as Psyche, The Psyche as Muse

In dens of passion, and pits of woe,
He saw strong Eros struggling through,
To sun the dark and solve the curse,
And beam to the bounds of the universe.

Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Beauty"

Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her,
And tempted her out of her gloom—
And conquered her scruples and gloom. . . .

Edgar Allan Poe: "Ulalume"

At the moment it comes out the Muse ('world'
 the Psyche (the 'life')

Charles Olson: Letter to Elaine Feinstein

The Psyche of the American Poet is the subtitle of this book for several reasons. I began with a question in literary history: the separation of American poetry from its British parent; the development of qualities of imagination, voice, form, and technique that could be called American. Here and abroad American poetry has continued to receive increasing attention as its importance and originality have come to be

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recognized and its influence has extended not just to Britain and Europe but to Latin America, Africa, and Asia as well. Where peoples are engaged in generating national cultures, American literature might well have a special significance since we had to find or project our identity rapidly and self-consciously under the urgent pressures of modern history. For Americans, too, the study of our poetry remains crucial, as we move from a youthful period of exuberant, often ruthless, (we thought) endless expansion into the disturbing self-doubts of the present time, when we must search ourselves if we are to mature, even survive, as a people. Our limits forced upon us, we must figure out how to live within them by exploring the inner continent that we have generally shunned when we could.

From the beginning the way West was a psychological journey as well, but it was conducted by most Americans as much as possible out in the open sunshine of "a commonplace prosperity," as Hawthorne wryly observed in his Preface to *The Marble Faun*. When Jack Burden, in Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, headed West like Huck Finn to escape his trap and perhaps still find the New Eden over the horizon, he found at last only land's end and had to wedge down, as in fact many of our artists had learned to do before. If now in the middle of our life it is time for a national *nekuia*, our artists will be in many ways our best guides. Our poets have been pioneers of the psyche; many have been map-makers of the underworld. They have been there before most of us, and both the survivors who returned with hopeful clues and symbols and those who did not survive, or barely survived, have lived out aspects of a destiny that is collective as well as personal. Since the cultural situation has forced them to descend, their poetry is—or at any rate represents—their psyches to a degree that has not had to be characteristic of most English and European poets.

The word "mind" suggests a conscious, cerebral activity, engaged with the world or reflecting upon it. Literary and cultural histories account for the "mind" of individual artists or for the "mind" of an epoch or of a nation. Perry Miller, perhaps the most distinguished intellectual historian of America in this century, wrote *The New England Mind*, *The Life of the Mind in America*, and "The Responsibility of Mind in a Civilization of Machines," and I gave my own book placing Emily Dickinson in various cultural contexts the subtitle *The Mind of the Poet*. Most literary criticism has dealt with poetry as a work of the poet's "mind,"

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analyzable into its constituent linguistic elements and so into its composite meaning. But I have come to see more and more clearly that accounting for the “mind” of the poet or of the poem is only a partial account, an anatomy of what has taken shape at or near the surface of consciousness. “Psyche” is a more inclusive and integrative word. It recognizes that conscious manifestations cannot be separated from the mysterious promptings and impulses of the unconscious that either engender those manifestations or struggle against them; it recognizes, further, that external conditions of social and cultural history affect and provoke not just those conscious phenomena, but the volatile, turbid unconscious as well. All artists are more rooted in and susceptible to that shadowy area than most of us. Many artists explicitly take the unconscious as the matrix of their art, and even those who rely more strongly on conscious formulation do so with a vivid sense of the power of the unconscious and consequently live more from the “psyche” than do people committed to the operation of the rational “mind” on data from the external world: scientists, social scientists, businessmen, behavioristic psychologists, even most philosophers, scholars, and critics.

In this study of American poetry, therefore, I wanted to see the poet’s mind as part of his psyche. Most psychological criticism has been rather narrowly and rigidly Freudian and, taking the work of art as clinical evidence, has dissected it in order to draw out of it the conflicts that constitute the artist’s neurotic problem in adjusting to external reality. The frequent result has been not an amplification or enrichment but a reduction of a complex work to symptoms and clinical labels. If I was going to find a way of bringing to bear psychological questions and insights that would extend the poem, open it to new depths, I knew that I would have to avoid single doctrinaire systems or schools of psychology. Just as an eclectic and synthesizing combination of critical approaches to a poem—historical, philosophical, and explicatory, let us say—permits a fuller reading of the text, so an eclectic and synthesizing responsiveness to various psychological theories and approaches was necessary for the widest and deepest comprehension of the poem at that level, most particularly a responsiveness to approaches that trusted, affirmed, and worked from the unconscious. So in writing the chapters of this book, I have drawn on a variety of psychologists and psychiatrists: Freud himself (particularly what Robert Duncan designated “Freud’s mythic imagination”); even more extensively, the archetypal

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psychology of C. G. Jung and Jungians like Erich Neumann and Marie Louise von Franz and James Hillman; neo-Freudians like Erik Erikson and Norman O. Brown; and others who belong in neither “camp,” such as R. D. Laing and Robert Ornstein. I used whoever could help me read more clearly the operations of the poet’s psyche—at once private and representative, personal and collective—as it expressed itself in the structures of language. For only then can there be a more genuine integration of the poem, just as the writing of the poem was for the poet an effort at integrating the unconscious and conscious aspects of his psyche. My purpose has been similarly integrative: to combine a literary-historical and textual reading of the poems with a psychological sensitivity.

If all art proceeds from the unconscious, more openly or less, more positively or less, then all art proceeds from and expresses what Freud called the erotic energy of the libido and what Jung described as the instincts imaged in our dreams and myths and art. The myth of Psyche—a late creation that seems very “modern” in its implications—links Psyche to Eros; the long story that is their myth and literary monument tells of the perplexing difficulties that beset their long-sought, long-delayed, necessary union. Freud contended that all aesthetic creation was the sublimation of—often the perverse deflection of—the libido. But the more penetrating insight would seem to be that language and imaginative expression are the substantive, substantiating means whereby poets—and through them, all of us—strive toward psychological wholeness and completion. This is all the more true, perhaps, in the case of American poets, challenged by their culture and so driven more deeply than others into the erotic and instinctual resources of the individual psyche. The poetry of each of the poets studied here dramatizes a particular interaction between eros and psyche. Whitman and Dickinson claim the most extended attention not because they represent, simply and separately, Eros and Psyche, but because, as a man and a woman, they represent more compellingly than the other poets the loving, lifelong contention of eros and psyche to work out the terms of their reconciliation.

I found myself, therefore, considering a phenomenon in literary history by attempting to reach as well the poet’s psyche, especially as it came to the creative act of expression. My aim was not to mount a rigorously or exclusively psychoanalytic investigation but to discern the

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elusive connections between the cultural situation and the psychological situation of the poets as those connections contributed to poetic theory and practice during the formative period of American literature. As we have come to perceive more deeply the interdependence of the social and subjective terms on which we live, we have realized not just the political aspects of psychology but also the psychological dimension of history, including literary history.

The first chapter presents the cultural situation in sweeping terms; the subsequent chapters study the five major American poets before the twentieth century, four of them from the nineteenth century, when the existence of an American poetry was being thrashed out, proclaimed, and tested. As would be expected, the issues are most deeply engaged by Whitman and Dickinson; this pair, curiously related in their contrasts, reflected much of the literary situation of their times, subsumed much of the imaginative currents of previous decades, and cast all this into sustained literary achievements. Moreover, their work exemplifies a masculine and feminine psyche enacting the premises and limits of the myth of the self-reliant individual, which, despite the attempts then and more recently to balance it through countermyths of social responsibility and fraternal communities, remains today the dominant myth of the American experience.

The major poets from the formative period of American poetry demonstrate the inseparability of, indeed the interaction between the cultural situation and the psychological situation, between social factors and private responses, between "mind" and "psyche," between psyche and eros. The poets who came to maturity between 1910 and 1920 or so, with World War I as a grim enactment of a turning point in civilization and the transition into the twentieth century, constitute the American Poetic Renaissance. The most important members of that generation are Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, H. D., T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Hart Crane. So original and individual were their accomplishments that they made American poetry pre-eminent not only in English-speaking countries but in the world at large. Building on or reacting against what the poets in this volume represented, they elaborated and complicated and internationalized American poetry. A projected companion volume to *The Tenth Muse* will study the major figures of the American Poetic Renaissance. Their efforts and achieve-

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ments comprise another phase of the American tradition, both the extension and the counterthrust to the initial sorting out of possibilities in the poets studied in these chapters.

The scholarship and criticism of the last several decades—most of it studies of individual poets—have created the contextual basis necessary for an attempt like this one to begin to trace out the tradition of a poetry that began with a worry about having no tradition. The notes to the chapters indicate only the most obvious of indebtednesses. I want to cite especially here two books that develop powerful arguments about the American poetic tradition with a different perspective from mine: Hyatt H. Waggoner's *American Poets from the Puritans to the Present* (1968) and Roy Harvey Pearce's *The Continuity of American Poetry* (1961). I want, too, to remember the following people particularly: the late Perry Miller, not only because he led me into a consideration of the subject years ago through his lectures, seminars, and writings, but because he will always stand in my intellectual life as a Promethean Demiurge; friends and colleagues, because in various ways they offered support, encouragement, inspiration, and constructive criticism: Joel Porte and Robert Kiely at Harvard, David Levin at Virginia, Claude Simpson, Jr., at the Huntington Library, Hyatt Waggoner at Brown, Albert Guerard, Herbert Lindenberger, Donald Davie, and Thomas Moser here at Stanford; Adrienne Rich and William Everson, because the fact that my critical remarks about the poet's psyche made sense to such different poets with special affinities for Whitman and Dickinson confirmed for me that I was on the right track; Josephine Guttadauro, for typing the manuscript; David Langston, for preparing the permissions file; and Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, because in all aspects of my life, including the writing and revision of this book, she has made possible the creative interchange of eros and psyche.

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Preface to This Edition A Backward, and Prospective, Glance

"Gods always face two ways," says H. D. in *Trilogy*, by which she also meant that humans always face two ways. The welcome offer of Cambridge University Press to reissue *The Tenth Muse* presents the moment for me to look backward and forward. Walt Whitman called his last preface "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads," and the present occasion invites a stock-taking of my critical purposes in relation to the present state of literary study. I want to reflect on this book in relation to its sequel, *A Coherent Splendor* (1987), and to relate that project, which has been the radiating center of my professional life until now, to the changes that have conflicted literary study in the 16 years since the initial publication of *The Tenth Muse*; and out of that muddle I want to muse on the prospect for literary study in this decade and into the next century.

My graduate study in the 1950s and early 1960s trained me in what is shrugged off by contemporary critical theory as the "old" historicism and the now-"old" New Criticism. I was very fortunate to have had Perry Miller as my mentor during my doctoral studies at Harvard University; Joel Porte and I were, I believe, his last dissertation students. I had begun serious study of American poetry under Richard Fogle at Tulane University; and, listening at Harvard to Reuben Brower's subtle, supple explications of the poems of Dryden and Pope, I learned

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that the New Criticism represented not a political agenda but a technique for accurate reading and that textual explication need not forego the insights of intellectual and social history and even biography.

My doctoral dissertation, published as *Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet*, grew out of the received humanistic association of art and morality, and combined an interest in history and in the psychology of poetic creation to delineate the poet's inner life in language. Working out of my readings in American Puritanism and Romanticism, I set out to show how the play and counterplay of Emily Dickinson's psyche mediated her New England heritage and nineteenth-century culture into the idiosyncratic shape and rhythm and imagery of those apparently inexhaustible poems and letters. Without fully realizing it, I had fastened on the issues that have continued to tease and challenge me; and I found myself fascinated by the reciprocal interaction between "tradition and the individual talent"—though Eliot's "classicist" norms would have found my aspirations too "romantic" in trying to discern how history and psychology inform the epistemology of creative expression. Or, to put this last point the other way around, how poetry mediates history and psychology. So I set about understanding the complex ways through which poets make their meanings—the conscious and unconscious processes impelling acts of imaginative creation in particular poems and in the shaping of a life in poetry; and I also sought to understand that alchemy working not just in individual poets like Dickinson but in the pattern evolving over the years and decades within the culture shaping and shaped by those individual careers in poetry.

Together *The Tenth Muse* and *A Coherent Splendor* comprise my account of the American poetic tradition through the poetry and poetics of the major figures constituting the tradition. *The Tenth Muse* follows out the emergence of American Romantic poetry from its Puritan foundations. The religious, moral, and aesthetic heritage of Puritanism, for which Edward Taylor is the strongest poetic voice, persisted through the spate of Neoclassical imitations during the Revolutionary period to fuse with the new imaginative energies coming over from England and Germany. That fusion informed the imagination of all the major American Romantic poets—Emerson, Poe, Dickinson—except Whitman. Extending the historical argument into the first half of the twentieth century, the period I dubbed the American Poetic Renaissance, *A Coherent Splendor* traces the continuities and discontinuities between Modernism

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and the Romanticism that it in some respects rebelled against and in other respects reconstituted. The central chapters of *A Coherent Splendor* examine the careers of most of the major American Modernist poets—Wallace Stevens, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, H. D., William Carlos Williams, Allen Tate, Hart Crane—flanked by chapters on a pair of pre-Modernists, Robert Frost and John Crowe Ransom, and a pair of anti-Modernists, Robinson Jeffers and Yvor Winters.

A long essay entitled “The Genealogy of Postmodernism,” published in the summer of 1990 in *The Southern Review*, represents my first sortie into the largely uncharted territory of the contemporary poetic scene. I argue that Postmodernism, at least in American poetry, has defined itself by finally extirpating the Romantic aspect of Modernism, and that American poetry since World War II can therefore be read as a dialectic between the Postmodernist inclination and a counterinclination that I see as Neoromantic. The essay offers a sketch for a possible third volume on the American poetic tradition.

So I have set out to make a sweeping historical argument through close attention to poetic texts. There is nothing else quite like it in the scholarship of the field. I did not attempt the compendiousness of Donald Stauffer’s *Short History of American Poetry*, but instead concentrate on those major poets whose poetry and poetics most saliently exemplify the tradition as I saw it defining itself. At the same time, the scale of presentation was larger and more detailed than that of Stauffer’s book or of such other studies of the American poetic tradition as Roy Harvey Pearce’s *The Continuity of American Poetry*, Hyatt Waggoner’s *American Poets*, and Edwin Fussell’s *Lucifer in Harness*. Because I wanted the historical argument to emerge gradually and inductively from the give-and-take of individual, lifelong commitments to poetry, the chapters on those individual poets I chose to discuss are monographic in length and scope.

Returning to *The Tenth Muse*, I had to ask myself whether I might do it differently now, especially in view of the ferment in the literary academy that the accession of various theoretical schools—feminism, marxism, deconstruction, semiotics, new historicism, culture studies—has precipitated. My conclusion was, not surprisingly perhaps, that while no doubt there would be local differences in interpretation and perspective and emphasis, due in good part to exposure to recent “theory,” this book, and *A Coherent Splendor* as well, would not be substantively different in conception and structure or in argumentative tenor

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and intention. I want to offer, especially to those who have accepted “theory” as the new hegemonic orthodoxy in institutionalized literary study, not an apology but an explanation. Or rather the kind of apology that Cardinal Newman meant in naming his autobiography *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.

I recognize the salutary function of certain theoretical perspectives in stressing race, class, and gender in an academic and literary arena still dominated by white males, and in analyzing the structures through which literature and literary study have come to be canonized and institutionalized. Through the witness and writings of Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Adrienne Rich, I came to understand and draw on the feminist critique of literature and society from the early days of the movement.

At the same time, deep-seated convictions keep me from committing myself to the deconstructionist and new historicist venture. My purposes and ends remain different and to some extent antithetical to those of most Poststructuralist inquiries. I do not believe that individuals are merely functions of the political and economic—and so literary—systems within which they operate; that literature and art merely reinscribe the institutionalized social order; that consciousness is merely a function of language, and language merely a self-reflexive, arbitrary semiotic code; that a word is merely a signifier without a genuine signified; and that religion, morality, and politics merely legislate the dominant ideology. The word “merely” in the previous clauses is the key to the demurral I would lodge. Some theorists, I know, want to allow for individual choice and social change, but Poststructuralism is, for the most part, dogged by a numbing, finally nihilistic and self-defeating, determinism.

Emerson summed up all the uncontrollable, destructive, destabilizing factors limiting human existence as Fate, but opposed to Fate the potentially superior power of the human Will. Poststructuralists view Emerson with suspicion and even contempt for a *faux-naïf*, idealistic individualism that masked the imperialism of the white male capitalist. Even granting Emerson’s vulnerability up to a point, I draw a confirming strength from his conviction. I reject the Poststructuralist inclination to authorize a network of systems so overdetermined yet indeterminate, so fixed yet relativistic, so closed yet open as finally to denigrate and sometimes even to deny the psychological integrity, the moral and political responsibility, the religious vision of the individual and so of society.

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The deconstruction of the individual into an inscribed code means, in Yeats' words, that "the centre cannot hold;/ Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." Indeed, the point is that there *is* no center to hold. As Lacan and Derrida have gone on to demonstrate, with that slippage everything starts sliding and skidding: the efficacy of language in engaging and interpreting a physical or social or metaphysical reality; the capacity to make discriminations and judgments about identity and commitment, meaning and value; the authority of art and philosophy and religion in construing and constructing private and public life.

So, among other consequences, the effect of the ascendancy and institutionalization of Poststructuralism has been the erosion of literary study as an intellectual discipline. The hue and cry in the academy since the 1970s has hectored literature and the humanities in general to abandon their aestheticist elitism, sterile formalism, and disciplinary parochialism for the widening vistas of interdisciplinary study. It goes without saying that literary critics should be as broadly cultivated as possible, but the call for humanists to join social scientists—principally sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists—in interdisciplinary study has a hidden agenda: not the enrichment or extension of literary and humanistic study but its subversion into the methodology and goals of the social sciences. The list of journal articles and books published by university presses in recent years chronicles the steady surrender of literary study to a certain kind of ideologically driven social science that has arrogated to itself the term "culture studies."

For, strictly speaking, there can be no such thing as interdisciplinary study. Literary critics, historians, philosophers, linguists, psychologists, and anthropologists bring their interests, however broad and interdisciplinary, to focus and use within the purposes, materials, and methods of a particular discipline. Disciplines can overlap and intersect and illuminate one another, but scholars who ignore defining distinctions and adopt the methods and aims of other disciplines do so at the risk and sacrifice of their own. They do not cross over into a neutral no-man's land—such a place would be desolate anyway—but cede themselves into somebody else's intellectual and methodological territory.

The distinctive and defining responsibility of literary study is to study literary materials on their own terms—in formalist terms as verbal structure and technique—since the unique constellation of words constitutes the unique fusion of thought and feeling, of psychology, pol-

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itics, and morality that is the irreducible text. It exists in vital interrelation to the society and culture within which it functions, but it exists on its own terms. Characteristically, interdisciplinary study focuses not on the complexities of the text but instead on the political, anthropological, psychological, and linguistic theory for which the text is evinced, often reductively, as empirical evidence. By contrast, the literary critic's experience, personality, religion, morality, politics, knowledge of history and psychology, study of language and literature, sense of formal convention and experimentation all come to bear on the text: interpreting how this selection of words constitutes and enacts an experience of a particular political, moral, religious, psychological, emotional texture and character; and then judging both its aesthetic success and its moral, social, or religious value to the reader and the world it addresses.

At the base of such an apology for the literary discipline is, quite unapologetically, the conviction that literature performs a function in the moral, psychological, religious, and political life of the individual and thereby of the society. Not at all a simple or unproblematic function—quite the contrary; but a basic and essential function. Otherwise I could not conscientiously be a literary scholar and critic. If language, no matter how slippery the relation between the signifier and the signified, is not a genuine act of or effort at signification, if the language act does not mediate an engagement between subject and object that illuminates both subject and object—no matter how ambiguous the assumptions of that mediation, how muddled its means, how unresolved its conclusions—then literary study is indeed in a parlous way.

I am aware that such ideas—ideals, really—are dismissed by Post-structuralists as “essentialist”; I have no quarrel with that description. I am aware, too, that some would dismiss religion, humanism, even formalist criticism as expressions of an individualist ideology manifestly deconstructed by a history of racist, sexist, classist oppression. But one must make a distinction, again an essentialist distinction, between principles and the inevitably tainted historical record. Ideas, ideals, values will, in their historical expression, be imperfectly realized, often corruptly used and abused. But if one believes in those values—Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, secular humanist, feminist, marxist, ecological, or whatever, or any synthesis thereof—then historical failure is all the more reason to keep trying to refine and realize them. I reject the notion that ideas and ideals are *merely* historically

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bound. Their expression and realization are, again and again, up to us; in discerning what our ideas and values are, and what they might be, lies the challenge of freedom and responsibility, including the freedom and responsibility of literature and literary criticism.

So I let *The Tenth Muse* and *A Coherent Splendor* stand witness—in this Postromantic, Postmodernist, Poststructuralist fin de siècle—to the efficacy of the literary discipline and to the power of humanistic, moral, and religious values to discern meaning, move readers, and change history. My colleague Marjorie Perloff, who studies the avant-garde, recently remarked to me that a position like mine is so rear-guard that it might represent the vanguard of what lies ahead in literary study. She meant the joke seriously, and, facing both ways on the cusp of the two centuries, I hope she is right.

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Johnson, "Some Edward Taylor Gleanings," *New England Quarterly*, 16 (1943), 280–296. Lines from "In Gratitude to Beethoven" and "The Man in the Silver Ferrari" from *Inside the Blood Factory* by Diane Wakoski. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Company, Inc. Copyright 1962, 1968 by Diane Wakoski. Lines from "The Choice" from *Collected Poems* of William Butler Yeats. Copyright 1933 by Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., renewed 1961 by Bertha Georgie Yeats. Reprinted by permission of Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc. British rights by permission of M. B. Yeats, Miss Anne Yeats, Macmillan of London & Basingstoke and Macmillan Company of Canada.

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He who endeavors to fix the personality of America in one eternal, unchangeable pattern not only understands nothing of how a personality is created, but comprehends little of how this nation has come along thus far . . . he fools himself if he supposes that the explanation for America is to be found in the conditions of America's existence rather than in the existence itself. A man *is* his decisions, and the great uniqueness of this nation is simply that here the record of conscious decision is more precise, more open and explicit than in most countries. This gives us no warrant to claim that we are higher in any conceivable scale of values; it merely permits us to realize that to which the English observer calls attention, that being an American is not something inherited but something to be achieved.

Perry Miller

"The Shaping of the American
Character," *Nature's Nation*

Leaving aside all questions of style, there is a difference between Tennyson's *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* and Whitman's elegy for President Lincoln *When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd* which is significant. Tennyson . . . mourns for a great public official figure, but it would be very hard to guess from the words of Whitman's poem that the man he is talking of was the head of a State; one would naturally think that he was some close personal friend, a private individual.

To take one more example—two poets, contemporaries, both women, both religious, both introverts preoccupied with renunciation—Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson; could anyone imagine either of them in the country of the other? When I try to fancy such translations, the only Americans I can possibly imagine as British are minor poets with a turn for light verse like Lowell and Holmes; and the only British poets who could conceivably have been American are eccentrics like Blake and Hopkins.

. . . every European poet, I believe, still instinctively thinks of himself as a 'clerk,' a member of a professional brotherhood, with a certain social status irrespective of the number of his readers . . . and taking his place in an unbroken historical succession. In the States poets have never had or imagined they had such a status, and it is up to each individual poet to justify his existence by offering a unique product.

W. H. Auden

"Introduction," *The Faber
Book of Modern American Verse*

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You can only live for yourself; your action is good only while it is alive—whilst it is in you. The awkward imitation of it by your child or your disciple is not a repetition of it, is not the same thing, but another thing. The new individual must work out the whole problem of science, letters and theology for himself; can owe his fathers nothing. There is no history; only biography.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
Journals, May 28, 1839

No poet, when he writes his own *art poétique*, should hope to do much more than explain, rationalize, defend or prepare the way for his own practice: that is, for writing his own kind of poetry. He may think that he is establishing laws for all poetry; but what he has to say that is worth saying has its immediate relation to the way in which he himself writes or wants to write: though it may well be equally valid to his immediate juniors, and extremely helpful to them. We are only safe in finding, in his writing about poetry, principles valid for any poetry, so long as we check what he says by the kind of poetry he writes.

T. S. Eliot
"From Poe to Valéry,"
To Criticize the Critic

Nothing could be more inappropriate to American literature than its English source since the Americans are not British in sensibility.

Wallace Stevens
"Adagia," *Opus Posthumous*

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The American as Artist,
The Artist as American