

Cultural Politics, Rhetoric, and the Essay: A Comparison of Emerson and Rodó

Sophia McClennen
Illinois State University

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Volume 2 Issue 1 (March 2000) Article 4**Sophia McClennen,****"Cultural Politics, Rhetoric, and the Essay: A Comparison of Emerson and Rodó"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss1/4>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 2.1 (2000)**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss1/>>

Abstract: In her article, "Cultural Politics, Rhetoric, and the Essay: A Comparison of Emerson and Rodó," Sophia McClennen compares two essays which have been central to debates over "American" cultural identity. Her work is a detailed comparison of the persuasive language used in "The American Scholar" by Ralph Waldo Emerson and "Ariel" by José Enrique Rodó. She focuses on the specific ways that the rhetoric of the persuasive essay binds Emerson and Rodó to a literary tradition and consequently impedes each author's ability to construct a liberated culture. She also demonstrates how the comparative method is a useful tool for analyzing representations of cultural autonomy. For in both essays the author is intent on resisting cultural colonization from a dominant power; yet the tools employed in such resistance ultimately resort to thoughts derived from others. The similar literary and intellectual framework of these essays suggests that a correlative historical moment -- nation-building -- and political motivation -- the quest for an autonomous cultural identity -- can lead two authors from different places and different periods to produce very similar types of rhetoric or persuasive discourse. The conflict between these essays' cultural politics and their use of rhetoric explains one of the fundamental pitfalls of these texts: On the one hand, each essay wants to convince the reader to think "freely" yet, on the other hand, clearly articulates and dictates the guidelines for such behavior.

Sophia McCLENNEN**Cultural Politics, Rhetoric, and the Essay: A Comparison of Emerson and Rodó**

The essay has historically been the literary space of persuasion. Since the genre's development by Michel Montaigne in his *Essais* (1572-80, 1588) (see *Montaigne* <http://www.orst.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/montaigne/m-essays_contents.html>), essays have often been a driving force for assessing social crises and suggesting paths for change and intellectual autonomy. Following Montaigne, essayists have often documented the status of their current society and suggested that their readers to move forward and change. While those essays seeking social transformation reject what they consider to be the negative influences of predominant cultural trends, their recourse to rhetoric relocates their methodology within the long tradition of essay writing, and consequently denies the essayist a clean break with the past. This use of discourse results not only from the confines of linguistic persuasion but also from the nature of the essayist's task. The reader must be convinced that current modes of thought are "intellectually flawed" and, further, that what the essayist proposes is "better." Such methodological parameters often lead the essayist to provide the spectacle of a debate between the proposed course of action/thought and the currently existing hindrance to such action/thought.

Both "The American Scholar" (see Emerson 1981; Emerson 2000a <<http://www.jjnet.com/emerson/amscholar.htm>>) and "Ariel" (see Rodó 2000 <<http://www.analitica.com/bitbliblioteca/rodo/ariel.asp>>) perform linguistically to convince their readers to embrace a new way of thinking and being. The first, by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) (see Johnson <<http://www.transcendentalists.com/1emerson.html> >), was addressed to a group of graduating Phi Beta Kappa students at Harvard in 1837. The second was published in 1900 by the Uruguayan (see Lonely Planet <<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/dest/sam/uru.htm>>), José Enrique Rodó (1871-1917), and also takes place in an academic setting, albeit in a fictional one. The temporal gap between these two writers and their continental separation would perhaps suggest that the outcome of these scholars' work would by necessity differ greatly; one might expect to focus more keenly on the distinctions between their projects than on their similarities. Nevertheless, the fundamental connection between their methods of persuasion highlights the linguistic constraints of the genre in which they wrote. Regarding these two particular texts, their form (the persuasive essay) and content (cultural independence) explain how both essayists become caught in the paradox of using rhetoric in order to convince the reader to think independently. Through a comparative analysis of these two essays and their linguistic strategies, it is possible to discern the complex situation which intellectuals face when arguing for, or attempting to found, an autochthonous and liberated culture.

Emerson and Rodó shared the impetus to provoke their readers to create a new cultural identity through use of the persuasive essay. The similar literary and intellectual framework of these essays suggests that a correlative historical moment -- nation-building -- and political motivation -- the quest for an autonomous cultural identity -- can lead two authors from different places and different periods to produce very similar types of rhetoric or persuasive discourse. This discursive practice displays one of the fundamental pitfalls of the genre of what I would call the active/provocative essay which is, on the one hand, intent on convincing its readers to think "freely" but which, on the other, clearly articulates and dictates the guidelines for such behavior as they are set forth by its author.

The need to encourage "free thinking" is a direct consequence of the fact that both Emerson and Rodó occupy moments of historical and political crises within their respective regions. Emerson, observing an absence of national identity in pre-Civil War America and noting the consistent return of the academic community to the teachings of Europe, argued that it was imperative to create a new "American" cultural identity, which would respond to the influence and imposition of Europe with an established intellectual and institutional tradition. One of the founders of New England Transcendentalism (see Woodlief 2000a <<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/index.html>>), Emerson's philosophy rejected European, Enlightenment rationalism. Yet his critics were to be found among his colleagues in the

United States. Ann Woodlief explains that Emerson stressed individuality and creativity, which put him in opposition to other scholars and members of the clergy, such as Andrews Norton, who felt that advocating such extreme self-reliance could be interpreted as anti-Christian (Woodlief 2000b paragraph #11 <<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transweb/ondsaddress.htm>>). Despite such criticism, Carl Bode notes more positively Emerson's sense of self-importance and urgent need to lead his country. He felt that the nation needed him to push it toward action and away from "intellectual lethargy" (Bode in Emerson, xxix). In order to achieve these goals, Emerson wrote extensively about ways in which the nation could aspire to greatness and he advocated an American way of life founded on self-reliance, inspiration, action, and purpose. In "The American Scholar" he links intellectual sloth with the crisis of American identity: "Perhaps the time has come when ... the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill" (51). Emerson seeks to shape his nation's identity by awakening its sluggard intellect and his medium is the essay (for an interesting connection between the essay form and the goal of inciting critical thinking where Emerson writes with regard to Montaigne, see Emerson 2000b <<http://www.jjnet.com/emerson/montaigne.htm>>).

In the Southern Hemisphere, Rodó's Latin America was finally ending the Wars for Independence, which spanned most of the nineteenth century (1808-98) and culminated with the Spanish-American War (see Hispanic Division <<http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/>>). In the case of Uruguay, similar to other Latin American countries which had been independent for decades, its independence in 1828 did not mean political stability and the small nation was plagued with wars between liberals and conservatives. As a result of such a prolonged period of political unrest, divisive intellectual movements plagued Latin America in general and Uruguay in particular. In order to free the region of imperialism many intellectuals believed that Latin America needed to seek a strong and stable cultural identity as resistance to centuries of colonization. Yet, there was considerable disagreement as to how to achieve such cultural independence. Responding to those Latin American writers such as Andrés Bello (1781-1865) (see Bello <<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/9505/andresbello.html>>) and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888) (see Palma <<http://www.raulpalma.com/sarmien/index.html>>) who sought a model for cultural revolution in the example of the United States, Rodó felt a powerful impulse to reject the looming domination of American intellectuals. Against Sarmiento -- author of the famous essay *Facundo* (1845) (see Sarmiento 2000 <http://www.raulpalma.com/sarmien/obras/facundo/fac0_0.htm>) and who advocated copying American civilization and argued against the barbarity common in many regions of Argentina -- Rodó hoped to forge a unique and independent culture. He wished to create a unified vision of Latin American culture, which could resist intellectual imperialism. Similarly, Emerson chastised his fellow citizens for reverting to the teachings of Europe and allowing themselves to be intellectually colonized by their former political adversaries. Consequently, both authors write against cultural domination from stronger powers that they consider threatening to the creation of national identity, or in Rodó's case, one should say continental identity. Emerson's text speaks to the "American" scholar while simultaneously prescribing the necessary elements of such a being, since he believes that the existence of "American" scholarship is in jeopardy. Similarly, Rodó's text carries the subtitle "To the Youth of America" ("A la juventud de América"; all subsequent translations are mine.) Although it is obvious that the "America" to which both authors refer is quite distinct geographically, their projects require the emphasis of the term "America." It is important to note, however, that Emerson's use of "American" does not account for the presence of his Southern cousins. Although Emerson protested the U.S. invasion of Mexico from 1846-1848 (see Department of National Defence <<http://www.cfcsc.dnd.ca/links/milhist/mexus.html>>[inactive]), when writing "The American Scholar" he does not account for the fact that the countries to the South are also American.

Rodó's term, in contrast, brazenly places Emerson's America under erasure. Rodó wants to posit an American youth that is in no sense Northern, and his exclusion of the adjectives "Latin" or "South" demonstrates an early rhetorical recourse to linguistic persuasion. While he prescribes a

path for the intellectual youth of Latin America, he simultaneously makes a political statement by using the term "America" in connection specifically with Spanish America. By claiming that "America" does not refer to the United States, he advocates the notion that the "real" America is not the North, but the South, where the terms "North" and "South" reflect the terminology of the time. North means the United States and South means the all of America South of the Mexican-U.S. border. Given that "Ariel" was written in the context of the Spanish-American War and in the wake of the Monroe Doctrine (1823) (see Welling

<http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/H/1994/ch5_p3.htm>), Rodó's text underscores the need to reject any emulation of U.S.-American culture and challenges any form of U.S.-American intervention in the region (see Hope <<http://kuhttp.cc.ukans.edu/cwis/organizations/las/interven.html>>). It is important to emphasize that Rodó does not argue that any foreign influence is negative, for he clearly accepts models from Europe; his focus is the threat of cultural colonization posed by the U.S. Yet in his effort to separate North from South, he overlooks the linguistic trap of referring to the United States as the North and leaves Mexico in linguistic limbo. Through their use of rhetoric both Emerson and Rodó employ titles that attempt to establish "American" identity. For Emerson, American means "not European," and for Rodó, American means "not the U.S." However, the signifiers here do not yet signify. The existence of the "Americans" referred to in these essays depends on the strength of the texts that follow. The political charge of the rhetoric employed in these essays is evident from the outset. The texts, specifically, rely on forms of persuasion that use language as the means for producing cultural power and more specifically the power of the self to claim autonomous identity. The contradiction between a persuasive discourse that means to teach the reader to actually resist cultural "persuasion" and seek liberation from outside influences is both a perplexing and ironically necessary consequence of the genre of the essay. Roberto González Echevarría, in *The Voice of the Masters*, speaks of the essay genre as a rhetorical game where the intentions of the author are, by the necessity of the genre and its goals, masked and consequently authoritarian. "In the essayistic tradition the voice of power and authority does not don the mask of the dictator. The figure that emerges to preside over the essay is the maestro, the teacher whose task is to plumb the depths of language and history in order to render the voice of culture articulate ... in short, to turn this voice -- pure, autochthonous -- into a source of authority" (14). By assuming the voice of a teacher, these authors claim a position of power and legitimacy which heightens their ability to convince their readers to accept the essayists' strict and rigid guidelines for culturally autonomous intellectual thought and behavior. Only through the linguistic manipulation of the reader can the reader become free: herein lies the paradox of "liberating lessons."

The differing ways in which these two authors resort to such manipulation is suggested by the manner in which these essays are framed. Emerson's essay was first presented as a speech to Harvard students. Beneath its title the reader is informed that this was "an Oration delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, August 31, 1837." The essay begins by emphasizing the ambience of a speech through the salutation: "Mr. President and Gentlemen" (51). This essay, then, made its first appearance as a performance. This fact is significant to its placement within a collection of Emerson's essays, others of which were originally speeches. There is a sense of the importance of a significant historical event, a sense of the moment that accompanies the reading of the text. As a former lecturer to Harvard's brightest, most promising students, Emerson confers upon his published essay the pre-established authoritative legitimacy he was accorded by his original listeners. Therefore, the following claims to truth and knowledge that Emerson makes garner greater import.

The reader encountering this text becomes inscribed within this audience, but the audience is now a fiction, or rather, a textual device that immediately locates the reader in a receptive position. Emerson, the master, the teacher, speaks. The reader, the student, listens. In contrast, Rodó's text was not actually a speech. Yet, it shares an astonishingly similar frame. "Ariel" begins with a narrative description of a teacher bidding farewell to his students of many years. They meet for one last seminar in the teacher's study. In the description of this study the reader learns that the students have come to call their teacher Próspero in reference to Shakespeare's *Tempest*

(Shakespeare <<http://techtwo.mit.edu/Shakespeare/Comedy/tempest/thetempest.html>> [inactive]). The *Tempest* tells the tale of Próspero who arrives at an uncivilized island and encounters two types of reactions: one exemplified by Ariel, who learns the ways of Próspero, and the other by the figure of Caliban, who resists Próspero's cultural teachings. In further reference to Shakespeare's play, the teacher has a statue of the character, Ariel, which he is fond of caressing while he lectures: "Próspero caressed, meditating, the forehead of the statue. He then sat his students about him and with his firm voice, *magisterial* voice, that he had in order to grasp an idea and project it into the depths of one's spirit ... he began to speak faced with affectionate attention" ("Próspero acarició, meditando, la frente de la estatua; dispuso luego al grupo juvenil en torno suyo; y con su firme voz, -voz *magistral*, que tenía para fijar la idea e insinuarse en las profundidades del espíritu ... comenzó a decir, frente a una atención afectuosa)" (4). The statue becomes his muse and empowers him with its magisterial voice. This voice is firm, powerful, as we may imagine Emerson's was the day in which he delivered his oration, and it is received with affectionate attention.

Why create the fiction? Rodó's fictive academic setting remarkably resembles the environment of "The American Scholar." Inasmuch as Rodó was involved in intellectual debates with essayists whose authority had been ratified through their association with educational institutions and, in the case of Sarmiento, journalism, it hardly seems coincidental that his famous essay creates the authoritative ambience of the classroom. Aware of the pedagogical positions from which his intellectual precursors Sarmiento and Andrés Bello had written, Rodó presumably presented his essay as an oration so as to place it alongside the essays to which he was directly responding. Given that Sarmiento and Bello, both university professors, were more sympathetic to the notion of adopting U.S.-American cultural practices as a rejection of Spanish cultural influences, Rodó in his effort to persuade readers to reject their proposals places his rhetoric on equally powerful ground. As Carlos Fuentes has noted: "[Rodó] is twenty-nine when he writes *Ariel*, but he poses as an elderly teacher, surrounded by his disciples and delivering his philosophical testament. This valetudinarian stance does not preclude the rhetorical flourishes of what is basically a written speech" (13). Consequently, Rodó's fictitious Próspero is the teacher speaking to his students. He has power and knowledge that they seek from him. As a sign of the mentally manipulative persuasive properties of rhetoric, the artifice of this frame disappears and, as pages pass, the reader forgets that the monologue being read was not actually a speech, because it reads like one. The words of Próspero reveal Rodó's poetics when the teacher explains to his students: "I believe that addressing the youth on noble and lofty issues, whatever they may be, is a form of sacred oration" ("Pienso que hablar a la juventud sobre nobles y elevados motivos, cualesquiera que sean, es un género de oratoria sagrada") (4). Rodó aspires, through such statements, to suggest that his own essay is part of the "form of sacred oration."

It is noteworthy that Emerson conceives of the essay as part of the intellectual's inheritance of classical literary forms as does Rodó. "The American Scholar" begins with a reference to the Greeks and a call to American intellectuals to create their own tradition: "The millions that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests" (51). Nevertheless, these essays demonstrate how the particularities of classical oration and its linguistic strengths lead their authors to prescribe action dogmatically. In order to maintain the forceful tone which Emerson and Rodó elected to set the stage for their arguments, they continue, whether deliberately or not, to write within a foreign and classic tradition. Both authors, inevitably, become trapped in the paradox that they wish to teach "free thinking" by means of rhetorical "indoctrination." Both authors resemble each other in their use of classical oration and narrative voice. In his opening, Rodó uses the second person plural, or "vosotros," to include the reader -- an interesting choice given the fact that that form had effectively disappeared in Latin America by 1900. The second person plural was certain to seem "foreign" to his readers. Emerson, on the other hand, employs the first person plural, thereby including himself also: "We do not meet for games of strength or skill ... Our day of independence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands draws to a close" (51). These are the voices that these authors use to commence their orations and to underscore a rhetorical alliance with their audience. Yet, the third person appears

most frequently in both texts and those moments where the third person narration is interrupted by an outburst of the first person are a useful way of understanding their rhetorical methodology.

For example, in the third section of "The American Scholar," Emerson calls upon his readers to take action and not be reclusive bookworms: "The preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious to the conscious, is action" (59). This type of broad generalization, typical of Emerson's writing, is quickly followed by a plethora of "I"s: "The world -- this shadow of the soul or *other me* -- lies wide around ... I run eagerly into this resounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next to me ... I pierce its order; I dissipate its fear; I dispose of it within the circuit of my expanding life. So much of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have I vanquished and planted, so far have I extended my being, my dominion. I do not see how any man can afford, for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake. It is pearls and rubies to his discourse" (59). This passage reveals various elements of Emerson's rhetorical authority. First, he makes general prescriptive statements about the role of action in the scholar's life. He then performs that action himself -- with nine instances of his empowered "I." His life is exemplary and he contrasts such unity of mind and body with the sedentary scholar who has only discourse -- no pearls and rubies. One must remember that Emerson's project is to commingle action with discourse. He will assert his identity while describing what others must do in order to acquire one: "is not the true scholar the only true master?" (53). Yet the "American Scholar," according to Emerson, is primarily a hope and not a reality, except in Emerson's own life. So, the text performs the "American Scholar" and acts as a role model for the student. The student is dictated to, and supposedly liberated: "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system" (56). The irony of course is that this text tries to attract just such satellites. By passively listening and following the orator's advice, the student will purportedly become an active, independent, American scholar.

Similar strategies appear in "Ariel." In the same way in which Emerson's desires use a rhetorical guise, Rodó also employs the first person to shock the reader into agreement. Much of Rodó's text is an effort to motivate the youth of Latin America to reject the allure of U.S.-American materialism by seeking an autochthonous spirituality and cultural strength. North America (referring only to the United States) as a cultural evil is alluded to throughout the text but Rodó does not begin to discuss his views straightforwardly until the fifth section (there are six sections plus an introduction and conclusion). After the initial usage of the "vosotros" forms, the majority of the first four sections is in the third person. Surprisingly, the first person plural enters shortly after the start of the fifth section when Rodó identifies his enemy by name: "This is why the vision of a willfully *de-Latinized* America, without the extortion of conquest, and later reconstructed according to the archetype of the North, already floats through the minds of many concerned for our future. It inspires a model society that has been formulated at every level through the most suggestive parallels to the North, and it is manifested by constant proposals of innovation and reform. We have our own *Northern mania*. It is necessary to oppose this vision by using our own reason and feeling to limit its effects" (34) / "Es así como la visión de una América *deslatinizada* por propia voluntad, sin la extorsión de la conquista, y regenerada luego a imagen y semejanza del arquetipo del Norte, flota ya sobre los sueños de muchos sinceros interesados por nuestro porvenir, inspira la fruición con que ellos formulan a cada paso los más sugestivos paralelos, y se manifiesta por constantes propósitos de inovación y de reforma. Tenemos nuestro *nordomanía*. Es necesario oponerle los límites que la razón y el sentimiento señalan de consuno" (34).

The third person in this passage demonstrates the way in which Rodó uses the power of an objective voice to describe his particular view of the cultural crisis facing Latin America. When the first person plural appears describing the "Northern-mania" which he is arguing against, he includes himself in the group of those who have been affected negatively by the allure of the North. Yet, clearly, Rodó does not consider himself a victim of "Northern-mania." By using the first person plural, he artfully criticizes his public, shrouding the attack through claiming that he, too, is part of this wayward society. Yet, there is no doubt that the use of "we" is merely a rhetorical device used to connect him to his audience. Despite his language of camaraderie, Rodó follows this

passage with a clear assertion of his view and challenges his readers to agree with him. As seen in Emerson, Rodó's essay style first generalizes about his society, and then makes a direct call to action in the first person singular. In the next passage, the use of the first person singular immediately removes him from his audience, which he appeared to be a part of only lines before, and places him outside as the bearer of greater wisdom: "I well understand that one can acquire inspirations, illuminating lessons, in the example of the strong. I well understand ... but I don't see the glory in proposing to abandon the character of our nations -- their unique *personality* -- in order to impose on them identification with a foreign model and make them sacrifice the irreplaceable originality of their spirit...." ("Comprendo bien que se adquieren inspiraciones, luces enseñanzas, en el ejemplo de los fuertes ... Comprendo bien ... Pero no veo la gloria, ni en el propósito de desnaturalizar el carácter de los pueblos -- su genio *personal* -- para imponerles la identificación con un modelo extraño al que ellos sacrifiquen la originalidad irreemplazable de su espíritu...") (34).

Here Rodó, through the words of Próspero, uses the strong communicative power of the first person to call for the autonomous creation of identity. The "I" here is a self-defining "I": I write in the first person, therefore I exist independently. This simple rhetorical device of making struggle personal leads the reader to relate to the cultural crisis facing Latin America. For Rodó, this cultural crisis will be remedied by the youth of Latin America who, influenced by the sage words of their teacher, will leave his dusty study to energetically claim their new destinies. Another equally powerful example is that of Ariel. The image of Ariel rhetorically creates an association for readers who are familiar with Shakespeare. The symbol plays various roles within the text, beginning with the title. In Shakespeare's play, Ariel is the character who, unlike Caliban, learned how to assimilate the teachings of Próspero. Symbolically, Ariel represents a role model for Latin American youth. But given its borrowing from Shakespeare, the figure of Ariel seems to be very different from an autochthonous symbol of cultural independence. Rodó's use of Ariel is not entirely commensurate with his aims, for Ariel, while a quick study, is also considered an example of a totally passive intellect, incapable of thinking for himself. In this sense, the figure of Ariel becomes a metaphor for Rodó's quandary: how can Ariel at one moment passively learn and at another be a symbol of resistance?

On another level, Ariel is the statue that inspires the master teacher's thoughts. To attribute such power to a statue is somewhat strange. As both muse and source of inspiration, the statue of Ariel appears to be cold and confining. The literary figure has now been transformed into an inert object. Yet, it is an object capable of inspiring liberating thoughts. Obviously Rodó's intention is to liberate, but his version of liberation is that which conforms exactly to the tenets put forth in his essay: liberation here means the freedom to agree with Rodó. At the end of the text, Próspero comes full circle and refers again to the statue and to its symbolic import. "Even more than for my words, I demand from you a sweet and indelible remembrance of my statue Ariel. I want the light and pleasing image of this bronze to be imprinted forever on the innermost intimacy of your soul" ("Aún más que para mi palabra, yo exijo de vosotros un dulce e indeleble recuerdo para mi estatua de Ariel. Yo quiero que la imagen leve y graciosa de este bronce se imprima desde ahora en la más segura intimidad de vuestro espíritu" (54). What Rodó implies is that he wants the rhetorical device of Ariel's statue to be strong enough to be remembered by his readers. It is another linguistic trick to call the image "leve y graciosa" (light and pleasing). How can something, imprinted on the most secure intimacy of your spirit, be light and pleasing? By describing the statue with such unthreatening adjectives, Rodó further masks his textual plan. "I often dream of the day in which history will reveal that the Cordillera resting on the soil of America has been marked as the definitive pedestal for this statue, becoming the immutable altar of its veneration" ("Yo suelo embriagarme con el sueño del día en que las cosas reales harán pensar que la Cordillera que se yergue sobre el suelo de América ha sido tallada para ser el pedestal definitivo de esta estatua, para ser el ara inmutable de su veneración" (55). Here he elevates his symbol -- a symbol that is an imported product of his rhetorical power -- over the South American continent. The violence of this imagery is dissipated, again, by Rodó's linguistic maneuverings. Moreover, as the title of the text, Rodó's essay, "Ariel" -- like the statue -- is subtle at times in its rhetorical

manipulations, but it is still strong and imposing. Since it was first invoked in Rodó's essay, the figure of Ariel has loomed over Latin America and has deeply affected debates over intellectual autonomy. In fact, one could say that intellectual debate about the independence of Latin American identity has centered on this figure. Perhaps the most marked example being the Cuban José Fernández Retamar's *Caliban*, which argues that the figure of Ariel is a symbol of cultural subordination and not liberation.

The devices that Rodó uses to mask his authoritarian strategies do not ultimately succeed in creating a text that is capable of freeing its readers from the outside imposition of a cultural identity. Even though Rodó's use of the figure of Ariel as an emblem for Latin American cultural independence was well meant, its source (from Shakespeare) and context (in a play understood by scholars like Retamar to advocate the colonization of barbarians) was highly problematic and extremely polemical. For instance, Fernández Retamar opposes Caliban to Ariel and argues that Ariel is a symbol of passive assimilation to cultural dominance, while Caliban, who learns his master's language but refuses to obey his commands and eventually uses the language of his master to curse him, is a symbol of resistance and revolution. Interestingly, though, both Rodó and other subsequent Latin American intellectuals who have argued in favor of cultural autochthony, regardless of their use of textual role models, follow a similar practice of writing essays that strive to liberate their culture by providing specific and rigid modes of action.

Emerson's text runs into similar difficulty when he prescribes the means to a liberated and autonomous culture. In contrast, though, Emerson's symbol of "the American Scholar" is generic and appears without the ensuing literary trademarks associated with Shakespeare. Emerson, consequently, does not run into the same problems that Rodó's text does with its recourse to a famous literary figure. Emerson's "American Scholar" is meant to symbolize the author's imaginary perfect American intellectual. It may also be a sign of Emerson's rhetorical confidence that he entitles his essay "The American Scholar," as if he and he alone were capable of describing the features of such a being. In contrast with Rodó's use of a borrowed figure, Emerson boldly sets out to describe his suggestions for American youth without the need for a unified intertextual reference. In fact, this distinction may also point out important differences in the type of originality that these two essayists seek for their nations. Emerson's text is the call for U.S. independence from Europe. Thus, he cannot use a European symbol as his guide any more than Rodó could have taken his imagery from U.S.-American literature. The crucial difference, then, is that Emerson is forced to create a generic American, while Rodó, who is specifically targeting the influence of the United States, does not consider the use of a figure from British literature to threaten his profile of American culture.

Although Emerson's central figure is not borrowed, as is Rodó's, from another literary work, his essay, like Rodó's, has numerable references to other texts. Emerson, for instance, frequently alludes to other famous writers, including Shakespeare, who is referred to on five separate occasions. Rhetorically, this abundance of citation further empowers the discourse: others have said similar things; therefore, the essay increases in literary value. Ironically, as in the case of Rodó's problems with the use of Ariel as a role model, Emerson by, on the one hand, describing a wholly unique American scholar, different from any intellectual precursor and by, on the other hand, bolstering this description with the ideas of other famous writers, actually undermines his goals. What is most noteworthy is the fact that these contradictory rhetorical devices work: Emerson's American scholar, a supposed construct of the essayist himself, becomes a more powerful figure through comparison with the ideas of others (on a theoretical as well as practical level, this is an interesting aspect and result of the comparative approach, here with regard to cultural politics). For instance, Emerson's use of *Hamlet* demonstrates the manner in which the essayist appropriates a well-known symbol to illustrate his point. Emerson states, "Our age is bewailed as the age of Introversion. Must that needs be evil? We, it seems, are critical; we are embarrassed with our second thoughts; we cannot enjoy any thing for hankering to know whereof the pleasure consists; we are lined with eyes; we see with our feet; the time is infected with Hamlet's unhappiness, 'Sicklief o'er with the pale cast of thought'" (68). Emerson uses Shakespeare's character to legitimize his cry for criticism and introspection, gathering power from

the image of Hamlet brooding and urging his readers to consider critical thinking as necessary and not as a "sickness." Yet, Emerson's call for the valorization of introspection does not need the example of Hamlet. In fact, by referring to Hamlet, Emerson only shows that his argument is neither original nor culturally independent. Moreover, the figure of Hamlet causes similar problems for Emerson as those encountered through Rodó's use of Ariel. In both cases, the authors modify literary characters to enable their arguments. Hamlet's characterization as a "thinking man" has made him an "international" and "classic" symbol of the need for transforming one's thoughts into action. Such a reference only serves to overshadow Emerson's own notion of America's "thinking man," and further demonstrates that the combination of thought and action is not the unique cultural concern of American nationalism.

While Emerson's essay draws rhetorical power from the use of other literary symbols, there is a vast difference in degree between the use of this technique in "The American Scholar" and its excess in "Ariel." Rodó rarely makes a point without supporting it by the claim of another intellectual. To cite merely one example, Próspero states in the first section: "I say to you with Renan, 'youth is the discovery of an immense horizon, which is Life'" ("Yo os digo con Renan: 'la juventud es el descubrimiento de un horizonte inmenso, que es la Vida'" (5). By invoking the name of another thinker, Rodó, like Emerson, gains authority and persuasive power. Nevertheless, in the case of these essayists the recourse to the ideas of others typifies a structural and ideological conflict. Both are determined to release their societies from the oppressive cultural traditions that threaten the creation of an "independent" subject. Yet, they themselves are incapable of creating texts that are independent of these traditions. The fact that they ultimately resort to the words of those same people they wish to eradicate from their own cultural constructions reveals the double-bind from which they write: they are trapped by the literary traditions of the persuasive essay. In fact, the rhetoric of the essay hides its own meaning, for etymologically and historically an essay refers to an attempt or a rehearsal. The text "essays"; it tries to persuade the reader to see the writer's point of view. But the performance quality of the essay imparts to it a sense of the already accomplished. The writer must speak authoritatively and with confidence, and must mask the cracks in his/her argument; or else, the text will not be successful. Without rhetoric, without persuasion, the essay only tries but may fail.

The persuasive goal of the "The American Scholar" is the description and intellectual acceptance of Emerson's notion of a "Thinking Man." His introduction states: "In this hope I accept the topic which not only usage but the nature of our association seem to prescribe to this day -- the *American Scholar*. Year by year we come up hither to read one more chapter in his biography. Let us inquire what light new days and events have thrown on his character and his hopes" (52). What follows, however, is not the description of an already accepted mode of being, but a clear and specific outline of what Emerson believes the students whom he is addressing should become. Hence, the "character" of the American scholar is that which Emerson "hopes" to provoke. Emerson continues by using a fable of the division of the gods of Man into men to explore what he sees as the threat to man's individual identity. He believes that by allocating to the scholar merely the function of being an intellect, the scholar is doomed to be merely the "parrot of other men's thinking" (53). In order to free man from this evil, Emerson uses this fable to represent the dangers of succumbing to pre-established categories of identity. Yet, his tools for such liberation also incarcerate the individual, because such magisterial authority refuses to allow the possibility of any other alternative.

Rodó similarly reverts to the use of a fable to delineate what he sees as the all-important inner sanctuary of man, which, as Emerson also believes, must resist the social pressures of society. Rodó's fable does not refer to gods but to a king. The king has a special room in his palace where he is untouched by outside materialism. After he has recounted his fable, Rodó, like Emerson, draws the conclusions that he hopes his students will follow: "I give to this tale the setting of your own interior realm. Open with healthy gallantry, like the house of the trusting monarch, to all of the currents of the world, there exists within one's self a hidden and mysterious chamber which is unknown to profane guests and which belongs to no one but serene reason. Only when you penetrate inside this inviolable stronghold will you be able to call yourselves, truly, free men" (15)

/ "Yo doy al cuento el escenario de vuestro reino interior. Abierto con una saludable liberalidad, como la casa del monarca confiado, a todas las corrientes del mundo, exista en él, al mismo tiempo, la celda escondida y misteriosa que desconozcan los huéspedes profanos y que a nadie más que la razón serena pertenezca. Sólo cuando penetréis dentro del inviolable seguro podréis llamaros en realidad, hombres libres" (15). With the same tone that Emerson uses, Rodó questions his reader's existence as a man. The persuasive power behind such claims is evident.

Emerson and Rodó construct an image of man who is entirely self-sufficient. In Emerson's case, the men of the clergy are depicted pejoratively as effeminate, half-men, because they do not have the will power to think for themselves. Again, one observes the paradox of rhetoric: Those men who do become "self-reliant" have followed their master's teachings. Interestingly, here man's power does not come from domination over others, and women specifically, but from self-control and consequently self-liberation. Rodó's text uses the adjective *fecundo* repeatedly in reference to the man who has claimed control over his identity and has found a way to unlock his spirit and soul. Emerson, along similar lines, sums up his essay with the following question: "Is it not the chief disgrace in the world, not to be a unit; -- not to be reckoned one character; -- not to yield that *peculiar fruit* which each man was created to bear, but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred, or the one thousand, of the party of the section, to which we belong; and our opinion predicted geographically, as the North or the South?" (71; my emphasis). One can only wonder about the "peculiar fruit" which the self-reliant man yields or the fecund state of Rodó's ideal, male youth: The self-reliant man is also capable of fecund, organic production rendering woman obsolete....

While most of my analysis has dealt with rhetorical devices in these essays, these two texts also share similarities in content. For instance, both Emerson and Rodó believe that the intellectual should be separated from the masses. Their texts call for the development and support of a national intellect, independent of the stronger, more powerful cultures that threaten their incipient cultures. Furthermore, both texts share similar attitudes about the duties of the scholar. He should not be a recluse; he should act, because only by acting can he become fully empowered. Yet again, the contradictions in these essays are revealed: they seek the passive absorption of the master's words while desiring that their students be active and self-sufficient. Emerson's notion of self-reliance is not entirely shared by Rodó, for the latter suggests a certain spirit of Latin American identity that is more unifying intellectually than the alienation of Emerson's solitary "Thinking Man." Nevertheless, the collective intellectual unity that Rodó seeks continues to reside within the domain of an educated elite, just as Emerson's "Thinking Man" may be self-reliant but cannot be truly successful without the existence of others who practice similar intellectual strategies. Interestingly, both Emerson and Rodó are elitist insofar as they argue that only specific and special individuals can evolve into exemplary intellectuals. In fact, their vision of cultural identity requires that only a select group dictate to the masses the actual features of "proper" cultural freedom. Consequently, these texts reveal another trap of the essay genre. For it is generally the case that the essayist believes that he or she has a unique insight into society which others simply cannot see. Ironically, Emerson and Rodó wish others to see the world differently, aggressively, introspectively, but at no point can they allow for the possibility that the result of such visions may take on its own unique interpretation of the world. In this way both authors link their description of a "free man" to a concept of cultural independence which is very clearly controlled by their own authoritarian claims to cultural knowledge. These two essays purport to provide guidelines for the creation of a new national identity, one that liberates, and they were extremely influential. Emerson's has been dubbed America's literary Declaration of Independence and "Ariel," according to Alberto Zum Felde, for instance: "fulfilled the aspirations of a Latin American consciousness, becoming its gospel" ("colmó las aspiraciones de la conciencia americano-latina, siendo su evangelio" (qtd. in Rodó xxii). From a comparative perspective, then, both of these essays can be considered as equally powerful historical examples of intellectual efforts that struggled to create autonomous cultural identities within the context of an early post-colonial cultural crisis, where post-colonial specifically refers to the difficult cultural make-up of a region previously under colonial rule. The problematic social state of cultural inheritance versus autonomy

endemic to regions that were formerly colonies is certainly a shared trait in the work of both of these writers. Moreover, the fact that both of these essays did have an enormous impact on intellectual responses to the issue of post-colonial identity is testimony to the powerful force of their rhetoric in cultural nation building.

As this analysis demonstrates, the cultural politics and rhetoric of these two texts do not differ greatly. Perhaps the most marked difference is the hybrid nature of Rodó's style, the mixture of literary and scholarly discourse. The fictionalized frame of the classroom reappears at the end, as the master grows silent to let one of his disciples speak. When a favored student, named Enjolras for his resemblance to Hugo's character, leaves his teacher's study, he becomes a portent of the future. Enjolras gazes at the stars and effectively imitates the discourse of Próspero. Pondering the sky, symbolically surrounded by the masses, Enjolras sees the heavens regarding "all men": "As the masses pass, I observe that, although they do not look to the heavens, the heavens watch over them. Over the dark and indifferent mass, like furrowed land, something descends from above" ("Mientras la muchedumbre pasa, yo observo que, aunque ella no mire al cielo, el cielo la mira. Sobre su masa indiferente y oscura, como tierra del surco, algo desciende de lo alto") (103). The revelation of Enjolras fictionally depicts the goal of Rodó's text: the student feels intellectual liberation.

In contrast, Emerson's last word is passed up to God: "A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men" (71). Emerson, less optimistically and in the vein of a different kind of romantic vision, challenges his readers to create the first nation of men. His final lesson focuses on inspiration -- the inspiration to form the "first" nation of men. He aspires to inspire and his essay plays the role of "the Divine Soul." In their final words each essay challenges the reader to make a difference and to participate in cultural reconstruction. Yet, in the end, both "American" essays are tainted with signs from the outside, and both are caught within the double bind of a rhetoric that endeavors to liberate. What is most striking is that due to the enormous influence of these essays we can conclude that, despite the problematic use of rhetoric which has been borrowed from foreign sources and regardless of the authoritarian urge to force "free-thinking," these essays continue to play a significant cultural role as they push the reader toward inner reflection. These texts persist, in many ways, as controversial models for the continuing debate on what actually constitutes "American identity." Emerson warns us, though, that: "Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments" (1981, 57). And, as these texts reveal, their message of cultural reconstruction perpetually risks being "subdued by instruments."

In closing, I must mention that even today, while the cultural identity of the Americas enters yet another phase of crisis, one can find essayists who follow in the footsteps of their literary precursors. One might think of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, or José David Saldívar's *The Dialectics of Our America*, both influential texts which refer to different Americas and yet, similarly, speak of the cultural crises their Americas face. Moreover, both texts make bold suggestions about the ways in which such crises should be confronted and both argue for a specific way in which their region's culture should maintain as well as increase its intellectual power. These two contemporary texts suggest that the combination of using a style based on persuasive rhetoric and a goal of inciting cultural reconstruction found in Emerson and Rodó is merely one example among many. Moreover, the discursive practices of Emerson and Rodó appear to be persistent features of essays concerned with "American" identity.

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Author's Profile: Sophia McClennen works in Latin American Cultural Studies at Illinois State University. Her areas of interest include media studies, critical theory, comparative cultural studies, and gender studies, and she has published her work in these areas. She recently co-edited an issue of *Mediations* (Spring 99) with a special focus on Chilean culture after Pinochet which included her article "Chilex: The Economy of Transnational Media Culture." She has an extensive study of the work of Ariel Dorfman forthcoming in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* (Winter 2000) and she is completing her first book on exile literature and theories of cultural identity. E-mail: <sam50@psu.edu>.