



BRAHMA

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.

Ralph Waldo Emerson / 1803 - 1882

R. Waldo Emerson

'ACCORDING TO EMERSON, THE PRIMARY CONCERN OF THE POET IS LIBERATION. FIRST OF ALL LIBERATION FROM A MERE MATERIALISM, BUT ALSO LIBERATION FROM THE PRISON OF IDEAS. EMERSON IS AN EXTREMIST HERE: 'EVERY THOUGHT IS ALSO A PRISON.' IT IS NOT THAT THIS OR THAT THOUGHT MAY BE WRONG OR DAMAGING OR USELESS. EVERY THOUGHT IS A PRISON, BECAUSE A THOUGHT, ONCE FORMULATED, BECOMES AN IMPEDIMENT TO THINKING. TO THE PHILOSOPHER, TO THE MORALIST, TO THE CRITIC OR STATESMAN, EVEN TO THE HUMANIST, TO ANYONE FOR WHOM DOCTRINE IS IMPORTANT, SUCH AN ATTITUDE AMOUNTS TO INTELLECTUAL ANARCHY. NEVERTHELESS, THIS IS WHAT EMERSON IS UP TO WHEN HE TALKS ABOUT FORM. IT IS A MATTER OF VALUING THE PROCESS OF THINKING OVER ANY PARTICULAR IDEA, EVEN A GOOD IDEA. IT IS ON THIS BASIS THAT THE POETS ARE 'LIBERATING GODS', WHY 'THEY ARE FREE AND,' PUN INTENDED, 'MAKE FREE,' WHY THE POET 'UNLOCKS OUR CHAINS.' BUT THIS IS ALSO WHY THE POET, AT PLAY IN THE FIELDS OF FORMAL THINKING, IS REGARDED BY THE CONVENTIONAL CITIZEN, THE METHODICAL THINKER, THE MANIPULATING POLITICIAN, AS CAPRICIOUS, UNPREDICTABLE, UNRELIABLE AND EVEN DANGEROUS. ARTISTS TEND TO GET OUT OF CONTROL, AND IT IS NO ACCIDENT THAT AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES KEEP SUCH TIGHT REINS ON THEM. PLATO NOTED THE PERIL OF POETS FOR THE STAGE, AND HE WAS RIGHT...

(ANONYMOUS REVIEWER)

"Emerson at the core is a fraud and a sentimentalist, and his fraudulence impinges at least lightly upon everything he wrote: when it disappears from the subject, it lingers in the tone; even when he brings his very real talent to bear upon a thoroughly sound subject, he does so with a manner at once condescending and casual, a manner of which the justification, such as it is, may be found in his essays, but of which the consequence is a subtle degradation of the poetic art."

Yvor Winters: JONES VERY AND R.W.EMERSON, from IN DEFENSE OF REASON

W. Winters