

The Elasticity of the Individual: Early American Historiography and Emerson's Philosophy of History

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[O]ur endeavor has not been to write History in the order of time but in the order of the mind; which sort of History has this advantage, when successful, that it is not true in one particular case but must be true in all possible cases. Philosophy aims to supersede the voluminous chronicle of centuries by showing its eternal agreement with the order of thought in the mind of every man.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Philosophy of History*

Just like other students of early national and antebellum American literature, I have been pulled back to Emerson time and again.¹ This is an introductory essay on the development of American historiography, roughly from the post Revolutionary era to the mid 19th century. After years of struggle with historical writings published during the period in question, I have barely managed to come to a conclusion and confirmed my initial hypothesis about the singularity, or to be exact, natural historical detailedness and static atemporality of early American historiography, only to find that the Sage of Concord hinted quite casually of my whole point in

his major lectures and essays. It feels so embarrassing and perplexing, but I have to admit, a bit soothing at home, too. By way of introduction to my main thesis on this subject, then, let me start with an overview of the problems of early American historical writings and how they are epitomized in Emerson's idea of history.²

Writing a history is not a thing to be taken for granted, and when it comes to writing an American history, it is more than difficult, or so it was especially in the late 18th to mid 19th century when the country freshly started its own independent national life. The difficulty was threefold then: first, primary source materials were scattered around both inside and outside of the country (the best document collections of relevance to American colonial and revolutionary history were deposited in the office of the Board of Trade and Plantation in England and the Archives of the Marine and Colonies in France); second, even if materials were scratched together for use, America was a newborn country, unstoried and historically blank, in comparison with time-honored European countries; and third, and most significantly, American history had to be new in form, too – not just a history of a new nation, but a new type of history. The traditional way of historical apprehension had been provided by the Puritan ancestry, whose typological worldview warranted every single event that did and would transpire in America as an antitype of its corresponding Biblical archetype. American history, in other words, was always already prophesied in the sacred history of Christianity.

The task of early national historians was to set America free of such Puritan prophetic, or they might say, superstitious history, as well as of the dark past of the Old World. Just as American independence was the very

embodiment of the Enlightenment ideas of man and society, the historians were quite willing to view the past from the same enlightened and rational standpoint.³ Then it was a logical choice for them to stick to solid facts and individual source materials themselves, which had been taken for something predetermined and prescribed within the typological framework but was now free and open to rational and positivist interpretations. So daunting a challenge as it was, they set out to collect and preserve all the scattered materials pertaining to America. Their endeavor looked rather obsessive even to the point of being labeled “the cult of facts.”⁴ “New England people, especially those of Massachusetts and Connecticut,” one contemporary reviewer said, “have always been a documentary people,” and he even went on to proclaim, “Let us gather every fragment of its history; let us allow nothing to be lost.”⁵ Source hunting had definitely consisted of the essential part of American historiography since its dawning era and produced a number of portly volumes of documentary history, such as *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (1792 to the present), Jared Sparks’s compilation of biographies and writings of great men, Peter Force’s *American Archives* (9 vols., 1837 – 1853), Justin Winsor’s *Narrative and Critical History of America* (8 vols., 1884 – 1889) and Henry Harrisse’s *Discovery of North America* (1892). Winsor’s and Harrisse’s books pretend to be a “narrative” or a story of “Discovery of North America,” but these volumes are all collections of a forbiddingly huge amount of historical documents concerning America.

Once materials were ready on the table, the next procedure was to thread them together into a coherent narrative order. The last-quoted reviewer, while praising the exhaustive detailedness of Benjamin Trumbull’s *Complete History*

of *Connecticut* (2 vols., 1797 – 1818), could not but be afraid if “The common reader would be repelled from Trumbull’s book by the diffuseness with which he details the church histories of his villages. All knotty controversies in theology are duly canvassed; the half-way covenant and the inroads of sectarianism; the momentous incidents of church reproof and discipline; the merits of ministers; these are all considered with elaborate monotony.”⁶ This was true of all the documentary histories published in those days, which were encyclopedic, objective, but never narrative. And to make matters even more difficult, the historians already parted with the Puritan typological worldview, which had so far worked as a master narrative for human history; they had to create their own methods to depend on. In a sense, American historiography from the early national to the antebellum period was both an incubatory and a proving ground for new forms of historical narrative. From Jeremy Belknap’s *History of New-Hampshire* (3 vols., 1784 – 1792) to Francis Parkman’s seven-volume series of American colonial history, *France and England in North America* (1865 – 1892), American history tried out one form after another for the synthesis of otherwise disjointed individual events and episodes. Sometime it was presented in a satirical outfit, as in Belknap’s history; at another time, it was knitted with the geographical expanse and thereby spatialized and visualized on a cartographic image of the continent, as in Emma Willard’s “History in Perspective”; and still another time, it was given the geological depth, as in Parkman’s representations of historic sites.⁷ And even more intriguingly, what was common to these efforts was their strong affinity with natural history and its atemporal order. Natural history, the most prevalent way to define the New World from its discovery to the colonial era, served as a sort of paradigm for

early national historiography, although it left a subtle but indelible mark of ahistoricity on it and thus thwarted the full narrativization and temporalization of historical accounts.

Natural history and early American historiography had much to share with each other in the first place – collecting, preserving, and ordering materials –, and in either case, the crucial point lay in how to handle individuals (individual natural objects, individual people, individual events, and individual documents). It was, in other words, the problem of how to reconcile the uniqueness and typicalness of individual components in the overall systematization.⁸ If you put a stress on the former, unruly individuals refuse to integrate themselves into a whole; and if you highlight the latter instead, each individual drowns its own unique identity in the general unity. And this problem of individuality was the very focal point to which early American historiography and Emerson’s philosophy of history directed themselves together, and as was always the case with Emerson’s dialectic argumentation, he introduced a remarkable model of individuality, which miraculously resolved the conflict between discrete particularity and general unity in historical narrative.

Although Emerson openly depreciated history and lamented over the contemporary attitude of retrospectiveness, he addressed himself to history with apparently paradoxical pertinacity. Aside from the frequent references to the term, he began his first essay collection with a discussion on “History,” and even chose for the title of his lecture series in 1836–1837 “The Philosophy of History.” History, conceived as distant “then” and “there,” was what his philosophy of “eternal Now” had to tackle squarely and overcome (*PH*, 158). In the course of the deliberate confrontation between

the present and the past, he then renovated history and suggested an ideal, if problematic as well, type of historical individual, which was a major concern of early national American historiography, too.

Let us take a look over the lecture series “The Philosophy of History.” The twelve lectures collected here are of great importance in understanding Emerson’s thought in general because some of his major ideas – Nature, Self-Reliance, Over-Soul, and of course, History, too – are found in their variant forms, and quite suggestively to the purpose of this essay, moreover, the first introductory lecture focuses upon the role of the individual in history and the last one is aptly titled “The Individual.” To begin with, Emerson explains about the historical development of the individual, which traces way back to ancient Greece: “In Greece, certainly, the individual begins to emerge, and we form acquaintance with persons, rather however from collateral record than from the formal history. But individuals recede again in Rome into the nation, and are more entirely lost in the wars of Europe in the Middle Ages” (*PH*, 8). And after a long interval, according to Emerson, the age of individuals has come with the birth of American democracy, and the true object of history then is man, the individual, “the portraiture in act of man, the most graceful, the most varied, the most fertile of actors” (*PH*, 9). Emerson’s encomium is unbounded for the individual, by which he means in this context a solid body equipped with natural-born potency, in contrast with the artificial and fictional power of conventional institutions. And yet, the demise of the individual comes all too soon. Even while his praise for the individual still reverberates in the air, he flatly downgrades the very same individual only a couple of pages later. “All our education,” he maintains, “aims to sink what is individual or personal

in us, to stimulate what is torpid of the human nature, and so to swell the individual to the outline of this Universal man and bring out his original and majestic proportions” (*PH*, 12). What really matters now is the “Universal man,” also known as “the Universal mind,” “Spirit,” “Over-Soul” or some divine principles that govern the whole universe. In one of other lectures that follow, the individual is taken for even “The antagonist nature to this Universal mind” (*PH*, 84). Hence a logical question: why is such a radical change possible in the characterization of the individual? Or why does Emerson bother about individuality anyway if his argument soon deserts it for universality?

For those initiated into Emerson’s transcendental philosophy, the answer might be evident in the above-quoted line. The point is the elasticity of the individual, which enables one to “swell... to the outline of the Universal man” and identify with the divine spirit. In other words, the Emersonian individual can alternately expand and contract in its signification, so that the distinction between individuality and universality turns out nothing actually. Note the elastic capability of the individual exercised in the following passage.

Civil History, Natural History, the history of art and of letters are to be explained from individual history or must remain words. There is nothing but is related to me; no mode of life so alien and grotesque but by careful comparison I can soon find my place in it; find a strict analogy between my experiences and whatever is real in those of any man. (*PH*, 19)

At first, “individual” denotes something familiar, real, personal, and

“related to me.” History must be a story of common everyday people, not in the least to do “with an Alaric or a Bourbon, with fighters or lawmakers” (*PH*, 20). The personal “me” is, however, the one who can also detect a universal analogy among all human experiences, and thus the individual man is sublimated into the universal “Man,” “the one Mind common to all individual men” (*PH*, 11; *H*, 237). A crucial statement is set forth in the concluding lecture “The Individual.”

The Individual Man in the order of nature is of that importance, of that elastic and ever growing magnitude as to arrest and deserve the entire influences of nature and society upon himself... As the mind unfolds it does not show itself as an adjunct to society but it becomes the central point from which all other individuals must be regarded. Others exist to illustrate to the individual the riches of his nature, to embody his thoughts, to fulfil the predictions of his spirit, to publish in the colors of the pleasant light the secrets which preexisted in the closet of the mind. (*PH*, 176)

This mechanism of elasticity works every time Emerson addresses the issue of the individual. The Emersonian individual resides at once in “now and here” as a real and personal entity with a temporally and spatially finite body and in “the everlasting Now, and the omnipotent Here” as an ideal being identical with the universal mind (*PH*, 90).

The elasticity of the individual is *the* primary requisite for Emerson’s philosophy as a whole, so it recurs throughout his writings. *Nature* (1836), for example, features an extremely elastic self and its ready switch back

and forth between microscopic and macroscopic outlooks. Indeed Emerson first admits “The whole character and fortune of the individual are affected by the least inequalities in the culture of the understanding; for example, in the perception of differences. Therefore is Space, and therefore Time, that man may know the things are not huddled and lumped, but sundered and individual” (*N*, 27). Still, while our attention is still directed to individuals, differences, Space and Time, his vision suddenly leaps high into the region of the universal laws: “Time and Space relations vanish as laws are known” (*N*, 27). Moreover, his terminology connotes the same instant alternation between individuality and universality. His words – especially, such major terms as “nature,” “soul,” “idea,” “man,” and the like – always bear the individual and universal connotations at the same time, whether the first letter is capitalized or not. At one moment, “nature” signifies natural objects in the physical world, but next, without warning, it turns to something more holistic and spiritual, supernatural. “Self” in “Self-Reliance” always implies both the individual self and the universal self. The process of the individual/universal reciprocation is usually occult but intrinsic to nature, and man has the power to discern signs of the universal mind in individual entities and thread them one after another into a uniform chain. Emerson names a poet, among others, as the one “whose eyes integrate all parts” (*N*, 9).

History doesn’t remain unaffected by the alternate expansion and contraction of the individual, either; or on the contrary, it is one of the principal fields where its elastic nature is fulfilled to the utmost. All the historical events are now found to be both unique and general, and a historian, just like a poet, synthesizes them into the universal order of human history, which in turn reveals itself microcosmically in each component

part. Following this individual/universal reciprocation in each historical event, history necessarily acquires the same elasticity in its perspective. It alternately zooms in and out as it were, shuttling back and forth between individuality and universality, and grasps at once the innermost nooks and crannies of individual lives and the panoramic general view of universal history. Its perspective is, in Emerson's own phraseology, "elastic as the gas of gunpowder... instantly our heads are bathed with galaxies, and our feet tread the floor of the Pit" (*RM*, 622).

If the whole of history is in one man, it is all to be explained from individual experience. There is a relation between the hours of our life and the centuries of time. As the air I breathe is drawn from the great repositories of nature, as the light on my book is yielded by a star a hundred millions of miles distant, as the poise of my body depends on the equilibrium of centrifugal and centripetal forces, so the hours should be instructed by the ages, and the ages explained by the hours. Of the universal mind each individual man is one more incarnation. All its properties consist in him. Each new fact in his private experience flashes a light on what great bodies of men have done, and the crises of his life refer to national crises. (H, 237 – 238; emphases added)

The whole history is incarnated in each person's private life, so that "the deeper he dives into his privatist, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds, this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true" (*AS*, 64). Typically, Emerson first zooms in to a most obscure private life, and the next moment his viewpoint soars up to the transcendental zoom-out platform

(just like a transparent eye-ball looking down from the hill) to recognize its identity with the general flow of human history. Every historiography must start with most individual and personal facts, and then confirm their universality or direct connectedness with the universal mind, and come back again to individuality. “In like manner, all public facts are to be individualized, all private facts are to be generalized. Then at once History becomes fluid and true, and Biography deep and sublime” (H, 246). When Emerson says “there is properly no history; only biography” (H, 240), what is on his mind is a biography of the individual/universal mind. A historian is the one who is possessed of the quick zoom-in-and-out elasticity in perspective, which effectively cancels all the distinctions between particular and general, past and present, and public and private, and reduces or rather inflates everything to be one and the same as the unified whole.

The best example of the zoom-in-and-out elastic historiography is, of course, Emerson’s own *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (1850). This is a collection of biographies of historical celebrities, and in a sense, the whole book is a paean to heroic individuals, just as in Thomas Carlyle’s *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841). A great man is, Emerson claims, the one “who inhabits a higher sphere of thought” and “has but to open his eyes to see things in a true light, and in large relations” while others must take great pains only to end up with false ideas in most cases (*RM*, 616). Without doubt, he is an exceptional individual, “a foreign greatness” (*RM*, 627). A moment later, however, the heroic individual suddenly turns out not so exceptional to distinguish himself completely from other people, nor foreign enough to stand independent and aloof. After all, he is a “representative” man: representative of the general population, or

more significantly representative of the universal mind which he shares with all. At the most fundamental level, he is the same with others, being only a part of the whole. Individualism proves nothing, and the prime concern is again what is called the universal mind, soul, or genius – the spiritual kernel of all mankind. “The study of many individuals leads us to an elemental region wherein the individual is lost, or wherein all touch by their summits. Thought and feeling, that break out there, cannot be impounded by any fence of personality. This is the key to the power of the greatest men, – their spirit diffuses itself” (*RM*, 630 – 631). While dealing with a historical figure in particular, Emerson directs his vision far beyond to the all-inclusive spirit at the same time. This is the way history ought to be.

The genius of humanity is the right point of view of history. The qualities abide; the men who exhibit them have now more, now less, and pass away; the qualities remain on another brow... Happy, if a few names remain so high, that we have not been able to read them nearer, and age and comparison have not robbed them of a ray. But, at last, we shall cease to look in men for completeness, and shall content ourselves with their social and delegated quality. All that respects the individual is temporary and prospective.... [H]e appears as an exponent of a vaster mind and will. (*RM*, 631)

Plato, Shakespeare, and Goethe, whose biographies are collected in *Representative Men*, are esteemed as long as they are exponents of the universal mind, but not so because they are complete for themselves. The use of great men in history depends on how the study of their individual

lives guide us to “a vaster mind and will.”

Here is the most problematic and trickiest part of Emerson’s idea of history. Apparently, it duly meets the demands of the age of democracy, dragging down the heroic few from their thrones and replacing them with common men, who are found just as good as great men: “Each philosopher, each bard, each actor, has only done for me, as by a delegate, what one day I can do for myself... What is that but saying, that we have come up with the point of view which the universal mind took through the eyes of one scribe; we have been that man, and have passed on” (AS, 67). And yet, what is the case with great men holds true for common men: they, too, are selfless scribes of the universal mind. Every individual, renowned or obscure, is valuable *and* trifling exactly for the same reason that his every action and thought is ascribed to the uniform agency of the Over-Soul. One will infinitely expand to identify with the universe and, in so doing, indefinitely diffuse into nothing.

We first share the life by which things exist, and afterwards see them as appearances in nature, and forget that we have shared their cause. Here is the fountain of action and of thought. Here are the lungs of that inspiration which giveth man wisdom, and which cannot be denied without impiety and atheism. 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. (SR, 269)

“I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all” (N, 10). It might

feel good to be embraced by the vital principles of the universe, but it is also an ontological crisis for each individual, who is now only a receiver or even “a passage” for the universal truth to come through. And by definition, the emptier the pathway is, the better. Each individual historical event also is an reenactment of the universal will, nothing original or unique on its own.

How is history possible then? If at all, historiography would be like an endless cookie-cutting, which leads us to nowhere but a series of the same-size, same-shape and same-taste cookies. That uniformity is an index to the spiritual universality in human affairs, but how boring history would be to read and write about (The paradox of paradoxes is, that Emerson’s own historical account is a good read, as he himself is quite a character never to be contained by any measure). Not just boring, moreover, Emerson’s conception of history even denies the very historicity or dynamism of historical change, because universality, applied to the temporal order, is another name for eternity or static timelessness. For him, the universal mind is the timeless axiom of human history. “The Times are the masquerade of the eternities” (LT, 153); the true face of human civilization hasn’t changed so far and will never do so henceforth either, and each historical event and chronological era is only a fleeting expression of the eternal physiognomy of the universal mind. If the mission of historiography is, as Emerson insists, to detect “the oneness or the identity of the mind” through the course of apparent historical changes (AS, 67), then you don’t have to trace back to the remote past, let alone the mouldy stack of historical documents. Just look around yourself now and here, and you will find the same eternal laws working just as well as it did in the past. “All inquiry into antiquity, – all curiosity respecting the Pyramids, the excavated cities,

Stonehenge, the Ohio Circles, Mexico, Memphis, – is the desire to do away this wild, savage, and preposterous There or Then, and introduce in its place the Here and the Now” (H, 241). Viewed from this angle, history should be a confirmation of the uniformity, not the diversity, of all human events. Emerson’s jeremiad, “Our age is retrospective” (N, 7), voices not the antihistorical injunction – Don’t look back – , but rather the nonhistorical mentality – You don’t have to look back because no fundamental distinction is admitted between the present and the past.⁹

Thus the elasticity of the individual precipitates history into a stasis. Of course, the elastic individual is an ideal type in historiography. If every individual can instantly turn universal and common to all, there is no possibility of conflict between individual component parts and the orderly narrative arrangement as a whole. The elastic individual is intrinsically plastic and perfectly fit to the general course of history, so nothing is lost when incorporated into the overall order. Paradoxically, however, this ready adaptability also brings about the impossibility of history at the same time. Each individual event looks too universal, too common and too uniform through the course of time, so any sort of historical transition from one state to another is simply inconceivable. “The permanence and at the same time endless variety of spiritual nature finds its fit symbol in the durable world, which never preserves the same face for two moments. All things change; moon and star stand still never a moment. Heaven, earth, sea, air, and man are in a perpetual flux, yet is all motion circular, so that whilst all parts move the All is still” (PH, 32). Nothing changes in history, but it is only a surface form that metamorphoses as time goes by. Essentially, human history is in perpetual stasis.

When I assert the importance of Emerson's idea of history as a clue to understand the nature of early American historiography, my point is that both share the problem of elastic individuality and its logical corollary, *i.e.*, history in stasis. Admittedly, Emerson was a man of poetry, so his eternal history might look like a product of poetic intuition. And yet, it was not. The idea of eternity and universality in history was not a deviant caprice but the rule for the historians in early national and antebellum America. Or to be exact, it worked as a natural limit for their experimentation of historical narrative. The post-Revolutionary and early 19th-century American historians attempted to achieve freedom in historiography through the departure from the Puritan fated view of history, and allowed each individual historical subject its own unique and independent historical import. Still, when integrated into a coherent narrative form, those unique individuals suddenly turned necessary units in the eternal order of universal history. Quite simply, there was no narrative style conceived that could break down the limit of atemporality. Emma Willard and Jedidiah Morse put American history in a geographical order and rendered it as something spatially unfolded, but they realized in the end that the spatialization of history confirmed the atemporality of their cartographic representations of history. Francis Parkman made a step forward to give the geological depth to his panoramic vision of history and thereby bring time to his historical accounts, but his conception of time was so uniform and circular, something like a regular layering one leaf of stratum upon another, virtually nothing was found moving and changing in its tableau.¹⁰ This static timelessness was a common feature of the late 18th- to mid 19th-century historiography in America. This is my thesis, in a nutshell.

This introductory approach to early American historiography might as well conclude with an example illustrating how atemporal historical writings could be in those days. Let us take a quick look at the idea of “progress” expressed by one of the most noted historians of the day, George Bancroft, whose *History of the United States of America* (10 vols., 1834 – 1873; revised into 6 vols., 1876) was a culmination of the first golden era of American historiography. Asked to give a lecture for the semicentennial anniversary of the New York Historical Society in 1854, he chose the topic of historical progress, to be specific, “The Necessity, the Reality, and the Promise of the Progress of the Human Race,” and to our surprise, his discussion sounds exactly like Emerson’s. Although the term “progress” intimates the dynamism of continual historical changes, Bancroft urges us to realize it is not just like that. Human progress turns out to be about something eternal, universal, and thereby ahistorical.

Every man is in substance equal to his fellow man. His nature is changed neither by time nor by country.... Each member of the race is in will, affection and intellect, cosubstantial with every other; no passion, no noble or degrading affection, no generous or selfish impulse, has ever appeared, of which the germ does not exist in every breast. No science has been reached, no thought generated, no truth discovered, which has not from all time existed potentially in every human mind. The belief in the progress of the race does not, therefore, spring from the supposed possibility of his acquiring new faculties, or coming into the possession of a new nature. (*PHR*, 9)

Human progress doesn't imply any addition to, nor any transmutation of, the universal order of things, but it instead is an unfolding of nature's true potentiality, which might have been hitherto concealed but always been there. Truth, what Bancroft calls "the child of eternity," never changes; "The progress of man consists in this, that he himself arrives at the perception of truth. The Divine mind, which is its source, left it to be discovered, appropriated and developed by finite creatures" (*PHR*, 9). Human progress is thus recognized to be of set purpose and goal, and the role of history is to record a steady unfolding of the divine will. Or it is not history that Bancroft is talking about here, but destiny, American manifest destiny.¹¹

The late 18th- to mid 19th-century is often called "the age of history" in America.¹² People's interest in history was augmented by their newborn consciousness of national independence, and a number of local and national histories were published one after another to win popular acclaim. The nationalistic and romantic bent has been often detected in these writings, but what has been overlooked so far is that the era was totally devoid of any definite method of historiography.¹³ Having just parted with Puritan prophetic historiography, the historians of those days had to contrive their own ways to write a history. The early national to antebellum era was a period of so-called historiographical interregnum; the Puritans had gone already, and the next master narrative – the evolutionary theory – was yet so long to come, still unavailable then. Thus American historiography of this period performed a series of experiments about how one could narrate a history while unable to rely on any grand frame of reference. At one extreme, history was presented as a promiscuous accumulation of individual data (a plethoric documentary history, with stress on the uniqueness and independence of each individual

historical subject); at the other, history was welded into a rigid timeless order of the universal will (an Bancroftian history/destiny, with stress on the necessity of each individual historical subject); and the historians typically wavered between these two ends.

Each historical event was unique and free, but at the same time predestined in the eternal principles of the universe. Emerson might be glad about this duality, because it perfectly matched with his poetic vision: “In poetry, where every word is free, every word is necessary” (*PH*, 49). Still, the same duality imposed a tremendous burden on the contemporary historians. Considering that their methodological groundwork was so unstable, it was quite incredible that so many attractive historical writings were produced during this period.

Notes

- 1 I totally agree with Irving Howe, when he says there is a so-called Emersonian climate in American culture. “To confront American culture is to feel oneself encircled by a thin but strong presence: a mist, a cloud, a climate. I call it Emersonian, an imprecise term but one that directs us to a dominant spirit in the national experience.” Howe, *The American Newness* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986): i.
- 2 This essay is an excerpt from an introductory chapter for what I am going to submit as a doctoral dissertation. I am so happy to acknowledge Professor Takeshi Morita’s warm encouragement I have received since my graduate school years on.
- 3 Lawrence Buell points out the post-Revolutionary ambivalence toward Puritanism. The early national “liberal” era exploited Puritan history and

- legacy as an origin of the national self, but at the same time continually distanced itself from Puritanism or its rigid, irrational, and anti-liberal orthodoxy. See Buell, *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution through Renaissance* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1986): 193–213.
- 4 E. H Carr’s classic *What Is History?* touches upon the cult of facts in 19th-century historiography. See also Michael Kraus, *A History of American History* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1937): 171–183.
- 5 “ART. VII. – *Documentary History of the American Revolution. Published in Conformity to an Act of Congress.* By MATTHEW ST. CLAIR CLARKE and PETER FORCE. Fourth Series. pp. 1886,” *North American Review* 46 (April 1838): 476, 487.
- 6 “ART. VII. – *Documentary History of the American Revolution,*” 479.
- 7 As for Emma Willard’s spatialization of history, see Yoshinari Yamaguchi, “American Geographico-History: Visibility and Timelessness of Emma Willard’s Progressive Maps and History in Perspective,” *Review of American Literature* 20: 46–69. I published a part of my argument on Parkman’s historiography in Yamaguchi, “The Panoramic Point of View and Visual Training for Americans: ‘Bird’s-Eye View’ Stories of Two Travelers,” *Review of American Literature* 21: 73–97; and “The Traveling Historian: Spatiality and Memories of Landscape in Francis Parkman’s Historiography,” Hiroko Washizu and Yoichiro Miyamoto, eds., *Literature and Epistemological Frameworks* (Tokyo: Yushokan, 2007): 77–103 [*Written in Japanese]. As for Jeremy Belknap, I’ve just revised my paper presented at the annual conference of the American Literature Society of Japan on October 11, 2008, which will be published soon with a title “Natural History Turned National History: The Problem of Unity and Uniqueness in Jeremy Belknap’s Historiography.”
- 8 This issue has the same roots as what is called “the problem of induction,” which also highlights the handling of the individual. As for the problem of induction and its impact on the post-Enlightenment epistemology, see Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Science of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), and as for

its implications with natural history, see Christoph Irmscher, *The Poetics of Natural History: From John Bartram to William James* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1999).

- 9 R. W. B. Lewis gave a definition to “the antihistorical” and “the nonhistorical” respectively, and categorized Emerson into the nonhistorical group. See Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1955): 161.
- 10 According to Stephen Jay Gould, the geological thoughts have ever been influenced by either of these classic imageries, arrow and cycle, and they represents the two types of reasoning: to think temporally and to think spatially. Thinking temporally, one tends to imagine the world as an endless series of cause and effect stretched in a linear course, while the spatially oriented one is likely to think up a image of synchronic network of events. Put another way, the former is inclined toward change, and the latter is congenial to stasis. Both conceptual models are related to each other, but not evenly. The balance shifts according to the emphasis one puts on one or the other. Parkman’s idea of geological time is tinged with the cyclic mode of reasoning, also known as the uniformitarian view of history. See Stephen Jay Gould, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987).
- 11 Etymologically, “destiny” derives from the Latin word “de + stare”, which means “establish” and “stand firm.” Thus the term implies its own ahistorical connotation. Wittingly or not, John O’Sullivan created a truly fit metaphor for the ahistoricity of American history: “Manifest Destiny.” See John O’Sullivan, “Annexation,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*. 17 (Jul/Aug 1845): 5–10.
- 12 As for the 19th-century booming of historical writings, see William Charvat, *Literary Publishing in America 1790–1850* (1959; Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1993) and Buell, *New England Literary Culture*, 23–55, 193–260.
- 13 As for the survey of American historiography, see Kraus, *A History of American History*.

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