

THE NATURE OF EMERSON'S SKEPTICISM: A STUDY OF HIS MAJOR SKEPTICAL ESSAYS

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled **“The Nature of Emerson’s Skepticism: A Study of His Major Skeptical Essays”** is the result of investigation carried out by me at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Professor Liza Das. The work has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university / institution for a research degree.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Mr. Arfan Hussain has prepared the thesis entitled “**The Nature of Emerson’s Skepticism: A Study of His Major Skeptical Essays**” for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. The work was carried out under my general supervision and in strict conformity with the rules laid down for the purpose. It is the result of his investigation and has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university / institution for a research degree.

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April 2018

Supervisor



The truly civilized man is always skeptical and tolerant...

H. L. Mencken

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Among the celebrated figures in American literature, Ralph Waldo Emerson is the most identifiable personality whose works, especially the essays, have been read and followed by a majority of the people owing to the fact that they facilitate a unique kind of intellectual inclination. His proclivity towards double consciousness and skeptical temperament, as has appeared in his major writings, posits a challenge for the readers to comprehend them fully.

Having first been through two of his most discussed essays, namely, “Experience” and “Friendship”, as suggested by my supervisor, I was compelled by curiosity to delve deep into the vast Emersonian world though it seemed at first to be a challenging task. As I was engrossed in reading those thought-provoking literary pieces packed with profound philosophical thoughts in tranquil intellectual ambience of the campus of IIT Guwahati, the quotations from Emerson’s essays became my daily sermons that in course of time paved the way for writing my thesis based on them. In the last five years, the involvement with the primary as well as the secondary works related to Emersonian skepticism was so intense and penetrating that even discrete words like ‘Emerson’ and ‘Skepticism’ have caught my attention straight away wherever I located them. I am still encountering these kinds of enthralling moments even as I feel I have reached the culmination of my research work.

Emerson’s treatment of skepticism in his major essays indicates that a complex doubleness of ideas and thoughts had preoccupied his mind. It is expected that all the aspects of Emerson’s literary masterpieces cannot not be incorporated within the boundaries of a work like the present thesis owing to the fact that his contribution to the world of literature is too diverse to be comprehended in a single piece of work. His sermons, essays, poems, books and journal articles deal with a wide-ranging corpus of ideas that are philosophical in nature. Moreover, the propensity to experiment with all ideas he had held at one point in time as well as the polarity in his thoughts have problematized the issue of granting him a definite position vis-à-vis other literary figures of his time. His belief in the philosophy of non-linearity and unpredictability got reflected prominently in his essays.

This thesis is the fruit of my unceasing effort and hard work at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Guwahati, over the last five years. It will not be an exaggeration to mention that the academic campus along with its picturesque beauty all around served as an active catalyst in drawing out the best of my capabilities while writing the thesis. The high-tech infrastructure and other essential paraphernalia provided by the department endowed me with a wide conducive atmosphere in carrying out my research efficiently.

First of all I thank Allah for good health and sound mind that were indispensable to carry on my thesis work.

The person who has shaped, molded and given a proper form to my work from the beginning up to the submission of the thesis is undoubtedly my supervisor Prof. Liza Das whose continuous guidance throughout the years of research, her positive attitude for any kind of challenging task, the unflinching faith in me to carry on my study on a topic apparently tough, as well as the motivation showered upon me whenever I felt low and exhausted in my work finally yielded a positive result. Her motherly care and love has never let me have homesick feelings even in the hostel life during the last five years. I would have been unanchored in the vast sea of research if she had not been the persistent torchbearer for me. I am sure that these words would never be enough to express fully my acknowledgment towards her.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my Doctoral Committee as well as the other faculty members both from the department and from other institutions who have provided me with the useful ideas, invaluable comments as well as constructive criticism that were enormously helpful and necessary while moving in the track of research through the years without any stumbling block.

I am truly grateful to all the faculty members of the Department of English, Cotton College. Special mention goes to Santanu Phukan sir for enriching me with his invaluable suggestions and opinions when I ever had approached him.

Words fail me in expressing my appreciation to my betrothed Tanzim whose love, relentless encouragement and supportive outlook have acted as catalyst in the process of accomplishing my task. You have made my journey beautiful. Thank you!

My gratitude also goes to my friends and fellow labmates for all kinds of thought-provoking discussions as well as the jolly moments we have had irrespective of time and place. Special mention goes to Mr. Pankaj Kumar Kalita whose commitment to his work motivated me even in the time of distress. I am highly indebted to Dr. Hemanta Barman who helped me in many ways with his valuable suggestions throughout the years.

Last but not the least, I am grateful to my wonderful parents for their unconditional love, care, sacrifice and immense support that hover around me all the time like a blessing; they are the faces who always helped me in the adverse moments of my life by standing beside me. I take this opportunity to dedicate this thesis to Amma and Abba.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: The Skeptical Tradition and Ralph Waldo Emerson's Major Essays

Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight

Emerson, "Experience"

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), known as the sage of Concord is considered one of the chief spokespersons for Transcendentalism, an idealistic philosophical and literary movement of the mid-nineteenth century which professed superiority of intuition, belief in individualism and self-reliance, nonconformity to customs, tradition and government authority, and the inherent goodness of people. It had originated and flourished in New England, and was largely a moral philosophy that asserted the value and integrity of the individual vis-à-vis the collective or universal (see Myerson; Wayne). Transcendentalism was a popular intellectual movement especially in America and its influence on the American minds had been intense. Emerson, the "centre of American Transcendentalism" (Skipp 29) seems to have devoted his whole life to propagating the ideas of the movement that emphasized mainly rising above human experience and non-conformity to any inherited beliefs. David C. Lamberth observes that "Emerson's view is, sadly, not as closely studied as it deserves to be" (72). His freedom-loving nature tends to make American minds free from all established customs and orthodox traditional beliefs that are embedded in the society. It appears that Emerson had never compromised with consistency and constantly felt the need of examining his own everyday experiences in the material world (see Allen). This nonconformity to conventional established ideas is the basic need of a true transcendentalist.

Articulating the impact of this transcendentalist movement, historian O. B. Frothingham remarks that Transcendentalism “affected thinkers, swayed politicians, guided moralist, inspired philanthropists, created reforms” (v). Though of German origin and flourishing for a brief period of time, it could successfully leave a mark on the American mind through proponents like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Before America, transcendental philosophy was developed in the schools of France and Germany due to the acquisition of its ideas by the intellectuals of these two countries. But the required ambiance in America for the blossoming of transcendentalist ideas is provided by Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Margaret Fuller. Indeed, it can be said that New England Transcendentalism is a native phenomenon of America in spite of its foreign origin. Emerson, “with his active hostility towards authority” (Zwarg 33), has given it a new tempo by attacking institutional tyranny of any form. Transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau stand for “moral innocence which they identify with Nature, against the corruption of civilization” (Miller 678). It is only through Nature that oneness among God, man and Nature is possible. Nature seems to be the utmost important element for Emerson as well as other transcendentalists as “[n]ature is the teacher—the American land is a school room” (Isip 23). So nature appears to provide individuals the tool for their inner development which is not possible with the formal teaching of any institutional education. Known as a critic of society in his time, Emerson published dozens of essays, poems and delivered more than one thousand public lectures. With all his writings he had guided Americans in their spiritual journeys of discovering their inner selves. His lectures have possessed appealing magnetism to the minds of those common people who are free from any impact of institutionalized customs and beliefs. Robert D. Richardson Jr. in his book *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (1995) has emphasized the importance of Emerson’s lectures and says:

Emerson’s audience...was not the assembly of judges, professors, ministers, school-board members, and other persons who had been institutionalized. It was, as it henceforward would be, the single hearer, the solitary reader, the friend—unknown but always singular—who felt and still may feel personally addressed and shaken by the collar when encountering Emerson’s startling observations (265).

About Emerson's audience Margaret Fuller in "Emerson's Essays" (1844) also comments that though his audience is not so large in size "it [is] select and it [is] constant" (qtd in Porte 603). His own solitary contemplation which is placed above any societal activity has a distinct position in all his literary activities.

Emerson, "the Yankee Sage of American studies" (Wolfe 137) is among the most popular American literary figures whose writings are not easily fathomable and they are at times even inscrutable in nature. It is not easy to grasp the meaning of his writings and this fact is reiterated in the essay "Emerson's Tragic Sense" (1953) where Stephen Whicher remarks: "The more we know him, the less we know him. He can be summed up only by those who know their own minds better than his" (285). Emerson's writing seems to be odd owing to the difficult mystical ideas and beliefs that cannot be penetrated easily. In most of his literary works, the charisma is always there that is appealing but Emerson's direct personal presence is absent and that makes them inscrutable. Whicher seems to have found the cause of obscurity in Emerson's writings and that is, as he says, "Emersonian tragedy" (286) that permeates his literary career. An understanding of this inherent tragedy which is adequately presented in the essay "Experience" can be helpful to know him as this essay is an "enigmatic touchstone of the Emersonian corpus" (Finan 65). Joel Porte in "The Problem of Emerson" (2001) criticizes Whicher's failure to understand Emerson as "obscure" and comments that Whicher's "failure to fathom the secret of one of America's greatest authors implies not only an inability to get at the meaning of American culture at large, but also a personal failure that finally baffles speculation" (679). Emerson's writings, especially the essays, must have possessed peculiar qualities that are not amenable to be understood easily as they are philosophical, and are food for the contemplative mind. Moreover, in his essays, he appears to contradict his ideas thereby making them impassable to be comprehended easily. In spite of using "obscure tropes" (Isip 22) in his writings "having haunting, incriminating and frustrating" (22) effects, it is evident that they are "beautiful, completely heartfelt, and clearly 'instructional'" (24). Again Richard Poirier in his *Poetry and Pragmatism* (1992) seems to be preoccupied with this difficulty of reading Emerson as for him Emerson himself has made it difficult to be read and understood. Poirier finds a solution for this difficulty and says, "[i]f you want to get to know him, you must stay as close as

possible to the movements of his language, moment by moment, for at every moment there is movement with no place to rest”(31)

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s writings appear to have been influenced by that of Montaigne, the great French essayist of all time. Emerson is highly indebted to Montaigne as the subjective and conversational style employed extensively by him in his essays is borrowed from the latter. Unlike the other English essays of his time, Emerson’s essays like “The American Scholar”, “Compensation” and “The Poet” are quite long and full of contemplative information. In each of them, Emerson appears to incorporate diverse aspects and makes it one composite whole. The form of his essays is considered quite similar to his lectures. He is at his best in essays like “Self-Reliance”, “The Poet”, “New England Reformers” and “Spiritual Laws” which are highly enriched with ideas and views full of sublimity. Being a profound thinker as well as eloquent orator Emerson’s essays reflect abundant wisdom invaluable for his readers. Emerson’s essays are not only read and appreciated in America but great Indian minds like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda have showered Emerson with praises. While Gandhi was in jail in South Africa he wrote to his son, “[t]he essays [of Emerson] to my mind contain the teaching of Indian wisdom in a Western Guru” (qtd in Gupta 228).

Emerson’s *Collected Essays: First Series* (1841) and the *Second Series* (1844) including the significant essays, “Self-Reliance”, “History”, “Spiritual Laws”, “Compensation”, “Friendship”, “Love”, “The Over-Soul”, “Circles” and “Art” in the first, and “Experience”, “Character”, “The Poet”, “Gifts” and “Politics” in the second series can be regarded as among the best essays discussed on varied aspects of life ever produced in the world of literature. Emerson’s essays are thought-provoking, simple as well as lucid encompassing different subjects. In the essay “Circles” Emerson clearly reveals his impatient nature regarding his search for knowledge. His powerlessness to confirm any knowledge and truth as absolute is conveyed by the following lines: “I am only an experimenter. Do not set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as I pretended to settle anything as true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker (180)”. Emerson is fascinated with the eastern world. His affinity towards eastern literature is best reflected in the essay “The Over-Soul”. The most common subjects in all his essays are related to his ardent belief in individual power

and self-reliance of human being as suggested by Transcendentalism. Nonconformity to tradition and custom, importance of Nature as a doorway to the Over-soul as well as the power of intuition always seem to be recurring subjects in his essays. Emerson is a believer of both idealism and pragmatism (see Weiland 166). He seems to believe in both theory and practice. Though primarily an idealist at the same time he highly appreciates a farmer who is the perfect embodiment of practice, not theory. He has recognized “the limits of an education which prepares the mind for abstract thought at the expense of interest in everyday activity” (Weiland 161).

According to *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (1995) “skepticism, in the most common sense, is the refusal to grant that there is any knowledge or justification” (Audi 738). The European roots of skepticism are found in Greek philosophy. Plato’s famous school ‘Academy’ was deemed as a starting point from where philosophical skepticism had developed. The first great philosopher of skepticism was Pyrrho of Elis (360-275 B.C.) and the Pyrrhonists deferred their judgments if they recognize a conflicting opinion. The main principle of Pyrrho’s attitude is articulated by the word *acatalapsia* which connotes the impossibility of comprehending or conceiving a thing. Sceptics tend to question accepted ideas which are normally regarded as true and final. They believe that “one cannot know anything about the external world” (Huemer 7). For them any occurrence can never be understood totally by our sense organs. Senses do not give us directly and instantly the awareness about the physical world. Separating skepticism from idealism, Michael Huemer labels the skeptic as “agnostic” and the idealist as “atheist”, and this places the former in a safer position between the two because he is not expected to make arguments whether our own beliefs regarding external realities are false or not and his duty is limited, i.e. to “create some reasonable doubt” (7) regarding those realities that eventually lead us to draw no proper conclusion. Unlike the idealist, it is not obligatory for the skeptic to reject openly the existence of the external world and therefore they can be placed in a secure zone. A skeptic appears to be suspicious about the possibility of overall knowledge about something or about the reality of the external world. His judgments never affirm something as ultimate truth. Instead, he takes a mid-way which is regarded as a safe place for any proposition. Doubt, which is according to Rene Descartes “a methodological point of departure” (Sagi 43) is the first thing that arises whenever a true skeptic faces a general belief. They never

finalize any comment or opinion as ultimate truth and instead of that they appear to postpone their judgments regarding any kind of established knowledge. A life with suspicion is regarded as happier by them than a life holding any belief as final or justified. Sceptics always appear to be cautious and think critically while making comments on something and it leads them to play a major role regarding any problem or solution. The thirst of a skeptic for knowledge is never quenched and so his/her journey is always in process. This point is echoed in Casey Perin's *The Demands of Reason: An Essay on Pyrrhonian Scepticism* (2010), where he suggests: "The sceptic suspends judgment about whether reason, as the dogmatic philosopher thinks of it, can establish it as true that honey is sweet" (42). This particular propensity cannot be seen as having negative impacts since "tranquility accompanies suspension of judgments" (Empiricus 5). But this tranquility or serenity of mind seems to be always in process as doubt acts as a catalyst to make the skeptical mind restless and postponement of any judgment becomes an unconditional necessity. Thomas Baldwin in *G. E. Moore* (1990) deals with the ideas of philosophical skepticism as held by G E Moore, the significant philosopher of the century and seems to draw a relation between an argument forwarded by a skeptic and its eventual conclusion as follows: "According to the sceptic, the assumption that he has this knowledge destroys itself, not his argument for the skeptical conclusion" (276). Thus it appears that a conclusion does not challenge or weaken the arguments made by the skeptic. The very assumption acts as a self-destroyer and thereby does not allow any evolution to a final conclusion for which a skeptic always seems to be detached from its final comments regarding any end. English philosopher P. F. Strawson in *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties* (1985) comments on skepticism as follows:

Strictly, skepticism is a matter of doubt rather than of denial. The skeptic is, strictly, the not one who denies the validity of certain types of belief, but one who questions, if only initially and for methodological reasons, the adequacy of our grounds for holding them. He puts forward his doubts by way of a challenge—sometimes a challenge to himself—to show that the doubts are unjustified, that the belief put in question are justified (2).

Albert A. Johnstone in *Rationalized Epistemology: Taking Solipsism Seriously* (1991) views skepticism as having some parasitic nature and divides parasitism into two sorts, namely

epistemic and conceptual. According to him skepticism is “suicidally parasitic” like the other parasites found in nature and “it attacks the very everyday views, conceptual framework, and procedures that it presupposes for its own enunciation (89). A natural parasite is an organism that lives on other species and gathers its needed food and shelter until it destroys the body of the host. In the same way, a philosophical skeptic view can survive with its own arguments until it attacks back on them. It is like a suicide when it does so and this suicidal tendency is inevitable to keep its own doubts intact. The most common situation a skeptic faces during the process of affirming knowledge regarding external realities seems to be reflected best in the work of Angela M. Coventry when she opines on the condition of David Hume, a prominent skeptical philosopher for whom everything is uncertain and while making uncertain judgments, one (judgment) is compiled on the other judgments making the situation more critical to overcoming uncertainties altogether. Coventry says, “...when two uncertainties are compounded, no matter what they are, the result is even greater uncertainty” (140). This has made any initial probable judgment diminished and reduced and eventually “as Hume puts it ‘a total extinction of belief and evidence’ and we are left with a mere idea, with none of the force and vivacity that characterizes a belief” (141). So it appears like a chain system where one proposition invalidates the previous one and this process continues until the suspension of judgments comes to play its own role.

Adherence to skepticism, especially the philosophical one, does not create any chaos within human minds; instead, it provides an opportunity to perceive the external world cautiously with attentiveness which is indispensable for every human being on earth. It is not an attitude of restriction altogether; it is not a harmful limitation of arguments. It is a sieve or a filter that separates our vision from recognizing any fact or truth in its concrete form which is contaminated with several lies or falsehood. The significance of skepticism is that it acts as a pair of the lens with which we can pragmatically observe the uncanny and problematic external world that complicates human insights. It is an approach to critical observation towards any kind of easy conclusion or irrefutability in the realm of nature. Refusal to take any definite stand while facing contradiction or dualism and thereby stretching arms towards both sides without any categorical commitment towards them seems to be a judicious step. Unconditional acceptance of ideas often blinds human beings and thereby blocks mental

faculties for any further thinking. Skepticism, as George Santayana says, is the “chastity of the intellect” that “should not be relinquished too readily”. It delivers a thinker from any obligation towards faith or belief. There is “a nobility in preserving it coolly or proudly” (69). Finding provisionality in an established notion is like opening new vistas to ponder over that particular notion from different angles or perspectives. It is like opening a new chapter of a book written continuously on knowledge. Though outside of the ambit of philosophy people have a tendency to equating skepticism with cynicism which does not seem to be a true account of it. Though both terms are slippery, cynicism is associated with distrust while skepticism is an experiment of a particular trust or belief; it never openly negates it.

Literature throughout human history seems to have been proper vehicle to carry skeptical thoughts from one mind to another. Emerson has chosen many intellectuals like Plato, Napoleon, Goethe and Montaigne from the annals of iconic human figures and enlisted them in the series of essays entitling as *Representative Men* (1850). Among all these great figures the most important place assigned as a skeptic is Montaigne who “cultivated skepticism... in order to produce sublimity” (Sedley 15). Even Milton who undoubtedly seems to strive for sublime thoughts in his literary works has “forged sublimity...through his encounter with skepticism” (15). In *Comus* (1634) and *Paradise Lost* (1667), Milton is revealed as a true skeptical writer of the age. Both these two great writers of the age of Renaissance in their works appear to be haunted by the “skeptical recognition of the inadequacy of any one notion of eminence” (21).

Though the skeptics, in general, seem to take the side of limitations of arguments and opinions, their beliefs and ideas cannot be limited to any particular field. Whether it is literature, religion or other branches of human interest, doubt as a harbinger of skepticism will cast its shadow irrespectively until the desire for acquiring knowledge is fulfilled. This widespread nature of skepticism is highlighted in the article of Paul L. Heck according to whom “[a]s doubts about true knowledge” skepticism is “a universal phenomenon shaped by intellectual concern and social configuration of the local context.” (106). Emily Dickinson and P. B. Shelley, another two prominent literary figures seem to accept skeptical attitude in their poems. Emily Dickinson was born and brought up under the shadow of a scientific era

which is remarkable for extraordinary discoveries and technological advancements occurred to modern human civilization. Her devoted attention to and abundant use of scientific terms in poetry are the outcome of her close association with various branches of sciences in her childhood. In the later phase of her life this endows skeptical attitudes as “on the one hand science was transforming the world around her in astonishing way...on the other hand, science was fast becoming civilization’s new Holy Grail in the quest for certainty and seemed to be undermining the validity of religious and aesthetic modes of knowing” (White 122). Doubt and skeptical thoughts are so prevalent in her mind that in one of her poems she embraces skepticism as something which is sweet and pleasant:

Sweet skepticism of the Heart—
That Knows—and does not know—
And tosses like a fleet of Balm—
Affronted by the snow—
Invites and then retards the Truth
Lest Certainty be sere
Compare with the delicious throe
Of Transport filled with Fear— (qtd in White 122).

The literature which enormously witnesses the tendencies of skepticism is the literature of Victorian age as during this period the clash between emerging science and orthodox religion led common masses to a stage where agony, distrust, sorrow, pessimism and restlessness are the main components that have shackled life. During this period, among the giant literary figures, Mathew Arnold and Lord Alfred Tennyson have come out distinguishably with their ideas full of doubts and confusions regarding the prevailing condition of the age when discoveries made by science have become a threat to the age-old Christian religious beliefs. Mathew Arnold’s skepticism is identified by Goethe as “active skepticism” one “which constantly aims at overcoming itself” (qtd in White 439). Again Mary Maristella Wagner has clearly portrayed the character of Mathew Arnold as follows:

Intellectually he was a skeptic; emotionally and by education he was intensely religious. Reconciliation of these two tendencies was too difficult for Arnold, and he developed the attitude of doubt and uncertainty for which he is usually remembered...Throughout his entire life he was never able to take a definite position on ultimate subjects (Wagner 46).

In the seventeenth century John Milton's contribution to literature flourished during the Renaissance period is primarily upheld in his famous epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667) where the working of the mind of a skeptical poet is clearly revealed when discrepancy seems to arise at the excessive sympathy shown by Milton to Satan. Though "presentation of heroic qualities of Satan" as argued by K.M. Jain and Shabnam Firdaus, "is continually accompanied by explicit or implicit condemnation" (162-163) of him, Milton's primary goal of writing the poem and his subsequent devotion in eulogizing Satan's character as an hero of uncompromising power and will to overthrow God can be seen as the assimilation of Milton and the character Satan both of whom appear to be supporters of devil. In case of Satan the limitation or finitude of human knowledge takes the shape of crisis. Satan is "the father of skeptic heroes...obsessively retrospective, not prospective" (Sharkey 2). When Satan has undergone a serious kind of crisis due to the confrontation with finitude his inability to cope with this situation leads him to rebel against God who overthrows him from heaven. It is the pride of Satan that finally brings him damnation. He seems to be a devotee of skepticism as "the skeptic finds himself caught in a cycle of perpetual self-destruction, the beginning and the end of which is pride" (14).

Eminent eighteenth-century poet Alexander Pope appears to be a firm believer of skepticism as his poem *An Essay on Man and Other Poems* (1829) noticeably elucidates dual nature of human predicament.

Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,

A being darkly wise and rudely great:

With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,

With too much weakness with stoic's pride,

He hangs between, in doubt to act or rest;

In doubt to deem himself a god or beast;

In doubt his mind or body to prefer;

Born but to die, and reasoning but to err (Pope 13).

Pope's view regarding nature of man as hanging creature as well as "an ambiguous being or intermediate entity" (Belzen 36) who cherishes doubt and unable to compromise between mind and body is a brilliant exposition of his skeptical mind in particular and humankind in general.

John Keats can be understood as a follower of skepticism as his poems are the finest expositions of doubts and uncertainties that permeate both his personal and poetic life (see Sharp). J Robert Barth in his article "Keats's Way of Salvation" (2006) identifies him as an "inveterate searcher after truth rather than one who ever felt he had a firm grasp of it" (285). Barth finds that in case of religious poetry Keats takes a middle path in his journey between the two tendencies; secular as well as orthodox. Barth maintains, "[i]n approaching religious dimensions of Keats poetry, I suggest that a middle path may be taken, on the one hand, a thoroughgoing skeptical and secularizing view, on the other, a view that would baptize Keats into something approaching Christian orthodoxy" (286). Keats in his lifetime was very much familiar with the Christian ideologies and the sayings of the Bible that had helped in creating a religious tendency within his mind. But at the same time the liberal and secular atmosphere that had been enjoyed in his school time molded his mind in a different way. Again, as viewed by another author Robert Ryan, the middle path taken by Keats is due to "both Keats's innate skepticism and suspicion of institutional Christianity and his unceasing search for a broader religious meaning in his life and in his poetry" (286).

Skepticism was an integral element for Emerson which becomes prominent in the later part of his life. His personal life, as well as the commercial industrialized life of America, played a vibrant role in fetching gradually the skeptical beliefs into his mind (See Forster). In "Skeptical Triangle? A Comparison of the Political Thought of Emerson, Nietzsche and Montaigne" (2011) Alan Levine successfully charts the common relationship among

Emerson, Nietzsche and Montaigne, the three famous philosophical skeptics and outlines that “Emerson is considerably less skeptical than both Montaigne and Nietzsche” (223). Both Nietzsche and Emerson seem to love and praise Montaigne as a skeptic. Emerson is so full of praise for Montaigne that he considers the latter in his writings as one of his six major representative men. Besides the commonality among the three skeptics, Levine in the essay appears to establish another relationship between Emerson and Nietzsche for whom from the early age Nietzsche has read Emerson’s writings a lot and comments that Emerson is “one of only four authors in his century that may justly be called ‘master of prose’” (224) . These three men seem to possess many skeptical features that are quite common. For all of them, conventional ideas, habits etc. are common enemies and they oppose established ideas, tradition and customs. Levine with minute observation tries to place Emersonian skepticism on a different platform for which though they had cherished skeptical ideas which are deemed alike, “Emerson’s skepticism is neither Nietzschean nor Montaignean” (225) due to his different metaphysical ideas. His doubtful attitude or the skeptical outlook is not a process that has come to him suddenly. It is his personal life and his grief that chart the inward path for skeptical ideas that came to his thoughts silently.

The essay “Experience” written in 1843 after the untimely death of his son Waldo reveals Emerson’s growing skeptical mind more visibly. He appears to start making skeptical arguments about the world of idealism and the world of experience and oscillates between these two worlds. At that time, Emerson was accustomed to the realities of life as he has lead a life full of grief due to the death of his family members leading him to a place of mere solitude. He has lost the world of innocence as time passed and has tried to examine his condition in particular and human conditions, which he terms “the lords of life” (“Experience” 83) in general. His idealism as a transcendentalist writer begins to suffer a stark opposition after the 1840s. He seems to be trapped in between the world of innocence and experience struggling to reconcile with them. This essay “questions man’s ability to ever arrive at truth and acknowledges man’s limitation in his use of nature” (Kirklighter 45). Though Emerson appears to defy grief for the loss of his son yet his way of grieving is thoroughly felt by the readers. The death of his son Waldo “begets the other subjects” (Cameron 26) in the essay “Experience” and the loss, caused by the deceased one, is “so inclusive that it is suddenly inseparable from experience itself” (18). To put it in a way, it

can be felt that it is Waldo who is the center of the essay though we do not find his name in it. It is Emerson's rhetorical power through which he has made us feel the presence of an absent subject. After Waldo's demise, he seems to lament that he did not feel the incident intensely. But the language used by him tends to reveal the fact that the shock after the demise of his son truly has frozen his nervous system. He felt "so deeply that he could not feel" (Allen 302). His views clearly reveal his skeptical mood about experiencing as well as non-experiencing the inherent grief. Stephen Whicher says that "by the end of 1843, a skeptical mood had crept in; although he thinks that Emerson never embraced it thoroughly" (qtd in Guillen 216). About life, Emerson himself has declared in the essay "Experience" that "[l]ife itself is a bubble and skepticism and a sleep within a sleep" (205). Matthew Guillen also comments on Stanley Cavell's work which reflects, "that the entire modern history of philosophy can be viewed as dominated by a fixation on what he calls the 'skeptical problematic', the idea that philosophy is locked in conflict with the skeptic who denies that the world can be known with certainty" (216-217). Emerson is cautious while delineating his doubly conscious self in "Experience". He does not affirm anything except a mood of melancholy which is, as if, also in process. Phrases in "Experience" like "swim and glimmer" (49), "most slippery sliding surface" (51-52), "rough rasping friction" (51) and "train of moods" (53) are clear evidence of the essayist's inner working of the mind as a skeptic that seems to represent the lack of affirmation regarding his own existence at a particular place.

For Emerson, "the mid-world is best" (66) and being a skeptic does not appear to be bad because skepticism is "not gratuitous or lawless, but are limitations of affirmative statement" (76). It cannot be regarded as wanton as it seems to generate a kind of power to the mind of a person while arguing. It appears that arguments made by the skeptics are normally overlooked as futile and baseless. But, in spite of it, the doubts presented by them as arguments cannot be overthrown as "skepticism usually excites, and always survives" (Fischer 107). Even to be a good critic a person must follow skeptical attitude at first regarding any idea or belief. It empowers the critic to take an unprejudiced stand in the process of criticism. The importance of skepticism is echoed in Stanley Cavell's important work *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (1988) where he assigns it (skepticism) a permanent place which is "the central secular place in which human

wish to deny the condition of human experience is expressed; and so long the denial is essential to what we think of as the human, skepticism cannot, and must not, be denied” (5). Cavell is full of concern of the skeptical condition regarding experiencing outer reality, and Emerson is also more devoted to deal with the possibility of experiencing grief which is external but most important fact of life. So long as the seed of denialism will be acting as a vital force, the suspension of any judgment continues to exist. Emerson’s doubtful mind or skeptical attitude is disclosed not only in one essay like “Experience”; all the series of his essays bear more or less traces of skepticism. Skepticism seems to be so inescapable for Emerson’s writings that it traverses from one essay to another. Apart from “Experience”, other essays like “Friendship”, “Circle”, “Self-Reliance”, “Art”, “Compensation” and “Fate” can be seen as proper embodiments of his doubtful attitude. The sentences like “[s]ociety is a wave” (“Self-Reliance” 136) “[a]ll things are double, one against another” (“Compensation” 143) and “[d]ream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion” (“Experience” 200) illustrate the substantial as well as arbitrary quality of his writings. Sometimes he appears to doubt what he himself initially believes as true. In the essay “Friendship”, Emerson makes some positive remarks about friendship like “[h]appy is the house that shelters a friend!” but suddenly he becomes aware of susceptibility of making such comment and starts seeing friendship as a kind of threat lurking on the head of an individual. Again, on the one hand he says “[a] friendship is a person with whom I may be sincere” and on the other hand takes help of paradoxical comment and says “[e]very man is sincere; at the entrance of a second person hypocrisy begins” (138). If Emerson’s style of writing is looked into, it is quite noticeable in the essay that to delve into the world of skepticism he resorts to oxymoron and states that friendship is nothing but “delicious torment” (136), and “beautiful enemy” (144). To enjoy the company of brothers or sisters is similar to the condition of “blood in our proper veins” but at the same time to be with them is “a sort of joyful solitude” (“Spiritual Laws” 123).

Though the friendship between Emerson and Henry David Thoreau is a very remarkable chapter in the history of American Transcendentalism it seems that at last it has become a futile relationship due to the incompatibility and contradictions rooted deeply in them. “If Emerson and Thoreau were friends”, as questioned by Michael Brodrick, “why did they describe friendship as an unattainable ideal? They might have lived by their high minded

theories of friendship or revised them to make them comport with their actions” (92). In response to this question, it can be said without doubt that both of them must have developed skeptical attitude towards the benefit of ideal friendship as envisaged by them earlier. Russel B Goodman in his article “Emerson and Skepticism: A Reading of Friendship” (2009) explores Emerson’s doubt regarding friendship which is also mentioned in another essay “Montaigne, or the Skeptic.” Goodman tries to focus on indispensability of friendship in human life and observes critically the ideas as perceived by Emerson by the term ‘friendship’. He finds in all the essays written by Emerson “an internal linkage” and a sort of “process or flux” that continue very smoothly. Friendship, as perceived by Emerson seems to be something divine that cannot be attained by common man which is a “high demanding virtue” (5). Friends are nothing but “dreams and fables” (“Friendship” 145). Even in the essay “Montaigne, or the Skeptic” Emerson appears to praise Montaigne who is for him undoubtedly a perfect skeptic. Montaigne, the “godfather of modern skepticism” (Weidhorn 5) tremendously influenced other famous philosophers like Pascal and Descartes. He draws his philosophical ideas from the ancient tradition and sometimes his notions are identified with that of Pyrrhonian skepticism. Montaigne’s sincerity seems to be best appreciated by Emerson for whom he is “the frankest and honest of all writers” (“Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 240) having a “superior mind” (242).

Henry David Thoreau, a leading figure of American transcendentalism, is one of the best disciples of Emerson. Though there is a fourteen-year gap between Thoreau’s age and Emerson’s, they are like friends. Emerson regards him a person so close to his heart and he gives the Walden wood to Thoreau to live there. Their friendship is “the rich event in literary history” (Sattelmeyer 187) but both of them are so skeptical about friendship that some unknown facts drove their friendship apart and after that they could never manage to re-establish their old relationship and intimacy. Thoreau expresses his feelings of friendship as follows: “Ah I yearn toward thee, my friend, but I have not confidence in thee....Though I enjoy thee more than other men, yet I am more disappointed with thee than with others” (qtd from Bridgman 264).

Again, a sense of ambivalence can also be regarded as a part and parcel to skepticism as the follower of this philosophy, though inwardly, seems to adhere to two opposite conflicting

forces or ideas about something or someone at a particular moment. Most of the transcendentalists from New England, including Emerson and his disciple Henry David Thoreau, are the ardent supporters of abolition of slavery prevailed in the USA. But the intrinsic doubt about the possibility of sweeping away the slave system from the American society made them skeptic to some extent. American political and legal systems were so nasty that it did not take a long time to intensify their wavering approaches towards social welfare. Their prime motive to purify human hearts through spiritual teaching appeared to be useless in front of social and political reality. This aspect reverberates in Leslie Wilson's words:

The Transcendentalists also felt some ambivalence about ardent abolitionists and others who sought to reform society through political and legal action. Transcendentalism stressed the reform of society through perfection of individual from within, not through external social means (Wilson 17).

This ambivalent nature of the transcendentalist writers seems to be the outcome of a “double conscious” (Porte 42) mind developed in the last stage of nineteenth century when material progress due to industrialization has touched the zenith and teachings of the transcendental masters have become ineffective to give lessons of idealism. They appear to become aware not only of the importance of self-reliance and individuality but also feel the inability in their part to transform the society in their desired forms either with the help of pen or of lectures delivered at different times. Instead of believing oneness of God, man and Nature which is the prime motto of the transcendental writers of America, they painfully seem to recognize the age as the age of “potentially destructive reflectiveness and self-consciousness” as well as “the age of severance, of dissociation”. The young men born in this time, as argued by Emerson himself, are “born with knives in their brain, a tendency to introversion, self-dissection, anatomizing of motives” (qtd in Porte 41). So it is noticed that transcendentalist writers owing to doubly conscious minds are torn between two extremes i.e. lure of the lifestyle provided by materialism and the urgency of spiritual life. In striving for unity between these two poles their approaches to any subject become full of doubts and they eschew in finalizing judgments. Though Emerson attacks on material lifestyle openly in his essays, he does not seem to stick to his own ideal as the material progress, economic

growth, commercialization of American society as well as American culture due to the advancement of science and technology are the main issues that always haunt him in his only support of spiritual life. Improvements in commercial sectors are so tremendous in America that “[l]iterature itself became an article of commerce at this time” (Gilmore 1). It has become mere commodity. At this critical point of time, Emerson seems to be a harsh critic of prevailing powerful economic state of affairs and scientific evolutions in the capitalist American society which, according to his view, corrupt men’s primitive soul yet at the same time being fascinated admits the overshadowing power of science and commerce and appears to eulogize scientific paraphernalia at the various points of his essays. Due to this double conscious attitude he never articulates the actual impacts of science and technology on human life and takes for himself a middle place like a true skeptic which is for him the safest place. In this aspect, Michael T. Gilmore comments, “Emerson went from condemnation to celebration of the modern economy, and even in his agrarian phase he had praise for industrialists and merchant capitalist as men of strong will who imposed their designs on nature” (8). The transition of Emerson’s attitude from idealism to realism in his appreciation of commerce signals the working of a skeptical mind that systematically ponders and contemplates over his own judgments thereby placing himself in an unconvinced position. He does not seem to accept or reject the overwhelming prosperity brought by trade and commerce in capitalist American society. Thus, “the well-known shift”, as David LaRocca argues, “from the idealistic criticisms of the market in the early Emerson to the ‘realistic’ apologies for the market in the later Emerson has much to do with the perceptions of the impotence of his criticisms” (635).

The clash between the ideal and the real seems to be intensified along with the age of technology and scientific progress and Emerson is not an exception to the ideal-real dilemma created by his age. The overshadowing influence of science has left his idealism crippled in the real world and Emerson adopts skepticism as a weapon against the orthodox authoritative hands of religion to make American minds free (see Curtz). Due to Emerson’s failure—though it may be a power to some critics—to make final judgment which is nothing but the sign of a true skeptic is recognized by Barry Tharaud as an “anarchic propensity similar to that of the leading critics of postmodernism”(449). Emerson’s anarchic propensity, unlike that of postmodernism, is viewed as psychological as well as spiritual but

lack of order and confusion are two basic qualities that both Emerson and a postmodernist embrace truly.

A dual sense and contradiction in his arguments regarding his acceptance of rural and urban life are quite evident in his writings. Fascinated by both urban and rustic landscape, Emerson seems to reconcile his attitude and becomes cautious about his own position taken on this journey. Sometimes instead of becoming happy as a possessor of the safe middle way, he expresses a sense of disappointment for his inability to pose himself in one place. The following lines express the restless feelings that Emerson has encountered, “I wish to have rural strength and religion for my children, and I wish city facility and polish. I find with chagrin that I cannot have both” (qtd in Bronski 27). Emerson’s skeptical tendencies are not simply thoughts that come to him discontinuously in intervals. These are uninterrupted processes that permeate throughout his life. Elisabeth Hurth in her “Between Faith and Unbelief: Ralph Waldo Emerson on Man and God”(2003) has rightly remarked that “the charges of skepticism, unbelief and atheism were to haunt Emerson throughout his career as minister, poet and scholar and cast a permanent shadow on his religious quest” (483). Joseph Cook in his book *Transcendentalism* (1878) delineating the nature of Transcendentalism in New England seems to place himself as a transcendentalist writer of the school of Immanuel Kant and Coleridge and finds Transcendentalism as “the science of self-evident, axiomatic, necessary truth” (49) which are “dateless eternal noon” (10) as they never become outdated.

Edited by Joel Myerson, the book *Transcendentalism: A Reader* (2000) emphasizes the futility of identifying Transcendentalism as a movement to grasp all ideas it proposes in concrete term. It appears to be very fluid and any watertight definition of it is futile. The readers who wish to define it surely undergo a sort of “hermeneutical paralysis” as they “expend almost all their energy in trying to define the movement and have little energy left to enjoy and understand the literature”. Though the followers of this movement are known as transcendentalists, they have not demanded themselves as philosophers of this particular school; apart from believing some explicit common rules by them they even not sure what are the goals of it for which they are regarded as transcendentalists. These followers seem to follow different writers and philosophers acquiring diverse knowledge as suited to their beliefs. They are “essentially syncretic” (xxv) and mix all information to form a new idea.

This fact is also repeated in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism* (2010) where Transcendentalism is identified as spiritual or religious movement of America which is “not monolithic or easily defined” (Myerson xxiv).

Though there does not appear to be a direct connection between transcendentalism and skepticism it can be argued that most of the transcendental writers who were staunch believers in the power of the human ideal world in course of time have deviated from their own beliefs and become skeptical of it. In one sense, it may be considered that both these two developments oppose one another in their respective attitude towards life and knowledge. Transcendentalists generally believe that it is not just the human senses that provide knowledge or information, the world of intuition also has sweeping power over knowledge. The similarity between transcendentalism and skepticism can be seen in one major point that the adherents of the former are skeptical about the importance of external authorities in the individual life as they celebrate the power of self-reliance as a powerful entity of human life. Any kind of support towards individualism or idealism is against the attitude of the skeptics since they tend to recognize the dual phases of everything as equally powerful; for instance, they do not support the endorsement of idealism as done by the transcendentalists; instead they doubt or suspect the ideal power since along with idealism they consider equally the other part which is materialism. This is the prime problem for the transcendentalists that they did not find any place to put their ideal philosophy in the scientific material world of America. Their plan to develop idealism which is once equated with transcendentalism has become fruitless when they consider actions and events occurred in real life.

Skepticism is not only a way or process of achieving something which is determined. Instead, it is an “intellectual and a polemical tool rather than a goal in the pursuit of a good life” (Dawe 04-05). It is a vast as well as a complicated intellectual area and cannot be reduced merely to a negative or positive idea. Sextus Empiricus, a distinguished Greek philosopher defined Skepticism as “a mental attitude which opposes appearances to judgments in any way whatsoever with the result that... we are brought firstly to a state of mental suspense and next to a state ‘unperturbedness’ or ‘quietude’” (qtd in Whitman 16). Skepticism, as argued by William Twining, involves skeptical attitude and “doubt about the

possibility of any kind of knowledge or about some specific branch of knowledge or about some particular assertion or supposed fact or about something else”. Nature of the skepticism can vary from person to person. Sceptics, as analyzed by Twining, can be “tough-minded or tender-minded, sincere or insincere, genuine or spurious” (142). Twining tries to categorize three different kinds of philosophical skepticism i.e. epistemological skepticism, ethical skepticism and irrationalism. In support of philosophical skepticism, he speaks about Anglo-American philosophers’ paying of tribute both openly and implicitly to its persistence “by treating it as their main target of attack” (149). Twining has pointed out a peculiar and an amazing kind of a skeptic terming him as ‘Thursday skeptic’ who, according to him, “acknowledges that it is notoriously difficult consistently to sustain a genuinely skeptical position” (142). A ‘Thursday Skeptic’ does not adhere constantly to his skeptical ideas and he values reasons and arguments most of the time but surrounded by doubts in various levels like a skeptic at a particular time in a Thursday.

Immanuel Kant considered skepticism as “a resting place for reason...but it cannot be its permanent dwelling-place” (427). He compared a skeptic with “nomadic tribes who hate a permanent habitation and settled mode of living, attack from time to time those who had organized themselves into civil communities” (viii). In case of a believer of this idea, a particular logic or certainty of knowledge seems to be futile as it is always in process. So any reason forwarded by him cannot last long. Like the old nomadic people who due to various reasons had shifted their dwelling position in search of an ideal convenient place to survive and who had even tried to unsettle other accumulated communities to escape any harm in future by them, skeptical minds also seem to shift themselves from one idea to other ideas or one argument to another argument. In this process of restless oscillation, they never decide anything as justified or final. Debi Prasad Chattopadhyaya in his book *Induction, Probability and Skepticism: A History of Rival Ethics and Economics* (1991) charts different forms of skepticism as initial, methodological, philosophical, scientific and universal skepticism and agrees with the view that “skeptics do not follow the same form” (118). Equating realists with skeptics he opines that in some ways or other all skeptics show tendencies of realists and vice versa. The author in the book seems to be obsessed with the ways by which skeptical challenges can be met and with examples he tries to show how philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein and G. E. More try to refute skepticism. Arguing in

support of skepticism he brings Indian context to his discussion saying that Indian philosophers like Uddyotakara and Vatsyayana see the possibility of initial doubt though they deny the possibility of skepticism. The connection of skepticism to the world of Indian philosophy is also explored by Dipankar Chatterjee who perceives a lack of remarkable skeptical attitude in the thoughts of Indian philosophers. Chatterjee goes into the depth of Indian philosophy and observes that “Indian philosophical worlds are mystically oriented; they are unaffected by the thrust of skeptic’s arguments” (195). Skepticism, as argued by him, is an “attack on the possibility of knowledge” (196) but for him, Indian methods of Carvaka, Jainism as well as Buddhism do not seem to refute the possibility of knowledge. Doubts developed seldom in the minds of Indian Vedic people and even the literature produced during the time admitted the possibility to know the real which is against the skeptical notion. Carvakas believe in perception as the way to knowledge. For them, anything that is beyond our perceiving capacity cannot lead to any justified knowledge. “Such a view”, Chatterjee maintains, “is not skepticism” (198).

In the same line, John M. Koller in “Skepticism in Early Indian Thought” (1997) seems to uphold a similar view about the Indian philosophers’ dispassionate attitude towards skepticism. In spite of various schools like Lokayata, Carvaka as well as Barhaspatya, there is very little well-known philosophical literature of skeptical thought as “Skepticism”, he argues in the first line of the article, “has not been warmly received by Indian philosophers over the ages” (155). The author finally finds an Indian mind’s too much preoccupation with the self as an important subject and subsequent “reluctance” (163) to reduce it to the position of an object to examine it critically hinder the action of skeptical attitude thereby making them less attracted to this particular philosophical idea.

Again Manfred Weidhorn in *Anatomy of Skepticism* (2006) talks about how skepticism is embedded in Christianity and argues about the possibility of a sense of anxiety regarding God’s judgments in future time which is beyond comprehension for the common people and “the result is fear and trembling begotten of doubt” (2). The doubt which is identified by Weidhorn as inevitable that makes people restless and uncomfortable and “louder is the inner voice of doubt in some or many people, the louder are the externalized public assertions of certitude”. It seems to irritate people making them impatient to know truth that

eludes every time. In the book, the author clearly divides all skeptics into two groups: hard and soft skeptics. The hard or dogmatic skeptics like Gorgias reject every possibility of truth and soft ones like Sextus Empiricus are “open minded” (3) who believe in possibility of extracting truth by a specialist. Skepticism, for Weidhorn, is “unavoidable and uncontrollable” (5).

A. J. Cascardi in one of his articles deals with the relationship between skepticism and deconstruction that various critics have tried to establish. Though a critic like J. Cantor views deconstruction as “a version of skepticism” and as a “skeptical enterprise” (1), Cascardi appears to oppose this idea as “there are significant differences between skeptical doubt and deconstructionist indeterminacy” (2). Jonathan Barnes in *Toils of Skepticism* (1990) focuses his attention on Pyrrhonian skepticism that prevailed at first in Greek philosophy, and deals particularly with the works of Sextus Empiricus, the main representative of the Pyrrhonian School. In this literary work, the “Agrippan aspect of Sextus’ Pyrronism” (Barnes ix) is dealt with meticulously. Agrippa is a scholar who is mentioned in the book named *Agrippa* written by a skeptic named Apellas. In the book, out of five chapters which are compilation of five lectures delivered by Barnes, the first four chapters lucidly deal with various arguments and beliefs of Pyrrhonian skepticism which are later used by Sextus. Though Sextus is a famous writer whose sole writings help in the survival of Pyrrhonian Skepticism, Barnes does not seem to regard him as unique because though he was “a prolific author” he is “not an original thinker” (vii). The originality of Sextus Empiricus is also doubted by R. J. Hankinson in *The Sceptics: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (1995). Though the works of Sextus seem to introduce us with Greek Skepticism he “provides a vast compendium of sceptical argument drawn from variety of earlier sources” (5) for which he cannot be regarded as an original thinker. The basic difference between Academic skepticism and Pyrrhonian skepticism as understood by Richard Popkin is that the latter “emphasize[s] in the cultivation of an *attitude*, rather than the development of an epistemological statement” (Simerka 142) which helps in the suspension of judgments. On the other hand, Academic skeptics seem to be more uncompromising in holding beliefs as for them “nothing at all can be known for certain because of the unreliability of sensory perception” (51) that makes reliable conclusion impossible.

Skepticism, therefore, is not limited to the ancient or the modern times. Traces of skepticism can also be found in the middle ages and Henrik Lagerlund in his book *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background* (2010) upholds this particular fact, that skepticism, in case of ages or periods, cannot be understood in isolation. It is a phenomenon of human thinking that permeates all historical ages. The aim of this book is the understanding of medieval skepticism that helps in perceiving other problems related to it in modern philosophy. With the help of minute analyses of the contributions made by scholars of middle age like John Dun Scotus, Ghazali, Henry of Ghent, Nicholas of Autrecourt, John Buridan, William of Ockham, Albert of Saxony and Thomas Aquinas the author shows how all of them are aware of human knowledge as well as of the problems related to it. The author argues about the places of skepticism in the medieval age which for him seems to be less prioritized. Henrik Lagerlund in the book lucidly discusses the limitations of the survival of skepticism in middle age and tries to give it a proper platform that the medieval period denies.

In the article “The Pseudo-Problem of Skepticism” (1999) Brendan Sweetman argues how the problem related to skepticism is prevalent in the minds of philosophers beginning from Descartes and asserts the truth that in spite of having been taken seriously by philosophers of many generations no solution has emerged so far. Though philosophers like Barry Stroud and Peter Unger are engaged in solving skeptical problems most of the philosophers, as Sweetman says, “regard the problem of skepticism as a wasteful academic exercise and dismiss it out of hand”. For him, the problem of skepticism is nothing but “*a pseudo-problem... and therefore not one that we should take seriously and expend much time and energy trying to solve and worry about the consequences if we fail to solve it*” (229). Again, Oscar Wilde in his famous *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (2009) regards skepticism as a kind of faith. For him, it is the “beginning of faith” (408).

Michael Shermer, an American essayist and activist regards skepticism as having the power to destroy the prevailing evils of our society like superstition and black magic as it “counterbalances them by emphasizing the value of rational inquiry” (4). Skepticism for Shermer is “not ‘seek and ye shall find’ but ‘seek and keep an open mind’” (5). Tracing relation between science and skepticism he argues that the questioning approach that is

generally adopted by a skeptic in his search for knowledge is an essential part of science. Ludwig Wittgenstein accepts a different kind of attitude towards the power of skepticism. Doubt, which is part and parcel of skeptical arguments, is seen by him to be developed only after the existence of belief. Unlike Descartes, Wittgenstein in his book *On Certainty* (1969) argues vehemently that “doubts come after belief” (qtd in Bandman 272). It is the belief that leads to the development of inquisitiveness and doubts in human beings and not the other way round as it is expected normally. The idea of skepticism as offered by him in *On Certainty* is related to the artificial stand of skepticism as it must be “self refuting” (Peterman 91) due to the contradictions and inconsistencies evolved in his arguments.

John H. Heidt in his book *A Faith for Skeptics* (2005) extensively deals with the relation between faith and skepticism. Unlike the assumption of faith and skepticism as being poles apart the author appears to find an inherent relationship between the two where one complements the other. For him “faiths, if it is the right kind of faith, and skepticism, if it is skeptical about the right things are not really contradictories but complementaries” (Heidt preface). In the chapter “A Misplaced Skepticism” he clearly outlines the predicament of a skeptical mind who with his earlier supposed beliefs about life and his surroundings finally observes incongruity after experiencing another kind of reversed and traumatic situation leading to unhappiness and disillusionment. We become doubtful when stark realities of life attack us contrary to our earlier supposed truths and “... when we discover that the self-evident truths we learned from childhood are not so self-evident after all, a terrible and even violent struggle wells up within us” (28). David Louis Sedley in *Sublimity and Skepticism in Montaigne and Milton* (2005) elaborating the idea of sublimity and skepticism with the support of various comments made by famous authors like Samuel Monk, Paul De Man, Jean Francois Lyotard and Immanuel Kant, tries to examine whether sublimity paves the path to skepticism or vice-versa. Considering all comments on this sublimity-skepticism relationship, Sedley seems to take a middle position as for him “the two early modern phenomena, the rise of the sublime as an aesthetic category and emergence of skepticism as a philosophical problem, are interrelated” (8). This conclusion is drawn by him with the help of solid critical observations made on the writings of Montaigne and Milton. For him sublimity is not merely a style; it symbolizes something more than that. By drawing the

relationship between them Sedley says “a skeptic resides in a state of ignorance” (11) and this ignorance is the place where sublimity thrives on.

Skepticism in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s writings has been discussed by critics at different times. In the article “Neither Here nor There: On Grief and Absence on Emerson’s ‘Experience’” (2010) Ryan White discusses Emerson’s skeptical behavior which had surfaced after the death of his son Waldo and is seen as “a major schism in his life” (285). Ryan critically examines Emerson’s inability to deal with the outer world’s facts with the language used in the essay “Experience” and perceives Emerson’s concern as “faultiness of language” (285). Rejecting Sharon Cameron’s observation of Emersonian grief as bold and pervasive, Ryan White seems to accept grief as outer reality to Emerson and holds that grief “comes and goes of its own accord because it is external to Emerson himself” (289). The author seems to identify Emerson’s skepticism as “a bargain”, a word borrowed from Breitweiser, which would “sacrifice happiness to gain freedom from fright” (299). So it seems that Emerson is intentionally denying love or showing indifference to the death of his son so that he can thwart mourning or grief. The problem of Emerson’s life, as he argues, is the presence of a “threat” which is nothing but “an enervating skepticism” (291). Stanley Cavell’s reading of Emerson is one of the most significant contributions to the field of American philosophical writings. His sharp observations on Emerson’s diverse literary works have paved a smooth path to be followed by other scholars. His book *Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes* (2003) is one of such endeavors known for the “insistence on Emerson’s philosophicality” in his writings (2). In the same line, Richard Deming observes, “Cavell insists that Emerson’s thinking has been systematically repressed and has not been taken seriously ... as philosophy” (819). Cavell seems to be more preoccupied with the ideas of practical life as envisaged by Emerson who is identified as “a muse of pragmatism” (Cavell 7). In *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (1994) Cavell discusses both Romanticism and Transcendentalism by bringing various luminaries like Emerson, Edgar Allen Poe, Henry David Thoreau, Wordsworth and Coleridge to his discussions. Along with such topics, he also portrays skepticism as an indispensable dispensation which is “an argument internal to the individual or separate, human creature, as it were an argument of the self with itself”. It is a “secular place” (5) that signify “repression

of knowledge” the beginning of which is “the insinuation of absence of a line, or limitation” (51).

Michael Fischer in *Stanley Cavell and Literary Skepticism* (1989) explores Cavell’s interdisciplinary interests. Cavell is read ardently not only by the students of painting, music, film and photography but that of literature as well because he shows his keen critical interest in reading the literary works of Thoreau, Emerson and Shakespeare. Bringing together Cavell’s writings on skepticism and that of other poststructuralist critics like Stanley Fish, Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida, Fischer draws a connection among them as he finds “important affinities between post-structuralist criticism and traditional epistemological skepticism that concerns Cavell” (1). Cavell’s argument for the unavoidable conditions associated with skepticism is portrayed in the book *Stanley Cavell and Literary Studies: Consequences of Skepticism* (2011) where it is regarded as an “existential condition that is inevitably lived whether destructively or productively”. Thus the doubt grown out of skepticism is a “reflection of inescapable finitude that characterizes every human life” (1). Tracing similarities between T. S. Eliot and Emerson, John Clendenning in his article “Time, Doubt and Vision: Notes on Emerson and T. S. Eliot” (1966-67) has argued that both writers have developed similar tendencies regarding the meaning of human experience in the material world and the possibility of acquiring knowledge. With bold examples, he has insisted on the importance of evaluating the writings of both Eliot and Emerson on the same ground as “they shared a similar concept of time, an insistence on the necessity of skepticism and a religion based on faith as opposed to reason” (126). According to the author, Eliot is full of praise for the doubtful attitude that Emerson had held and it is named “‘Boston doubt’, a doubt that is believed to be a fundamental and unique characteristic of American mind” (128). Here Emerson is said to be “born with a knife in his brain” (132) as his skeptical attitude is sharp enough like a knife to cut into pieces any dogmatic beliefs. Both Emerson’s poem “Days” (1857) and Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915) noticeably reveal the power of time and experience that actually deceives us. Owing to the same shared ideas Clendenning has identified Prufrock as “a latter-day Emersonian, one of ‘several thousands of well-bred people in a provincial American town’ who has faced the ‘Boston doubt’ ” (131).

In “Emerson and Economics” (1940) Alexander C. Kern underlines the difficulty of understanding Emerson as well as his economic notions as Emerson “contains fragments of every type of view” (678). Though basically a transcendentalist it is useless to categorize him as a particular writer owing to his eclectic selections of subject matters. Examining the economic thoughts as shared by Emerson, Kern seems to identify him both as an idealist and a materialist. Russell Sbriglia argues that Emerson’s transcendentalism reflects a process of “limited transcendence” (1). Sbriglia is of the opinion that Emerson’s skepticism is not only external as he has also internalized it “as a means of examining and interrogating his own position” and this fact is reflected in most of his essays. Emerson is seen as a person who is more preoccupied with questions related to ethics than epistemological ones. Even his self-interrogation or “revising of the self” is also identified as “ethical maneuvers” (3). He appears to have emphasized more on internal skepticism and firmly believed that “if our education is to teach us anything it much teach us to be skeptical ourselves, to be averse to wedding ourselves to paltry performances and therefore ossifying into an ‘attained’ self” (13). In the same light, Stanley Cavell also focuses on Emerson’s constant longing for “an unattained but attainable self” (12). In spite of the repeated endeavor to achieve that unattained self as revealed in some of his essays, Emerson seems to undergo a lifelong process that has not come to an end.

Robert C. Miner in “Pascal on the Uses of Skepticism” (2008) attributes power and glory to skepticism as it plays a “constructive role in the very process of seeking” (114) that ultimately makes us familiar with knowledge. It empowers us in the process of searching truth of any kind and finally “protects us from arbitrary conclusion” (120) as our search continues. Though Pascal seems to deny the existence of total skepticism he has not altogether eschewed himself from the positive side of it as due to its “extraordinarily potent force that demands close attention” (113). Miner in that article has asserted the possibility of the existence of two types of skeptics i.e. ‘smug skeptic and ‘seeking skeptic’. The first one is “a dogmatist in disguise” whereas the seeking skeptics are the “real skeptic[s]” who “sincerely lament their doubt, who regard it as the ultimate misfortune, and who sparing no effort to escape from it make their search the principal and most serious business” (114). Artur I. Ladu in “Emerson: Whig or Democrat.”(1940) explores the possibility of identifying Emerson both as a Whig and a Tory simultaneously as he is seen to take the side

of both parties at various moments. Though mostly he is regarded by many critics as a supporter of liberal political ideas with the tendencies to reform the society from the orthodox religious or other social practices like slavery, at the same time, as argued by Ladu, “they notice, but usually do not attempt to explain his conservative and aristocratic utterances” (419-420). Emerson seems to be cautious about his opinions regarding political judgments made at various times. Though a solid supporter of Democracy, Emerson in his later life has become doubtful of the ideas held by the democrats of his time as “they did not base political action on morality or shape their politics toward the promotion of political culture” (433). Slowly he seems to develop hatred for the Democrats and their incapacity to give society something as envisaged by him. But as an alternative he even has not found proper solace in the Whig party as an opposition to Democratic one as the former like the later also has “failed at length to found their conduct on ethical principles and to seek as their supreme aim the full cultural and spiritual development of the individual” (440-441). Emerson has noticed vices and shortcomings of both the parties and thereby seeks a different place congenial for him and his opinions. Thus the never-ending search continues within his mind.

Like A. J. Cascardi, David Smith in his article “Emerson and Deconstruction: The End(s) of Scholarship”(1984) has clearly identified similarities between Emerson’s skepticism and Derrida’s Deconstruction and has argued that like the other deconstructionists “Emerson recognized that the mind’s longing for Presence coexists with a skepticism that undermines this aim at every point” (382). Like the notion of deconstruction about the elusive nature of a center that cannot be located Emerson also seems to find no center to be based upon by any definite knowledge. The “irreducible doubleness” (385) and contradictions which are indispensable parts of the Emersonian world appear to shackle him in his search for final knowledge. His simultaneous attachment to dualism and contradictions like liberalism and conservatism, idealism and realism, unity and variety reflect his skeptical temperament. Owing to his continual cerebral search for the meaning of life, in spite of his awareness of its impossibility, the author has termed him an “experimenter” (386), an “endless seeker”(388) and a “celebrant of transition in the mind’s life” (386). The quest for any foundation is absent in both cases.

Skepticism has always seemed to be a haunting and lingering term in the world of philosophy and to understand its various aspects is a continual process for many scholars. Jonathan Vogel is one of them who in an article “Skeptical Arguments” (2004) has marked the skeptical problem as “*underdetermination problem*” (426). According to this underdetermination principle, no conclusion can be drawn as there are rival competitors to prevent it from being an ultimate conclusion. In *Emerson and Science* (2005) Peter A. Obuchowski endeavors to focus on Emerson’s attitude towards scientific discoveries and explores how owing to a cynical temperament Emerson abstains from adhering to a single and absolute idea regarding scientific advancement and its material impact on the spiritual ideas of Transcendentalism. Obuchowski relates scientific views of Emerson with those of Goethe. The author identifies lifelong interests of Emerson on science as his “scientific thinking is intimately related to his thought as a whole” (Obuchowski Introduction). Because of the inability to make a final judgment, even in the writings on science, Obuchowski argues, “Emerson ranges from extreme censure to extreme praise” (Introduction) which indicates the unsteadiness and undecidability of his mind as he sees both positive and negative sides of scientific discoveries that had already engulfed the American society. His lasting interest on science rests upon his unending endeavor to reconcile with his two separate views occupying his mind at the same time and each of the two views seems to demand its validity thereby creating a massive tension in his psyche.

Emerson’s hesitant mind seems to have grappled with a chain of doubts as he himself poorly reacted to the situation when the question of importance has come between society and solitude. In spite of Emerson’s desire to live in a complete solitary place outside from the world of day-to-day social activities, it appears that he becomes doubtful about its inherent values as “extreme solitariness invites intellectual claustrophobia and solipsism” (Hall 119). So it can be perceived that Emerson being aware of this fact seems to incline towards social engagement along with his belief in the importance of seclusion. H. G. Callaway with his subtle observation finds a tension in Emerson’s psyche regarding these two aspects i.e. Society and Solitude. He sums up the dual nature of Emerson as “both individualist and universalist...both radical and pluralist and universalistic monist; he aims for greatest possible universality” (qtd. in Hall 122). In the same way, Fabian Ironside also discovers the

same truth in Emerson's essays for whom in most of the essays he "fluctuates between dismay and ecstasy, optimism and skepticism before he closes" (176).

As expressed in his book *Emerson* (2003) Lawrence Buell identifies Emerson who "dearly loves to affirm unity and harmony of being" (208) at the same time recognizes his failure to do that at some points of his life who constantly strives to achieve that unity and finally adopts dubious or skeptical path which is viewed by Buell as "wise" (208) and in following this road instead of lamenting Emerson appears to enjoy it. Rather than regarding Emerson as a devoted philosopher concerned with the subjects related to the mind and the soul, Buell appears to be happier to label him as an "ethicist for whom the core concern was negotiation of life in the world" (210). Emerson, a strong individual not frightened by conventions of his time, seems to have been worried and troubled as he is "afflicted with a more spiritual malady, a sense of drift and disorientation (111). He had envisaged a particular social structure suited for American life. But at the same time, he was skeptical about the possibility of doing this. His hope turned to mere disappointment as everything was changing there before his eyes. Though a pure idealist, Meola argues, "at times it seems Emerson wanted to overwhelm himself with the world's material reality, as if in a determined effort to correct his perpetual tendency to idealize and dream" (117). Due to this dual nature, Emerson has "preferred a middle ground" (120).

Again owing to this particular duality of Emerson, in "Bi-Polar Emerson: Nominalist and Realist" (2013), Joseph Urbas has even called him "Bi-polar" (78) who accepts two contradictory poles i.e. both Realism as well as Nominalism.

Michael L. Deery in his thesis entitled "On the Brink of the Waters of the Life and Truth, We are Miserably Dying: Ralph Waldo Emerson as a Predecessor of Deconstruction and Postmodernism" (2005) identifies in Emerson the tendencies of deconstruction as well as postmodernism as the language used by him appears to be a futile attempt to understand God and he comes to believe that "God [is] unknowable, and ultimately his writing emits pessimism because of his evolving agnostic thoughts" (2). As revealed in his essays Emerson's increasing suspect on the possibility of language and art that he employed to know the ultimate truth can be seen as a part of his skeptical beliefs and this fact "aligns him with the postmodern movement and install his thought as a precursory source for

deconstruction” (3). Emerson who contradicts himself in his essays regarding his claims to know the truth and ultimately the failure to recognize it is seen by Deery as due to the crippled nature of his language. Merely establishing Emerson as an optimist as done by Lawrence Buell, is understood by Deery as “a partial reading” (5) of Emerson’s work. Instead of that, he appears to see him (Emerson) as a writer who “emits pessimism” (2) and becomes “skeptical of mankind’s ability to transcend God” (5).

As the review of literature presented shows, the commentary on skepticism in Emerson has been largely piecemeal and sporadic in volume and treatment. The critical literature on Emerson’s essays has kept this significant aspect of Emerson at the periphery while focusing largely on Emerson as a transcendentalist. The review of literature on skepticism as a philosophy and on skepticism in literature indicates that there exists a lacuna in Emerson criticism as far as the vital presence and aspects of skepticism in his essays is concerned.

The present study conducts a close reading of selected major essays of Emerson with a view to addressing the existing research gap by exploring the various and complex implications of skepticism in Emerson’s essays. The objective of the study is to highlight *the nature* of Emersonian skepticism as revealed in the selected essays. The aim of the study is to attempt a comprehensive study of Emerson’s skepticism so as to understand a key aspect of the writer that still invites wide-ranging and in-depth exploration. The study of necessity is on generic or abstract themes like Friendship, Politics, Experience, Life, and Fate since the focus is on the nature of his skeptical writings. The selected essays are subjected to close reading using the relevant literature on skepticism as a philosophy as well as the general attributes of literary skepticism.

Chapter I entitled “Introduction: The Skeptical Tradition and Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Essays” covers some of the fundamental aspects like writings of Emerson in general, introduction to skepticism and its impact on literature as well as in Emerson’s literary essays. This chapter is a preface to the whole idea and nature of skepticism as Emerson imbibes in his lifetime. It also contains reviews of literature that help to understand how Emerson is critically seen by various writers time to time with respect to his inclination

towards skepticism. It also helps in shedding light on those aspects or areas that have been given less critical attention till date by the previous authors.

The second chapter, “Emerson, Epistemology and Skepticism,” includes three of the famous essays of Emerson, namely, “Experience” (1844), “Montaigne, or The Skeptic” (1850) and “Plato; or the Philosopher” (1850) where the author extensively deals with the idea of skepticism especially, in the first two. This chapter is an endeavor to understand how Emerson keeps his views in a middle position or in a mid-world which is endorsed by himself in the essay “Montaigne, or the Skeptic”. The essay “Experience” published in a period of transition of his life from optimism to skepticism about the possibility of acquiring absolute knowledge beyond the power physical experience, marks this mid-world or “temperate zone” (“Experience” 65) as important for a skeptical mind. Montaigne is seen as an ardent supporter of this mid-world who, similar to Emerson, appears to accept the fact that there is something which is not entirely knowable in search of the truth or knowledge. So both authors speak of the “middle region of human being” or the “position of equilibrium” (“Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 240). Montaigne, highly esteemed by Emerson in the essay ‘Montaigne, or the Skeptic’, is placed among the chosen individuals in *The Representative Men* (1850) who create lasting impressions upon Emerson and his principles. Similarly, the famous classical Greek philosopher Plato is also among the notable personalities whose life as well as his judgments and opinions have left an enduring impact on Emerson’s life, and the essay “Plato; or the Philosopher” exclusively deals with the philosophical ideas of this classical figure as Emerson seeks solutions to the philosophical problems of life in Plato. Indeed Emerson “sees his works as extension of Plato’s” (Bailey 79). Being a supporter of the mid-world who avoids polarity or extremity in all cases of judgments, Emerson is always in search of a balanced or impartial soul which he finds both in Plato and Montaigne. Emerson acknowledges in “Experience” that “[t]he mid-world is best” (65) and the balanced soul can only occupy the middle region or the temperate zone. This kind of soul is empowered with two elements simultaneously—i.e. body and the soul who does not completely prefer one over the other and hence suspends his or her judgments. Emerson’s endorsement of Montaigne and Plato seems to be understandable to the point that similar to the two great personalities he also oscillates between his acknowledgment of the power of the self-reliance and skepticism towards it.

Chapter III entitled “Central Skeptical Concerns in Human Relationships” covers three chapters “Experience” (1844) “Friendship” (1841) and “Fate” (1860) vividly employs the notion of ‘lords of life’ as enumerated by Emerson in “Experience” saying that there are seven kinds of lords that dictate human life at diverse points of time to make people submissive to their overwhelming powers. These masters or lords are the chief components that seem to inform Emerson about the influence of skepticism as they are the bedrock of the Emersonian shift from his realization of self-reliance and individualism to the doubtful attitude towards it. The essay “Experience” has declared these ‘lords of life’ as Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface, Surprise, Reality and Subjectiveness that are also reverberated in the other two essays—“Friendship” and “Fate”. “Friendship” as published in *Essays: First Series* (1841) is a fine meditation on subjects like affection and discontent veiled in human affairs at different junctures of life. In it, the central focus of Emerson seems to be weighing up this cordial relationship by analyzing the advantages as well as the disadvantages associated with this kind of human bond. But the skepticism of friendship as developed in the mind of the essayist does not seem to help him to come up with a solution. As a result of it, Emerson is notably seen to postpone his judgment regarding the effectiveness of friendship or other human bonds in real life. The essay constitutes an extended sequence of contemplation as well as argumentative dialogues on friendship which is for Emerson nothing but “a sort of paradox in nature” (“Friendship 195”). It is “uneasy pleasures, “fine pains”, and “delicious torment” (190). The lords like Illusion, Surprise and Reality seem to work persistently to unmask the genuine face of friendship that has sown the seeds of skepticism in Emerson about the need of human intimacy, though sometimes it appears to inculcate sincerity in the character of a person who has close acquaintances. Similarly the essay “Fate” that was published in the later part of Emerson’s literary career when he acquires both sweet and bitter taste of life. Both the essays i.e. “Experience” and “Fate” appear to be significant for Emerson as they portrays how optimism, as esteemed in “Self-Reliance” (1841), is withered gradually in the face of hard realities of life. “Fate” is a fine exhibition of Emerson’s helpless condition when what he can do is only to accept the power of the providence. He appears to realize the existence of some external circumstances—which can be identified as ‘lords of life’—that challenge the power of idealism which was once above all for Emerson. These lords contrive with human fate to

teach individuals the feebleness of their potential. Though Emerson does not completely turn away from the idea of self-reliance as a persuasive force to place individuals triumphantly in the midst of all adversaries of life, his doubt about the supremacy of idealism in the epoch of materialism and scientific progress seems to loom large undoubtedly to the extent that he acknowledges the power of human fate as unchallenging and unstoppable in life.

Chapter IV entitled “Emerson’s Approach to Life” mainly covers “Experience” (1844), “Illusions” (1860) and “Circles” (1841), essays that appear to be the embodiment of Emerson’s approach towards life and exploration of the principles and ideas he upholds from 1841 to 1860 which of course a crucial stage of development of his existence along with the acquisition of skepticism. Throughout the chapters as included in the thesis work, the essay which is most discussed is undeniably “Experience” as it sheds light persistently on the transitional period Emerson has undergone in his life. This literary piece of work brings out the issues that are crucial to comprehending Emerson’s outlook towards skepticism. Again, the essay “Illusions” is about unmasking the truth that human senses do not provide all-encompassing knowledge as the lord Illusion is the backbone of human inability that shuts all individuals in a world of mere appearances. Emerson regards that there are “pillows of illusion” (“Illusions” 292) that dictate human life without providing the essence of truth or knowledge. Individuals can only dream of getting the truth at hand and one dream only takes them to another one as there is no end to illusions. Both “Experience” and “Illusions” dig out the fact that a melancholic tendency prevails in the latter part of Emerson’s career and the literary works are the best embodiment to mark it out noticeably.

The last chapter “Conclusion: The Nature of Skepticism in Emerson’s Essays” is an attempt to find out the nature or the basic features of Emersonian skepticism. This part is the summation of all the preceding chapters. It attempts to investigate the nature and the cause of the transitionality of his opinions and thereby explores the philosophy of process or expansion Emerson has been familiar with throughout his life. Another significant aspect of this section is the investigation whether his skepticism is only a temporary phase or a permanent chapter of his life.

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CHAPTER II

Emerson, Epistemology and Skepticism

The idea of the ‘mid-world’ or the ‘middle region’ is one of the central motifs in Emerson’s writings. His literary works, especially the essays, are solemnly engaged in finding and thereby bestowing unparalleled values to this place. It is not a physical place to be sought; it lies in the mind of a human being that helps in assessment or judgment of notions and ideas. It is that analytical place where a man of refined thoughts essentially feels empowered in providing his opinions regarding two conflicting issues or themes and in so doing, making himself the perfect contender of this middle world that can be obtained when an individual avoids extremes. The idea of “the middle region of our being” (65) as outlined by Emerson in “Experience” stipulates avoiding a solely spiritual or physical life. Human power, as Emerson seems to believe, lies in combining the two opposite elements—spiritual and material—as both have an equal share in making life complete.

According to Robert Corrington this mid-world “stands between self and the environment and holds both together in co-transparency” (8) and this motif is so powerful in Emerson’s literary works that “it would not be an exaggeration to say that Emerson stands as one of the early pioneers of Midworld” (5).

Emerson’s support of it is a direct signaling to his repulsion to excess or departure to a position or a point which is viewed by him as a “temperate zone” (“Experience” 65); a place without any friction or any irregularities of life. His aversion to either the poles of life—positive and negative, material and spiritual—may also be seen as a kind of reluctance to accept any kind of nuances that his personal life seems to offer. Simultaneous awareness of the two sides of life is possible if someone resides in the middle ground of life; any argument or any opinion seems to be relevant at all levels as they come out from the middle sector. Inhabitants of either of the two opposite poles or extremes—the materialist and the spiritualist, for example—will surely miss the reality or the truth of life. In Emerson’s case too, a similar kind of harmonious combination of the two occurs as he imbibes both of them. His praising of the middle region as “best” (66) in the essay “Experience” inevitably

indicates his own nature and his attitude towards life. Peter Balaam has marked out Emerson's support for opposing sides as, "attempting to address [Emerson's] awareness of the perpetual 'discrepance' between the evidence of human significance and the shabby experience of so many actual days, Emerson advocates for both sides of the equation with equal vehemence"(54). There he finds no compatibility between the power of the individual as a significant being and the possibility of experience in real life. He becomes doubtful of the power of the self-reliant individualism which he propounds earlier because in the later part of his life he finds that the self is not so powerful as he had thought it to be; the death of his son Waldo and the subsequent failure in his part to experience the reality which was the death itself makes him feel that one does not seem to gain what he actually aims at and this is a catastrophe for him.

Muhammad Quayum compares Emerson's power to this sweet blend with Walt Whitman as both show dual tendencies towards the spiritual world and the material world. For him, "although they were interested in a spiritual life and in the higher consciousness of human beings, they were not indifferent to the individual's physical or practical side" (19). Both are aware of the fact that the pleasant combination of the material world and the spiritual world is the ultimate route that will lead them to the middle region of the human being which is a "temperate zone" ("Experience"65). In seeking a permanent place in the mid-world Emerson adheres himself to both sides as he doubts the sole utility or value of only one aspect of them. For instance, he not only insists on ideal or spiritual part of life like a typical transcendentalist for whom unlike the spiritual world or the world of ideas the material world is merely an illusory world. He embraces the truth of the physical world also along with the spiritual world. He sometimes behaves like a true pragmatist. Recognizing the power of material world or the wealthy life he says in the essay "Wealth" (1876): "Poverty demoralizes...The world is his who has money to go over it...Man was born to be rich, or, inevitably grows rich by the use of his faculties; by the union of thought with nature" (78-86).

Discernment of the real world is somewhat crippled as human perception plays the role of an antagonist. Perception or observation never introduces people with actual knowledge as it changes with time. Our sense organs are not always decisive; human life, as Emerson says in

“Experience”, is “not so much threatened as our perception” (“Experience” 49). The inability of human beings to grasp the reality of life, which seems to be the main cause behind his skeptical nature, is due to some opium-like substances present in all events of life that create drowsiness in them and it is as if they move to and fro without knowing the destination. Emerson appears to identify similar kinds of condition when he exclaims with regret, “[w]hat opium is instilled into all disaster!” .There is the “most slippery sliding surface” that holds knowledge or truth along with the individuals. It is the lack of a “rough rasping friction” (51) to have a direct and lasting contact between the individual and the truth. Emerson believes that human beings can never attain “sharp peaks and edges of truth”. Grief itself appears to be shallow for him that “plays about with the surface” (52) without introducing Emerson to the reality which is the demise of his son. He grieves that he cannot feel or experience the reality.

For the skeptic, no fact is absolute and to know the slippery nature of truth or reality one must know how to accommodate both sides of human thought. The search for truth is an ongoing process of human life as one should be ready to accept a number of surprises that can come in one’s journey, making him/her contemplate several times on an issue or truth as assumed so far. While assuming a middle position an individual may be able to accept any surprise life offers to consider or to weigh them. Those surprises are to give one the taste of good and evil at the same time. They give the individual a chance to refine his thought process and to enrich the mental faculties while considering both sides before giving a final judgment. Human life, as Emerson marks in “Experience”, is “a series of surprises and would not be worth taking or keeping if it were not” (69). It aids or avails them to understand the fact that no truth is certain; in fact, it is “an apprenticeship to the truth” (“Circles” 281).

The essay “Experience”, along with other essays, deals at length with epistemology which is an important aspect in the philosophical quest of Emerson; he combines the ethical, moral and metaphysical along with the epistemological aspects in them. It is difficult to see his essays from one direction as he comprehensively puts all these aspects into the various themes of discussion.

Emerson seems to believe that while acquiring knowledge or information a man may come under the compulsion of human temperament or mood that inevitably shapes his understanding of a situation or knowledge of the external world. Pure knowledge or fact is not attained by human beings. Human temper or disposition appears to dictate a man while comprehending a matter. Human temper colors our point of view and thereby directs our perception. Stanley Cavell in *The Senses of Walden: An Expanded Edition* (1992) has suitably pointed out this fact regarding Emerson saying that, his brilliant piece of work “Experience” is on the subject of “the epistemology, or say the logic of moods” (Cavell 126). Emerson seems to be obsessed with the power of human senses to acquire knowledge while writing “Experience” but this interest does not last for long as his essays published later part of his life are the best example of this shift. Van Leer has pointed out that “[i]n the late essays in general, and “Fate” in particular, Emerson seems to confess his disinterest in the epistemological project so prominent up through “Experience” (qtd in Larocca 653). This may be due to the fact that essay like “Fate” has made him feel the power of external objects that dictates human understating of a subject or a matter. Emerson becomes more conscious of the subduing power of those exterior forces like the seven lords of life that control or check the supremacy of individualism and self-reliance. Emerson’s growing awareness of the deception of human senses to get acquainted with the reality of life leads him to a skeptical approach regarding his own earlier belief in the self. He doubts the empirical power of human senses and calls it as “paltry empiricism” (“Experience” 85).

Stephen Mullhall in “Can There be an Epistemology of Moods?”(1996) opines that moods play a vital role where acquiring knowledge is concerned. The moods, which are an inseparable part of the emotional condition of the man, color their judgments of the outer world and influence the way of thinking. Mullhall compares the emotional and rational conditions of the human being as,

The rational or cognitive side of human nature is often defined in contrast to its affective or emotional side, the latter being understood as having no role to play in the revelation of reality. On the contrary, where reason and senses can combine to disclose the way things are, moods typically cloud that cognitive access by projecting purely a subjective coloration on the world and leading us to attribute

properties or qualities to it which have at best purely personal and internal reality (191).

Emerson seems to equate moods with seven lords of life. These lords or so-called moods come before we acquire knowledge and shape our understanding of a subject according to the mood we are undergoing at that particular moment of time. Moods command human perceptions that ultimately limit their power to knowledge. These moods or lords are “likely to dictate beforehand the shape of one’s epistemology” (Bloom 79). The knowledge of the absolute truth is something ungraspable. Truth, as Emerson argues in “Fate”, is “in the air” (“Fate” 276). For him, it is better to remain in the mid-world which seems to be the closest distance from truth without going to any polar point. Truth for him has a fluid nature which cannot be located at one point in time. Emerson’s philosophy is backed by a sense of fluidity or an ongoing process present in everyday life and the book *The Major Prose: Ralph Waldo Emerson* (2015) edited by Ronald Bosco and Joel Myerson has appropriately marked this fact proposing that Emerson bestows on his readers “a process philosophy, or ontology of being” (xvi) that is worth following in all aspects of life.

The reality is surrounded by several layers of falsity or inaccuracy; it can never be grabbed either being spiritual or being material in nature. Barry Albert Wood notices that “despite his overriding desire to reality as a whole rather than dualism Emerson refused to limit reality or man either a material or spiritual level: his intuition would never allow it” (9). The middle region is never going to be occupied by those who reside in either of the extreme poles of life and harbor either too radical or too orthodox tendencies in their outlooks. But the people with dual consciousness,—for instance, Emerson (see Porte 42)—who does not adhere to any kind of established notion or philosophy do possess the power. According to David Robinson, this double consciousness is born at that moment when “the brief experience of spiritual ecstasy casts its disparaging shadow over the course of ordinary life” (57).

The doubtful situation for Emerson seems to arise when he comprehends the difficulty to arrive at the truth owing to the position he occupies in the process of knowing. He imagines himself caught between the two opposite points but fails to locate himself in any one of it. In the very beginning of “Experience”, he explains this predicament as,

Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes and believed that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one which go upward and out of sight (49).

Human beings do not seem to know the reality because they “live amid surfaces” (62) which cannot be penetrated to grasp reality. The discovery of this predicament as Emerson is talking about in the above-mentioned line is called “Fall of Men” (77) that is the “‘discovery we have made’...that our flux of moods only ‘play about the surface’ and never introduces [us] to reality” (Rothman 273).

Emerson perceives “the middle region” (“Experience” 65) as a kind of power or control over any changes of life. He himself stands on this ground inviting his readers to adapt themselves to such an environment or world. His adhesion to this ground provides him “moderates goods” only and he is happy to have it without any complaint. This may be the attitude of a skeptic who seems to be pleased with such a condition. Emerson says in “Experience”

I compared notes with one of my friends who expects everything of the universe and is disappointed when anything is less than the best, and I found that I begin at the other extreme, expecting nothing, and am always full of thanks of moderate goods (64).

Emerson knows that human beings are surrounded by surfaces that cannot be penetrated and “true art of life is to skate well on them” (62). He is not going to propound any formula for it but to convey to the reader the message that people do not seem to experience all that they wish to do; absolute truth is unattainable and so, for him, it is preferable to behave like an experimenter or an “endless seeker” in all matters. He assures that “no facts are sacred; none are profane” (“Circles” 297); so it is useless to make any claim which is final. It is human tendency to come quickly to a conclusive argument or a justified point or position without giving a pause or to rethink about a matter or issue. Dylan Weller marks this fact as “one of the dangers of philosophy” and Emerson at this critical moment “places emphasis on the

need to spend time with the simple, yet deeply mysterious and transformative questions” (93).

The essay “Experience” has raised the question regarding the capability of individuals to acquire knowledge. Stanley Cavell in “Thinking of Emerson” (1979) has rightly marked that this essay is about “epistemology, or say the logic, of moods” (168). Emerson in “Experience” views “pedantries” or “fineries” (61) with critical eyes and respects the “mid world” (66) that can be found on the “highway” (65) of life. The best thoughts of life are produced in this particular pleasant zone or in the “highway” that, according to John Lysaker, “entails a rejection of esoteric paths ‘into the cold realm of pure geometry’ as well as a crass empiricism that takes nature to be just as it is given to, or even as , sensation” (124). The highway indicates the broad and smooth area of the human mind that gets enough space to meditate on an idea. Ian McGuire comments that this road or highway as Emerson seems to recommend, is not merely “a place of movement or transition but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a place defined by its position in the midst of things. It is the most frequently taken and the most direct route, but it is also paradoxically, a difficult path to stick to” (88). Following this route is difficult as it demands a twofold consciousness of an individual about a thing or about an idea.

The mid-world is the realm which is free from all obscurities of life. A skeptic appears to be an inhabitant of this region as indicated by Emerson who avoids having any attachments with the extremes. He constantly and cautiously examines his own dwelling place and finds it comfortable. For him finding oneself in the extreme positions is wrong as he is aware that extremity should be avoided. It only provides a limit to a person. A man dwelling in the mid-world knows the fact that there “much is to say on both sides” (“Experience”67) and therefore his position ultimately offers him the chance to say that all with a critical eye. Similarly, in the essay “Montaigne, or the Skeptic”, Emerson opines, “[i] know that human strength is not in extremes, but in avoiding extremes” (236) and the primary task of a skeptic is to know how to do that efficiently. Extremes or the polarity can only be avoided if the balance can be made and Emerson is always in the hunt for that balancing power in man which he subsequently finds in individuals like Plato and Montaigne. He believes that only a balanced individual knows the “true art of life” (“Experience” 62) which is to survive

smoothly on the surfaces or the illusions of life. Illusions threaten people at all levels thwarting all predetermined plans or goals. Only the balanced soul knows the art of mastery above all these obstacles. The inhabitant of the middle region of life has the power to thrive at any place as he knows how to skate on the slippery or illusory grounds of life. As his foothold is not grounded in any certain places permanently he is capable enough to move from one region to the other region freely. According to Emerson, a balanced soul is empowered with the “native force” who may prosper both in the extreme positions of human habitation i.e., in “oldest moldiest conventions” and in “the newest world” (62). A man of skeptical mind seems to postpone his judgment as final and thereby he is flexible enough to suit himself to these two worlds.

Emerson openly declares in the essay “Experience”, “[h]uman life is made up of the two elements, power and form, and the proportion must be invariably kept if we would have it sweet and sound. Each of these elements in excess makes a mischief as hurtful as its defect” (67-68). The harmonized balance of the power and the form, as Emerson considers, can only help a person occupying the mid-world. Leaning too much towards one side of the two elements will imbalance the whole way of perception of an individual and then the taste of the result will be sour; sweetness lies in understanding the value of both sides. A “sweet and sound” (68) judgment is actually the result of a keen analysis of a careful mind. Emerson emphatically declares his inherent belief in the urgency of mid-world as,

The middle region of our being is a temperate zone. We may climb into the thin and cold realm of pure geometry and lifeless science, or sink into that of sensation. Between these extremes is the equator of life, of thought, of spirit, of poetry,—a narrow belt... The mid-world is best (65).

The intermediate region is the proper setting apt for the skeptic; it is the place “of consideration, of self-containing; not at all of unbelief, not at all of universal denying; nor of universal doubting”. A skeptical mind, for instance, as Montaigne, considers, does not affirm anything as final. The man arguing from the middle region is not unprotected; he is free from the danger of vulnerability. It is as if he has built a house suitable for all weather conditions. “It is one of more opportunity and range,” Emerson continues, “as when we build a house, the rule is to set it not too high nor too low, under the wind, but out of the

dirt” (“Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 238). He is the man who seems to belong to the “third party” that cannot be categorized as a total believer or unbeliever of any fact or knowledge. When a man from this party gazes at something he knows well that what is before his eyes is not ultimate knowledge he is searching for; he acknowledges the fact that, “.I see plainly...that I cannot see” (236). He admits that there is something which is beyond the comprehensive faculties of him and stepping into the middle ground only enables him to understand his own power. He is aware of how to maintain the balance between the two extremes.

Life gives us surprises at every moment; it is too delicate and hard to pin down and everything cannot be understood as being glued to one extreme corner. People should know how to come out of the “narrow coop” of life and should be vigilant of all directions as Emerson says “there is much to say on all sides” (237). Acquiring the mid-world is not a trouble-free task as for him it is a “narrow belt” (“Experience” 65) which is difficult to pass through. It is a matter of maintaining balance while walking through this narrow road of life though it is considered as a comfortable zone. This balance can only be achieved by winning the tug of war between opposite impulses within people. This Emersonian vision of existence of two concurrent opposite worlds clearly explores his double consciousness mind. Emerson seems to perceive all in dual terms and strives to deal with a subject that essentially helps him finding out more opinions and views.

Quayum has summed up the Emersonian philosophy of doubleness in the following three points: “Both nature and human beings are in configuration of the two opposing poles of the universe; i.e. physical/spiritual and body/soul; therefore in order to retain his human condition, the individual has to find “the middle region”, “the temperate zone” and the “mid-world” between the two.” (13) All individuals should know how to coordinate with all sides in a harmonizing way along with expressing conviction in the unification of these opposites. Quayum in the concluding part of this book has provided the solution to transit to the middle ground:

This ‘temperate zone, ‘mid-world’...could be attained by harnessing and harmonizing the opposite forces and attributes of the individual, such and body and soul, the physical and the spiritual, reason and emotion, imagination and experience

as well as the bringing together the opposite laws of mortality/immortality, individualism/ society, wealth and wisdom (273).

Emerson appears to be well-aware of the fact that contradictory forces must play its role in the production of meaning. It cannot be a static one as a perpetual action upon the other side goes on unendingly. Nothing is refined on earth; purity must have the traces of impurity. The mixture of good and evil or right and wrong paves the way for an individual to reside in the mid-world. Emerson preaches, “[e]very good quality is noxious if unmixed” (“Experience” 68). It is an art to harmonize between these two extremes and balancing them smoothly. Emerson knows how to deal with these circumstances by bringing together the two parts. Being a transcendentalist he knows how to open up his mind to the variations of life that wonder us. A transcendentalist thinker always “believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of human mind” (“The Transcendentalist” 95) to the nuances of life and the miracle seems to happen only in the mid-world. Isolated or orthodox minds do not appear to comprehend simultaneously the shades and lights of their thoughts. Only a skeptical mind is able to understand both sides as he has made himself available to synthesize the both of it. He holds together both parts still do not completely subservient to either of them. In “Society and Solitude” Emerson admits, “[w]e must keep our head in one and our hands in the other” (15). Similarly, Sanja Sostaric has noticed dualism in Emerson’s writings. With a scrutinizing voice, she comments,

Throughout Emerson’s work the soul, as the life-giving principle and the only authority, was contrasted with the meaninglessness and /or evil body. The theme was endlessly varied and clad in different terminology. Thus Emerson alternately spoke of mind and matter, Spirit and the world or, in later essays, faith and fate (273).

The mid-world is not a particular enclosed area. It is not a blocked entirety that can be measured with mathematical calculation. Rather it is a “the source for various environments which govern human life” (Corrington 5). It is not a realm of conciliation between the two sides. It is an undefined point where the meeting occurs between good and the evil, right and wrong. Emerson’s preference for it signals the existence of a place where all judgments can be postponed. In “Experience” he emphatically asserts, “[t]he mid-world is best” (66). Extreme realms of anything seem to be rough and devoid of harmony. In one of his journals

he describes this fact with the help of mythological figures Scyllas and Charybdis: “Unity or Identity, & Variety. The poles of philosophy. It makes haste to develop these two. A too rapid unity or unification & a too exclusive devotion to parts are the Scylla & Charybdis” (qtd in Yoder 50). Both Scylla and Charybdis are sea monsters that cause destruction to the sailors. Emerson compares them with unity and variety as both of them are harmful without any moderation. The inclination too much towards unity or towards variety seems to be an ominous act. It is a harmonious amalgamation of the two that Emerson seeks to endorse in this case. The interplay between this two—unity and variety—provides the middle ground; a ground for creative thought for all human beings. Unity or Identity and Variety or Diversity are the two worlds in the top and in the base respectively. Plato, who is regarded as a “balanced” soul by Emerson, knows how to make a “wonderful synthesis” (31) of the two sides. It is a “rare coincidence” occurred in the mind of Plato which is “capacious of these contrasts” (44).

Again Quayum studies comparatively the urgency of occupying the middle region of the human individual as favored both Emerson and Walt Whitman. Both of them perceive the importance of the human body and the soul. It is the harmonizing capacity of the two poles that eventually determine the sanity of the human being. Quayum notices:

[L]ike Emerson...Whitman believes in the symbolic view of mankind, that human beings are a sum total of opposite attributes of body and soul in which the body acts as a manifestation, symbol and signature of the soul. ... [B]oth Emerson and Whitman subsequently came to recommend that in order to be human and retain the ‘tyrannizing unity’ of being, it is necessary for the individual to maintain a middle ground between the opposite attributes of body and the soul (17-18).

What seems to be significant in the case of Emerson’s discussions and supports of middle region is the subject of volatility associated with that position. Whether a person can stick to that place forever or swings again from time to time according to his own moods and temperaments is the central concern. Ever changing temperament never allows settling here permanently. It is the human propensity to get attracted towards the destination; human beings tend to stabilize their own position regarding any idea or opinion. But destination always deceives all; the beauty lies in the continuous journey. Stability threatens any kind of

ongoing process of life. A famous Welsh poet has fairly remarked on it saying, “[t]he beauty is in the walking; we are betrayed by destination” (Stine 95).

Michel Eyquem Montaigne was one of the esteemed Renaissance philosophers of sixteenth-century France who was behind the invention as well the popularity of the essay genre. Even the word ‘essay’ itself is used by him and this genre has earned popularity after his literary work *Essais*. Michel de Montaigne who is known for his skepticism is highly esteemed by Emerson in “Montaigne, or the Skeptic” and he agrees to pay homage by placing him in the catalog of a few selected wise personalities of human history. Emerson’s reverence for Montaigne is owing to the uncompromising nature shown by the latter in the case of epistemological questions arising in human minds. The qualities cherished by Emerson are related to Montaigne’s frank disposition of the impossibility of human beings in acquiring complete knowledge of everything. Both of them seem to be agreed with the idea that there is something that is not fathomable in each and every stage of the search for truth. Though human beings demand that they have absolute knowledge there are some “unavoidable, victorious, maleficent forces” (244) like time, fate, fortune, love and destiny that separate them from reality by creating illusory surfaces upon it. In this case, Emerson mentions seven kinds of moods or “lords of life” (83) in the essay “Experience” that lead human beings not to absolute knowledge but to illusions. He laments his incapacity to gain an authentic and absolute knowledge saying, “[i] am very content with knowing, if only I could know” (85). Here he is skeptical of the power of an individual to grasp an all-encompassing reality on solid footing. Charles Landesman and Roblin Meeks argue in *Philosophical Skepticism* (2003) that Montaigne “tries to undermine human pretensions to superiority” and for him, the reason is “weak” and “incapable” to deliver a structured knowledge. The cause of this inaccessibility to knowledge is related to perceptions gained through sense organs that are “deceptive and, therefore human knowledge lacks any reliable foundation” (226).

Emerson’s appreciation for Montaigne is not only a verbal disposition; he seems to have swallowed completely the writing styles of the latter which have distinct repercussions on his own literary creations. Similar to the observations made by Montaigne regarding politics and government during the sixteenth century that reflect the “human fallibility” or “weakness and limitations of human beings” (Laursen 100), Emerson also appears to have

parallel kind of vision regarding political matters of the nineteenth century America. Both of them extremely believe in freedom of the individual from the clutches of the institutional tyranny of their respective times. The ideas of self-reliance and individuality in Emerson appear to bear the traces of the same kind of opinions held by Montaigne. Celebrating the close affinity between these two great personalities of two different time periods, Joseph Lawrence Basile in “The Crisis of Consciousness in Montaigne and Emerson” (1976) comments,

Montaigne and Emerson, by insisting always upon a confrontation of the self and the naked truths of the universe, share a vital and incontrovertible kinship. In their mutual attainment of a vision of the self which, in effect, becomes a vision of all humanity, they form an interesting relationship of the mind which spans the temporal and the spatial distances between Renaissance France and the Concord of the “American Renaissance” (17).

Emerson’s doubts and subsequent abhorrence towards the contemporary political scenarios of America due to the hypocritical and selfish motives of the politicians and subsequent desire for freedom of the self from all these political insincerity may be compared to the same political scenarios faced by Montaigne.

The essay “Montaigne, or the Skeptic”, according to Claudia Carlos, can be categorized into three parts; the first describing “the constant tension in humanity between two extreme philosophical positions (abstractionist/materialist)” (Carlos 6) and stressing on the general tendencies of the skeptic to dwell in the middle position or the middle ground; the second part is mainly on Montaigne’s propensity for skepticism who is regarded as the perfect representative man of this philosophical inclination, and the third part deals with an examination considering “whether Montaigne’s skeptical position is a wise one for us to adopt” (6). Both the two personalities adopt similar kind of writing strategies that can be understood while scrutinizing it from the socio-political predicaments faced by them. Their writing techniques, according to Claudia Carlos, exhibit “art of covert argument” (2). The two men at different times have faced political and religious upheavals and it is seen that instead of making direct arguments they seem to take different paths to argue. Carlos is of opinion that like Montaigne in his “Des Cannibales” Emerson in his essay “Montaigne, or

the Skeptic” takes recourse to “a technique of deflection: seeming to argue for one thing but really accomplishing something else” (3). It is a kind of deceptive strategy employed by both the writers. Even in the essay “Montaigne, or the Skeptic”, a common reader seems to anticipate or expect biographical details of Montaigne, but ironically Emerson tricks them by offering a brief sketch of Montaigne. The major part is occupied by some other pieces of information that have definitely connected us to Montaigne without giving any data on Montaigne’s life history. Overt arguments on political matters appear to hurt the common people in America and Emerson might have understood this fact pretty well when his “Divinity School Address” was bitterly received at Harvard in 1838. He comprehends the fact that “speaking too frankly could entail serious social and political consequences” (6) and this seems to be the reason that the essay “Montaigne, or the Skeptic” is heavily loaded with indirect argumentation.

The essay “Montaigne, or the Skeptic” begins with the notion of the two-sidedness deep-rooted in an idea when Emerson remarks, “[e]very fact is related on the one side to sensation, and, the other, to morals”. Every skeptical mind appears to be responsive to these two sides and it is a perpetual journey or “game” for him that propels him always to find the other side while one side is visible or perceptible through the senses. Emerson observes that there is “a slight shudder of astonishment at the exhibition of the other face, at the contrast of the two faces” (234). Skeptics argue on any issue keeping in mind the existence of two opposing sides. The benefit of postponing judgments seems to be acquiring “ataraxia or freedom from worry” (Bett 7) which is constantly searched by the skeptical mind. Montaigne also seems to be the same type of skeptic to play the ‘game’ of these two opposite sides while writing his essays as it is observed that “Montaigne will ‘in the course of any one essay contradict whatever statement he had seemed to support” (Laursen 111). These two exposed faces or “this head and this tail” are termed by Emerson as “Infinite and Finite; Relative and Absolute; Apparent and Real and many fine names besides” (“Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 234). According to Cicero, it is quite common that “the skeptics argued every issue in *utramque partem* [‘on both sides’]” (Laursen 111). The essay “Montaigne, or the Skeptic” deals with the concept of the dual faces as noticed in the case of Montaigne. A man of skeptical belief like Montaigne is seen always to keep himself in a balanced position which is the “middle region of our being”. He is fond of, Emerson says,

the “position of equilibrium” (“Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 240) which is provided by the mid-world as discussed in the essay “Experience”. Russell Goodman in *American Philosophy before Pragmatism* (2015) has pondered upon this form of writing and comments on “Montaigne, or the Skeptic” as, “the essay...is the appropriate literary form for a mode of thinking that seeks insights, angles of vision, and progression of thought but makes no claim to completeness, nor even at times to correctness”. For him, it is a “literally a trial or attempt, not a fully finished product or complete system” (158).

Emerson’s paramount reverence for Montaigne as discussed elaborately in the book *The Representative Men* (1850) and his election of him as a “representative of Skepticism” (“Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 239) and subsequently placing him or making him occupy the middle region are owing to the ambivalence and contradictions shown by Montaigne in his opinions and ideas abstaining from any certainties or any final judgments. All his judgments, similar to Emerson’s, are provisional and fluctuate continuously from one point to other. Montaigne himself has marked out his own conditions of flux as follows:

The world is but a perennial see-saw. Everything in it—the lands, the mountains of the Caucasus, the pyramids of Egypt—all waver within a common motion and their own. I am unable to stabilize my subject: it staggers confusedly along with a natural drunkenness. I grasp it as it is now, at this moment when I am lingering over it. I am not portraying being but becoming: not the passage of one age to another... but from day to day, from minute to minute (qtd in Maleuvre 170).

The lack of stabilization as Montaigne has mentioned above is the chief reason Emerson has placed him in the mid-world as from this he seems to be able to linger over one point to other without adhering completely to one side or party. Montaigne’s support for the fluidity of ideas reflects the nature of a skeptic who is playing the role in the essay of “a mediator between sensation and morals, abstraction and materialism, and the wise observer judging the best things of life, especially of human life” (Goodman 158). This wise observer or in the Emersonian term, the “wise skeptic” is one who “wishes to have a near view of the best game” (“Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 238). He will not participate in the game as his purpose is not to win or lose but to observe closely without any biased view of the two teams or parties that represent the two sides. He wants to belong to the third party that seems to be the

safe zone without any commitment to the two opposing extremes. Montaigne's failure to grasp one cardinal opinion due to "natural drunkenness"(qtd in Maleuvre 170) obliquely indicates common man's predicament in general and his own predicament in particular when he marks out in the essay "Experience" as, "[m]en live in their fancy, like drunkards whose hands are too soft and tremulous for successful labor" ("Experience" 63). There is a political undertone in the enumeration of the character Montaigne. Emerson is in the search of some representative men that deserve a place in his utopian model of American democratic system. Cristina Kirklighter has enumerated the cause of Emerson's hero-worship as done in the essay of *The Representative Men* as, "an American skeptic like Emerson interested in promoting democratic ideals viewed heroes (with their strengths and weakness) not as monarchical rulers but as inspirations and examples for American future leaders and mentors"(50). Montaigne is here one of the heroes that Emerson analyses for his exceptional qualities of skepticism. The whole essay has a systematic way of progression; Emerson has not talked about skeptical behaviors of Montaigne out of nowhere. It is interesting, cautious as well as contemplative attempt to explore the best in the character. Emerson introduces his hero quite later and assigns him the world which is befitting for him. This world or zone is unadulterated by extreme views or ideas that Emerson despises. It is the "temperate zone" (65) as specified in the essay "Experience".

Critics have marked on the resemblance between Montaigne and Emerson regarding their style of writing and the philosophical ideas of skepticism both of them seem to have propounded in their respective essays. They preach the idea of individualism giving importance to the power of the self upon other external authorities. Distinguishing them as followers of definite kind of skepticism does not appear to be easy as their attitudes towards doubt and suspicion are not constant. Montaigne cannot be regarded as a Pyrrhonist as "he does not want to eliminate the possibility of judgment" (Hartle 243). Again, Alan Levine places him among the academic skeptics as "Montaigne's Academic Skepticism, based on ignorance of transcendent truth, and the search, not for a universal science, but for self-knowledge" (Levine 79). Emerson's discussion of Montaigne does not identify the latter as a skeptic of a particular fold as most of the discussion is about the space or the ground Montaigne occupies. Moreover, this discussion itself does not appear to directly identify the scheme Emerson follows as he considers no system while making arguments. George Kateb

in “Self-Reliance and the Life of the Mind” (2002) supports this view saying that “his purpose is to have no system...we must be as careful as possible as in assigning beliefs to Emerson” (3). Since his beliefs and ideas fluctuate time to time, assigning him a specific place in the arena of a particular fold of philosophy does not appear to be an easy task. Even his skeptical beliefs are manifold which is pointed out by Russell Goodman in *American Philosophy before Pragmatism* (2015) as follows,

Emerson conceives of Skepticism in four main ways: (1) as a radical doubt about the reality of the world and other people... (2) as a limited and desperate form of human life, (3) as a rueful sense of the disappointments and tragedies of life; and (4) as an admirable way of life practiced by ancient skeptics... (57).

The essay “Montaigne, or the Skeptic” has rightly been called as a piece of contemplative literary work that bears “a touch of autobiography or even implicit self-portraiture” (Worley 41) of Emerson more than other essays that are discussed in *The Representative Men*. The hero-worship as done by Emerson methodically indicates the adoration for his own skeptical attitude along with Montaigne as he uncovers a distinguished resemblance between their ideas, writing styles as well as their adherence to the skeptical world of knowledge. After going through a book authored by Montaigne, Emerson clearly points out in “Montaigne, or the Skeptic” that, “[i]t seemed to me as if I had myself written the book, in some former life, so sincerely it spoke to my thought and experience”(239). It is evident from the remark that comprehending the beliefs and ideas as held by Montaigne about knowledge and other aspects of the world, a reader seems to pave the path of knowing the mind of Emerson. It is Emerson who views his own state of mind replicated in the words of Montaigne. The admiration set aside by Emerson for Montaigne as a skeptic may also be applied to him as both of them seem to be inhabitants of the mid-world or the “middle-ground” (236).

Montaigne is best known for his skepticism and his philosophy greatly influenced latter-day philosophers like Blaise Pascal and Rene Descartes. Many critics perceive his skeptical attitude by placing him in different philosophical positions; some of them judge him from the Pyrrhonian skeptical point of views while others locate him in the field of Academic skepticism. Ralph Waldo Emerson is also one of those scholars who speculate on the position held by Montaigne in the skeptical tradition.

Emerson, “the Concord Philosopher-poet” (Faust 79) in his “Montaigne, or The Skeptic” declares that “the philosophy we want is one of fluxions and mobility” (238). The human mind should be cautious enough to accept and respond critically to any nuance of life. Human past and steadiness always try to immobilize the thinking process of an individual thereby crippling his experimenting sensibilities regarding views and opinions on a certain idea. Andrew Epstein observes that the “inability to change one’s thinking, unwillingness to call today’s truth a falsehood tomorrow is the root of that ‘foolish consistency’ Emerson famously castigates as the ‘hobgoblin of the little mind adored by the little statesmen, and philosophers and divines’” (56). This so-called ‘foolish consistency’ seems to create a mental inertia that emaciates the nervous system for which an individual tends to prop himself up with all conformist convictions and deeply rooted old-fashioned ideas without any critical eyes. Emerson advocates that individuals should shun the desire to attain any kind of uniformity, fixity or certainty as nature itself is chaotic. He should never try to dwell into an “angular dogmatic house” (“Montaigne, or The Skeptic” 238) that does not teach anyone the importance of flexibility in life.

The notion of “fluxions and mobility” that Emerson seems to admire in the essay is directly related to the essayist Montaigne. The appreciation Emerson displays towards Montaigne in the essay is inspired to the fact that Montaigne, the “Wise Skeptic”, has successfully developed the philosophy of “fluxions and mobility” (“Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 238) and has taken the middle zone between the two extremes like that of the abstractionist and the materialist. Both Emerson and Montaigne seem to have recognized and appreciated the temporariness faced by humankind in every aspect of life. Every conclusion arrived at through arguments or logical discussions appear to bear the possibility of further begetting some other conclusions or endings and the process appears to continue in a spherical way without any signs of termination. They are of the same opinion that absolute truth always escapes from human grasp as it is slippery and obscure in nature. Emerson does not seem to be interested in the unidirectional truth, but in the way of truth or the where truth travels. For him, the journey to truth is more significant than truth itself. Montaigne in his famous *Essays* comments that “truth is engulfed in deep abysses where human sight cannot penetrate” (Montaigne 422). Truth resides in an unapproachable world.

It is seen that at the inception of the essay “Montaigne, or the Skeptic”, Emerson introduces his readers to the two worlds—the world of the abstractionists and the world of the materialists—that have not been extolled by the essayist. They (the abstractionists and the materialists) simply adhere to extreme views. After eliminating these worlds Emerson gradually comes to the third world where the inhabitants are cautious and not fixed to any beliefs. Montaigne is the man who, according to Emerson, is a fit person to reside in. It is a place for the “wise skeptic” (238) like Montaigne. Though Emerson delves deep into the character of Montaigne analyzing the pros and cons, he fails to place him into the fold of the representative men or the great heroes of the nation. His inability or hesitation to make a proper list of representative men as wholly representative of good qualities inevitably indicates his own skeptical attitude. He is cautious and contemplative enough to look with his keen eyes to both the qualities—good and evil—of men thereby abstaining from celebrating all the good qualities of those heroes in reality. Though Emerson eulogizes Montaigne as a wise skeptic and places him among seven representative men, he topples down the whole structure of appreciation built by himself. He even doubts the wise nature of Montaigne which is given a substantial place in his essay. He thus suspends his own judgment for Montaigne when he comments, “[s]hall we say that Montaigne has spoken wisely, and given the right and permit expression of the human mind on the conduct of life?” (241). So the plan of hero-worship does not seem to be convincing all the time as Emerson due to his own skeptical nature starts doubting those figures for whom he has gathered reverence as representative men of American world. Kirklighter is conscious of this attempt of Emerson who sums up it as, “[a]lthough Montaigne had a circle of scholars that he admired, his adherence to Pyrrhonian skepticism prevented him from venturing too far into the realm of hero worship”(48). Emerson seems to put a limit into his endeavor may be in apprehension of finding several defects or negative qualities which may threaten to topple down the world of admiration he has built around those heroes. He doubts what he has already been said about those personalities in *The Representative Men* because he understands that truth is always partial. It is not graspable as human life is not powerful enough to do so. Obstacles are always there that prevent him from attaining the taste of reality or truth. Finding truth is an unending process or journey. Emerson has marked out this predicament of human beings as, “[o]ur life is like an ass led to market by a bundle of

hay being carried before him; he sees nothing but the bundle of hay”. This “bundle of hay” (“Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 236) symbolizes the thick layers that separate individuals from the reality.

All human beings, according to Emerson, appear to be caught between two sides or faces of nature namely—Heads and Tails, Relative and Absolute, Infinite and Finite, Apparent and Real—and there is a continuous “game of thought” (234) among all. These are the two worlds of extremes inhabited by two different kinds of people—men of talents (or materialists) and the men of genius (abstractionists). Emerson distinguishes these two kinds of human beings as follows:

One class has the perception of Differences, and is conversant with facts and surfaces; cities and persons; and the certain things to pass;—the men of talent and action. Another class have the perception of Identity, and are men of faith or philosophy, men of genius (234).

These two classes of people always place themselves in opposite limits and hence fail to come to the mid-world. Both of them exasperate each other. But the “third party”, Emerson argues, “finds both wrong by being in extreme”. He who occupies this party is a man who “labours to plant his feet, to be the beam of the balance. He will not go beyond his card. He sees the one-sidedness of these men of the street”. He is a person with a “cool head” who does not lose his temper in unnecessary toil. He is unlike those of mere abstractionists who “spend their days and nights in dreaming some dream” (236) and the men of materialism who merely “stick to cotton, sugar, wool and salt” (235). But the skeptic holds on to the middle of these two extremes as he says, ‘I know that human strength is not in extremes, but in avoiding extremes’. The middle world is designated as the realm where thought process of a human mind is free from any partial view. He is a man who dares to say as “[b]ut I see plainly... that I cannot see” (236). He is cautious and contemplative; his mind is fraught with several questions all the time. He is not as quick and energetic as the people from the two extreme worlds.

Emerson has an attentive mind with the power of judicious calculations for which he wishes to delay or suspend judgments instead of accepting established notion or idea promptly and

inconsiderately. He simply considers a matter or a fact and systematically avoids any kind of exaggeration. Emerson artfully gives befitting comments in the mouth of a skeptic like this:

What is the use of pretending to powers we have not? What is the use of pretending to assurance we have not, respecting the other life? ... If there is a wish for immortality and no evidence, why not say just that? If there are conflicting evidences why not state them? If there is not ground for a candid thinker to make up his mind, yea or nay,—why not suspend the judgment? I weary of these dogmatizers. I tire of these hacks of routine, who deny the dogmas. I neither affirm nor deny. I stand here to try the case. I am here to consider...to consider how it is (237).

The powers lacking in a skeptic is termed by Emerson as “lords of life” (83) in the essay “Experience”. This lack itself seems to be a power that authorizes a skeptic to think infinite times before passing any judgment. Skeptics accept the fact that life is not a simple game as regarded by the men of mere talent or the men of mere genius; life is “subtle and elusive”. They understand the scope of knowledge in any field of discussion. The word ‘knowledge’ itself appears to be in flux as it slips away when people try to grasp it in its entirety. The world of knowledge is too vast to put into a narrow human mind. The truth is merely an illusion, as Emerson maintains, “[w]hy fancy that you have all the truth in your keeping? There is much to say on all sides” (“Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 237). A man either from the world of senses or from the world of ideas hardly knows that there is the possibility of sustaining another world or a mid-world. A man from this particular world never melts away with the sorrows or with the ecstasy of life. He is a man of consideration; he is a judicious man in an Emersonian sense. Considering a fact is like suspending it for more analysis and scrutiny with sharp eyes. It is like peeling away continuously the covers of illusions around a fact.

The mid-world, as built by the skeptic is “not too high nor too low, under the wind, but out of the dirt”. The word “dirt” seems to indicate any extreme views that make dirty of our own arguments. The house built here is “of consideration, of self-containing, not at all of unbelief, not at all of universal denying, nor of universal doubting”. It is an “angular dogmatic house” that can sustain any kind of storm either from two worlds. The man who dares to live in such a house believes in the philosophy “of fluxions and mobility”; he is a

judicious man who put “wise limitation” (238) while judging anything. “These qualities”, Emerson argues, “meet in the character of Montaigne” (239) who is a “mediator between sensation and morals” (Goodman 158). For Emerson, Montaigne is the honest person whose style of writing seems to attract his attention as it is in the form of conversation which is far away from pretention. Like Emerson who prefers the “middle region of our being” (“Experience” 65) to the extreme poles as occupied by the abstractionist and the materialist, Montaigne also cherishes his view regarding the region. Ann Hartle in *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher* (2003) opines,

Montaigne identifies a ‘middle region’ of men and; within that middle region, he distinguishes between two types: those who are and remain in error because they stop at the appearance of the first sense, and those who have come through error to the ‘extreme limit of Christian intelligence’ (105).

The mid-world as identified by both Emerson and Montaigne appears to play a great role in their thoughts as it has provided them the chances to judge or re-judge their own views. It is the locus of symmetry and equilibrium. A skeptic does not believe in that kind of knowledge which is static in form. Knowledge is ever-growing. Even Montaigne has a similar view regarding knowledge who admits the impossibility of gaining it in total form as it is always in the state of flux. His motto, “[w]hat do I Know?” (Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 241) indicates the fact that absolute knowledge is not graspable by human beings. There is a gap between what people think about and how it comes up in reality. This gap or “chasm” is marked by Emerson saying, “[i]n every house, in the heart of each maiden and of each boy, in the soul of the soaring saint, this chasm is found—between the largest promise of ideal power, and the shabby experience” (246). This fact also seems to be realized by Emerson in the essay “Experience” when he fails to find a harmonious relationship between the power of idealism and that of realism or materialism after the death of his son Waldo.

Though Emerson praises and highlights the character of Montaigne for his skeptical mood, in the later part he inevitably seems to succumb to the fold of moral sentiment which indicates the nature of skeptical beliefs he imbibes gradually within himself. For him, skepticism is not so a place to be grasped all the time by a person belonging to the middle world as skepticism also recedes at the command of moral duty. It is the moral responsibility

that comes out with flying colors in case of any individual. He enumerates this point in “Montaigne, or the Skeptic” as, “[t]he final solution in which skepticism is lost, is, the moral sentiment which never forfeits its supremacy”. Thus it seems that the middle ground or the temperate zone as systematically assigned to Montaigne throughout the essay is not a permanent place and moral sentiment of an individual put a stumbling block to realizing completely the power of skepticism. The mood or the temperament is not a permanent condition of man; as “all moods may be safely tried and their weight allowed to all objection: the moral sentiment as easily outweighs them all, as anyone” (246). Even in the essay on Swedenborg, Emerson talks about similar kind of power of moral sentiment as “the atmosphere of moral sentiment is a region of grandeur which reduces all material magnificence to toys” (“Swedenborg, or the Mystic” 55). For Emerson, the whole moral world is “a place of freedom” (Worley 40) and skepticism does not seem to hold a man for a long time in its charm. The moral sentiment is “the drop which balances the sea” (“Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 246). Skepticism is refuted by “an eternal cause” (247) and “Emerson’s insistence on the necessity of accepting the ‘Eternal Cause’ make it possible for him to refute skepticism” (Basile 16). It is the human propensity to look for stability or permanence in the midst of fleeting or alterable. Though a skeptic seems to suspend his judgment by postponing his arguments, there is a possibility of accepting an optimistic view in place of skeptic one. Emerson says at the end of the essay, “though abyss open under abyss, and opinion displace opinion, all are at last contained in the eternal cause” (“Montaigne, or the Skeptic” 247). Though he does not seem to explain the true meaning of eternal cause in the essay it is a clear indication of the way through which skepticism seems to be faded away when there is a command from the eternal cause. He occasionally admits that magnetism of skeptical opinions has momentary influences in his life. Even Charles Lowell Young has marked out the same truth about the nature of Emersonian skepticism, “Emerson was quite incapable, nonetheless, of maintaining the skeptical attitude to life as anything permanent or final; or even of entertaining a doubt except in regard to particulars” (Qtd in Kirklighter 48).

“Plato; or the Philosopher” (1850) is a fine literary work authored by Emerson and compiled along with other essays of *The Representative Men*. This essay appears to be one of the witnesses of Emerson’s particular skeptical mood as imbibed in the later part of his life.

Ronald Bosco in “We Find What We Seek: Emerson and His Biographers” (2000) rightly marks this point as, “by the time *Representative Men* appears in 1850, he is a thorough skeptic, effectively ceasing to measure men and their cultures according to his own exacting, idealistic standards of what is desirable, and willing to accept them as face value: as imperfect and limited by circumstances” (279). Plato appears to be the actual educator for Emerson and some of his views and thoughts are the purest reflections of Platonic ideas. He still holds a fascinating place among the thinkers and the philosophers of the contemporary time and for Emerson, “out of Plato come all things that are still written and debated among men of thought”(“Plato; or, the Philosopher” 22). F. O. Matthiessen has pointed out the relationship between the Greek Philosopher Plato and nineteenth-century American essayist Emerson as, “[t]he representative men whom [Emerson] most revered was Plato. Plato had been able to bridge the gap between the two poles of thought, to reconcile fact and abstraction, the many and the One, Society and Solitude” (3). But Emerson himself declares the impossibility of reconciliation between these two poles and tries to grasp another plan or another world where two poles meet but never seem to reconcile completely. He says in “The Transcendentalist”, “the worst feature of this double consciousness is, that the two lives...really show very little relation to each other; never meet and measure each other...and with the progress of life the two discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves” (102). The contemplative soul is one who seems to know the skill of holding on to the middle ground of life. And he is the Philosopher Plato. Emerson discerns the double conscious mind of Plato and says, “[i]n short, a balanced soul was born perceptive of the two elements” (“Plato; or the Philosopher” 31). He has made a conscious attempt in the essay to secure a middle ground for Plato as an unbiased soul who appears to have married the two different aspects of nature. He is aware of the spiritual as well as the material poles of life and these two worlds are fused with his personality.

Plato can be regarded as the perfect embodiment of the amphibious individual who according to Emerson is “weaponed for two elements, having two sets of faculties, the particular and the catholic” (“Nominalist and Realist” 219). The complexity lies in the character of Plato for his double conscious attitude, can also be pointed out in the character of Emerson as he combines within himself both idealism and realism and at times it becomes a matter of confusion among the scholars to assign him a proper place for his

contradictory views and ideas. His essays, that reflect his mind, are so complex and multifaceted that Ray Benoit comments, “[i]dealists dismiss Emerson as a pragmatist and the pragmatists dismiss him as an idealist” (487). In both the cases, the adherents of their respective beliefs seem to be right as the nature of Emersonian ideas is so contradicting that placing him in a fixed position is not possible. He is the real advocate of the philosophies of fluxions and mobility; his non-conformism has provided him a separate place among other. Unlike the pure idealists and the pure realists, his eyes are not fixed or bounded by one absolute truth because he knows it well that, “[t]heir every truth is not quite true. Their two is not the real two, their four not the real four; so every word they say chagrins us” (“Self-Reliance” 56). Emerson understands the fact that both of them can never attain truth because truth does not reside in any extreme points but in the “highway” (“Experience” 65) and a person who takes a tour and skates properly in the middle region of life seems to travel on that highway.

Plato’s ideas are still relevant today and Emerson appears to have imbibed the platonic ideas to a large extent. He even regrets in *New England Reformers*, a lecture that is published in his *Essays: Second Series* saying that among the thousands of students who have passed out from the colleges in America only a few have read Plato. Plato’s writings deal with the essential philosophical ideas as according to Stuart Brown, Emerson appears to believe that “there are no important problems in the range of philosophy which are not at least touch upon in the writings of Plato” (325). Plato’s ideas provide the urgent catalyst in solving philosophical problems and praising this aspect of Plato, Emerson goes on to the extent saying that “Plato is philosophy and philosophy Plato” (“Plato; or the Philosopher” 23).

Emerson’s love for contradiction, inconsistency and his simultaneous observance of the two worlds in search of the third or the mid-world has been significantly influenced by the Platonic ideas. Stuart Brown precisely marks this fact in “Emerson’s Platonism”(1945) that, “the fundamental inconsistency of Emerson’s thinking lies at the very heart of Platonism, in Plato’s own writings as well as those of his disciples, and perhaps also at the heart of experience itself” (335). Besides Plato, Emerson seems to have read Proclus, Timaeus, Heraclitus, Parmenides and Philolaus and these are the philosophers who have drawn him more towards Platonic ideas. Plato offers no consistent views about any fact; he notices the

possibilities of having a continuous process or extension while finding it. Emerson comments:

[Plato] is more than an expert, or a schoolman, or a geometer, or the prophet of a peculiar message. He represents the privilege of the intellect, the power, namely, of carrying up every fact to successive platforms and so disclosing in every fact a germ of expansion (“Plato: New Readings” 48).

This notion of expansion indicates that no fact is permanent; fact or truth bears the possibility of expansion or continuous development. The idea which is recognized as true today may be proved as false by tomorrow. Along with the expansion of man’s thinking about a certain matter, the meaning of the same may also expand in the different directions. Plato is among the “highest minds of the world who have never ceased to explore the double meaning...of every sensuous fact” (“The Poet” 10). Meaning for him is always manifold. A person with a balanced soul will act cautiously in such a condition as he is not completely committed to any pre-established position or idea for which he can extend his own opinion pushing the boundaries of possibilities. He postpones or suspends his verdict as he knows the balance and thereby escaping from extreme limits. In this case, Plato seems to be the best embodiment who, according to Emerson, “keeps the two vases, one of aether one of pigment, at his side, and invariably uses both” (“Plato; or the Philosopher” 32). He comprehends both unity as well as variety. Emerson keeps Plato among those people like Swedenborg, Goethe and Shakespeare who “have the perception of identity and the perception of reaction” (“Use of Great Men” 10). They are men whose responses towards the two sides are calculative and cautious.

Plato, though an idealist, appears to stand on the middle path which is not completely attached to the material world or to the ideal world. This middle ground, which is normally occupied by the skeptic, is expandable on both sides of the two worlds. Emerson reacts on this point as, “[e]verywhere [Plato] stands on a path which has no end, but runs continuously round the universe” (“Plato: New Readings” 48). From this ground, a fact or a truth is expanded in all directions continuously as the germ of expansion is within all facts. Plato, on this path, can find the possibilities of generation of opposite or contrary thoughts which is also prominent in the world of Emerson. He is a man who knows and considers both the

world; he has a balanced and a stable mind who perceives “the two elements” (“Plato; or the Philosopher” 31) i.e., the two-sidedness of everything. He is well-known, according to Emerson, for “the perception of the generation of contraries, of death out of life and life out of death...his discernment of the little in the large and large in the small; studying the state in the citizen and the citizen in the state”(“Plato: New Readings” 48-49).

Emerson notices that both the unity and the variety are the “two cardinal facts lie forever at the base”. This unity and variety are required to be embraced by an individual in right proportion as it is “impossible to speak or to think without embracing both” (“Plato; or the Philosopher” 27). These two elements represent two different worlds that control the action of an individual. The most common mistake on the part of the human is the readiness to identify them with any one of the worlds without acknowledging the existence of the other. Emerson has pointed out this problem among the students of America as follows:

Each student adheres, by temperament and by habit, to the first or to the second of these gods of the mind. By religion, he tends to unity; by intellect, or the senses, to the many. A too rapid unification, and an excessive appliance to parts and particulars, are the twin dangers of speculation (30).

Plato is the exceptional man for Emerson owing to the perceptiveness of the two elements. He is the embodiment of two sides—the world of religion or spiritual world that professes unity and the world of senses that emphasizes diversity. Emerson praises the quality of double consciousness in Plato owing to his “wonderful synthesis” or harmonizing balance between European as well as Asian qualities.

The unity of Asia and the detail of Europe; the infinitude of Asiatic soul and the defining, result-loving, machine-making, surface-seeking, opera-going Europe,—Plato came to join, and, by contact to enhance the energy of each. The excellence of Europe and Asia are in his brain” (31).

The union that can be noticed in Plato is nothing but the “union of impossibilities” (31). This is the appearance of two opposite poles or the duality of things. He is always fortified by himself when he advocates or proposes any idea and whenever he gives any opinion or statement, the thoughts seem to appear belonging to both poles. This twoness or polarity of

thought appears to be one of the features of the skepticism and Emerson's continuous praise of this fact reflects his own mind. It is evident from his arguments as made in the essay for the representative man Plato that Emerson envisages a third place or a common ground to be occupied by Plato who is aware of both the other two extreme worlds namely the world of idea or spirit and the world of matter or sense who combines or imbibes both without succumbing to any one of them.

R. A. Yoder has remarked on dualism in Plato's character, "as a philosopher Plato apprehended the dual cardinal facts, unity and variety; as a poet he combines lofty speech with low phrases; as a man he joined the symbolic heritage of Europe and Asia" (67). Emerson places both Plato and Montaigne "'in a middle essence', halfway between actuality and imagination, and they define...the mid-world that is best" (69). Before discussing bipolar nature as found by Emerson in Plato, it is imperative to showcase how Emerson has become conscious of these dualistic tendencies after his critical eyes on Plato and his thoughts. The fusion of the two world noticed in Emerson also happens to be a cardinal point in Plato's life who "marries the two parts of nature" (67). Emerson is always in search of a common ground between the pragmatic and the ideal; he rejects his complete affinity towards both of these at a given point of time. Neither of these two parties claims Emerson as a sole representative of their particular tendencies as "the idealists don't take Emerson into their sides marking him as a pragmatist and at the same time the pragmatists dismiss him labeling him as an idealist (Benoit 487). His refusal of total belongingness in either of the two parties does not necessarily indicate his disingenuousness. He is not a man of hurry who does not contemplate his own arguments; he is a profound thinker. The duality as marked by Emerson is the result of his contact with Plato. Ray Benoit says, "[b]riefly; by interpreting Plato, he chose neither spirit nor matter but viewed each as aspects of a ground of being, if you will, higher than both. For this reason, he is a pragmatist and an idealist without, strictly speaking, being either one" (488). Plato's inconsistency or complete non-submission to any of the two parties signals about his inconsistent mind highly praised by Emerson. In the essay "Self-reliance" he proclaims that consistency is a sign of foolishness which is nothing but "the hobgoblin of little minds" (58).

One of the obvious aspects of the essay “Plato; or the Philosopher” is that the exploration of dual consciousness of Plato responding towards both the spiritual and the material world concurrently identifies the inner working of Emerson’s mind; he seems to imbibe the same nature and tendency in his response to those worlds. He has the same liking for the inconsistency and non-adherence to rules, customs and popularly recognized views. He rebels against consistency and believes in changeability and unpredictability of things or ideas. He regards everything as a part of a larger truth. Though Emerson is an “unrelenting child of idealism”, as marked by Parrington, “his eyes were never blind to reality”; the job he has done primarily is to “heal ‘the tragic gap between the real and the ideal’” (qtd in Quayum 20). In the essay “Plato; or the Philosopher”, Plato has been placed in a world which can be termed as the world of judicious judgment. From this world, a person can weigh or consider a proposition in an unbiased method. This world may be termed also as the mid-world where no knowledge assumes finality or conclusiveness providing ample opportunity to ponder over a particular matter to postpone or defer judgment.

Emerson’s tendency to deal simultaneously with the broad corpus of life—including both the idealist and pragmatist side—has facilitated him to search the middle region of it. In this search he has never accepted one at the expense of the other; in fact, he does not seem to admit a total annulment of idealism from the material reality of American life. He cautiously avoids these two extremes managing to stand between them and it has rightly been said that Emerson’s contradiction and inconsistency that grow out of his polarity is “a logical inconsistency that stems from his contact with Plato” (Benoit 488). Emerson deeply absorbs Plato’s ideas; both of them never accept either spirit or matter as the absolute ground to land safely in philosophical arguments.

His denial of total belonging to any one of the two parties has made his path smooth to jump from one aspect to the other. His simultaneous preoccupation with both the worlds or, as it can be said, his concern of dualism without preferring one to the other seems to be observed from the gender perspectives. “Emerson”, as argued by Thomas Dumm, “embraces spiritual Hermaphroditism” (123). Hermaphroditism is a condition when both the sexes are simultaneously present in an organism. Though in Emerson it is not the literal existence of male and female reproductive organs, at the same time, it is for him a method of inclusion or

incorporation of both the sides of a thing or an idea that is generated in his mind. Pondering over George Kateb's concern about Hermaphroditism, Dumm comments, "Kateb asserts that Emerson believes in everyone is more or less hermaphrodite" (124). For Emerson, it is a situation when the two extreme things are possessed in a combined way at the same time. His quest and the subsequent articulation of the place of the man in the universe also indicate the existence of two worlds that human beings are required to embrace due to its dominant presence around them. In one of his sermons namely "Pray without Ceasing", he enumerates his belief saying that, "[i]t ought to be distinctly felt by us that we stand in the midst of two worlds, the world of matter and the world of spirit" and the success of human life depends on how they respond to these worlds simultaneously in a synchronized way. The coordination between the world of matter and the world of spirit seems to be the dominant aspect of the skeptical mind. Difficulty plays its role in the way of harmonization of these two dominant spheres as "our bodies belong to matter, our thoughts to spirit" ("Pray without Ceasing" 59). Emerson knows how to adapt himself to these twofold realms as he says, "I accept the clangor and jangle of contrary tendencies" ("Experience" 64). His acceptance of the two or his openness of his mind to see the positive, as well as the negative of them, does not reduce him to a supporter of any one of the sides. Emerson, like Plato, is a balanced soul who floats in the middle region. Their arguments are also globular without having any end. Like Emerson, Plato seems to have no definite method of argument. Plato has contributed a lot to the philosophical ideas of Emerson. Charles Malloy opines that "Emerson was 'born to Plato and had him by organization and by temperament'" (qtd in Faust 79). Emerson's literary method seems to bear the technique of Plato. Plato reverses his opinion as he tries to make everything balanced. Emerson opines in Plato; or the Philosopher":

... [Plato] has not a system. The dearest defenders and disciples are at fault. He attempted a theory of the universe, and his theory is not complete or self-evident. One man thinks he means this, and another that; he has said one thing in one place, and the reverse of it in another place. He is charged with having failed to make a transition from ideas to matter... He argues on this side and on that (45).

Plato's arguments do not conform completely to any of the two extreme poles. His sentences, views and ideas are "self-imposed and spherical". He derives power from the moment of transition and for Emerson, "our strength is transitional, alternating" (Plato; or the Philosopher" 32). It is the moment of transition that takes an individual towards knowledge or fact. The real taste of human life is not provided by life to those who fix himself to a certain ground or a rigid position. Similarly, life does not provide its meaning or knowledge of it to those who are too flexible and who move relentlessly. It is in the transitional moment that real power of human being can be felt. This transit or shift is possible for Plato who can be termed in the words of Emerson as "a circular philosopher" ("Circles" 296) who oscillates between the two grounds or poles. He is the inhabitant of the mid-world which is according to Emerson is the best to weigh and consider other worlds. Plato tries to grab the middle course that satisfies both the sides and parties. The fine blending of idealism and realism can be possible in this place alone.

The important part of Emerson's preoccupation with his heroes in *The Representative Men* including Plato chosen as better examples for humanity is that he even does not seem to be satisfied with them. This is due to the fact that his philosophy is always in process and his work in *The Representative Men* is to experiment only; he considers or weighs down those selected great men or heroes and tries to experiment with the possibilities of considering them as models of American life. Though Emerson admires those individuals in his essays, "he does not wish to hold up any one of them as a fixed example, because then his process philosophy would come to a halt" (Myerson xvi).

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CHAPTER III

Central Skeptical Concerns in Human Relationships

Of Emerson's key essays, it may be argued that "Experience" (1844) "Friendship" (1841) and "Fate" (1860) are highly fraught with his skeptical ideas and inevitably indicate his own approach towards it as well as towards human relationships. These three essays brilliantly employ the idea of the "lords of life" ("Experience" 83) to signal how skepticism grows in the mind of man owing to the constant presence of any one of the seven lords as Emerson enumerated in the essay "Experience". These ultimately forbid him to commit himself to any concrete truth or fact while dealing with human relationships and with the society.

The first essay that elaborately deals with the idea of 'lords of life' (83) is "Experience" where Emerson talks about how the skeptical disposition seems to develop within his mind the time he analyses the father and son relationship. Though an uncompromising champion of individuality, Emerson gradually begins to find the powerlessness of the individual being; he finds an awkward situation as the self appears to be overpowered by a bundle of unavoidable circumstances that force him to accept his own fate. These conditions or the situations created by these lords of life are vividly enumerated in the essay "Experience".

Stephen Whicher in *Freedom and Fate* (1953) observes that a helpless condition of Emerson is at the root of his skepticism and says, Emerson "finds that the self on which he would rely is governed by an incongruous set of conditions which he can neither reconcile nor control" (qtd in Mahoney 10). These lords are the real masters of life that bring an unaccepted condition for those who happen to face them. In that pathetic condition, a person cannot make a clear distinction between two contradictory situations and with a skeptical mood, having faced such perplexed moments, can do nothing but suspends cautiously his judgments.

While discussing from different perspectives the changing nature of Emersonian viewpoints as expressed in his essays, many critics like Nicoloff, Firkins, Michael, and Whicher have

noticed traces of skepticism, naturalism as well as realism but the aspect that seems to be considered by them as common in Emerson is that,

...the idealistic Emerson who before the mid-1840s held for the radical primacy of Nature and the individual souls as the 'lords of life' through which the universal was made known seems to have been displaced by another Emerson, who after the 1840s accepted the individual and the culture as fixed and limited (Bosco 93).

The gradual change in the thought of Emerson in 1840s is attributed to the death of his son Waldo that has made him a skeptic of the view of nature as compassionate and benevolent to all. The essay "Experience" brings his belief in idealism into question as it marks his struggle to comprehend the demise of his beloved son in the territory of philosophical ideas advocated by idealism. He finds that the individual soul has failed to bring changes into his life as expected. The literary works published during the first part of his career are fraught with political, philosophical as well as cultural optimism. But later on, his vivid and lively optimism seems to be plunged into utter despair and hopelessness when his personal life is itself overburdened with loss, sorrows and pains. The essay "Experience" is the best instance to mark the distinction between the two Emerson: the former Emerson with uncompromising optimism and the latter Emerson with pessimism and skepticism. This essay can be seen as depicting one of the vital parts of Emerson's own life, as well as his subjective attitude towards the gradual changes occurred to his opinions and thoughts. This essay is a landmark of Emersonian literary works that signals "the transition from Emerson's ecstatic youthful declamations of transcendence to the sadder, more skeptical and more conservative misusing of an older writer who emphasized 'acquiescence' to inescapable existential limits" (Dolan 138). Here Emerson is contemplating about the sudden death of his son and in spite of several attempts he fails to find any consolation in nature to overcome the irreparable loss. Mary Cayton explains:

Emerson had been discovering for some time the limitations of his philosophy of nature. With Waldo's death, his doubts about the beneficence of the universe crystallized in a new way that left his view of the individual's relation to the nature transformed (219).

Though he comments on the power of the mind and the self in “Self-Reliance” as “nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind” (52) and supports idealism, the power has yielded no result. Stephen Whicher justifies this view when he says, “Emerson’s whole dream of practical power through self-reliance is just that—a dream” as it is “not a genuine program of action ... what he afterwards called it, romance” (Whicher 69). On the one hand, he ardently speaks in favor of self-reliance and individualism, but later being skeptical of the possibility of self as a dominant factor to change life and his thoughts he gradually succumbs to the effective power beyond the power of the self. This effective power is recognized as “lords of life” (“Experience” 83) and fate that justify submissiveness of the self-reliant man. Thus Emerson’s optimistic tone developed in the first part of his career appears to be marred by doubt and skepticism. The man, who uncompromisingly supported the active and vital authority of the human race, suddenly gets surrounded by passivity and submits himself to the power of fate or destiny. He has started distrusting the power of self-reliance as omnipotent in human life. His established beliefs on the power of the individual have suffered a hard blow as time passes on. He safeguards his own previous thought labeling himself only as an experimenter who does not resolve or reconcile anything. In the essay “Circles” (1841) he says: “I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker with no past at my back” (297). His idea of the possibility of uniting individual soul with the divine soul or the Over-soul seems to have collapsed when in “Experience” (1844) he comes to a conclusion that this unity is not attainable as every individual soul is estranged from the divine soul because of the presence of “an innavigable sea” between them that mercilessly “washes with silent waves between us and the thing we aim at and converse with” (52). Crossing or passing this sea is beyond the capacity of human beings. He realizes that reality cannot be wholly experienced. He fails to experience his own grief and he says, “[i] grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature” (53).

The seven lords as enumerated by Emerson in “Experience” are the inseparable parts of all that do not help individuals to comprehend reality and make them move around false and elusive notions of it. In one of his journals, Emerson explains this predicament of the human being as, “[t]here are many skepticisms. The universe is like an infinite series of planes, each of which is a false bottom, and when we think our feet are planted now at last on the

Adamant on the slide is drawn out from under us” (*The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* 295). Again Emerson’s own positive justification for skepticism is evident when he says in the journal as, “[v]alue of the Skeptic is the resistance to premature conclusions. If he prematurely concludes, his conclusion will be shattered, & he will become malignant. But he must limit himself with the anticipation of law in the mutations—flowing law” (*The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Emerson 295).

Emerson’s firm belief in Nature as a universal soother of the grief-stricken heart fails to convey any positive result. He starts developing doubt about Nature’s restorative faculty to release his pain of loss incurred by the death of his near and dear ones including son Waldo. “Indeed”, Cayton opines, “Emerson had written in November 1838 that he believed his faith in Nature would keep him from grieving the loss of the wife, child, or mother at all ...Waldo was dead and nowhere was there explanation or comfort” (220). Thus while encountering the inadequacy and shortcoming of Nature he becomes skeptical of the possibility of a swift and a smooth relation between Nature and man as envisaged in his earlier part of his life. Emerson’s rage against Nature after the death of his son is also marked in the poem “Threnody” where he seems to scold nature for its betrayal:

Perchance not he but Nature ailed,
The world and not the infant failed.
 (“Threnody” 15)

His unquestionable faith in Nature as mirrored in his early writings appears to be altered gradually and he becomes doubtful of it. Emerson starts suspecting the adequacy of his own knowledge regarding the functioning process of Nature.

While discussing Emerson’s skeptical attitude towards human relationships a significant phrase that seems to encompass the most of his ideas is “the lords of life” in the essay “Experience” that signals a major twist in his beliefs and thoughts. The essay begins with a vivid depiction of different kinds of individual incompetence. His continuing doubt of any human relationship and of the sustenance of intrinsic power and supremacy of a self-reliant person in the course of life has been expressed in this essay. These “lords of life” as listed by

Emerson in the last section of the essay are “threads on the loom of time”. These are so knitted with the time that they affect and give shape to the daily experiences of ordinary life. They are fully active in the life of all men and women but their manifestations in different individuals may differ; their influences seem to be felt at different times in diverse ways and befalling of these lords on lives appears to be the accomplishment by three conspirators, namely, time, place and action. Even Emerson fails to find out the order of these lords as their manifestations are subjective; they are not in the same order for all men. Emerson admits, “I dare not assume to give their order, but I name them as I find them in my way” (83).

These seven lords appear to play a game with human beings and the “inventor of the game” i.e. God, though unnamed, is ubiquitous in the playground. They are so powerful and identical in nature that Emerson does not dare to name them in a chronological order. He only notices them marching from East to West and man walks in bewilderment among them. The chronological list that Emerson tries to formulate depends only on his mood as it does not match with the list as made in the beginning part of the essay. The impossibility of making a sequential order is only attributed to the fact that “tomorrow [the lords of life] will wear another face”. Their unrivaled powers have made the “little man... walked about with puzzled look” (47) in the universe. The purpose of Emerson thinking about the possibility to make a list of these seven parts is to show how people desperately fall short to see the fraction of their own selves that seem to be hidden from them. Though the human mood is missing in the list as enumerated by him as a vibrant subject in “Experience”, it is quite embedded with all of them. In the same way, though the importance and the indomitable power of time are being prioritized and admitted thoroughly in many of his essays Emerson does not include it among the seven lords of life. It seems that the inclusion of items in the list itself depends on his own sentiment and mood at the time of writing the essay “Experience”. These unconquerable powers expose the shortcomings that exist silently in every human being. Emerson’s skepticism of any kind of authoritarian view is primarily due to these seven lords that invalidate completely the power of authority or the assertion of absolute knowledge of reality. No living being is authoritative enough to make him or her independent of these lords.

The question “[w]hy should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?” (“Nature” 27) as aroused in Emerson’s mind indicates his curious attitude similar to that of a skeptical mind that along with the principle of self-reliance harbors suspicion of such relationships in the material as well as in spiritual life. Illusion’s ugly face always seems to haunt every individual and stands as a stumbling block to any knowledge. Emerson has pointed out numerous kinds of illusions that impede human progress. He says,

There are deceptions of the senses deceptions of the passions, and the structural, beneficent illusions of sentiment and of the intellect. There is the illusion of love... There is the illusion of time, which is very deep; who has disposed of it?...There is the illusion that shall deceive even the elect. There is an illusion that shall deceive even the performer of the miracle (“Illusions” 294).

These are the most potent types of illusions, the progress of which cannot be checked. Human beings are so captivated by the illusoriness of their views that Emerson compares the situation to that of continuous dreaming. He says, “[d]ream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion” (“Experience” 53). Emerson from the very beginning of his literary career does not seem to be oblivious of the “barrier to, and the general unlikelihood of such relation taking place” (Goodman 39). He contemplates the lack of originality in human relationships due to the existence of illusion as follows:

There is an optical illusion about every person we meet. In truth they are all creatures of given temperament, which will appear in a given character, whose boundaries they will never pass: but we look at them they seem alive, and we presume there is an impulse in them (“Experience” 55).

For Emerson, it is Temperament, one of the lords, which shows its mastery by creating two disparate views between the viewer and the viewed. It conspires with mood and colors our perception leading us away from reality. Temperament creates an illusory atmosphere in front of human eyes. Both Temperament and Illusion plot against individuals. Temperament, as argued by Emerson is “the iron wire on which the beads are strung” (54). It “shuts us in a prison of glass” (55) and cripples our vision. Illusion creates a superficial surface in front of the eyes that prevents our looking beneath it. The images like “iron wire” (54) and “prison

of glass” (55) appear to be potent enough to render its works in human life. Temperament is so compelling that it creates limitation and restrains the individual from the reality. It fortifies a boundary which cannot be crossed. All human behaviors, observations, and perceptions are colored by the temperament. John T Lysaker comments on mood and temperament as follows: “On Emerson’s terms, we are beings that are always mooded...Moods and temperaments are perceptual and practical forces in our lives, illuminating facets of the world and enabling certain relations while discouraging others”(45). In spite of its powerful nature of Temperament, Emerson is “adamant that involuntary perceptions can outstrip temperament” (44). Though he proclaims Temperament as final, he simultaneously aware of the fact that our temperament does not seem totally weaken our condition. He comments in “Experience”, “[o]n its own level, or in the view of nature, temperament is final...But it is impossible that the creative power should exclude itself. Into every intelligence there is a door which is never closed, through which the creator passes” (58).

Human beings are controlled by temperament or “structure”. The rising or the setting of the sun is a natural phenomenon occurring every day; but it is up to the temperament or the human mood to respond to those beautiful events. Under the impact of temperament, human organs sometimes become “too convex or too concave and cannot find a focal distance within the actual horizon of human life”. A genius knows how to keep a balance between his own views and the views dictated by his temperament. But what is generally seen is the opposite of it as Emerson put it in his words, “very mortifying is the reluctant experience that some unfriendly excess or imbecility neutralizes the promise of genius”. Emerson laments the fact that men of promising career and personality fail to live up to the desired goal just because either they die at tender ages or “they lose themselves in the crowd”. Thus any promise of attaining fulfillment appears to be an illusion. Perfectness does not seem to be achieved according to a set goal. The best example may be the representative men as Emerson had assembled them into the pages of *The Representative Men*. They are men of genius with their own drawbacks and faults. Emerson has not portrayed them as completely polished men of characters. Every person we come across creates a false impression on us. In reality, Emerson marks, “they are all creatures of given temperament” (54). Human temper “prevails over everything of time, place and condition” (55-56). It is under the spell

of temperament that “[m]en resist the conclusion in the morning, but adopt it as the evening wears on” (55). Temperament makes a man hear his own voice only cutting himself from other influences. It is the lord which conspires with another lord Illusion and imprison us in an invisible enclose.

Succession, another lord, is a “secret of illusoriness” that does not let anyone focus or concentrate on a particular thing or idea thereby influencing human perception. Nothing seems to be stationary to be grappled with forever. Our longing for the permanence or stationary is shattered by the hurrying succession of our moods. Change is inevitable; the more we try to stop the succession or the progression the more we fail to grasp it. “Gladly we would anchor, but the anchorage is quicksand”. It is an “onward trick of nature” (58) and every man is destined to fall prey to this trick. The events occurred in human life in succession can never be altered. It seems to have resemblance with “the Stoic doctrine of world-acceptance and resignation”. The Roman stoic-cum-philosopher Seneca has marked out how chain or succession of events, big and small, assume the role of the lord:

Those decisions are fixed and permanent ...You will go the way that all things go...This is the law to which you were born; it is the lot of your father mother your ancestors and of all who came before you as it will be of those who come after you. There is no means of altering the irresistible succession of events which carries all things along in its binding grip (Woelfel 126).

Emerson identifies Surface as another potent lord of life that draws human beings away from reality. There are innumerable layers of surfaces that come before all individuals as they deal with the outer world. James Guthrie is of the opinion that ... “Emerson had come to believe by the time he wrote “Experience” that human beings’ interactions with the world and with each other consisted primarily of surfaces encounter other surfaces”(121). Thus one surface or layer carries a person only to another one thereby taking far away from reality or truth. Truth does not seem to be a particular entity and it is covered by innumerable surfaces of deception. Emerson in his poem “Blight” has marked the condition as,

Give me truths;

For I am weary of the surfaces,

And die of inanition (“Blight” 152).

Emerson’s quest to know the exact place of an individual subject is conditioned by the fact that there are innumerable numbers of surfaces that cover us making impossible to know the essence or the exact location of human beings. The beginning of the essay “Experience” with the question as “[w]here do we find ourselves?”(49) seems to indicate the basic idea that there is a vast gap between what we think of ourselves or of our actual place of existence and where we are actually in the material world or the real world. Shamoan Zamir has precisely noticed that “...Emerson conceive[s] of consciousness as passive perception and action as unreflective activity, and so fail to give an adequate account of the location of the subject in the world” (12).

Surprise is another of the powerful lords of life that enables people to be aware of their helplessness while experiencing daily life. Goodman argues in *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition* (1990), “[s]urprise is essential to Emerson’s conception of life as a set of concentric circles, around every one of which another can be drawn. When it is drawn the limitations and the possibilities of life take on an entirely different aspect” (50). These surprises are different in their natures and impacts on man. Nobody knows what kind of dress surprise is going to wear tomorrow. Truth cannot be attained wholly and whenever someone attempts to grasp it he is sure to be surprised with many layers of truths that remove the man from the originality. Human beings come across the lord Surprise at different point of time unexpectedly that reminds them their powerlessness to grasp the exact nature of surprise itself because it is a flash of light that swiftly passes by giving a man the taste of something for which he is not at all prepared. This is the reason Emerson places it in the list of seven selected lords and he seems to have a great concern for it as the unexpectedness and the newness are carried by Surprise. The possibility of drawing one circle after another to an incalculable extent as Emerson points out in the essay “Circles” may be understood as the possibility of surprises that life offers to human beings at every stage of it to an unimaginable level. Any kind of discovery or newness is always associated with surprise.

In “Circles” Emerson opines:

Life is a series of surprises. We don't guess today the mood, the pleasure, the power of tomorrow, when we are building up our being... The masterpieces of God, the total growths and universal movements of the soul, he hideth; they are incalculable. The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory and to do something without knowing how or why; in short to draw a new circle (298-300).

In a similar way in "Experience" Emerson comments, "[l]ife is a series of surprises, and would not be worth taking or keeping, if it were not. God delights to isolate us every day, and hide from us the past and the future" (69).

In both the cases, it can be noticed that men do not have total possession of what has already happened and what will happen in future. The inaccessibility to the future happenings conveys its award to a human being in the form of surprise and revelation. For Emerson, these series of surprises may befall us at any moment. He does not seem to be indifferent to these powerful forces of life as he is ready to accept them believing that life is worth living if people accept the inseparability of surprises. The lords of life including Surprise are not static and they assume different colors and faces as time passes. A man cannot be controlled forever by these lords because Emerson believes that everything is in the state of flux and process. Even a truth may assume the color of falsehood in course of time. Similarly, there is nothing to be feared of Surprises or any other lords because it is the integrity of human mind that can challenge these temporary commands or authorities. Surprise, for Emerson, is not filled with negative powers; it is the genius who surprises the common man with their discoveries and inventions. He says, "[i]n the thought of a genius there is always a surprise" (70). Surprises make a man aware of something strange or unbelievable. Everyone is surrounded by them at stages of life that "magically liven our experiences" (Guillen 215).

Reality, another influential lord, for Emerson is surrounded by the fog named Illusion. Language fails to convey to us what is real or what is the truth. There is no objective truth. People see things from their own subjective lenses and create their own stories from their own viewpoints. All thoughts or facts are fragmented, incomplete and partial in nature. People should accept or receive whatever has been given by the destiny. Truth does not seem to be chosen by man; it can only be experienced or received. The path of experiencing

truth is not a convenient path and therefore according to Emerson the “[l]ife of truth is cold, and... mournful” (“Experience” 82). Individual beings are destined to receive it with layers of illusions. Susan Dunston in “In the ‘Light Out of the East’: Emerson on Self, Subjectivity and Creativity” (2012) has noticed this condition in Emerson when she says, “as Emerson knew all too well by the time of ‘Experience’, we must be receptive to what is rather than to what we would prefer, what would be convenient, what we assume or the fraction of reality that our selective attention happens to register”. Only a part of reality is allowed to be enjoyed by man as total reality is always an elusive idea. Even it is seen that the language fails to deliver the desired result due to its limitations to express the essence of reality. The world has an “indelible inscription” (26) for mankind which is surprising and unanticipated. Sometimes the inscription seems to be very excruciating for the layman as it shocks him unexpectedly. The most challenging deed for Emerson as expressed in “Experience” is to stay intrepid and experience what life bequeaths him.

Emerson restores confidence in the absence of a real world around him and says, “I know that the world I converse with the city and in the farms is not the world I think” (“Experience” 85). The reality is something else that cannot be grasped totally. Every time people console themselves of getting the taste of reality but it is far apart from them to be understood: “There are moods in which we court suffering, in the hope that here at least we shall find reality” (52). The hope to find the absolute reality is a continuous process. Though reality always slips away from our hand the quest for this is always there. Human beings appear to be confused due to the poor dream-like attitude to recognize the reality. A lethargic or a sleepy atmosphere always surrounds human perception. Emerson acknowledges the fact that “sleep lingers all our lifetime about our eyes, as night hovers all day in the bough of the fir tree” (49). Human beings are inept to think straightly. The future is not unfurled before the eyes according to their own wishes. So if any good or bad happens to them they are surprised immediately. Until the curtain laid by the future is lifted human beings are helpless. Waldo’s death has finally brought Emerson closer to apprehend the overshadowing power of reality. It seems that all people simply try to comfort or console themselves thinking that as death is inevitable and all must meet this final destiny, so all will surely know the “reality that will not dodge” them. This reality is the absolute reality for all men who always “look to that with a grim satisfaction”. But the tragedy is that “real nature”

(53) always appears to evade us. Rexford Styzen marks that the occurrence of grieving for the death of his only son teaches Emerson “how difficult it is for human beings to probe below the surface of things” (Styzen 23). The evasion of reality or the “evanescence and lubricity of all objects” as marked by Emerson seem to be the “the most unhandsome part of our condition” (“Experience” 53). It is the human tendency to believe that if they endeavor “[they] shall find reality, sharp peaks and edge of truth. But it turns out to be scene-painting and counterfeit”. Reality teaches men that there are no sharp edges of truth; there are innumerable layers of so-called truth that lead people nowhere but to the world of illusion. Emerson repeatedly laments that reality is something that always slides on; he is never introduced to reality though he tries to find out the essence of it. “An innavigable sea” (52) defends reality from those who try to comprehend it. This sea washes away all the means of communication between reality and the person trying to discern it. Emerson’s idea of Subjectiveness as the last part of the seven lords of life inevitably indicates and asserts the individuality of each and every individual. Being a transcendentalist philosopher he emphasizes on the power of individualism as well as each man’s subjective view that differs unavoidably from one to the other person. Due to the power of subjectivity one interpretation provided by one man is not similar to that of the other man. The power of subjectivity controls not only the individual but also the thinking, ideas or views of that person. There exists a huge gulf between all men and their subjective views; each man cherishes a peculiar relation to nature which may differ from person to person.

Emerson in “Experience” compares the subjective world of an individual with that of a globe like this:

There will be the same gulf between every me and thee, as between the original and the picture. The universe is the bride of the soul. All private sympathy is partial. Two human beings are like globes, which can touch only in a point, and whilst they remain in contact all other points of each of the spheres are inert; their turn must also come, and the longer a particular union lasts the more energy of appetency the parts not in union acquire (78).

The subjectiveness of each individual empowers him with an exclusive kind of a point of view that may be different in the case of the other people. Emerson maintains, “[w]e believe

in ourselves, as we do not believe in others. We permit all things to ourselves, and that which we call sin in others, is experiment for us” (79). Due to the different subjective points of view we judge one thing from a different direction that yields dissimilar meanings. This is the power of subjectiveness before which all human beings are helpless. Knowledge varies due to the varied subjective attitudes.

James Guthrie opines,

The necessity of subjectivity removes from our experience the dependable presence not just of objective realities; Emerson goes on to observe, but also of moral absolutes. Each action individual takes may ultimately appear to be consistent when viewed from within the context of his own personality even if that action violates society’s laws and merely our own sensibilities” (121).

The subjective knowledge does not seem to take us to a universally acknowledged objective truth. The language used by a particular person to indicate something is itself insufficient to achieve an absolute knowledge. Emerson here appears to be skeptical of the power of language itself to deliver us the reality or truth. The predominance of the lords over human capability to know the absolute reality seems to represent the imperfection and the feeble quality of the human beings in general. Craig Brush in *Montaigne and Bayle: Variations on the Theme of Skepticism* (2012) has rightly remarked on the limitation of human potential as, “[t]he world is too unsure, nature too various, the possibilities too diverse for anything as feeble as man to be able to extract truth from being. That the truth must be hidden gives witness to the frailty of man, yes, but also to the richness of creation (157).

Human knowledge is extremely inadequate and poor in the face of these seven lords that defeat an individual in his/her quest for truth. Brush continues with his arguments that “[m]an was not created to know, but to receive from above what Providence apportions to him. When he strives to attain knowledge, he attempts to transcend his own limitations, thereby falsifying his nature and incurring deplorable consequences” (158). Emerson’s inherent doubt on the dependability of knowledge of the external world gained through sense experiences results in admitting the indissoluble strength of the ‘lords of life’. This idea of ‘lords of life’ is explored not only in “Experience” but the other essays “Friendship”,

‘Illusions’ and Fate’ appear to deal with this theme to explore the human relationships. The fact that Emerson has included only seven lords in the essay “Experience” does not necessarily indicate that these are the exclusive powers that act on human beings. Emerson’s confession, that only these lords have appeared in his life as powerful agents, hints at the possibility of the existence of other authorial powers similar to that of seven lords that may appear in the life of another being also.

The essay “Friendship” published in 1841 and included in *Essays: First Series* is a fine contemplation on affection and discontent in human relationships at various moments of life. It is a wonderful endeavor on Emerson’s part to evaluate the depth of affiliation among people who are known to one another but have failed to yield the desired mutual understanding and cooperation due to a kind breach or gap that can only be felt personally. One of the closest human relationships that man can ever have is undoubtedly friendship that provides affection, comfort and mutual aid in all weathers of life. In one sense, it can be regarded as a direct blessing from the Almighty because a friend really does a lot for the other friend. Emerson is also one of the luckiest people to celebrate friendship with friends like Henry David Thoreau and Margaret Fuller during his lifetime and his essay “Friendship” is the best embodiment of it. Jeffrey Steele in “Transcendental Friendship: Emerson Fuller and Thoreau” (2006) comments,

In the 1830s and 40s Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau engaged in prolonged series of meditations and dialogues on the meaning of friendship. At key moments, each writer decided that fundamental issues of human development could not be articulated without taking into account the role of friendship (121).

Emerson, being aware of the dual sides of the nature of friendship, feels the utter need to discuss the positive as well as the negative side of it through “Friendship”. His skeptical disposition appears to be revealed gradually as the essay progresses from one point to another expressing its pros and cons. Emerson who admits the need for this vital relationship to lead a successful life simultaneously doubts the actual need of it in realizing self-reliance he vehemently argues for. Emerson believes that it is the lack of capacity to understand or match the moods of one person to that of another for which knowing a friend becomes

impossible in the true sense. He feels that he is not sure of his friend's mood and thereby cannot experience it by himself equally. He exclaims, "[i]f I was sure of thee, sure of thy capacity, sure to match my mood with thine, I should never think again of trifles in relation to thy comings and goings ("Friendship" 190). Alan Levine marks this fact in "Skeptical Triangle? A Comparison of the Political thought of Emerson, Nietzsche and Montaigne" (2011) by comparing him with Montaigne, "[l]ike Montaigne, Emerson is skeptical about human capacities. Emerson discusses three different human phenomena that we cannot and should not trust: mood, senses and our understanding" (243).

Emerson seems to find it at odds with his proclamation of self-sufficiency and autonomy in life from all authoritative views. He feels that in course of time friends also behave like dictating or imposing one's own demands for the sustenance of the relationship. He articulates true friendship as the hardest thing that cannot be broken by any outward blow because "[w]hen they are real they are not glass threads or frostwork, but the solidest thing" ("Friendship" 192) ever known. But he is also doubtful about the possibility of such a solid relationship. Because the very moment friendship commences between two individuals the charm tends to fade away: "All association must be a compromise, and what is worst, the very flower and aroma of the flower of each of the beautiful natures disappear as they approach each other" (190-191). Though Emerson proclaims that "a friend is a person with whom I may be sincere" and "happy is the house that shelters a friend" (193) he suddenly alters his voice showing his readers the alarming side of friendship as "at the entrance of second person hypocrisy begins" (194). Emerson oscillates between his contrasting notions of sincerity by the practice of which people can come close to the truth. Though he accepts that a self-reliant individual can be genuine only with himself or herself saying that "everyman alone is sincere" (194), he never totally shuns the idea that sincerity can also be developed while coming in contact with another friend instead of the self only. He again writes in the same essay:

A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him I may think aloud. I am arrived at last in the presence of a man so real and equal that I may drop even those undermost garments of dissimulation, courtesy and second thought, which men never

put off, and may deal with him with the simplicity and wholeness with which one chemical atom meets another (193).

The most noteworthy instance of friendship that the American minds have ever celebrated is that of Emerson and his disciple Thoreau. But later both of them seem to be skeptical of continuing the relationship in that level as has been started earlier. Both of them have sensed a lack of compatibility and sincerity between them and have identified “combative and antagonistic aspect of friendship” (Steele 134) drawing them apart day by day. The understanding of the momentary and delicate quality of human relationship has produced no fruit but skepticism. Like the impossibility of attaining reality as Emerson seems to understand at various stages of time that have been reflected in his essays, he comes to realize that every friendship is only a partial understanding between two men; not a lifetime achievement.

It is a friendship that allows one to share all his thoughts and ideas to another one without any hesitancy as it acts as intellectual exposure or revelation to one another without any obstruction. But such a comfortable ambiance survives for a short time period. Emerson finds a discrepancy in continuing such a relationship that gives only “sudden sweetness” (“Friendship” 190) to one another. He says, “[a] friend, therefore, is a sort of paradox in nature” (195). It is not that Emerson is skeptical of friendship only; sometimes, he seems to find any human relationship as something that fails to keep the promise made at the beginning of it and doubts the existence of absolute and universally accepted ideal acquaintances all the time. His skepticism is not limited. In this regard, Russell Goodman remarks,

No particular friend or relationship is signaled out in Emerson’s statement that ‘whole human family is bathed with an element of love like a fine ether’. The tone is sanguine but the reader is left to wonder where in this picture is the friendship of one person to another (8).

With the help of “Friendship”, Emerson seems to extend his doubt up to any kind of human relationship that exists on earth.

The complexity he finds while understanding human nature is also marked in the case of Montaigne who has molded Emerson's thoughts and ideas. Montaigne is suspicious of the very nature of human being when he says, "[t]ruly man is a marvelously vain, diverse and undulating object. It is hard to find any constant and uniform judgment on him" (qtd in Casson 60). The unpredictability of human nature that shapes Montaigne's arguments is also influential in the case of Emerson.

Emerson in "Spiritual Laws" describes the relationship with binary opposition:

When all is done, a person of related mind, a brother or sister by nature, comes to us so softly and easily, so nearly and intimately, as if it were the blood in our proper veins, that we feel as if someone was gone, instead of another having come: we are utterly relieved and refreshed: it is a sort of joyful solitude (143).

Here describing the relationship as "joyful solitude" (143) seems to again indicate the double conscious mind of Emerson. Again in "Friendship" he frequently fuses words of binary opposition to define friendship like "uneasy pleasures", "fine pains", "and delicious torment" (190) "sweet poison". For him "[f]riendship, like the immortality of the soul, is too good to be believed" (187). Here he persistently employs techniques of skepticism by putting together words that are contrary to nature to provoke postponement of final judgment regarding the exact character of friendship. His changing vision regarding friendship between 1840 and 1841 is discernible if his outlook of this is compared. He extols this relationship in one of the letters to John Sterling published in 1840 as "I am a worshiper of friendship, and cannot find any other good equal to it...he is holy; let me be holy also; our relations are eternal" (*The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume 7*, Emerson 384). This attitude regarding friendship is contaminated as in the essay "Friendship" published just one year later. Emerson seems to be uncertain of his earlier thoughts thereby making paradoxical comments on it. He fails to obtain that kind of eternal friendship he has visualized earlier and laments, "[w]e walk alone in the world. Friends, such as we desire, are dreams and fables" ("Friendship" 203). For him, they are not going to cheer up the mortal soul of the two persons because duplicity and treachery do not let the relationship stay smooth. It is not only in case of friendship but any kind of human connection does not yield complete happiness or pleasure that is thought to be ideal. As

soon as Emerson seems to talk about the positive aspects of friendship there follows the hint of the impossibility of its existence. Perhaps the ideals he sets for a kind of unadulterated friendship can never be realized in mortal life. Even Emerson seems to be skeptical of matrimonial alliance when he remarks, “Marriage (in which is called the spiritual world) is impossible, because of the inequality between every subject and every object... There will be the same gulf between every me and every thee as between the original and the picture” (“Experience” 78). Emerson discerns a vast breach in the relationship between the bride and the groom in particular or man and woman in general. The hardest job in all relationships that Emerson distrusts seems to be carrying out the duty of keeping the initial promise at the appropriate time in the course of life.

The essay “Friendship”, according to John Lysaker, “has made Emerson a canonical name among those who consider the nature of friendship and its place in human life” (163). This literary piece of writing is an exposition of Emersonian mind who views friendship as “aporetic” and “full of paradoxes” (Korhonen 403). Commonly friendship is regarded as divine and pure that empowers one to lead a daring life thinking that one is always there to provide assist and care if needed. It is a “striking meditation” (Lysaker 163). But the most ironical side of it is that friendship behaves like seasonal flowers that seem to grow pale and shed their petals as the season changes. Emerson is so skeptical of it that he seems to find it as a symbol of oath unfulfilled. The sincerity and tenderness cherished a lot in friendship by him slowly become a mirage. Though both Margaret Fuller and Caroline Sturgis who have been fulfilling the need of true friendship in Emerson’s life, gradually, it is exposed that “while Emerson requires the utmost sincerity among friends his friendship with Fuller and Sturgis taught him well that sincerity sometimes wounds” (165). In spite of being around “circle of godlike men and women” (“Friendship” 197), he does not appear to be happy as he doubts the possibility of the existence of sincerity that is vital for the relationship.

The essay “Friendship” may also be read as testing friendship with all positive and negative aspects. Emerson finds the laws of friendship as corresponding to laws of nature: “The laws of friendship are austere and eternal, of one web with the laws of nature are in eternal alteration” (190). And again, he argues in *The Art of Successful Living* (2005) that “[t]he Law of nature is alteration” (32). Hence if the two sentences are compared, a clear point can

be derived that Emerson supports the view that there is no permanence in friendship; like the alterable laws of nature, the laws of friendship also tend to change. He supports the transitoriness or mobility of friendship and says, “[i]t should never fall into something usual and settled, it should be alert and inventive, and add rhyme and reason to what was drudgery”(“Friendship” 197). The alertness and the quality of unsettled friendship he supports indicate his skeptical nature who talks about cautiousness while accepting friendship. In the essay “Circles” he identifies himself as being an “experimenter” (296) who “unsettle[s] all things” (297). In the same line, Branka Arsic in the book *On Leaving :A Reading in Emerson*(2010) comments, “[i]f, in Emerson, unsettling is another name for experimenting then a friendship that is always exposed to leaving and arriving is, I suggest, something like an experimental friendship, always alert and always ready to quit”(201). Emerson’s advice seems to point out the fact that friendship should never be taken into account as something always positive and encouraging. His uncertainty towards friendship seems to be the repercussion of his personal relationships developed with many friends at the different parts of life that have badly failed to generate a smooth human relation. Though he acknowledges that friendship has its own charismatic influence as it does possess “golden hour” (“Friendship” 187) that is vital for happiness in life; but this golden hour has passed so promptly and unpredictably that it shatters all our aspirations and “we are surprised with shades of suspicion and unbelief”. Surprise normally bestows us some sudden ecstatic moment of happiness and it is normally associated with delight and joy. But the surprise, friendship bequeaths, is not joyous or pleasurable; here individuals are surprised to know the real limitation of friendship; the limitation of the positive impact of a friendship of one friend upon the other one. It hints at the “infinite remoteness” or the interior gap or detachment between them. Emerson compares the taste of friendship to that of an “Egyptian skull at our banquet” (188). By this comparison, he offers the metaphor of the skull of an animal as used in Egypt during feasts as a sign of something pleasurable and gratifying but momentarily enjoyed owing to its transitory nature. Friendship is also fleeting in nature because there is a huge split between friendship idealized and the friendship realized. This is the time Emerson perceives the gap between idealism and realism and finally becomes skeptical of bridging this gap in the real world. As a transcendentalist writer, he prefers idealism to realism. But when he becomes aware of the “inevitable failure of the ideal in the

real world of real man” (Bosco 38) he has embraced skepticism about the possibility of transforming his idealistic philosophical principles as uphold by transcendentalism to the realistic world or the material world.

Being incredulous of ideal friendship as envisaged by him as a “solidest thing” (“Friendship” 192) Emerson has ample reasons to feel the need of self-reliance or self-sufficiency to lead a life. He has to face a tug of war between the constant need for human affection and the perpetual desire to live in an intellectual universe. His idea of self-reliance seems to support the view that no relation is up to the mark except the relation with the self. In one of his journal entries of 1826, he comments on illusory nature of friendship saying, “... friends that occupy my thoughts are not men but certain phantoms clothed in the form & face & apparel of men” (qtd in Tharaud 364). His wish for a self-reliant life devoid of such illusory friendship is contrasted with his words in a sermon of December 1831, where he feels the necessity of such acquaintances to be known in the public sphere. For him it is “one of the intensest pleasures, to see far into the thoughts of another, and to be seen into by another...so that we feel that we are known” (365). Hence, in spite of his doubt regarding the sincerity and tenderness associated with friendship, he simultaneously appears to be around of such group of friends only for his need to be acknowledged by them. His idea of individualism and self-reliance as all in all to survive in a complicated world does not seem to be flawless as he himself acknowledges the fact that human beings can never prosper in isolation from the other human bonds that are inevitable. He confesses in “History” that “A man is a bundle of relations, a knot of roots, whose flower and fruitage is the world” (39). In spite of his bold assertion of himself as an ardent supporter of self-reliance in reality it is seen that he paradoxically accepts the importance of being in the social sphere. Thus he is skeptical of his own idea of self-reliance. He appears to occupy such a huge place in the minds of the American public during his lifetime that Lawrence Buell rightfully referred him as “the first public intellectual in the history of United States”(qtd in Ronan 369). The same fact is also echoed in the words of John Ronan in “Emerson’s Autobiographical Philosophy” (2010) where he remarks that even if Emerson has solemnly believed in the supremacy of the self or the solitary mind, “...in reality, few men, fewer writers, and perhaps no other American thinker has lived more in public or in the company of others that Emerson did” (369). The man who is occasionally doubtful of the very existence as well as the importance

of friendship in his personal life also feels the need of companions to make sense of the self as both the self and the other appear to be interdependent in their acquisition of meanings in life. The most important aspect of his unconvinced mind is that he does not seem to be consistent what he himself declares to be final.

Sometimes, as Goodman argues in “Emerson and Skepticism: A Reading of ‘Friendship’”, his dubious mood recedes as he “advances the epistemological claim that we know our friends at least as well as anything else we know” (11). Though he warns people against accepting or taking into account easily any kind of friendship and indirectly supporting for us to be skeptical of it, he suddenly reverts his own opinion and says, “Yet these uneasy pleasures and fine pains are for curiosity and not for life. They are not to be indulged” (“Friendship” 190). Whatever has been bestowed by life (e.g. Friendship) to us should be accepted and enjoyed and our suspicion regarding it should not impede us from enjoying the gift of life.

The whole essay “Friendship” is a revelation of the positive as well as negative sides of having friends in one’s life. There is an inherent stress between the need of friendship and the need of seclusion from any kind of overt social connection. Alan Hodder in “Let Him be to Me a Spirit” (2010) points out that “Emerson allows the paradoxes of friendship to stand” that inevitably signals his conscious mind that is fairly aware of its urgency in human life. The essay “Experience” is, therefore, a sincerer attempt that “at points, [it] oscillates almost dizzily between sonorous expressions of praise for the value of friendship...while elsewhere its tone is monitory and forbidding” (130).

The skeptical thought as germinated in Emerson’s mind may be seen as a discrepancy rendered by the two opposite thoughts; the demands of the individualism as a free and self-reliant person and the simultaneous pull of social links or human bonds as offered in the form of friendship. The two parts do not seem to be possibly going hand in hand. Jeffrey Steele in “Transcendental Friendship: Emerson, Fuller, and Thoreau” (2006) has justified this point as follows:

...Transcendentalist models of individuation cannot be completely reconciled with the theories of social relationship; for the demands of self-reliance, especially the

intuition of the “divine” depths of the self, often pull one out of the social orbit into an intense introspection (121).

In “Friendship” Emerson also makes positive remarks about friendship like “[h]appy is the house that shelters a friend!” but suddenly he becomes aware of susceptibility of making such comment and starts apprehending friendship as a kind of threat lurking on the head of an individual. Again, on the one hand, he says “a friendship is a person with whom I may be sincere” (193) and on the other hand takes help of paradoxical comment and says, “[e]very man is sincere; at the entrance of a second person hypocrisy begins” (194). The whole essay hints at the fact that Emerson swings between admirations of as well as distrust about friendship. His ideas are caught between these two worlds and his view has found no solid ground to stand affirm in one place. Friendship is, as if, far away from the ideal like any artistic work which is at a distance of the ideal art form. The discrepancy between the real and the ideal as envisaged by Emerson in the case of Friendship is similar to his view of art. Both of them—friendship and art—do not seem to yield the authentic result. What they promise is not going to be fulfilled in reality. The main argument of the essay “Friendship” is reflected in his another essay “Art”:

Yet when we have said all our fine things about arts, we must end with a frank confession, that the arts, as we know them, are but initial. Our best praise is given to what they aimed at and promised, not to the actual result... The real value of the Iliad or the Transfiguration is as signs of powers; billows or ripples they are of the stream of tendency; tokens of everlasting effort to produce... There is higher work for art than the arts. They are abortive births of an imperfect or vitiated instinct (337-338).

The “actual result” (338) which human beings aspire to achieve is always a matter of illusion. There is a vast gap between the initial or the early promise—be it of art or of friendship—and the final attainment or fulfillment of that promise. There is no consistency between these two phases. Emerson’s skepticism about the realization of ideal friendship in particular and of human relationship, in general, seems to be more concrete and dense in his later part of life. In “Experience” his doubt about all human bondage and love has reached its height when he proclaims that false impression always shows its hideous face

ubiquitously: “There is an optical illusion about every person we met” (“Experience” 55). The illusion never appears to allow us to realize the friendship idealized. A dark, gloomy and menacing ambiance always surrounds all relationships that forbid the smooth realization of it. Russell Goodman has found out the relation between the essays “Friendship” and “Experience” where Emerson depicts friendship as based on human moods: “If, as Emerson says in ‘Experience’ our life is ‘a train of moods like a string of beads’ each showing ‘only what lies in its focus’, then Emerson’s friendship essay records the moods of our lives with others” (9).

The question, while discussing the essay “Friendship” and the philosophy of self-reliance propounded by Emerson is whether a person who is completely independent and self-reliant needs other human beings to live with or to converse with. It can be noticed that Emerson’s skepticism about friendship does not necessarily indicate the existence of everlasting loneliness in the material world. George Kateb in “Friendship and Love” (2006) opines that “[w]hen we ask whether the self-reliant individuals need others we mean to see what human relationships Emerson posits as ideally suited to the self-reliant individuals” (191). Thus the essay “Friendship” can be read as an assessment of ideal friendship to see whether it is able to meet the demand in the real world or not. The friendship that Emerson appears to endorse is that which gives enough space to the mental development of a person without any hamper. A reciprocal adjustment and tolerance should be present amid two friends that do not want to alter or manipulate the behaviors and actions of the other person in relation. The momentous aspect of Emersonian investigation of friendship is that he has not taken any relation as approved or granted completely. He places all kinds of human love and relations—be it of friendship or of familial relations—to an acid test and looks at it from the positive as well as the negative sides. His critical and skeptical eyes always evaluate the human bonds cautiously and his philosophical insights on friendship seem to lead the readers nowhere as he eschewed up his own judgment to consider it either as good or bad. The dual attitude lingers on all over the essay pulling the subject matter to a place which he feels as a safer zone to deal with. From this zone, he evaluates the ideas of self-reliance and of friendship. The importance, given concurrently to both sides—the urgency of complete self-reliance and independent of the exterior element as well as the need of friendship and mutual helps—makes his argument floating on the air of verdict. His failure to judge

actually can be viewed as a positive aspect that empowers him to stay in the comfort zone. Any attempt to meet the ideal friendship is always postponed and never seems to be attained in reality. Between the human aim and the destination there lies a vast gap; the destination is slippery and slips away when individuals try to grasp it. A human soul only aspires to have a friend in reality who can be identified totally with the self. Total identification is like mirage only. In “Experience” Emerson laments the impossibility of meeting the ideal and real and says, “an innavigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we aim at and converse with”. The words “silent waves” seems to create an atmosphere which is hostile and threatening to human relations. It acts quietly but in a powerful way. The “innavigable sea” (52) does not allow human to experience friendship smoothly as it creates heinous waves that draw people apart constantly. What Emerson wants in a friend or a good company is something that helps in the mutual and comprehensive progress of both that is far away from all inconsistencies of life.

He says about it something positive as follows:

The delight in good company, in pure, brilliant social atmosphere; the incomparable satisfaction of a society in which everything can be safely said, in which every member returns a true echo, in which is wise freedom, an ideal republic of sense, simplicity, knowledge and thorough good meaning abide—doubles the value of life (“Social Aims” 49).

But the positivity of human companionship seems to be marred sometimes in his other writings. His search for a perfect model of friendship that increases the worth of life has not provided him a satisfactory result. His extremes sense of skepticism can be noticed in the “Introductory Lecture” of Lectures on the Times as given at Masonic temple, Boston in 1841 when he daringly asserts his views: “[a]ll Men, all things, the state, the church, yea the friends of the heart are the phantasms and unreal beside the sanctuary of the heart” (qtd in Kateb 192). In “Friendship”, he acknowledges the fact that friends are “of the heart” but it is merely a product of fantasy or illusion. A friend can be an externalized form of the self or the other self if he stands for both sincerity and truthfulness. He finds delight when he views that the other self of the friend is identical with his own self: “The only joy I have in his being mine is that the not mine is mine”. Thus the “not mine” seems to be completely

symmetrical with the “mine” if both the parts show sincerity and truthfulness to the relationship. But the challenge for Emerson appears to be the prospect of assimilation of the “not mine” and the “mine” (199) in physical as well as the mental world. The bridge between the two poles are fragile and as they come nearer to each other the “hypocrisy begins” (194). It occurs not only in case of two poles or two friends; even if the third joins them the smoothness no longer subsists among them. He says, “[t]wo may talk and one may hear, but three cannot take part in a conversation of the most sincere and searching sort” (198). Such kinds of conversations appear to be devoid of all sincerities that are fundamental for the cooperation and mutual understanding among them.

Emerson doubts the benefits of amity if the souls of the two friends or more come together and merge completely without any separation. He wants his readers to maintain gap while establishing companionship. They should be aware of the fact that they have their own individual identities and it is better not to lose them while coming close to a seemingly harmonious relationship. He asserts, “[t]here must be very two, before there can be very one” (199). It appears that Emerson in a way wants people to set up a bond like a mechanical blend or fusion where the individual parts retain its own uniqueness but still remains in a mixture. He desires an existence of cooperation in friendship as similar to the mechanical blending. The support of inevitable distance in friendship as Emerson portrays in the essay is well-noticed by George Kateb:

Emerson speaks of distance between friends... He sometimes advocates distance, knowing that the passion of friendship is to overcome distance; he sometimes seems troubled that since the growth of individualism in 1820's, all sentiments have weakened and an extreme distance or detachment, not intrinsic to the human condition has developed; and he sometimes resigns himself sadly to the inevitable existence of distance, to the 'infinite remoteness' in even the closest sorts of relationships, including friendship (203).

While discussing Emerson's shifting attitude towards friendship it is imperative to view it along with his personal acquaintances for which his skeptical behavior seems to develop. Among all the acquaintances the noteworthy one is between Henry David Thoreau and him as “it is a rich event in literary history, one important not only for what drew the men

together but also for what drove them apart” (Sattelmeyer 187). Once the gap has come between them they have never managed to restore it back later. Both of them seem to develop displeasure towards the presence of each other in a close bond. For Emerson, in course of time, Thoreau merely has become one of the many youthful friends-cum-disciples only who desperately failed to hold tight the charm of friendship they previously have shared together. Thoreau seems to be a stumbling block in the path of private progress of Emerson.

Thoreau in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (2001) suspects the reliability of a friend as for him “[i]t is impossible to say all that we think, even to our truest Friend” (182). A friend is nothing but a “ruthless Vandals” (185) and the relationship with him is so unpredictable and difficult to deal with that Thoreau compares it with taming of a hyena, “I could tame a hyena more easily than my Friend” (183). The “constitutional differences” that exist between two friends never make the path of friendship smooth and the greatest impediments of ideal friendship as Thoreau has noticed are “forever a forbidden theme to the lips of Friends. They advise by their whole behavior” (182). The interference in the form of advice hampers blooming the flower of the relationship independently. Friendship always seems to demand and try to mold the freedom and the self-reliant nature of a friend. In the same way, Emerson also feels hampered when a friend joins his company with all the impositions on his mental as well as physical world. His sense of individualism tries to overcome the need for friendship or other social closeness. The moment his theory of self-reliance gets precedence over friendship he tends to seclude himself from all external relations and utters, “[l]et me be alone to the end of the world, rather than that my friend should overstep, by a word or a look, his real sympathy” (“Friendship” 199). He knows that the ideal friendship can never be achieved; the moment a friend steps into the heart of another person it takes with him the seeds of disloyalty and roughness that prohibit the complete identification of one with the other. The gleaming face that friendship shows is momentary. In Thoreau’s words, “...the rainbow, however, beautiful and unerring a sign, does not promise a fair weather forever, but only for a season” (*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack River, Thoreau, 183*).

But the strain of optimism and the better pole of friendship are not totally discarded either by Emerson or by Thoreau. In spite of finding a bucket of demerits regarding friendship, both of them are aware that there is always something that evokes a positive result in this bondage. They are truly responsive to the two poles of it; they have critical eyes towards both the tranquil and the antagonistic part of friendship. Emerson finds cheerfulness in the union of friends and says, “[t]he effect of the indulgence of this human affection is a certain cordial exhilaration” (“Friendship” 183). The moment two friends start sharing their mutual affection they all have become uniformly transformed into new shapes as “the moment we indulge our affections, the earth is metamorphosed; there is no winter, and no night; all tragedies, all ennuis, vanish,—all duties even” (185).

Again like Emerson, the positive aspect is also marked by Thoreau when he asserts his belief in the utterance of an oriental philosopher: “Although friendship between good men is interrupted, their principles remain unaltered. The stalk of the lotus may be broken, and the fibers remain connected”. In another place, he eulogizes friendship by assimilating his own self with the self of the other, i.e. the friend as follows:

My friend is not of some other race, or family of men, but the flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone. He is my real brother. I see his nature groping yonder so like mine. We do not live far apart. Have not the fates associated us in many ways? (*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack River*, 183).

Friendship is a wonderful feeling in human life that cannot be completely separated from the need of it in daily life. The poem with which Emerson begins “Friendship” clearly renders his optimistic approach towards a friend when he says, “...thy nobleness has taught to mastermind my despair” (181). Emerson along with his intimate friends like Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau appear to have understood this fact. Marking this, Jeffrey Steele comments, “each writer decided that fundamental issues of human development could not be articulated without taking into account the role of friends” (121). For Emerson starting a friendship is a flash of ecstasy as well as an embarrassment; it is a complex understanding as he frequently moves back and forth with different arguments in the realm of friendship. Though the friendship between Emerson and Henry David Thoreau is a very remarkable happening in the history of American Transcendentalism it seems that at last, it has become

a futile relationship due to the incompatibility and contradictions rooted deeply in them. “If Emerson and Thoreau were friends”, Michael Brodrick questions, “[w]hy did they describe friendship as an unattainable ideal? They might have lived by their high-minded theories of friendship or revised them to make them comport with their actions” (92). In response to this question, it can be said without doubt that both of them must have developed a skeptical attitude towards the benefit of ideal friendship as envisaged by them earlier.

Along with Emerson his closest acquaintance Thoreau also used to write a lot on the friendship after the publication of Emerson’s essay. The book *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) by Thoreau is a similar kind of attempt of literary creation. Thoreau here cherishes the same kind of skeptical attitude towards friendship; though he praises it he also seems to be sure of the fact that it will not last forever. He ensures with his voice the volatility of friendship. He says, “[ts]he only danger in Friendship is that it will end. It is a delicate plant though native... Perhaps there are none charitable, none disinterested, none wise, noble, and heroic enough for a true and lasting Friendship” (179). Like the words as expressed by Emerson in “Friendship”, “at the entrance of a second person hypocrisy begins” (194) Thoreau also says with similar tone: “In human intercourse the tragedy begins” (179). It appears that Thoreau’s ideas of friendship are more inclined to his personal relationship with acquaintances that he has abstained from mentioning the name:

I know that I have frequently disappointed them by not giving them words when they expected them or such as they expected. Whenever I see my Friend I speak to him but the expector, the man with the ears is not he. They will complain too that you are hard...They ask for words and deeds, when a true relation is word and deed.
(Thoreau 179)

Like Emerson who notices the differences between the ideal and the real friendship, Thoreau is also aware of the same fact as he comments directly, “[f]riendship is not so kind as it imagined” (178). In a journal published in 1850, his lamenting voice is heard about the lack of confidence, “[a]h, I yearn toward thee, my friend, but I have not confidence in thee” (qtd in Mariotti 104).

Both Emerson and Thoreau try to evaluate friendship in terms of presence of blood. For Emerson, coming towards us “a person of related mind” either be it a friend or a brother or sister is like “the blood in our proper veins” (“Spiritual Laws 143) as “[w]e are holden to men by every sort of tie, by blood, by pride...” (“Friendship” 195). But Thoreau in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* seems to respond towards it as, “[Friendship] has not much human blood in it, but consists with a certain disregard for men and their erections, the Christian duties and humanities, while it purifies the air like electricity”(178). Emerson’s doubtful attitude towards friendship is not a sudden event; it may be seen as bearing the traces of influences from his own private acquaintances with affectionate disciple like Thoreau. The journal entries of the latter published during the contemporary time of Emerson have taken the issue of friendship seriously as a suitable subject matter and “while they [journals] shared a number of themes with Emerson, Thoreau’s private reflections made painfully visible the internal tensions of transcendental friendship—a difficult, albeit noble, ideal” (See Morris). The essay “Friendship” marks a deep-seated volatility and unpredictability that exist in friendship. Emerson’s failure to reconcile idyllic friendship with the existent friendship along with its inherent shortcomings makes him restless and the essay itself indicates how the refined love as Emerson envisaged in human beings is losing its vigor. True love seems to be impossible to reside within the human soul owing to the frailty it cherishes. It “transcends the unworthy object and dwells and broods on the eternal” (“Friendship” 206). He separates the intangible love from the tangible body placing it on a higher stage thinking that human beings have contaminated the love which is inherently pure. Friendship, he declares, “cannot subsist in its perfection” (197) although “from the height degree of passionate love to the lowest degree of good-will, [friends] make the sweetness of life” (183). He knows it well that the utopian model of friendship that he has built is merely live in the world of imagination as it seems to be impossible to be realized in the material world. Building such a model it is as if Emerson is satisfying his own imaginative faculties: “I please my imagination more with a circle of godlike men and women variously related to each other and between whom subsists a lofty intelligence” (197). An intense desire of self-reliance is revealed when he finds the hand of the friend as something embarrassment as it is not going to enliven his inner soul forever. He utters with suspicion, “Who are you? Unhand me. I will be dependent no more” (204). Emerson’s dual

attitude of friendship seems to be more prominent than Thoreau. He visualizes friendship in such a perfect structure that no human beings can follow it in the real world. Jeffrey Steele opines in this regard:

...Emerson analyzed friendship through dualistic categories that valued thought over feeling, intuition over perception, universal truth over worldly phenomena. But if the existential texture and emotional richness of friendship are missing in Emerson's discussions, they are replaced by an expression of friendship's ideal—relation of mutual recognition so perfect that it could never be fully realized on earth (136).

Emerson seems to situate friendship into a very high esteem; he judges his friends by a standard so elevated that seldom a person could achieve that in reality.

"Fate" (1850) is one of the distinguished essays published in *The Conduct of Life* (1860) that explores many significant ideas and notions as held by the mature mind of Emerson. *The Conduct of Life* is a cardinal piece of work that particularly focuses on several doubts and pessimism raised in his mind and the subsequent surrender to the destiny or fate along with an occasional return to the fold of optimism. "Fate" is the product of Emerson's mature days that embodies his vital and serious concern for human life. It is a valuable work to revisit Emerson's mental working when his life has taken a serious turn after the demise of his son Waldo. During this time Emerson realizes that some changes along with traces of skepticism have crept into his mind due to several reasons. His uncompromising faith on the power of the individual as an ultimate medium to know the world as reflected in the sentences like "[t]rust thyself" ("Self-Reliance" 49) and "insist on yourself" (81) become defenseless as he recognizes more powerful dictator of life, i.e., Fate. The "irresistible dictation" ("Fate" 261) of fate can never be denied. Human beings are forced to move in the path that fate creates particularly for them. Emerson defines it as, "[t]he element running through entire nature which we popularly call fate, is known to us as limitation". Fate seems to put a limit to human desires and aspiration; it gives them surprises and shocks in any instance. "Whatever limits us", Emerson maintains, "we call Fate" (268). It is not the fate of a particular human being; rather it is the common providence or destiny of all people. "The way of Providence", Emerson says, is "little rude". Emerson makes a long list of lords that "respect no person". They are parts of human fate. Human disease, fortune, lightning, gravitational force,

volcanoes and earthquakes have their own way of ruling mankind. Providence along with fate show no mercy to humanity as it has “wild, rough, incalculable road to its end” (263).

He appears to boldly accept the reality of life and the challenges that it offers him. He says:

I have no fears of being forced in my own despite to play as we say the devil’s attorney. I have no infirmity of faith; no belief that it is of much importance what I or any man may say: I am sure that a certain truth will be said through me, though I should be dumb, or though I should try to say the reverse. Nor do I fear skepticism for any good soul. A just thinker will allow full swing to his skepticism. I dip my pen in the blackest ink, because I am not afraid of falling into my inkpot (“Worship”175).

These lines express Emerson’s inner world at the time when the collection *The Conduct of Life* was published containing the cardinal essay “Fate”.

The shift from the optimistic outlook of his life as expressed in “Nature” and “Self-Reliance” to the fold of skepticism and pessimism with some oscillation of his mind seems to be best reflected in the essays like “Experience” and “Fate”. This is the transitional period of Emerson that teaches him how his ideal beliefs on Unity or oneness of God, man and Nature suffers a setback due to the harsh realities of life that create a breach or gulf between the two. This gulf, as Emerson points out in “Montaigne, or the Skeptic” is in “between the largest promises of ideal power and the shabby experience” (246) of life. And the seven ‘lords of life’ as Emerson has pointed out in “Experience” appears to be at the behind of this widening chasm or gap which, in succeeding time, makes a man double conscious. A cautious skeptic knows how to bridge this gap in the middle.

Fate or destiny plays a significant role in the life of a common individual as it acts as one of the major ‘lords of life’ though Emerson has not placed it among the seven lords. Fate alters the linear progress of the human thought process forcing them to consider or to reconsider their views or opinions of the internal as well as external existence. It delves deep into human life and tears their lots apart. The apparent proof that it controls the lives of the individuals is that in spite of hard work people sometimes desperately fail to earn the

deserved result or goal while on the other hand, by the grace of fate or destiny, some gain a lot with putting a small amount of effort.

“Fate” is one of the refined essays of Emerson. It addresses the subjects related to his personal life and tragedies along with his subsequent surrender to fate. He opines with a clear voice to explore the fact that the game played by fate is inconceivable as well as beyond human comprehension:

Deep in the man sits fast his fate

To mould his fortune, mean or great

(“Fate”, *Poems*, Emerson)

Fate shapes human life like any other lords of life. “The power of Fate”, Emerson points out, is “the dynastic oppression of submind” (*Journals and Miscellaneous* 229). The essay “Fate” signals the inner working of Emerson in his grown-up period. Stephen Whicher opines that this essay ultimately explores not the confusing mind of Emerson as can be noticed earlier; it seems to explore the final subjugation of his thought to Fate, the lord. Whicher notices, “[w]e no longer find in his later books either the confusion or the dramatic uncertainty that accompanied the serious adjustment of his earlier thought” (see Deming). Again Richard Deming in “Reading, Agency and the Question of ‘Fate’” (2007) analyses Whicher’s view as follows:

What Whicher call a lack of ‘dramatic uncertainty’ may be Emerson’s attaining a philosophical ‘negative capability’ which allows the essayist to become sensitive to the inherent paradoxes arising within a system of thought that offers the possibility of both ‘Fate’ and ‘Will’ (49-50).

The essay “Fate” published in the final part of his literary life signals how the transcendentalist thoughts appear to have waned away and subsequently a kind of skepticism has intruded into his mind. At the early stage, Emerson defines Transcendentalism in the essay “The Transcendentalist” (1842) as, “[w]hat is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism; Idealism as it appears in 1842” (93). But the essay “Fate” which was delivered as a form of a lecture in 1851 and published later in

The Conduct of Life in 1860 draws a vast difference between the early and the later Emerson as it is “emblematic of his diminishing belief in the power of idealism” (Schneider 62). Emerson’s growing awareness of and skepticism about the inherent power of the ideal issue to cope with the changing reality seem to be coming out more prominently in this essay. His mature knowledge about the changing socio-political reality of American life has forced him to be a fatalist: “[w]e are incompetent to solve the time” (“Fate” 261). His double conscious attitude towards the importance of public as well as private life and the subsequent techniques and methods to deal with reality can be noticed here when he asserts, “[a] man must ride alternately on the horses of his private and public life”(278). Progressively he turns out to be apprehensive of the magnitude of living a life in a private way depending exclusively upon the self. Though the essay “Fate” does not explicitly deal with the issue of slavery sustained in America, it appears that the struggle for the abolition of slavery started at that time indirectly shapes the ideas of Emerson as propounded in it. So the ethical question seems to be associated with it. The quote “we are incompetent to solve the times”(261) may also be read as hinting at the helplessness or lacking ability Emerson has felt to bring the required changes i.e. to abolish slavery. His ideas regarding the race problem in America seem to oscillate like the alternately riding the horses of public and private life without coming to one conclusion because he believes that it (racial problem) is everlasting and always sprouting unendingly. It is not only one essay that adequately expresses the skeptical turn that Emerson experiences in his life. Moreover, his frequent shifting of ideas as expressed in the most of his essays make it intricate to understand the nature of his thinking. It appears that both the poems and the essays, though sporadically, express his doubtful nature. Ronald A Bosco observes that “Drawing evidence from the journals and writings such as “Experience”, “Threnody”, “Montaigne, or the Skeptic” and “Fate” most readers and teachers of Emerson do indeed routinely concede his advance toward skepticism between 1844-45 and 1860” (93). His uncertainty about human life and the final resignation to the unseen and unfathomable fate or the fortune seem to be inherited to some extent from Montaigne whose penetrating eyes mark the fact that our fortune is dominated by some invisible forces that control all human affairs. He maintains, “[s]o vain and frivolous a thing in human prudence, and athwart all our plans, counsels and precautions. Fortune still maintains the grasp on the results” (Montaigne 92). Similarly,

Emerson in “Fate” also accepts the command of fate or fortune which is identified as an “element running through entire nature” that “limits us” (268). It never allows people to know how it plays invisibly with all of them with its controlling hands that confine people in a glass-like structure from where they can see the outside but penetration is not possible as its walls are fortified by fate. Emerson explains that an individual should accept the power of fate though protest is necessary for it. The essay exhibits a kind of pursuit of power or freedom. It is the search of this freedom from the tyrannical powers of the lords of life including fate that Emerson appears to wrestle with during his career as his imaginative freedom being a transcendentalist is constantly challenged by restraints like Fate and other lords. He constantly finds himself caught between the two worlds—of fate and of freedom—the reconciliation of which is impossible for him though he feels the necessity of the same. For Emerson, “[t]o hazard the contradiction,—freedom is necessary”. The seed of freedom is within Fate. Freedom and fate are the two sides of a similar coin. Emerson continues, “[i]f you please to plant yourself on the side of Fate, and say, Fate is all; then we say, a part of Fate is the freedom of man” (269). Though it seems to be inconsistent or paradoxical, Joseph Mullin says, “we may work deep—May, so to speak, confront fate with our own fatality” (338). These two sides constantly invite human beings to their own circle and a skeptic, in such a condition, tries to respond to both sides without any permanent attachment to any one of the two.

Unlike Montaigne, Emerson’s pessimism and his resignation to fate are sometimes challenged by the positive attitude that tries to negate the power of fate with the weapon of freedom or will. He asserts that though fate makes people emaciated making them obey its lordship there is another lord that challenges fate. He says,

Fate has its lord; limitations its limits; is different seen from above and from below; from within and from without. For though Fate is immense so is power, which the other fact in the dual world, immense. If Fate follows and limits power, power attends and antagonizes Fate (“Fate” 268).

A self-reliant person always builds his own world like a field nourished by himself. But the desire to cultivate there solely by the self is thwarted by the external element like fate that governs all kinds of growths in the particular area. Fate controls the result of everything and

it is a known fact that “we cannot trifle with this reality, this cropping out in our planted gardens of the core of the world” (268) But the most interesting aspect of his doubtful nature is disclosed when he moves away from his own comments and does not seem to affirm or take the side of one absolute view. He places his all arguments in a whirlpool that does not take him to a final conclusion.

Though Emerson succumbs to the power of fate in the essay commenting a lot on human powerlessness he suddenly seems to be conscious of his own idealistic principles of self-reliance that talks about personal or individual freedom. On the one hand, he succumbs to the “irresistible dictation” (261) of fate and on the other hand, believes that a man is free so far as he thinks himself to be a free individual undisturbed by those dictations or orders of fate. Emerson’s openness of his mind to see good and evil, right and wrong as both equally important in course of time makes his thought more complex and as a result, his literary creations seem to be loaded with oppositional views and arguments. It is his “frequently non-deductive, nonrational ordering of his expression” (Francis 73) that magnetize the attention of the reader.

The fate recognized as “the stealthy power” that “act on us daily” (“Fate” 263) is suddenly placed in a lower position by elevating the power of the individual freedom : “If you please to plant yourself on the side of Fate, and say Fate is all; then we say a part of Fate is the freedom of man” (269). Thus Emerson appears to be aware of both sides whose arguments oscillate between the power of freedom and fate; neither does he completely assign supreme power to fate nor does he ignore the freedom of individual man as dictated by his idea of self-reliance and individualism. He tries to create a balance between the fate and the individual power saying, “[i]f Fate follows and limits power, power attends and antagonizes Fate” (268). It is true that his growing awareness of the blockage or the chasm as existed between the individual self and the universal or the absolute has not entirely waned away his mystical ideas and his belief in the prospect and significance of this union. His theory of idealism and the belief in the oneness of God, man and Nature still linger within himself. Harold Bloom opines that “[i]dealism had always held a secret attraction for Emerson, which had survived unchanged even during the years when his teachers were telling him to regard it as dangerous” (Bloom 73).

According to Emerson the power of fate seems to be balanced at one point in time. He says, “[s]o far as a man thinks he is free” (“Fate” 269). Thus though he underlines the power of fate which may be termed as a master of life or “lords of life” (“Experience” 83) he becomes optimistic about the power of individualism which he seems to negate by discussing the overwhelming influence of fate. His pessimism, which is the outcome of his brooding over those lords, is invalidated occasionally by his optimistic views. He does not appear to be a methodical skeptic as he moves back and forth between his arguments for and against skepticism. “This skeptical Emerson”, as David Robinson observed, “is really a student of fact, not an innate or thoroughgoing doubter” (93). He is a student in the school of skepticism who does not follow a definite order or precise rules of a particular school. It seems that his nature of skepticism is peculiar as the belief in the Absolute truth, Divine Spirit, or The Eternal Cause often comes forward from the background to the foreground threatening his skeptical beliefs. The idea as propounded by Emerson in the first part of his career, “[n]othing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind” (“Self-Reliance” 52) seems to acquire relevance even in the midst of despair, pessimism and skepticism of his later life. Though he surrenders to the lords of life especially to the Fate or providence as marked in the essay “Fate”, there is a silent longing that seems to hover in his mind to believe in the fact that so long as a human being can think of as being free nothing make him or her surrender to the feet of it. This is the power of the freedom of man or of will that challenges human fate.

Similarly, though he talks in “Fate” about accepting the “irresistible dictation” of fate, he also marks the fact that human beings are compelled to accept liberty or freedom to counter the power of fate. He says, “[i]f we must accept Fate, we are not less affirmed liberty, the significance of the individual, the grandeur of duty, the power of character” (261). Thus he places the lord Fate and individual power or freedom on two opposite sides and tries to weigh down or consider both at the same time. This power is also termed in the essay as “fatal courage” (269). He seems to be grappled with the question of determinism; the urgent need before him is to settle the dilemma of freedom and fate in individual life. This dilemma is not only a part of his mental health; his essays also seem to bear the traces of this predicament. He is torn between the dictation of fate as he marks it out as a “beautiful necessity” and the urge to accept the power of freedom or the individual control over fate.

He never comes to a concluding judgment regarding these two forces and oscillates between them. The idea of “beautiful necessity” (278) appears to be the ultimate goal of Emerson which is marked by Donald Mahoney as an alternative use of Emerson’s moral sentiment. It is the moral faith where Emersonian skepticism seems to be finally merged with. Mahoney observes,

In the essay ‘Fate’, Emerson further debunks the skepticism he once, for a period of time, cherished and held. He again states that his refutation of the skeptical attitude results from his belief in the moral sentiment or in what he sometimes terms the Beautiful Necessity, the Oneness of all (48).

The notion of beautiful necessity gives him the opportunity to challenge Fate though he moves back and forth in his comments to do it. He seems to understand the iron laws of fate after the death of his son Waldo which is a major event in his life that constantly encounters his optimism and the power of individual will and freedom. Moreover, there are other several conditions that have made him incredulous of his teachings of self-reliance. His reliance on the power of fate becomes more prominent when he faces other catastrophes and upheavals that surprise him making him accept fate as a supreme ruler of life. He says, “[f]amine, typhus, frost, war, suicide and effete races, must be reckoned calculable parts of the system of the worlds”. All these external factors are too powerful for the common man as they are “pebbles from the mountains, hints of the terms by which our life is walled up” (“Fate” 267). But suddenly Emerson becomes conscious of other parts of fate and says that though limitation seems to be everywhere “[f]ate has its lord; limitation its limits”. Fate becomes ineffective in front of this lord and it is, according to Emerson, nothing but power. He comments, “[f]or though Fate is immense, so is power, which is the other fact in the dual world, immense. If Fate follows and limits power, Power attends and antagonizes Fate” (268). Thus the authority of Fate is challenged by the undisputed lord named power or will of the individual being. In this way, Emerson is trying to push back Fate making it weak before individual will. His skepticism which is the product of the imbalance between these two worlds inhabited by Fate and will seems to fade away when one side—the power of will—grows stronger than the other. But it does not happen all the time. As soon as Emerson is surprised by other lords similar to that of Fate or destiny he again goes back to the fold

where he is required to yield to its power. He does not appear to sustain his skepticism in all cases of his life and it is therefore difficult to consider him as a systematic or thoroughgoing skeptic. His nature is quite different from other committed doubters because his doubt or suspicion about the individual will as well as about the power of Fate is not constant.

Though he marks the power of destiny he is also conscious of individual power who can dominate destiny. The man with individual power or a man who knows the inner power of his soul can only dare to challenge it. Though he advocates self-reliance he is simultaneously conscious of fate that diminishes the power of self-trust. Stephen Whicher aptly remarks this contradictory attitude as: “We can see enough to sense in him a usually large gap, even a contradiction between his teachings and his experience. He taught self-reliance and felt self-distrust, worshiped reality and knew illusion, proclaimed freedom, and submitted to fate” (Whicher 285-286).

It is difficult to classify Emerson’s essays due to this opposite tension in his thoughts and ideas. Every forward movement of an idea is challenged and pinched back by an opposite kind of idea. He seems to be ever prepared to play with his own arguments. Even he observes that an evil is also a part of the good. For him, material world does not have an independent existence and it is the emanation from the world of spirit or idea only. He is even not showing any eagerness to resolve this problem; he is never going to tell his readers whether thought is better than action or vice versa. This contradiction and unpredictability, as inherent in the nature of his writing for which Emerson is seen as a man of doubt and skepticism, are not matters to be discarded way as a kind of irrational deeds. Rationality and logic are embedded in this technique or style of writing itself that cannot be separated from the man Emerson.

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CHAPTER IV

Emerson's Approach to Life

In order to outline in greater detail, the approach Emerson cherishes towards human life it is imperative to examine the essay "Experience" (1844) as it is proved to be one of the quintessential essays that extensively deals with the issues relating to the life of Emerson. It is one of the intensely personal essays of the author as it is packed with many of the remarkable events of his career that have challenged his general ideas and thoughts as carried throughout the life. This particular piece of literary work may be considered as the harbinger of skeptical thoughts as the kind of transition it has heralded both to his approach to life as well as his succeeding opinions as manifested in the later day literary productions. The essay unquestionably enables the reader to zoom into the subjective or personal aspects of the man Emerson with greater detail. It is the death of his son Waldo and his wife Ellen that have taught him how his personal life is invaded thoroughly by some of the impersonal forces that he cannot negate at any point. Waldo's death seems to be an ineffaceable truth for Emerson; his (Waldo's) demise "reveals itself the sight of a potent confrontation with the competing demands of the material and the spiritual" (Grossman 198).

Emerson's belief in individuality and the power of the self as mastering all odds in life are threatened to leave him in a position to accept both without judging one over the other. Brank Arsic in *On Living: A Reading in Emerson* (2010) upholds the same view as, "Since impersonal life traverses and inhabits us, the impersonal in Emerson does not...cancel out the personal but instead contrives it" (94). Emerson accepts both—the impersonal forces of Fate, Illusion and Reality as well as the personal force of individualism and self-reliance—without protesting much to adhere to his earlier beliefs on the unquestionable power of the human self as sufficient enough to know the external world. "If there is to be any rigor in interpreting Emerson's text", Arsic continues, "the question of the impersonal cannot be left aside" (92). Sometimes the decisive experiences or conditions of human life seem to occur without voluntary control of the individual. To their surprise, without personal awareness, people are fated to be parts of some events or happenings that provide unpredictable

directions to be followed at any cost. It is this pathetic condition of all human beings that astonishes them. In “Experience” Emerson has put it in the following way at the inception:

Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extreme, and believe that it has none. We wake and ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many alone, which go upward and out of sight (49).

Starting abruptly with the above-mentioned line clearly reveals the intensity of the astonishment that life has offered Emerson to comprehend it. The line “[w]here do we find ourselves?” automatically involves the readers with the miserable condition of the author’s consciousness about the general human incapability to make themselves free from the “series” (49), a place or position all are bound to inhabit without remembering the past or failing to grasp the imperceptible future. Man can never understand the “onward tricks of nature” which is for Emerson “too strong for us” (68) to comprehend. Nature has drawn the line of limitation beyond which nobody can venture into and all human beings are compelled to accept this limit at any condition. Emerson, having come to know this bitter truth, accepts the fate he is destined to be with till death though occasionally he asserts the possibility of individual freedom and will. With this realization, he appears to change his morbid as well as negative attitude to life behaving like a skeptic who accepts what befalls on him along with his realization of the other side of this fatalistic outlook. What has been his advice for his readers now is to learn to get attuned with the “beautiful limits” or to adjust to the “perfect calculation of the kingdom of known cause and effect” (69).

A sense of ennui seems to be an inseparable part of human life that hinders every individual to attain the knowledge of the reality. Emerson imagines himself as being a sufferer of this kind of human fallibility that is quite opposite to the power of the self-reliant person he has been asserting in the first part of his literary career. His predicament is like living in a world where no light is there to show the path of truth; it is as if “night hovers all the day the bough of the fire-tree” (49). The surface of reality or the absolute knowledge is so slippery that to grasp a point on this plane is thwarted by our lack of expertise to skate over it. There are seven kinds of lords that control human life reducing the power of human beings to that of little children. “Even if we do contrive to become truly self-reliant”, James Guthrie

observes”, “we are still ultimately subject to external and internal forces over which we can exert little control” (118) and these seven “lords of life” as Emerson termed, “hold sway over what phenomenal reality constitutes for each of us” (Guthrie 118). The epigraph of the essay “Experience” is about a child or a “little man” who eagerly observes the marching of these lords from “east to west” (47). He is baffled by the scene without knowing the proper identities of those abstract forces that are passing by. The use of the term “little man” seems to be significant enough as calling a child in this way reminds him that one day he will attain adulthood or will be a full-grown man and the same bafflement about the inherent power of the lords will remain as they haunt mankind from the very first day of life up to death. The little man observes the parade of the lords without doing anything to stop them or to change their progressions; what he can only do is to accept them as they are. The lords are the “threads on the loom of time” and to challenge these lords that are with the pace of time will be a fruitless attempt. The discomfiture arising out of this unpleasant truth puts Emerson in a position of that “little child” who can only witness them with awe and reverence. Emerson laments on his ineffectiveness to restrain their power and says, “I dare not to assume to give their order, but I name them as I find them in my way” (83). Emerson’s skepticism of the power of the self to control utterly the life he is leading has led him to compare an individual with a little child. He knows that challenging human fate as well as the power of time will not teach him the skill of skating on the “slippery sliding surfaces” (51-52) of life. A kind of opium is “instilled” (52) into all aspects of life. It creates drowsiness in all human beings that impedes them from attaining a “rough rasping friction” (51) to stay long at a particular point, idea or reality. In the essays “Experience”, “Circles” and ‘Fate” Emerson discusses basically the frailty of human control with an understating of the fleeting nature of life. Here Emerson “strives to define a means by which the self can withstand the vicissitudes of fate and time” (Guthrie 120) and he comes to a conclusion that it is only by accepting the power of both the self as well as the other external powers like lords of life that an individual can make his or her life happy and prosperous. He is always in search of a balanced attitude towards life and it is by accepting moderates in everything that the balance can be maintained. In “Experience” he says,

I am thankful for small mercies. I compared notes with one of my friends who expects everything of the universe and is disappointed when anything is less than the

best, and I found that I begin at the other extreme, expecting nothing, and am always full of thanks for moderate goods. I accept clangor and jangle of contrary tendencies (64).

The idea of human life or the approach to it as exhibited by Emerson seems to be impeccably explored in the most discussed essay “Experience” that sheds light on how he critically observes every nuance of it. Along with maturity, Emerson perceives the gloomier side of life that teaches him the incapacity of an individual to experience truth or reality to the fullest. Human life displays the fact that no one is powerful enough to understand the secret of completeness of life itself as it plays with human perceptions every time allowing them to know the feebleness of all kinds of human powers. Emerson is skeptical of a smooth path or journey of life as he comprehends the tyrannical presence of seven “lords of life” (83) namely Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface, Surprise, Reality and Subjectiveness. These lords, exterior to the human self, have put a check into the easy understanding of life. Surprises, one of the leading lords, make people aware of guiding power of the unanticipated event that shapes human understanding and knowledge. He seems to appreciate as well as acknowledge this, considering the part that unforeseen actions play a great role in overriding the power of self-reliance. For him, “[l]ife is a series of surprise” (69) and the nature of these surprises are always hidden till they appear before people unexpectedly.

After the death of his son Waldo, Emerson came to know how human insights and consciousness are not as supportive and helpful as to know the reality. Previously, what he had in his mind was that it is our own perception that helps us to observe the world as it actually is and simply changing that perception can provide mental peace. He was in an optimistic mood thinking that “this world results from a projection of our perceptions and therefore we could change it and improve it by the cleansing of our perceiving agents; that, indeed, the poetic word could act as an apocalyptic force, reconstructing reality for the better” (Beaver 120). But later he becomes doubtful of his own ideas on perception when he comes to know that human perception does not introduce an individual to the reality as there are innumerable layers of surfaces to be peeled off. Emerson rightfully says, “[o]ur life is not so much threatened as our perception” (“Experience” 49). He starts inquiring himself

about what he has assumed beforehand. At this point, the self-probing attitude helps him to discover some hidden elements that have made him reconsider his own words.

It is believed that human life is not as smooth as it seems to be on the superficial level. Human temperament conspires against all human tendencies to know the truth. Emerson observes that it assists “the system of illusion and shuts us in a prison of glass” (55) which is resilient enough to allow individuals to have contact with reality. Self-reliance merely does not help to make people free from this prison house. Emerson appears to be skeptical of human infallibility as temperament dictates human life; along with illusion, it blurs the human eyes and later colors them with falsehood. Trusting the self which seems erstwhile to be the unquestioning support for Emerson to have proper acquaintance with outer reality, turns out to be a mere illusion. Self-trust, Francese opines, which is “the ground of truth” for Emerson becomes also the “source of permanent suspect about our own powers”. Though individuals resolve to rely on the issue that “there is impulse, courage, ingenuity in ourselves” (110), in course of time it comes out to be an embodiment of self-captivity under the power of temperament and illusion.

The condition when an individual—like Emerson as mentioned in “Experience”—inevitably faces two contradicting truths regarding the approval of the existence of power as well as the powerlessness of the self is well-marked in *Fringes of Religious Experience: Cross-perspective on William James’s the Varieties of Religious Experience* (2007) as follows:

The price that deeper self pays for its regression to the aboriginal stance is clear; perennial dissatisfaction. Cheerful egotism spills out in a negative Sublime; since the positively enigmatic nature of the core self falls into a dark abyss. On the one hand, the will to believe or self-reliance should drive us to our own comfortable climate, whereas the cost of regression makes it almost unbearable. Antithetic forces, antagonist feelings, between enthusiasm and panic, hope and horror... love and fear are the marks of moral authenticity which seems to cause ironic waste rather than mere nihilistic destruction (109).

Emerson also seems to be caught between these two opposite tensions as mentioned above. Being a believer in the positive power of individualism, Emerson presumes everything under

the control of the self that consoles his soul at odd times. But in reality, he has to accept a complete negative scenario of the power of the individual self that has found some antithetical forces like lords of life dictating him everything on earth. He has to accept “the irredeemable co-existence of the good and the bad within the true self” (109) that draw the self in two opposite directions. The ape and the angel—both are inseparably linked to the nature of the human. The polarity in Emerson does not give a permanent tragedy to mourn as he, being a skeptic, shows his cautious attitude consoling himself by saying that, “[t]he mid-world is best” (“Experience” 66). It is human proficiency to put himself on the midway or the highway—i. e. between good and bad, hope and horror as well as love and fear. Even Emerson does not regard himself as a true follower of any ideal belief as he is aware of the fact that the illusory nature of human life will never provide an authentic knowledge or truth. His realization is well-articulated when says, “I know that the world I converse with in the city and in the farms, is not the world *I think*”. His thought is shrouded with innumerable layers of falsehood as time never offers him the true picture of anything in the world. Time is a merciless destructive force that never allows any concept or idea to get established as a permanent entity forever. Emerson expresses his alertness of this fact when he says “[w]e must be very suspicious of the deceptions of the element of time” (85).

One of the significant essays of Emerson which is centered on a particular idea of illusory nature of human life along with exploring many variations of this thematic subject is “Illusions” (1860). Emerson starts the essay with his remembrance of his last visit to the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky which is “an American version of Plato’s cave, in which one sees above a facsimile of stars, not the real thing” (Versluis 47). The inner landscape of the cave was so mesmerizing that the friends accompanying Emerson started singing having being enthralled by it. Emerson describes,

Our musical friends sung with much feeling a pretty song, “The stars are in the quiet sky”, &c., and I sat down on the rocky floor to enjoy the serene picture. Some crystal specks in the black ceiling high overhead, reflecting the light of a half-hid lamp, yielded this magnificent effect (“Illusions” 290).

But to their surprise, it was actually “a theatrical trick”; a part of illusion to the eyes that Emerson later discovered making him aware of the similar tricks that Nature plays with

human beings. He seems to be skeptical of the power of the self to overcome this illusion as “the senses interfere everywhere and mix their own structure with all they report of”. It appears that Emerson wants his readers to recognize how the power of the self is constantly in vulnerable positions to understand and utilize it adequately to know the absolute truth by raising the veil of illusion. Emerson holds the views of the romantic poets like Coleridge and Wordsworth—who prioritize the power of human imagination—when he asserts that “we live by our imaginations, by our admirations, by our sentiments”. Every truth is seen through the lens of mind’s eye that deceives the observer. Emerson unmaskers this bitter truth of unreliability of human senses though it is the common tendency of the orthodox people of the societies who hate this kind of task; “Society”, Emerson says, “does not love its unmaskers” (291).

Human beings are trapped in the world of appearances by the lord Illusion that never allows them to know “the secret of the world” (“The Poet” 12) and this secret is that “there are many worlds, and that each world that allows us to see and grasp only a limited field of objects” (Mastroianni 41). A meticulous study reveals the fact that there is a structural similarity between “Experience” and “Illusions”. Emerson’s awakening to skepticism resulting from “epistemological crisis” (Robinson 7) as distinctly explored by the essay “Experience” in 1844 saying that “there is no end to illusion” (53), seems to have had a lasting effect till 1860 i.e. the time of coming out of the essay “Illusions” when he provides identical view that “there are as many pillows of illusion as flakes in a snow-storm” (“Illusions” 292). Both of the two seminal essays mark the overwhelming presence of a series of illusions or deceptions in human life. Similarly, the metaphor of dream used earlier as “[d]ream delivers us to dream” (“Experience” 53) with an unending number of illusions reverberates again in 1860 when he says, “[w]e wake from one dream into another dream” (“Illusions” 292). The two essays appear to draw out the fact that Emerson’s attitude towards life as something gloomy and melancholic strikingly prevails. His later career has taught him a lot about life especially of the hard realities of experiencing the world. He seems to struggle more to assert the power of individualism and self-reliance as he fails to maintain the same voice as uttered emphatically in “Self-Reliance”. The faith in the power of the human will is replaced slowly by some alien factors which do not seem to do good to maintain his earlier confident voice. The illusory nature of human life hinders his belief on

perception as the sense organs do not appear him to introduce to the essence of knowledge or absolute truth. David Robinson is in the right line when he notices in this phase of Emerson's life that "[his] transcendental achievement was more fragile and complex than is often claimed and his revision of it more astute and compelling" (4).

Every sentence of the essay "Illusions" reminds the readers of the world they live in and how they have been hopelessly trying to find their own footings on earth or their meaning of living in it. Most of the sentences seem to reflect the general problems of the common masses who are engaged with linking their own selves to the lives they are leading. The sentence in "Illusions" "in this kingdom of illusions we grope eagerly for stays a foundation" (295) takes the reader to ponder over another essay "Experience" where he raises a similar problem of groundlessness faced by all individuals:

Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extreme and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one which go upward and out of sight ("Experience" 49).

The two essays—"Experience" and "Illusions"—appear to bear the resemblance in the point that "'Illusion' ends precisely where 'Experience' begins, replying to the question 'Experience' put to us—'where do we find ourselves?'. In a dark cave *and* alone before the gods is 'where we find ourselves'" (Mullin 346). The reference to the cave can also be seen as a prison house of glass as Emerson mentions in "Experience". It is a symbol of the enemy of all individuals conspiring with many layers of illusions to detach them from reality. It is an "especial trap" as identified by Emerson for creating hallucination and this trap is "laid to trip up our feet with, and all are tripped up first or last" ("Illusions" 293). It is not only with "Illusions" which is a part of the anthology of essays *The Conduct of Life* (1860), the whole collection raises the problematic question of the finding effective balances for the individuals amidst the harsh dictations of the seven lords of life. While pondering over the question of finding ourselves, Emerson is providing another clue to understanding the conditions of agony and restlessness from the very first day of human life. It is only like acquiring incurable diseases with endless sufferings without any solution for recovery.

Like sick men in hospitals, we change only from bed to bed, from one folly to another; and it cannot signify much what becomes of such castaways,—wailing, stupid, comatose creatures,—lifted from bed to bed, from the nothing of life to the nothing of death (295).

This sickness makes an individual effeminate; he does not seem to claim to have the power to find a proper solution for a healthy life and surrenders before those lords of life or of human perceptions. What he can do is to accept the way that is leading him to somewhere unknowable because “[e]very moment, new changes, and new showers of deceptions, to baffle and distract him”. In such a condition Emerson finds that celebrating the power of the self is not an independent task as there are many stumbling blocks to challenge life. Readers can perceive the attitude of self-doubt when he pronounces that “[t]he notions ‘*I am*’ and ‘*this is mine*’, which influence mankind are but delusions of the mother of the world” (296). Another fact lying behind this idea is that though Emerson doubts the power of the self to experience the unity of everything, he has not completely denied the essential unity of it. The tragedy of human beings is the inability to perceive the whole. In one of his journal entries, he analyzes this condition as, “Succession, division, parts, particles—this is the condition, this is the tragedy of man. All things cohere & unite. Man studies the parts, strives to tear the part from its connexion to magnify it, & to make it a whole” (qtd in Stiles 27).

Truth or knowledge, which Emerson seems to endorse even though it does not come to the grasp of human beings due to illusions, exists in “trope” as he says that “the intellect is stimulated by the statement of trope in a truth” (“Illusions” 296) but at the same time unfurls the another information that this truth is covered by illusion. Therefore an individual has to accept both truth and illusion at the same time. Douglas Atkins pronounces the same view when he says, “[t]ruth exists—even if we cannot (always) attain to it or grasp it” (91). Though Emerson once has judged himself as a considerer who does not affirm any possibility of truth or unity or oneness of God, man and Nature due to his inclination towards skepticism in the advanced period of life, the last part of “Illusions” has displayed another view of his belief when his comment appears to challenge the skepticism. Emerson does not seem to deny the possibility of a truth though it may not be grasped by individuals

wholly. The absolute truth remains unhampered as “the unities of Truth and of Right are not broken by the disguise. There need never be any confusion of these” (“Illusions” 296). No matter what occurs “in a crowded life” the god is always there. The unity is not vulnerable. The power of an individual remains intact as he only “fancies himself, poor, orphaned and insignificant”. He faces all the time fresh rays of deception that tries to sidetrack him. But “when by and by, for an instant, the air clears, and the cloud lifts a little, there are the gods still sitting, around him on their thrones—they alone with him alone”. Though there are illusions all around, Emerson has also marked other qualities that empower the individual self. It is moral sentiment that seems to offer limit to skeptical attitude towards human power. When the question of morality is concerned human beings feel free to accept those that their hearts deem as correct. Though illusions heavily influence the minds of people Emerson does not seem to accept the view that it will make individuals helpless till the end. Illusions cannot challenge the power of individuality all along; when “the air clears, and the cloud lifts a little, there are the gods still sitting around him on their thrones—they alone with him alone”. D.F. Mahoney’s words reflect the same truth when he says, “no matter though, the exact degree of effect Illusion had upon Emerson; its existence certainly aided the temporary reign that skepticism enjoys” (18-19). Emerson at the last paragraph of “Illusions” identifies the individual with gods. J Nicosia, with a long section in *Reading Marked Strand: His Collected Works, Carrier and the Poetics of the Privative* (2007) seems to express how Emerson tries to find the power of the self in spite of the deception of illusions all around. The section goes like this:

“Illusions” offers the notion that the only undeviating fact of nature itself is deviant and unknowable. But instead of lamenting the non-existence of a universal reality, Emerson celebrates the solipsistic empowerment of subjectivity—that daemonic power of creating a world for oneself. In confronting to the illusions that we believe are fixed, we delude ourselves, and lose touch with the Oversoul. The More we try to connect with the universe as something ‘out there’, the further we get from our goal. Conversely, the more we look inward, away from those illusions, the more we come in contact with the universe—in that the Universe is ourselves (149).

“Circles” (1841) is one of the substantial literary works of Emerson that encompasses numerous issues connected to human life and nature. Published in *Essays: First Series* (1841) the essay explores the fact that there is no exclusive kind of end or finality in the cosmos and all ideas and thoughts hint at the possibility of the creation of ever expandable circles around themselves. Human life is not a point of stagnation; it is an ever-evolving journey. Emerson’s philosophy of circularity as existed in human nature as well as in human life seems to be backed by a subjective event when he has lost his wife in 1831 and has been trying to find a solution to deal with the situation of remorse. The significant aspect of the essay is that though Emerson does not appear to support remembrance or retrospection in life due to his belief in fluid nature of every object in the universe, it marks a different aspect of his observations of life. Here Emerson, unlike the other essays, seems to be peculiarly backward-looking in spite of the fact that he habitually denounces it as revealed in the previous essays. Therefore “Circles” can be seen as an essay that focuses his shift of mind as well as his attitude towards life that has finally introduced him to the skeptical views gradually. Emerson comprehends the fact that his idealistic view of the super-power of the human mind to understand the human conditions is challenged by the pragmatist or realist views of it as he observes that reality is hard enough to stick to ever existing and unchallenged ideas. The essay is a clear indication of his alertness of the harsh realities of life as he seems to counsel his readers to get prepared for “the intrepid conviction that his laws, his relation to society, his Christianity, his world may at any time be superseded and de cease” (“Circles” 288). His existence on earth has taught him how ineffective and futile to regard the power of the self as unobstructed. The supremacy of religion, social beliefs as well as the control of the self may expire at any time once they are checked by other forces which have been termed in the essay “Experience” as lords of human life. He says,

Life is a series of surprises. We do not guess to-day the mood, the pleasure, the power of to-morrow, when we are building up our being. Of lower states, of acts of routine and sense, we can tell somewhat; but the masterpieces of God, the total growths and universal movements of the soul, he hideth; they are incalculable. I can know that truth is divine and helpful; but how it shall help me I can have no guess, for *so to be* is the sole inlet of *so to know* (298-299).

The proclamation that “[l]ife is a series of surprises” (298) is a vital aspect of the Emersonian approach to life as it indicates that human life is not all about depending on the self as the surprises individual faces are both external as well as internal. There are some overlords that command all human actions molding in the desired fashion which is beyond human capacity. The life of privacy which once Emerson has given utmost importance is destined to suffer a head-on collision with the public life in different aspects at all the time. George Eliot ponders on this idea saying in one of her novels *Felix Holt* (1866) as “there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life” (qtd in Henry 7). Similarly, Emerson seems to be dealing with the same dilemma of two lives—individual and public—without giving any final voice for or against any one of them. In the essay “Circles” Emerson somewhat accepts life in a fatalistic way without protesting much to the nuances of it as he comments, “[t]he way of life is wonderful; it is by abandonment” (300). At times, abandoning something appears to be an absolute necessity to experience the magic provided by life. Travelling through the path of absolute awareness does not always give the varied sensations people wish to get; it is required to forget or abandon the self or the utmost self-consciousness to experience various spices of life. Keeping himself/herself ready to accept whatever befalls on and cooperating with that situation without much protest lead to another phase of life which occasionally becomes a wonderful kind of attitude. A skeptic normally tends to adopt this strategy to satisfy the self as he/she keeps himself/herself flexible without any strict devotion to the hard and fast rule of life. He can adjust his lenses at any moment of time according to the moods. Though Emerson conceives of a world of no fixity or a world of fluidity he never abandons the fact that the existence of fixity only adds meaning to the fluxions and mobility. The two opposite aspects always try to capture a static or concrete position but fail desperately. Even “people wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them” (298). In a simple sense, it can also be understood that so far as human beings are unhappy, the desire for being happy will sustain forever. To understand one aspect of life the other aspect should also be counted. Though Emerson regards that human virtues are only initial he does not forget to add that development or progression seems to be practical only with “some principle of fixture or stability in the soul (297).

To comprehend the idea of circles one should relate it to the inevitable motion or ever-expanding processes of human thoughts that challenge so-called static human life. Life never gives individuals ample opportunities to stand still as their thoughts, being fluid, never allow them to do so. No one can gaze for long upon an object or an idea without fluctuation; the irresistible urge for flux, which seems to be an indispensable part of everyone, does not permit one to ponder over something ceaselessly. Meaning, acquired in course of time, gets diluted by other meanings which eventually prove to be more dominating ones knocking at the human mind persistently to emerge as universally acknowledged though only for some moments. The process with which human beings search for truth at all points of time with the help of arguments and investigations appears to follow a pattern of a circle around which similar circles evolve as the arguments go on. When one passes from one stage to the next stage of arguments in search of truth, there increases the number of evolving circles too where complete mutual identifications among them do not seem to be possible. Like human life or any human relationship, one particular circle is a momentary phase since new circles are in a queue to eliminate the previous one. Formation of these innumerable numbers of circles indicates how human thoughts move phase wise. In Emerson's words,

Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth. That around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-moon and under every deep a lower deep opens (281).

If anyone can make a circle where his or her arguments rotates, another person is simultaneously able to make a new circle, a bigger one, with fresh ideas and concepts that surely be dissimilar to those previous ideas. In this process, every end seems to bear the burden of new beginning inside only to be revealed at the entrance of new approaches or perspectives. What Emerson is trying here to depict is that human possibilities are innumerable only to be fathomed or discovered by some other entities. The grasp of absolute truth or the claim of authority to know everything is only a partial task. Everyone is in a continues process to know the truth without having the authority to know what will exactly come up next before his or her eyes as life itself is full of surprises. Time never allows knowing everything beforehand. Nikolas Kompridis has rightly said about the truth Emerson mentioned above as follows:

The very idea of ‘the most advanced consciousness’ is incoherent for it must presume epistemic authority over time itself; no one can be in a position to know in advance what has a future, what only a past, or to know what the next significant turn in human history will be...Those of us susceptible to the temptation to speak with authority about that over which we cannot claim authority might wish to heed the ‘truth’ of Emerson’s words. These words intend to outline a possible way of life (253).

The idea of circularity appears to coexist with human moods as Dominic Mastroianni in *Politics in Skepticism in Antebellum American Literature* (2014) relates this idea with Emerson saying that, “there is a certain circularity or sphericity to Emerson’s mood” (29). His mood seems to be in a flux as he accepts that it is the most dangerous element of human minds that never allows having fix perception on a particular subject. Moods always tend to fluctuate and dictate the mind what to believe or not at a particular moment. It is the human misfortune, as Emerson marks in “Circles” that, “we do not guess to-day the mood, the pleasure, the power of to-morrow, when we are building up our being” (298). The varied human moods, which are the bedrocks of human tendencies to accept or to see changes in life, seem to give rise to circles one after another. Human moods which can be clustered with “lords of life” as Emerson mentions in the essay “Experience” tend to give many colored lenses to the sight of an individual with which he can observe different aspects of a particular thing in different ways. The idea of human moods appears to indicate changeability of human perceptions and the existence of these seemingly temporary states of mind may indirectly help an individual in his journey of being cautious and skeptical towards a justified argument.

The varied temperaments of a person pave the path for a belief or idea to move to and from one sphere to the other. Cavell in “Thinking of Emerson” (1979) ponders over many questions related to Emerson’s choice of the idea of circles as follows:

I should like to extend the invitation to think about how he pictures us as moving from one circle to another, something he sometimes thinks of as expanding, something as rising. I note that there is an ambiguity in his thoughts here as between what he calls generating and what he calls drawing of the new circle, an ambiguity

between the picturing of new circles as forming continuously or discontinuously. I will not try to resolve this ambiguity now but I will take it that the essential way of envisioning our growth, from the inside, is discontinuous. Then my questions are: How does Emerson picture us as crossing, or rather leaping, the span from one circumference to another? What is the motive, the means of motion, of this movement? How do we go on? (174).

The formation of one circle following the other can be thought as the process of transition from one to the other where the power or strength actually resides in. The state of transition is momentary though powerful to form a bigger circle. The notion of changeability or mobility—be it human mood or a circle—is inseparably linked to Emerson’s thought in all aspects. Fixity is only an illusion as, “there are no fixtures in nature”. The whole universe is “fluid and volatile” (“Circles” 282). The old is always surpassed by the new and it is applicable to everything on earth. Emerson encourages his readers to embrace novelty of thoughts without any halt or break. It is necessary to be doubtful about the performance of any halt. As everything in nature seems to be circular or moves in a circular way, so it is the need of the time to adjust one’s views and comments along with the flow. He perpetually focuses on the point that human beings should know how to “rise” (287) into a new idea evolved in human minds. Ever expanding circles essentially indicate that desire of human beings also moves in a circular way that desperately seeks a permanent stoppage hoping to be satisfied fully along with their own aspirations. Their search for truth or originality is not going to be ceased in one circle or say in one kind of ideas as originality or truth does not appear to be the exclusive property of a particular orbit. It can be understood only with relation to other so-called truth which is in itself transitory. To find the concrete truth or original thing one has to relate it to something else. Emerson in “Shakespeare or the Poet” (1850) comments, “[a]ll originality is relative. Every thinker is retrospective” (251). In “Circles” Emerson constantly reminds his readers that steadiness or constancy is just a word so far as human knowledge is concerned. It is temporarily constructed for a brief time period until gets challenged by somebody else by creating another circle around the previous one which provides us knowledge. Those circles seem to be so similar that it can only be comprehended with close attention. The clear-cut distinction is likely to be ignored if observes casually. Human life can also be understood in terms of the idea of circles

propounded by Emerson. He says, “[t]he life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides towards to new and larger circles and that without end” (“Circles” 283-284). The formation of circles “wheel without wheel”, Emerson adds, are decided by the force of the human soul. The continual mobility or fluxion as he marks out as a recurrent motif of his essays is due to the fact that “heart refuses to be imprisoned; in its first and narrowest pulses it already tends outward with a vast force and to immense and innumerable expansion”. Even a general law which is accepted universally appears to be outdated bit by bit and becomes “only a particular fact of some more general law presently to disclose itself” (284).

Human life, as Emerson asserts in “Circles” is “a series of surprises” (298) and each final truth or fact is bare “the first of a new series” (284). It assumes different shapes and colors as it moves in the series or, we can say, from one circle to another. Being skeptical Emerson argues that no fact can be fortified completely for a long owing to the constant attack of other facts waiting to be born. Facts should always be considered as only initial as they become invalid in course of time. Leonard and Neufeldt and Christopher Barr in the article “I shall write Like a Latin Father: Emerson’s ‘Circles’” (1986) aptly comments, “Not surprisingly, ‘Circles’ demands that we reconsider the trustworthiness and value of all received knowledge and the intellectual habits that routinely load our faith on that knowledge”. The received knowledge can never be faithful enough to stop the formation of new knowledge as it is always backed by a kind of necessity to be like that. It signals, the authors argue, a kind of “pervasive skepticism” (96) for which Emerson has put forwarded the description of the circles. The polarity for which Emerson’s essays are known is also playing a vital role in the essay “Circles”. His bipolar arguments, his support for a life devoid of logocentric views or his skepticism towards any established belief or knowledge can be related to Jacques Derrida’s view of a center to an undefined place within a definite structure. The power of every circle gets reduced as another circle tends to snatch it from its center and in this tension, every center, continually formed shifts or changes its position perpetually. David Wyatt in “Spelling Time: The Reader in Emerson’s Circles” (1976) relates the central theme of the essay “Circles” to the de-centered world imagined by Derrida:

Any centre or present occupied in 'Circles' is superseded and must be continually reimagined. As attention to this process of redefinition frees us from the gravity of any and each new-found centre, our carrier is given over to free play rather to a fixed locus. Jacques Derrida describes the movement from Nature through 'Circles' as 'decentering'. This rupture of his traditional notions of structure and metaphysics is the 'central' event in Emerson's career (150).

David Robinson in "Stanley Cavell, 'Aversive Thinking', and Emerson's 'Party of the Future'" (2013) ponders on the idea of the Emersonian notion of circularity saying that each of the circles acts as "a metaphor for the growth of the self". This growth or development of the self has no point of stopover as long as human beings use the power of thinking. It is a kind of "onward thinking" (46) as explored in most of the essays of Emerson. Thinking onward will never allow an individual to ponder over his failure or achievement as the journey is never going to an end thereby yielding no final result—good or bad. In this chapter, Robinson wonderfully explains the idea of abandonment as Emerson promulgated in "Circles" as,

We draw a new circle not when we are inspired with new insight or braced with new strength, but when we reach an end or a place of incomprehension and disorientation. Not knowing the 'way' forward... we abandon ourselves to the unknown in order to know. It is an act that confirms our limitations but also brings new energy (46-47).

Abandoning whatever we cannot be able to know appears to be necessary for a healthy growth of life because it is only by leaving behind or letting some old ideas go away an individual can embrace novelty that acts as a catalyst to the balanced mental health.

Being an endless experimenter, as Emerson called him, he is supposed to engage in a relentless war against finding truth or fact or we can say draw unending numbers of circles and his idea of abandonment seems to be quite relevant here as Robinson marks, "true experiment, genuine inventiveness requires a kind of abandonment in his hope is enacted. In such a process, stability and finality must be discarded." (47). It is not desirable, as Emerson appears to argue, to rely utterly on the idea of absolute or solid knowledge as the "horizon of knowledge seems to be in constant retreat" (McMurry 119).

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CHAPTER V

Conclusion: The Nature of Skepticism in Emerson's Essays

The chapters included in this present thesis have attempted to deal in detail with the idea of skepticism as embedded in Emerson's thought processes evident in different degrees in the selected essays. Though many of the essays published after the cataclysmic event of the untimely death of his son Waldo have a greater say on the matter of skepticism regarding the reliability or otherwise of the human capacity to know the essential truth or the foundation of life, it is difficult to draw a distinctive line to make clear the intensity of his skeptical thoughts as it is completely a mental process that has been bearing the seeds of it for long. The problem while discussing the issues in relation to Emerson's skepticism seems to be that of placing him in a particular fold of philosophy owing to his restlessness in the exhibition of his philosophical tendencies. Being an "experimenter" ("Circles" 180) —a term Emerson himself uses to define the nature of his thought process—he enjoys ample opportunity to shift his points of view while preaching his ideas both in the form of lectures or in the written word. His transitional nature, while enunciating a particular idea, does not seem to allow him to stay at a conforming position for which readers commonly find his writings, intricate as they are, voluntarily made obscure by the essayist. Emerson's essays reveal the workings of his mind and the labyrinth produced within it as the contradicting thoughts muddled his consciousness making it intricate for the readers to assign him a particular place in the philosophical and literary history. Though most of the people know him as a precursor of Transcendentalism there still remains the problem of definite identification of Emerson as this movement itself does not appear to possess clear-cut ideas to adhere to all the time. Though the transcendentalist movement seems to have prioritized human self above exterior authority or institution it lacked a definite philosophical agenda to be pursued. The transcendentalists, especially Emerson, who is regarded as its "single most defining figure" (Buell, xiv), assume a different role at a different time whose actions does not allow categorizing them as pure devotees of crystallized ideas or beliefs which are exclusively cherished at all times. Emerson's essays play a vital role in the American literary world as these works have "helped shaped literary study, philosophy, politics, social reform,

and indeed –directly or indirectly—how we live our lives almost two centuries after his birth” (Porte, xi). They mark the eclectic nature of his writings though these are mostly based on his transcendentalist propensities. However, his devotion to the celebration of individualism is not well-fortified as the traces of skepticism teach him the bitter lesson regarding the vulnerability of the human self while approaching the realities of life. His occasional understanding of the susceptibility of human self before the power of the “lords of life” or human fate as elaborately discussed in “Experience” and “Fate” correspondingly challenges as well as contaminates his loyalty to transcendental beliefs. He becomes a skeptic of his own thoughts thereby transiting to and fro in his enunciation or the promulgation of his philosophical utterances.

Though Emerson appears to be distrustful of the possibility of attaining a concrete truth of everything, he fails to sustain his own skeptical position since his doubts about the power of the mind that arise at certain points of time are temporary when he reverted to his transcendental bent of mind that dictates the leading idea of “the supremacy of mind over matter”. In course of time, the man who doubts the possibility of all-round truth, changes his mind accepting his original views of the other transcendentalists who “believe in an order of truth which transcend the sphere of the external senses” (Ripley 25). It is judicious to accept the view that he has never completely shunned the power and potential of the individual self though sometimes his devotion to self-reliance seems to be hidden from the foreground only to get reflected back later. His skepticism is challenged frequently when it comes from the background to the center or the limelight since belief in individual potentiality is only provisionally receding; it is not obliterated from the vein of Emerson that attains significance at various points or moments.

This individual supremacy or the absoluteness of self-reliance is at the core of his doubt on too much appreciation of friendship as closeness among friends hampers the spiritual development of a human being. It seems to be true that “Emerson...saw no reason for friendship beyond a temporary elevation of the individual” (Park 69). It appears that he seeks after human relationship only for individual development or the growth and overall expansion of the self; beyond that he has not any plan of enjoying such strong bonds as he is rather selective and cautious in such kind of endeavors. But the problem seems to arise when

he simultaneously advocates the need of a friend to share his feelings and thoughts. He even appears to visualize another grim picture of the self that sometimes becomes helpless to offer or to feed the human soul. At this particular point of time, it is the other human beings that replace the individual self and he oscillates between these two polar opposites to the extent of an undecidable condition.

This double consciousness is clearly discussed in the essay “Friendship” where at the eleventh hour he chooses a mid-world to live in which does not betray his shifting position and from where he can preach his audience without compromising with his skeptical as well as his transcendental nature of thought. His belief in self-reliance perhaps seems to play a greater role in turning him back from the fold of skepticism to the fold of previous beliefs enunciated by Transcendentalism. This transition that has been discussed in all the chapters is revealed to be intrinsic and mood dependent. In his essays, it is not exposed with any linearity and sometimes it oozes out even within a single sentence in the form of oxymorons and binary oppositions. The serious concern in Emersonian skepticism is to find out the extent to which Emerson seems to be immersed in it. From the chapters where this particular objective has been looked into in detail, it appears to be indistinct to find out Emerson’s footing in skepticism as he himself denied in several places to mark out an exact position or ground he stands on. In “Experience” this predicament is described clearly where he miserably fails to locate himself between the stairs below as well as above him. He says,

Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes and believed that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one which go upward and out of sight (49).

The simultaneous coexistence of our desire to find an ideal, solid ground to know something and the skepticism of the same endeavor, in reality, undermine each other. Though Emerson believes in the power of the self which provides all kinds of ground to stand on he does not forget to affirm at some particular times the opposite condition of it.

Considering a person like Emerson who boldly asserts that human strength is “transitional, alternating” who is “above all the celebrant of *transition* in the minds life” (Smith 386;

original emphasis) it seems judicious to recognize his power in that transitional or progressive phase of life. If “nothing solid is secured; everything tilts and rocks” (“The Method of Nature” 82) as asserted by Emerson, it is considerably acceptable the way his opinions assume a fluid or volatile status. He preserves his faith in self-reliance in a seemingly permanent vault though skepticism tries to intrude into his vault sometimes. His skepticism is manifested in the “anxiety that all he knows of things are their surfaces” (Bradatan 47). He seems to be compelled to the fold of optimism about the power of the self from the pessimistic outlook intensified by skepticism. His withdrawal to this previous position cannot be viewed as his failure to sustain the skeptical position as being a self-proclaimed experimenter he has the every right to experiment with his own views and opinions. Being a common individual who is unable to control the powers of fate as well as of the seven “lords of life” does not mean or indicate that he should be glued to skeptical arguments. It may be a part of his mood that gets changed at different circumstances for which he is under the spell of skepticism for a temporary period of time. The spell turns out to be less compulsive and enthralling the moment he starts comprehending the human ability to know or to experience the reality which is transcendental in its nature. Even human fate which maintains supremacy over human mind appears to be checked by freedom or the indomitable will. This will is nothing but to accept moral sentiments which are prioritized by Emerson as a solution to the hold or power of skepticism.

Among the transcendentalist writers of America it is not only Emerson who has shown skeptical propensities and double consciousness in thoughts and ideas. Emerson’s disciple Thoreau also seems to follow similar attitudes while faced with materialistic growth in America caused by science and technological advancement that overpowers his preferred realm of spirituality. Similar to Emerson, Thoreau reflects a doubly conscious approach when he is dazzled at the convenience of industrial and technological inventions. His preference for a simple way of life amidst nature which is materialized in Walden has perhaps a momentary fascination as he could not isolate himself from the social obligations entirely and returned to the public life. It cannot be altogether neglected that his closeness to the kingdom of nature has not yielded any fruit though it is only within the bosom of nature he could perhaps understand the realities of life. Yet, it seems that to some extent he was compelled to compromise with his transcendental inclination which was venerated most in

the earlier part of his career that in course of time has made him recognize too the power of the material realities. Thoreau's awareness of these two aspects of thoughts reverberates in the following lines: "The view of nature as mere symbol did not, however wholly satisfy Thoreau, who wished, in the very glimpsing of the spiritual to retain firm hold on the material. He seems to have owned an instinctive materialism so tenacious that it would not surrender to transcendentalist idealism but combined with it instead to become the dominant partner in an earthy pantheism" (qtd in Garand 5). The earthy pantheism here is an indication of a mixture of practicality and divinity. Thoreau's transcendental idealism, as that of Emerson, does not seem to be a pure one as it is combined with skepticism due to the gradual recognition of the importance of materialism in life. His idea of leading a life of minimalism is quite ironic as he doubts the applicability of his experience in the woods. One of the noteworthy examples of Thoreau's skeptic nature seems to be exposed in the chapter "Sounds" of *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods* when, in spite of complaining about establishing railroads at the expense of environmental health in Concord, he cherished the development as worthy to be embraced by humanity: "...when I hear the iron horse make the hills echo with his snort like thunder, shaking the earth with his feet, and breathing fire and smoke from his nostrils, it seems as if the earth had got a race now worthy to inhabit it" (76).

Emerson has never accepted skepticism in a starkly negative light as he regards it simply a restriction that helps in understanding the usefulness of the suspension of judgments on particular points. His positive attitude towards skepticism may also be seen as the outcome of his thought that it would never last long as everything on earth is in a state of flux or dynamic progression. He may have understood that skepticism would never completely stay in his thought process as it seems to be overpowered by its opposite pole i.e. his faith on the power of self-reliance that empowers him to challenge the suspension of judgments created by skepticism. Though he accepts the duality existing on earth regarding matter and spirit, being a transcendental idealist he holds that the ideal or the spiritual has an ultimate sway over the material. But the reality is that this belief is also challenged, though temporarily, as he finds or asserts the importance of the material along with the spiritual. The comment on the predicament of human beings, as marked by David Smith appears to be a fitting one with reference to Emerson as he says, "[w]e are ourselves boundary creatures, uneasily Yoking Presence and absence, faith and skepticism, the 'fluid' world of spirit and the fixed world of

things” (394). Emerson accepts his skeptical stance in a positive light as he celebrates the shift or the transcendental behaviors by assigning or regarding these as beautiful for beauty resides in the transitional state or the moment of change of opinions as at that instant of time all judgments acquire power from their own transitionality That indirectly helps the person in being judicious as well as cautious in his making of any decision.

Human beings only can feel that they are able to ground themselves on the real or the absolute. But in reality, such a thought or feeling has not turned out to be the truth since the ground is too slippery to stand on. Experience never allows grasping that particular ground fully. The fluxion or the oscillation between the possibility of linking human beings to the real or the uncertainty developing in minds regarding such an effort is observed or looked at by Emerson through drawing God into this tug of war and says, “[t]here is the incoming or receding of God; that is all we can affirm; and we can show neither how nor why” (“The Method of Nature” 86). In this line the advent of God may be thought as signaling his consideration of individual self’s attainment of the absolute knowledge which is again fractional and incomplete since its advent is followed by a receding force that makes people feel the inadequacy of knowledge they can possess in reality. Each segment of knowledge a person can apprehend in the process of knowing is turned out to be smaller than the other pieces that are constantly overshadowing the previous one. It is similar to the concept of the circle promulgated by Emerson where around each circle another circle can be sketched. The quest for discovering the ultimate or the last circle always seems to be impossible which is analogous to that of finding a foundation in the intellectual task of searching the absolute reality.

An individual in his or her search for absolute accuracy of truth in the literary works of Emerson seems to be helpless while accepting the condition of the groundlessness of absolute reality; reaching a particular closure or hoping to get any kind of final meaning should be renounced as this kind of endeavor is attached with elusiveness. Experiencing the actuality in concrete terms is far away from human capabilities because a kind of inconsistency or discrepancy always exists between the two sides. Being an advocate of this kind of elusiveness as mentioned above, Emerson is left with only one way to deal with this sensitive condition, i.e. embracing the duality of every possible meaning or truth hidden in

any judgment. He shuns the desire for the centrality of meaning or Presence. This appears to bear only a temporary hold as the opposite kind of desire to affirm the possibility of absolute meaning is apparent in thoughts. There is of course “an appalling canniness lurking behind even what seem to be Emerson’s most flat-footed affirmation” (Smith 382). His attempt to gain the knowledge about a solid and proper ground from where a person can assert his opinion is a greasy one even though the failure to gain such a dependent ground is known to him as inevitable. Emerson is aware of this unpleasant truth when he says, “[g]ladly would we anchor, but the anchorage is quicksand” (“Experience” 58). Emerson accepts his double conscious attitude or the duality he perceives about a particular idea or opinion since his inner eyes are wide open to consider or to measure the seemingly opposite poles of life. He seems to accept this so-called ‘unhandsome’ circumstance (Cavell 39) of human life without any succumbing approach towards any one of the temptations or inclinations offered by the two sides which are poles apart. He is quite mindful of the fact that such opposite contrary parties or ideas can neither be dispelled from the human minds of those who basically adore skepticism nor can that be avoided too as dealing with such things are firmly packed within human temperament or mood. Whatever a particular mood dictates an individual, he or she is helplessly bound to respond to it. Only embracing the contradiction seems to be the final solution left for all individuals. In such instant of time, what Emerson yearns for is “the taste of two metals in contact” (“Plato, or the Philosopher” 32), i.e. the admixture of two polar opposites. This moment of juncture or this transitional moment bears perfectness and signals individual potentiality. Emerson adores that “mid-world” (“Experience” 66) where this transition occurs without any hindrance from either of the two sides. It is that point where everything seems to be balanced and Emerson endeavors to achieve the skill to create such a harmony for which he follows the one and the only principle i.e. the unsettling of all his stances or opinions either verbal or written. What he actually appears to do is to wait for a moment when this balancing act can be done without any chaos or disruption. Achieving such a feat, of course, does not seem to be free from any disorder on either side but the result is a harmonious one since both sides get simultaneous attention from the person.

In the essays selected for this thesis, he applies the above-mentioned method meticulously so that a common reader is naturally forced to ponder upon his words repeatedly to find the discrepancy or the contrary ideas he has planted there. It seems to demand patience and a

keen observation on the part of his readers to penetrate into the minds of the essayist. Dropping one idea suddenly in favor of the other does not hint at any fault or error on the author's part since that idea is actually not entirely ignored by him; it is only a way of 'measuring' many ideas that are constantly approaching the author's mind. It is his duty as well as his skill to create a balance so that being a skeptic a final solution can be postponed unendingly.

The first chapter entitled "Introduction: The Skeptical Tradition and Ralph Waldo Emerson's Essays" addresses certain general conceptions regarding Transcendentalism as propounded by Emerson, Skepticism in general as well as in his thought process, the double consciousness and the nature of his philosophical arguments enunciated in the selected essays. The obscurity in his arguments, his loyalty to the double conscious attitude, his realization of inescapability from the tensions created in the two polar opposite views, the coexistence of dual parts in most of the argument are the major issues that are always highlighted when the nature of Emersonian skepticism is concerned. George Kateb marks the occurrence of doubleness in Emerson as follows:

Emerson is persuaded of two things: every position is held for at least plausible reasons and perhaps for necessary ones; and every position is inevitably accompanied by or engenders an opposition that is also (though not always equally) plausible and necessary and also narrow (Kateb 5).

Moreover, traces of the theory of deconstruction also seem to be reflected in his skeptical nature as like a deconstructionist Emerson also does not appear to recognize language as a vehicle of total fact or meaning of everything. He believes in the existence of power in the point of transition; not in a static position. The universe for him attains harmony in the state of fluxions and mobility. Though Emerson recognizes the possibility of unity between man and Nature regarding the concept of oneness of all he is simultaneously aware of the impossibility of the harmonious existence of the two. This dualism plays a vital role in creating a perplexing notion of Emersonian doubt.

The second chapter entitled "Emerson, Epistemology and Skepticism" includes "Experience", "Montaigne, or the Skeptic" and "Plato, or the Philosopher" where the first

one draws the reader's attention towards Emerson's skeptical nature as it bears the seeds of this sort of tendencies that possess distinction though the disposition of the skeptical twist of mind seems to carve out its own place in his thought at different patches of time. "Experience" is a vital essay that gives its readers immense scope to probe into his mental world. It shows them the idea of the groundlessness of human commitment to reality. Emerson's constant struggle to understand the predicament of the sudden demise of his son Waldo in the light of his philosophical idealism is the central concern of the essay. His idealistic belief seems to be surrounded by the major problems like doubt and skepticism. After the incident of death, Emerson's earlier belief in the existence of unified, flawless and a complete universe appears to gain less momentum as skepticism regarding such possibilities creeps more prominently into it. He starts believing in the presence of a crack or a schism between his belief and doubt that actually has made the whole mental condition a complex one.

The other two essays have been chosen to testify how Emerson approaches the ideas held by two great personalities like Michael de Montaigne and Plato. His observations regarding these two scholars also bear the testimony to his own ideas that sometimes seem to replicate them in his characters. Understanding the philosophical arguments as provided by Montaigne and Plato from the critical viewpoint of Emerson helps to probe deeply into the psychological aspect of the essayist that is crucial to discern his own attitude towards aspects like the pursuit of knowledge, the realization of truth, skepticism and epistemology.

Both Emerson and Plato do not clearly state their own arguments or judgments about a particular topic. They accept the view of the abundance of meaning that may be hidden in a single sentence. Emerson's worries regarding the all-encompassing meaning or possibility of a single concrete truth are revealed in his use of language as employed in the essays since he thinks that no language is adequate to express the truth. By doing this the essayist invites the readers to find out their own meanings that are totally subjective in nature. This problem of language as an inadequate mode to know the world or fact around us is also relevant to Plato's writings as, "Emerson uses language ambiguously in much the way Plato constructed his dialogues in order to demand that the reader take an active role in the process of thought" (Bailey 80).

The third chapter entitled “Central Skeptical Concerns in Human Relationships” incorporates three essays “Experience” “Friendship” and “Fate” and focuses on main issues relating to love and happiness that are intricately related to human bondage. The idea of the seven lords of life as enumerated in the essay “Experience” seems to penetrate most of the major essays by Emerson especially “Friendship” and “Fate”. Emerson’s evaluation of friendship explores that how a friend in spite of being a true spirit in disguise that enlightens human heart, his/her presence sometimes threatens the tranquility of human mind. At this moment of complexity what Emerson can express is, “[l]et me be alone to the end of the world, rather than that my friend should overstep, by a word or a look, his real sympathy” (“Friendship” 198). His doubt about the purity of a true friendship as discussed in the essay leads him to accept a mid-world between the two extremes that offers him a needful distance from both sides which helps him in gaining a critical approach towards all kinds of human relationships. What Emerson argues in the essay is that it is essential to identify the illusory nature of friendship that acts as a lord to our life. As this lord is more powerful than a human being what he or she can do is to find a harmless or a safer zone where the individuality cannot be harmed by any deception. Emerson’s skeptical stance with regard to friendship appears to be his part of the endeavor in putting ideal friendship against the real one on the same plan and thereby oscillating between the two polar opposites without any confirmation or reconciliation.

Again, the essay “Fate” marks Emerson’s helpless surrender to the lord named Fate that threatens perpetually his power of will. There is a constant tension between accepting human fate and winning over it by the power of human determination or will. Fate basically deals with the inconsistent set of circumstances over which no compromise or regulation is possible in human part that eventually makes them accept the bitter truth which is that human power is limited and inadequate in some conditions. Emerson’s declaration of ‘unsettling’ all his views and ideas in the essay “Circles” seems to be relevant when his belief on self-reliance is countered by fate or destiny that turns down his previous claims of individual omnipotence. The essay “Fate” proves to be a vital piece of work where a sense of gloominess is well-marked as Emerson’s surrender to fate becomes more noticeable though he cannot reconcile between human fate and human will. This lack of the settlement

with respect to fate and will does not appear to be a subject of Emerson's complete helplessness as he voluntarily aspires to 'unsettle' everything while making arguments.

The fourth chapter bearing the title "Emerson's Approach to Life" probes basically into Emerson's three significant essays. i.e., "Experience", "Illusions" and "Circles". "Experience" talks about his own life as he mentions the major event of his son's demise which permeates throughout the essay unfurling the issues of transition and skepticism. It also explores Emerson's soft corner for the people with skeptical attitude who find the unreliability of any concrete truth of life. The complete lifespan of Emerson including the phases of becoming minister as well as being a venerated sage of the 19th century America "is an continual attempt to adjust and readjust inspiration to the demands of the world, to maintain a creative interplay between spiritual hunger and the constraints of the human constitution and social obligation" (Mott 218). Illusion, in the essay "Illusions", is marked out by the essayist as one of the seven lords of life that teaches Emerson the vulnerability of human perception due to the existence of layers of illusions all around in nature. The world has its own secret that never allows an individual to comprehend it. This acts as a stumbling block while realizing the power of the self-reliance. His honest confession that "there are as many pillows of illusion as flakes in a snow-storm" ("Illusions" 292) is a part of the consciousness of the complexity grown within his mind while recognizing the supremacy of transcendental self.

"Circles" reveals how an individual is required to undergo an unending journey in search of any fact. This journey teaches all individuals that it is circular in nature without any destination. Emerson's skepticism of any justified truth is backed by such a circular journey that shows the fact that human life is "an apprenticeship to the truth" ("Circles" 281); an individual can prepare himself to attain truth or knowledge only and such preparation or planning bears fruit on an unspecified period. "No truth", Emerson says is "sublime" (298) as it may be insignificant or unimportant as soon as new ideas and thoughts overcome the old ones. The unending journey of human life in persuasion of truth or knowledge can also be seen as a human quest to know the divinity. Attainment of divine pleasure or assimilation of the human with the divine seems to be constantly postponing as people draw new circle every time around an old one. This journey of postponement is the journey of a skeptic who

does not commit himself to a static position and tries to dwell in a world with advantages to move on. The progressive nature of Emerson's behavior appears to be a major issue in "Circles". The idea of the entirety or the totality of things or events as venerated by him as a transcendental thinker is nullified in this essay by propounding the concept of circles where totality only appears to be an elusive subject.

The limitations of the thesis rest on the fact that this volume of work has mainly taken into consideration of the major critically acclaimed and established canonical essays that have been read and re-read over the times though the nature of skepticism does not seem to form a most discussed area of research by the critics. Emerson, being a man of versatility, has not only confined his literary genius to the essay form; along with this particular genre he has tried his hands on other mediums like poems, journals and letters that also gives evidence his skeptical attitude. Moreover, his works as a whole are so heterogeneous in its context that the possibility of further studies by considering other issues outside of this present effort cannot be put in a straitjacket. A wide-ranging study of all the works including the minor essays, letters and journal entries would definitely contribute to Emerson criticism. However, this thesis may act as a catalyst to build a strong foundation for the path to be traveled by other researchers while dealing with Emersonian skepticism. His major essays, as discussed in the present study, may light up other areas also that have been less explored so far as his poems, letters and journals are concerned.

Emerson's limited adherence to skepticism seems to be owing to his double consciousness that exists in all parts of Nature. It is his approach to life that makes him an experimenter whose experiments appear to be incomplete without taking into consideration the dualism, and it is the demand of his experimental attitude for which his exploration of the meaning of life is not affirmed. It is owing to his experimental stance that he does not accept skepticism as an ideal permanent philosophy as he knows that sometimes belief acts as a more powerful entity to challenge skepticism though none of them is permanent in life. Emerson accepts inconsistencies and contradictions as parts of human existence and feels that these variations themselves have made life worth living. There is no way out for an unswerving life; it is better to accept both idealism and pragmatism because accepting dualities makes human existence meaningful. Similarly, both freedom and fate become powerful depending upon

human temperament for which canceling out one and preferring the other is not possible. Life has different phases and in each phase, one particular idea, of course provisionally, dominates it. Skepticism in Emerson can also be seen in the same light as it governs him momentarily. For instance, his shifting attitude towards human relationships is also a momentary response which has different phases and at different points of time, he attaches importance to different opinions. His fascination for experiment and his identification of the circularity that exists anywhere help him to cherish discrepancies and alterations of ideas. He appears to accept dualism optimistically because his visionary eyes have penetrated the deep facts of human life; his desire for being a balanced individual soul who can accept contrary worlds altogether without any reconciliation or settlement is persistent. Though the middle-ground he talks about in “Experience” is constantly a challenging battlefield owing to the constant fight between opposites, it is a daring task for a person of a skeptical bent of mind to have a firm grip in such a tumultuous ambience.

It can be said that skepticism in Emerson’s writings is simply a phase not only of his life but also of his mind. It is his mood that dictates his thoughts that dwell frequently upon a particular idea or concept. Even the idea of double consciousness in his case is itself subjected to his psychic process. Being a self-proclaimed experimenter, Emerson’s movement from one phase to the other or from one side to the other side is justified as he unsettles his judgments whenever contradictory ideas strike his mind without letting him ponder over a particular point for a prolonged time. As life itself is not static so his perception or consciousness cannot be supposed to adhere to one side. He himself is aware of the fact that life can never be imagined in totality as knowledge itself is inherently deceptive. The unpredictability of human life is linked with the unpredictable nature of human thought or mood. Life becomes colorful when human temperament is good. Mood dominates the degree of skepticism in individuals in general and in Emerson in particular. In one sense, it can be said that skepticism, due to the changeability of human mood or temper, also remains for some time. The philosophy of circularity or process is relevant to Nature. The idea of fluxion and mobility that Emerson seems to propound in his essays never let him remain with one argument. As a result, his skepticism too does not appear to remain a permanent entity; it also falls under the whirlpool of circularity or mobility.

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