

*R.W.E.*

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# EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

## INSTRUCTION AND PROVOCATION

A FEATURE DEDICATED TO INNOVATIVE EMERSON PEDAGOGY

## Teaching Emerson in the Archive

MICHAEL C. WEISENBURG

The challenge of making Emerson relevant and accessible to contemporary students is part of a larger question of how, or even if, we need or should help keep relevant the canonical works of western literature for the youth of today. While the problem of how to get young people interested in a dead white author is by no means new or unique to Emerson, the Sage of Concord's at first seemingly obscure topics and antiquated style often make his writings a bit difficult for students, and so the instructor is tasked with making Emerson a writer who students might want to read in addition to someone who they have to read. While others in these pages have offered techniques that embrace Emerson's paratactic rhetoric or have drawn correlations between his aphoristic style and the fragmentary nature of modern social media platforms,<sup>1</sup> I would like to make the case for encouraging students to feel an intimacy with Emerson. As easy as it may be to take a cynical view regarding the difficulties of teaching in an age of distraction, the truth always has been and continues to be that students are hungry for knowledge and desperate for connection. I would argue that the latter, connection, is more important now than ever. Specifically, I have found that in asking students to contend with the material history of Emerson's life, and in having them read selections from his journals and letters, they are better able to stop reading Emerson as a major canonical author—as someone whom they are supposed to read—and more as a person, someone who lived, loved, and died. By drawing students' attention to the biographical and cultural contexts of how and why Emerson thought, spoke, and wrote the things that he did, they are better able to incorporate his works into their lives rather than as part of a program of study.

During the 2017 fall semester, I had the privilege to teach an honors seminar on the American Transcendentalists. And while the anecdotes I'll relate in this piece are somewhat specific to this particular class, I hope that some

of the takeaways are adaptable to most circumstances in which Emerson is commonly taught. Matthew Kirschenbaum emphasizes the importance of knowing "how textual things work" in order to better teach students to "see the text as a social artifact."<sup>2</sup> In addition to the traditional assignments of reading quizzes, close readings, annotated bibliographies, and a final term paper, I had students work with primary source material in the rare books reading room, journal about their experiences, and write a material analysis of one artifact. Such recursive attention to the material reality of what it meant to live and write in the nineteenth century encourages students to slow down and consider both the fragility by which past authors come down to us through history and the tenacity it took these authors to commit their thoughts to publication. While much scholarship that falls under the rubric of the material turn in literary studies focuses either on the subjects that we find represented in books or on the arcane objects that made up the everyday life of the past, the most obvious and immediate example of historical material that teachers have at their disposal are the books and scraps of paper that constitute the archive itself.

The intimacy of handling archival material helps students feel more connected to the past and the writers we discuss in class. As is often the case with undergraduate students, many expressed difficulties reading and understanding Emerson's major works. However, when asked to read letters that Emerson wrote regarding his travels and lyceum dates, students began to relate to and empathize with the fact that he was not always able to make his deadlines or keep his promises. As Ralph L. Rusk has pointed out, "The letters, with their changing moods and temperamental varieties of style, give us, no doubt, the most valuable glimpses we can hope to have of the essential personality of Emerson. But they are perhaps equally important of his ideas, and the slow growth of his addresses, essays, and poems."<sup>3</sup> Rusk's

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## 2018 EMERSON SOCIETY DONORS

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## EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

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*ESP* welcomes notes and short articles (up to about 8 double-spaced, typed pages) on Emerson-related topics. Manuscripts are blind refereed. On matters of style, consult previous issues. We also solicit news about Emerson-related community, school, and other projects; information about editions, publications, and research in progress on Emerson and his circle; queries and requests for information in aid of research in these fields; and significant news of Emersonian scholars. Send manuscripts to the editor, Derek Pacheco, English Department, Purdue University, 500 Oval Drive, West Lafayette, IN 47907 or [dpacheco@purdue.edu](mailto:dpacheco@purdue.edu) (email submissions are much preferred).

Review copies of books on Emerson should be sent to book review editor Prentiss Clark, Department of English, Dakota Hall, Room 212, 414 E. Clark St., Vermillion, SD 57069.

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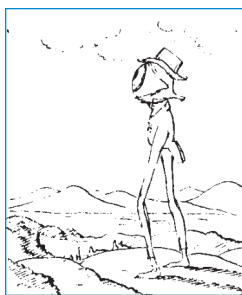
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# PROSPECTS



## Emerson Sightings/Citings

Frequent correspondent **Wendell Refior** spotted this:

In a recent talk on women in the mortgage tech industry, Marcia Davies, Mortgage Bankers Association COO, quoted Emerson: “What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us.”

More at <https://www.housingwire.com/blogs/1-rewired/post/42315-next-mortgage-conference-kicks-off-by-empowering-women-to-stand-together>

In his review of the Super Size Hilma, a beer flavored with vanilla, a burger bun, and french fries, Kyle Nabilcy writes,

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, in an 1834 poem called “The Rhodora,” about finding a flower in a place removed from most human appreciation. As he questioned the purpose of Nature creating beauty somewhere remote, the answer came to him:

*Rhodora! if the sages ask thee why  
This charm is wasted on the earth and sky,  
Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing,  
Then Beauty is its own excuse for being:*

Emerson will have to pardon me for equating his Rhodora with a french fry IPA, but it has somehow manufactured its own excuse for being, too.

More at <https://isthmus.com/food-drink/beer/the-charm-of-weird-beer-omnipollo-super-size-hilma>

In a recent article in the *Arizona Daily Sun*, “Inner Heroes: Advanced wisdom for dummies,” Burt Gershater quotes Emerson: “The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common.” See the “Prospects” chapter of *Nature* (1836): “It will not need, when the mind is prepared for study, to search for objects. The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common. What is a day? What is a year? What is summer? What is woman? What is a child? What is sleep?” (CW, 1: 99).

In a recent article on romantic poetry, Teryn O’Brien includes a section, “American Transcendentalists Wrestle with Beauty and Pain”:

A movement toward the love of all things, nature included, would define the poetry of the 19th and 20th centuries. The Transcendentalist movement launched in Boston in 1836, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson. An interfaith movement, its leaders believed in Hinduism, mystical Christianity, and Kantian transcendental philosophy.

Like Romanticism, Transcendentalism was heart-centered. The artists, writers, and poets who came out of this movement valued beauty, love, and morality. This idealism would lead, of course, to pain and grief, because the world was often dark. You can see the conflict between an idealized beauty and darker realities in Emerson’s “Ode to Beauty” when he calls Beauty an “eternal fugitive.”

However, these poets concluded that beauty was worth fighting for. Many Transcendentalists, including writers like Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, fought for social justice issues, including the abolition of slavery, believing that morality and beauty depended on one another.

More at <https://www.crixeo.com/romantic-poetry>.

In a letter to the editor of *HJ News*, Michael Warde writes, “My hope for myself and society is the same as Ralph Waldo Emerson’s when he wrote in his journal, “Let me never fall into the vulgar mistake of dreaming that I am persecuted whenever I am contradicted.” I think this one simple shift could help us accept one another, and acceptance brings peace.” See *JMN* 7: 139-40.

More at [https://news.hjnews.com/logan\\_hj/finding-our-way-back-to-civil-discourse/article\\_753bfe39-54ae-5c93-840e-44f52561c296.html](https://news.hjnews.com/logan_hj/finding-our-way-back-to-civil-discourse/article_753bfe39-54ae-5c93-840e-44f52561c296.html).

In the last issue of *ESP*, our correspondent **Clarence Burley** reported a discrepancy in the attribution for an allusion from Emerson’s “Circles”: “St. Augustine described the nature of God as a circle whose centre was everywhere and its circumference nowhere.” In response, our colleague **David Greenham** writes,

Surprisingly, considering the confidence of Emerson’s sentence, this phrase has not been located in Augustine’s works (CW, 2: 253-4). It appears to be based on a fragmentary misquotation that Emerson took down in his journal in July 1835 that begins, abruptly: “Can never go out of the sphere of truth whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere” (*JMN*, 5: 57). This quotation is from a book by the seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonist John Norris, in which Norris had quoted Augustine. However, these words are not attributed to the Saint but are rather by Norris himself and form part of an answer to an imaginary situation in which someone is in search of a personified “truth.”

The full sentence runs: “And that if he takes the Wings of the Morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the Sea, even there also he shall meet with her, and can never go out of her Sphere, whose Centre is every where, and whose Circumference is no where.” On the same page in his journal, Emerson had copied down some quotations from Augustine that were in Norris’s book, and when he came to use them for his essay five years later he appears to have conflated the two.

Keep an eye out for David Greenham’s article, “The Work of Metaphor: Emerson’s ‘Circles’ and Conceptual Metaphor Theory,” forthcoming in *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*.

**Note Regarding Emerson Society Bylaws:** The recent bylaw amendment was approved unanimously, and the new copy may be seen on our website.

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## PROSPECTS

(Continued from page 3)

### Emerson Society Panels at ALA Conference, 2018

The Emerson Society presents annual panels at the American Literature Association meeting, to be held this year from May 24 to 27 in San Francisco. Visit [americanliteratureassociation.org](http://americanliteratureassociation.org) for more information.

#### Emerson and Literature

Chair: Michael C. Weisenberg, University of South Carolina

1. Kristina West, University of Reading, “‘Fleeing to Fables’: Emerson in Children’s Literature”
2. Susan Dunston, New Mexico Tech, “Emerson in Marilynne Robinson’s *Gilead*”
3. Philipp Loeffler, University of Heidelberg, “Emerson, Longfellow, and the Professionalization of the Arts”

#### Emerson and Nineteenth-Century Arts Movements

Chair: Roger Thompson, Stony Brook University

1. Ann Beebe, University of Texas at Tyler, “Light is the first of painters: Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Luminism of John Frederick Kensett”
2. Tim Clarke, University of Ottawa, “A singularly dandified theory of manners: Emersonian Aesthetics amongst the Decadents”
3. Chacko T. Kuruvilla, University of California, Santa Cruz, “Emersonianism West: Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Ownership in Frank Norris’s *McTeague*”

### Thoreau Society Annual Gathering

The Emerson Society presents annual panels at the Thoreau Society Gathering, to be held this year from July 12 to 15. For more information, visit [thoreausociety.org](http://thoreausociety.org).

#### “Waldo and Henry: Points of Parting”

Chair: TBD

1. Alison Madura, Illinois State University, “The Political Monist: Foundational Philosophical Influence and the Rebirth of American Thought”
2. David Faflik, University of Rhode Island, “From Ecstasy to Blasphemy: Belief, Critique, and the ‘Negative’ Critical Tendencies of New England Transcendentalism”

### International Poe and Hawthorne Conference

The Poe and Hawthorne Conference will take place in Kyoto, Japan, from June 21 to 24, 2018. For more information, visit <https://poe-andhawthorneconference.com>.

#### Emerson in Translation (Roundtable Discussion)

Moderator: Sarah Wider, Colgate University

Fan Shengyu, University of Canberra

Atsuko Oda, Mie University

Masako Takeda, Osaka Shoin Women’s University

Yoshiko Fujita, Emerita, Nara Women’s University

Anita Patterson, Boston University

## Emerson, Hollywood, and the WWII Home Front

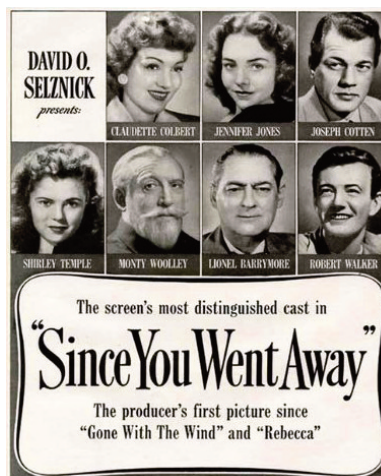
Wesley Mott

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

A sentence from Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay “Social Aims” appears onscreen in the sentimental Selznick International Pictures/United Artists wartime film *Since You Went Away* (1944), directed by John Cromwell and featuring Claudette Colbert, Jennifer Jones, Joseph Cotten, Shirley Temple, Monty Woolley, and Robert Walker. Nominated for nine Academy Awards (Max Steiner won for best music score), the film depicts the trials and heartbreak of the Hilton family—Anne (Colbert) and her daughters (Jones and Temple)—whose husband/father is serving as a U.S. Army captain and is later reported as missing in action. As both a wartime sacrifice and a means to make ends meet, the Hiltons take in retired Army Colonel William G. Smollett (Woolley) as a boarder.

The Emerson quotation appears 20 minutes into the film, and reads: “Life is not so short but that there is always time enough for courtesy.—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*” (see *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 10 vols., ed. Alfred R. Ferguson, Joseph Slater, Douglas Emory Wilson, Ronald A. Bosco et al. [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1971–2013], 8:46). The passage purportedly comes from a U.S. Department of Labor manual titled *Hints to the Paying Guest and the Paid Hostess*. In the context of the film, Emerson’s benign wisdom initially rings hollow because the irascible and demanding new boarder, Colonel Smollett, dismisses the manual as a “lesson in Old World courtesy and manners” and mocks it as a “war communiqué.”

He tries the patience of the Hiltons until tragedy exposes his own soft, kind nature, implicitly confirming Emerson’s sentiment.



*Since You Went Away* aired most recently on Turner Classic Movies on September 6, 2017.

## FELLOWSHIP UPDATE

### Molly Reed Barbara Packer Fellowship Recipient, 2017



The Emerson Society's Barbara Packer Fellowship allowed me to spend a month working closely with the excellent primary sources at the American Antiquarian Society's research library. These materials proved extremely valuable to my dissertation. My month in residence was productive and intellectually generative. I am particularly pleased to have received this fellowship from the Emerson Society, a community of scholars I greatly admire.

My dissertation, "Ecology of Utopia: Environmental Discourse and Practice in Antebellum Communal Settlements," considers environmental attitudes and practices in intentional communities of the 1840s. My research at AAS focused on the Northampton Community collection. This collection is one of the few substantive records of antebellum communal activity, providing insights into day-to-day life at Northampton. My research into this community expanded outwards to numerous related tracts, pamphlets, and unpublished sources that revealed the connections among communitarianism, the manual labor school movement, and agricultural reform. These sources helped me to develop and understand more fully the entangled theories of social and ecological regeneration that were so important for communitarians. I also consulted the Society's holdings related to dietary and health reforms, which informed the environmental ideology of 1840s communitarians. I was excited to find an annotated draft of Sylvester Graham's *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*, written in the author's hand. Rare publications from the colorful Brook Farm member Marx Edgeworth Lazarus, including his *Vegetable Portraits of Character*, were also valuable finds. But the richest aspect of my experience in residence at AAS was sharing my work with new colleagues, members of AAS staff, and other researchers. I feel very lucky to have spent a month exchanging ideas with this intellectual community over dinner, in scholarly talks, and during a group excursion to Fruitlands.

The research I conducted during my fellowship period last fall will figure prominently in my dissertation. It enabled me to write my first chapter, on the connections between the manual labor school movement of the 1830s and the ideas about manual and intellectual labor in nature for communitarians. I am currently preparing an article version of this chapter, which I plan to submit for publication in the coming months. I remain deeply excited about the wealth of material I found during my fellowship, and am confident that I will return to this repository in the near future, for there is so much more for me to explore. I am tremendously grateful to the Emerson Society and American Antiquarian Society and look forward to maintaining future connections with these vibrant scholarly communities.

*Molly Reed is a PhD candidate in the department of History at Cornell University. She works on environmental and cultural history in the nineteenth-century United States, with a focus on social reform communities. The title of her dissertation is "Ecology of Utopia: Environmental Discourse and Practice in Antebellum Communal Settlements."*

### Krissie West RWES Research Grant Recipient, 2017



With huge gratitude to the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society for this Research Grant, without which I would have been unable to visit the U.S. to continue working on my monograph, I visited the Boston Athenaeum, Harvard University, and the Concord Free Public Library last May to research Emerson's impact on the children of Concord and beyond, along with that of his contemporaries, Henry David Thoreau and the Alcott family.

My visit began with an exploration of the Emerson archives at Houghton Library, Harvard University, where I was privileged to access handwritten documents by Emerson that gave evidence of his relationship with children, both his own and others. Although Emerson is not usually included among the roster of Transcendentalist schoolmasters and educators, documents such as his address delivered in Providence, Rhode Island, on the opening of the Greene St School on June 10, 1837, show his commitment to the education of children, as well as that of adults. Emerson's thoughts on childhood were not restricted to education, however: notes on the subject of "Home" also considered the central role of the child in creating the home, as did his published essay, "Domestic Life."

I was also interested to discover a collection of six poems written by Emerson to his son, Edward. While some of these were written when Edward was a young man rather than a child, they still illustrate the love that Emerson held for his family. Verses such as "Happy New Year to Edward from Father and Mother" (1861) and "Given to E.W.E. by his Father and Mother" (1861) show a direct link between Emerson's writing and his children: poetry could be used for dedication, for celebration, and even for giving advice.

The most significant papers for me in reading of Emerson's relations to children were those dealing with the death of his eldest child, Waldo. While many of these are published in Emerson's letters and journals, reading the words in Emerson's own journals, in his own hand, were intensely moving; particularly the following entry: "28 January 1842. Yesterday night at 15 minutes after eight my little Waldo ended his life." I was also interested to see that pages had been torn from the journal at this point. As Jacques Derrida says in *Archive Fever*, "We will wonder what he may have kept of his unconditional right to secrecy, while at the same time burning with the desire to know" (101). That is the problem with archive exploration: it always leaves me with more questions than I began with!

I look forward to finding a publisher for my monograph, *Yet Child as I Am: Emerson and the Transcendental Child*, in the near future.

*Krissie West, PhD, is a sessional lecturer at the University of Reading in the UK. Her research focuses on Transcendentalism and childhood, particularly in the works of Emerson. She is also interested in constructions of the child as witch in New England literature, including Salem narratives and the works of Hawthorne and Emerson.*

## TEACHING EMERSON

(Continued from page 1)

insight not only makes a strong case for why the letters (and the journals) are helpful aids in teaching the origins of Emerson's major works but also in teaching Emerson the human; furthermore, I would add—as my teaching has suggested—that the letters are also important for reconstructing the world in which Emerson lived. Students began to appreciate the labor and time it took to produce writing in the period, and they also expressed a fascination with the objects of writing and publication as things in themselves. They became enamored with the delicacy of the paper, and were at turns delighted and frustrated at the need to learn the handwriting of a given individual.

Just as “the experience of writing letters is one of the keys to the *modus* of inspiration,” so too is reading letters an invitation to the past.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, many of them made it a point to announce when they were finally able to read Emerson's handwriting without difficulty. In suddenly recognizing how to read his hand, many expressed that they somehow felt like they got to know him a little better. Few of the students were accustomed to writing lengthy documents entirely by hand and even fewer were familiar with cursive handwriting. The initial difficulty of learning to read Emerson's hand soon gave way to a fascination with the technique and a respect for the labor that it took to send even the simplest communication during the nineteenth century. Emerson's life spanned the bulk of the century, and the record of his remains is also a record of the subtle changes in communication technology of the period. In analyzing his letters, students not only learned about Emerson's ideas and personality but also about the development of paper, ink, and pens, as well as the transition from folded and wax-sealed letters to envelopes with postage stamps. Students were surprised to suddenly see the advent of lined paper halfway through the semester, and they were utterly bewildered by the practice of cross hatching as a method of conserving resources when paper was scarce.

While these students arguably read and write more than any other previous generation, their primary form of communication, the text message, is so fundamentally immaterial that few even recognize it as writing. In class discussion, students brought up correlations to Snapchat, a popular messaging app that came to fame by virtue of the programmed destruction of the missive.<sup>5</sup> They came to realize that, unlike Emerson, whose letters we were then handling and reading, their own acts of private and ephemeral communication are utterly lost to history. This led to discussions about privacy, intimacy's shadowy companion. In spite of the 136 years since Emerson's death, students felt like they were doing something perverse in reading his letters. The practice was both troubling and titillating. Many of their

weekly posts featured Whitmanesque meditations on transcending time and space as they regularly handled the artifacts. Just as learning to read his handwriting was a way of getting to know Emerson, touching a page that he had once touched was a way of touching him. The sense of feeling close, perhaps too close, to Emerson gave the students license to care about him and the words he had written. We spent a considerable amount of time discussing the fact that many of Emerson's essays were culled from his journals and originally given as orations and lectures. While this is by no means a new approach to teaching Emerson's works, I found it helpful to contextualize the world of the lyceum and the physical reality of travel and performance as a means to get students to understand that Emerson was, in some circles, a popular figure. Emerson's lecturing tours “involved a good deal of preliminary correspondence to arrange places, dates, and subjects,”<sup>6</sup> yet, even with all manner of planning, the contingency of events would often make for the rearrangement of schedules and the cancellation of engagements. Apologies would at times be necessary, and the voyeurism of seeing a representative man make an excuse for himself was something that students were not prepared to expect. This had the effect of both making Emerson relatable and also making tangible the world of nineteenth-century American travel and postal services. In our age of relatively safe and predictable travel and nearly instantaneous communication, students were often surprised to see Emerson planning lecture dates weeks and months in advance, only to have to reschedule or send his regrets at the last minute when the train did not run on time or because one letter was sent before another could arrive.

In addition to letters, students also worked with newspapers, periodicals, and multiple editions of texts. This often proved revelatory for several reasons, most importantly in helping students experience literature outside the context of the massive anthology I asked them to buy and carry around with them every Tuesday and Thursday. The great anthologies of the twentieth century, while convenient, worked to occlude how individual titles originally circulated and were read. Periodicals were perhaps the most difficult to explain to students. While they are familiar with newspapers and magazines, seeing poetry printed alongside world news, gossip, and theater criticism was a bit surprising to them. They are used to genres being separate and unequal, with literature being a subject that, rather than being printed everywhere and passively consumed, needs to be actively sought out. Showing how different genres and styles used to share a common page helped to make Emerson's works seem less strange. Suddenly he fit into a cultural landscape that was greater than the parts they had been reading in isolation.

Students found that the marginalia in books gave them a chance to compare their own reading notes with those of readers from over a hundred years ago. In addition to

developing a growing intimacy with Emerson, they also developed a relationship to his past readers. Some students went so far as to imaginatively reconstruct who these readers might have been based on which passages they underlined and what kind of notes they wrote in the margins. The business of the literary marketplace has left its mark in the form of publishers' advertisements bound into the books of the period, and one student compared the practice to Amazon Prime's suggestions based on a user's past purchases. Just as reading the letters encouraged students to consider Emerson as a man writing, the books, pamphlets, and newspapers helped students to consider a world of people reading, a historical and transhistorical community of readers of which they were a part.

While not all academic libraries have manuscript material relevant to the Transcendentalists, many have books and periodicals from the period that can serve as examples of how works by Emerson and his peers were consumed. Even without direct access to primary documents, an attention to biographical and interpersonal elements that relate to an author and his or her work are an effective method for getting students to care about literature and the past. Millennial and Generation Z students are acutely aware of how social networks influence the development and transmission of ideas, and they prove quite canny at seeing the forest through even a scattering of trees. Furthermore, while they are extremely sensitive to the social elements of the texts they read, many expressed a feeling that their own lives lacked the tactile and

visceral engagement that seems to have been so commonplace in the past. Students' fascination and ready engagement with material history is not unlike the recent trends in collecting vinyl records and typewriters. In proposing that we push the temporal envelope back further, I am not suggesting that we make a cultural fetish out of writing by hand, buying stationary, or collecting old books (though those acts may be valuable in and of themselves), but rather that we leverage students' innate desire for the tangible as an affective heuristic, as a method for asking students to care about the past and how it has influenced our own present.

*Michael C. Weisenburg is Reference and Instruction Librarian in the Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of South Carolina.*

#### Notes

1. Sean Meehan, "Essaying with Emerson," *Emerson Society Papers* 28.1 (2017): pp. 1-2, 6-7; Kristina West, "#Emerson in 140 characters or less," *Emerson Society Papers* 27.1 (2016): pp. 8-9.
2. Matthew Kirschenbaum, "How Things Work: Teaching the Technologies of Literature," *Teaching Bibliography, Textual Criticism and Book History*, ed. Ann R. Hawkins (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 155, 156.
3. Ralph L. Rusk, "Introduction," *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. xxi.
4. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Inspiration," *Letters and Social Aims* (Boston: J.R. Osgood, 1876), p. 252.
5. Messages sent via Snapchat are automatically deleted after they have been viewed.
6. Rusk, p. xxviii.





## Reviews

EMERSON'S EASTERN EDUCATION. Shoji Goto. Nova Publishers, 2016. 154 pp. \$95.00 hardcover.

Shoji Goto's *Emerson's Eastern Education* can be considered an extension of his book *The Philosophy of Emerson and Thoreau: Orientals Meet Occidentals* (2007) as well as a product of his long-standing exploration of Emerson's profound engagement with the Orient. Professor Goto begins his examination by pointing out Emerson's disposition to build an American philosophy based on Plato's model, who with his "Eastern Education" integrates both "the unity of Asia and the detail of Europe" (xxxvi). According to Goto, Plato appears to have used Heraclitus's idea, and Emerson's encounter with the philosophy of Heraclitus dates back to 1819.

Goto, giving significant attention to the fragments from Heraclitus's *On the Universe* recorded in Emerson's journal around February 1844, argues in the first chapter that Heraclitus's cosmic insight that "death and life are linked to each other interchangeably, forming something like metamorphosis or transmigration" (2), strikingly affects Emerson and relieves his concerns about mortality as well as his deep grief caused by his son Waldo's death. Goto also stresses that Heraclitus's philosophy, based on metamorphosis as the law of the Universe and the idea of unity of opposites and universal flux, directs him to "his lifelong inquiry into a new way of religious and philosophical thinking outside or beyond the traditional Western philosophy" (19-20), especially in his later years. Goto adds that the thoughts of Heraclitus, whose native city Ephesus was subject to Persian rule in his lifetime, are closer to ancient Persian and Indian literature and religion than to the pre-Socratic philosophy in the West. To bolster this claim, Goto provides cogent and extensive research showing how Emerson comes into contact with Heraclitus, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism through *Histoire Comparée des Systèmes de Philosophie* by Joseph M. de Gérando and translations of ancient Eastern scriptures such as the *Zend-Avesta* by Anquetil-Duperron, the *Bhagavad Gita* by Charles Wilkins, the *Law of Manu and Shakuntala* by William Jones, the *Vishnu Purana* by Horace H. Wilson, and "On the Vedas, or Sacred Writings of the Hindus" (1808) by Henry T. Colebrook.

Goto's assertion throughout his elaborate examination of Emerson's journals, essays, and lectures in the second chapter is that modern German philosophy is not the only source of Emerson's new approach to idealism, because he develops a vision of what he calls Transcendentalism with the discovery of the concept of "the Infinite" in Anaximander's philosophy, the *Upanishads*, and the *Vishnu Purana*. The soul that Emerson finds in these Eastern philosophies and scriptures is the source of life-emanating force in endless motion, and is not to be apprehended externally by the senses and understanding but only by the soul itself. Goto contends that

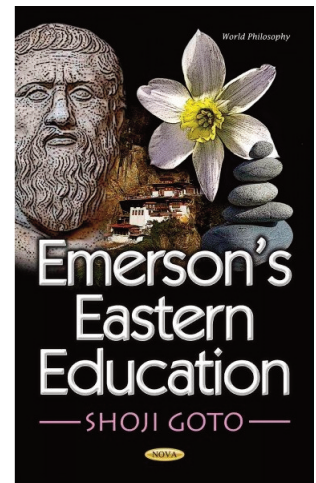
Emerson does not wish his philosophy in search of "the Infinite" to be systematically completed. Therefore, Emerson, "beginning to feel incongruous of the name of Being in Western philosophy," and investigating a new terminology for the Universal Being as a constant becoming, "contrives various terms like 'the First Cause,' 'the eternal One,' 'the Blessed Unity,' 'the aboriginal Self,' and 'the great and crescive self'" (75-76).

Goto goes on to assert in the third chapter that Emerson, influenced by Heraclitus, Zoroastrianism, and other Eastern religious texts like the *Upanishads*, the *Vishnu Purana*, and the *Gita*, replaces the traditional Western philosophy with the philosophy of the Over-Soul, or of the unity and equality. Based on this new kind of philosophy of soul and nature, Emerson, like Nietzsche later, develops his idea of "fluxions and mobility" and "the cyclical mutation in the way the law works in nature and in soul" in search of the "vast, life-emanating power," in which through the act of self-abandonment "the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one" (115).

It is noteworthy that Goto takes notice of the closeness of Emerson's idea of the infinite and the transcendent to Emanuel Levinas's and Jacques Derrida's deconstructive conception of the absolute transcendence of the other and the "relationless relation" (102). Levinas and Derrida oppose Heidegger's way of *Ver-sammlung* (gathering) as "leading to the infringement of the other, when freedom is impossible without strangeness of the other" (102). Goto asks, "If Deconstruction is the way 'to find the tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity ... at work within Plato's work,' then, isn't Emerson a deconstructionist before Derrida?" (113).

Goto steps beyond comparative scholarly analysis and the mere exploration of the influences of Eastern religions on Emerson. He does not overlook such influences as Francis Bacon's general and analogical approach to the philosophy of human nature or the identity-philosophy of Swedenborg, Montaigne, and Shelling. Goto makes an outstanding contribution for scholars of Emerson the world over. He roundly succeeds in his primary objective of presenting a clearer image of Emerson the cosmopolitan, who, "living on the ground where Orientals and Occidentals meet" (116), wishes for his philosophy to integrate elements of the East and the West.

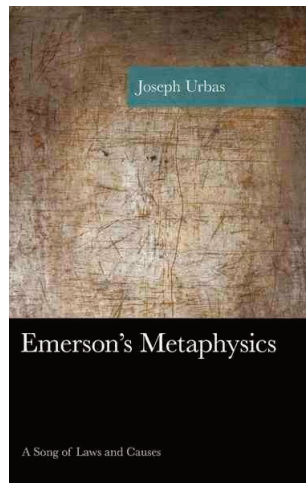
—Yoshio Takanashi  
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**A POWER TO TRANSLATE THE WORLD: NEW ESSAYS ON EMERSON AND EMERSON'S METAPHYSICS: A SONG OF LAWS AND CAUSES.** Joseph Urbas. Lexington Books, 2016. 235 pp. \$95.00 hardback.

Borrowing its elegant subtitle from an 1841 letter to Margaret Fuller, Joseph Urbas's *Emerson's Metaphysics: A Song of Laws and Causes* offers a compelling account of Emerson's career as a metaphysician and argues persuasively for the principle of causation as a structuring force animating his relentless philosophical pursuits. The study is at once "historical, biographical, and textual" (xix) and provides ample evidence to support its claims: spanning Emerson's entire writing career, from his 1821 Bowdoin Prize Essay at Harvard to his later lectures, it mines the major essays, addresses, and lectures, and confronts them with the sermons, the journals, and the correspondence in order to demonstrate the coherence of Emerson's thought and its reliance on a metaphysical bedrock. The book also



shows how the conversations and debates agitating the New England intellectual *milieu*, particularly the Transcendentalist movement, were consistently shaped by arguments over causality. On this count, one of Urbas's great merits is to refine and deepen our perception of the transatlantic circulation of concepts in the first half of the nineteenth century: if the role of Locke, Hume, Coleridge and German Idealism in the fashioning of New England

literary and philosophical cultural is now familiar ground, the book also shows how New England's "ontological turn" (1-25) was crucially informed by the reception of now largely forgotten French metaphysicians: Joseph Marie Degérando and Victor Cousin (70-85).

Through a careful combination of attentive close reading and meticulous historical recovery of neglected forebears, then, Urbas seeks, in the wake of Daniel S. Malachuk and Neal Dolan, to "retranscendentalize" Emerson by portraying him as a man of his times—and, consequently, as a committed metaphysician. He engages thereby in a fruitful, if sometimes polemical, critique of two important strands in Emerson studies, at the crossroads of philosophy and literature: not only does this study challenge interpretations of Emerson inspired by Stanley Cavell that emphasize his skepticism, but it also refutes postmodern readings that consider Emerson's philosophy as one of "infinite regress" (xxiv) foreshadowing Derridean deconstruction. The Emerson that emerges from this patient enterprise of "reconstruction" (xix)

is a figure whose philosophy proves much more unified than has been hitherto acknowledged and whose appetite for contradiction only makes sense against the backdrop of an unswerving belief in the foundational principle of causation, what Emerson called his "Doctrine of Faith." Urbas convincingly characterizes Emerson as a "bipolar" philosopher who constantly moved between the empirical and the ideal and for whom causation worked as a dynamic principle uniting the two poles of his thought. Here lies perhaps the greatest strength of Urbas's study: while it shows how causation functions as a *point d'appui* (193) on which Emerson built his philosophical method and concepts—from the law of compensation to the doctrine of use and the theory of impersonality, from the virtue of self-reliance to the power of the moral sentiment—it neither closes the circle of his thought, nor solidifies his philosophy into a static system. Quite the contrary: because causation always implies directionality, it is ultimately synonymous with the forward movement of life itself, with the constant flow of being.

For Urbas, Emerson's emphasis on life and being is evidence of the priority of his metaphysics over his epistemology or his ethics. Yet causation is also the most appropriate conduit to apprehend his philosophy of history, which Urbas considers in the final chapter of the book through an overview of *Representative Men*, *English Traits*, and the antislavery addresses. The slavery crisis is thus presented as "a historical application of [Emerson's] metaphysical doctrine" (178): because slavery ran counter to the onward movement of natural, i.e., causal, laws, abolition was an inevitable outcome. Such faith in melioration and progress enables Urbas to highlight—in a rather "traditional" or even "quaint" fashion, as he himself acknowledges (204)—Emerson's optimism and his steadfast reliance on an "affirmative philosophy" (LL 2:306).

In a productive paradox, then, *Emerson's Metaphysics* renews our understanding of Emerson's philosophy while pointing to its potential quaintness for contemporary readers, and it does so by inviting us to take this "philosophical writer," to use Lawrence Buell's felicitous expression, at his word: Emerson is a philosopher of the nineteenth century and it is exclusively on those terms that Urbas proposes to read him. Accordingly, this study will prove indispensable to philosophers, who will now be equipped with a "*fil conducteur*" (xxx) to guide them through the complex web of Emerson's ever-expanding thought, as well as to literary scholars, who will find Emerson's "vocation as essayist" (47) convincingly tied to the metaphysical challenges he confronted after reading three great practitioners of the genre: Montaigne, Bacon, and Hume. We can only look forward to the publication of Joseph Urbas's second volume and its "complete general account of [Emerson's] thought" (xix) that his introduction promises.

—Thomas Constantinesco  
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# My Emerson

*A column devoted to our readers' personal reflections on Emerson*

ZACHARY TAVLIN

My Emerson has never been the Emerson of *Nature*. When I first read the 1836 classic, at age 15, the “transparent eyeball” seemed too mystical. Now, as I’m finishing my PhD, it seems too managerial, too industrialist, *too classic* in the sense often attributed by Americanists to the nineteenth-century artist’s obsession with forms adequate to the great project of continental settlement. There may be a lesson there in how we train our scholars to read now. But a year or so later (back to high school now), when I read “Experience,” I was floored by one line about halfway through: “We live amid surfaces, and the true art of life is to skate well on them.” I don’t know if I would have taken it as gospel had I not been a Vermonter, if I had not all but skated to class that morning. Or if I had not fallen and broken my arm on a frozen pond the year before. Having fallen on ice, having *experienced* the particular way one falls on ice, I felt that I knew exactly what Emerson meant.

When you fall on ice, you fall cartoonishly. You lose your feet completely; you float in the air for a beat, but only a beat, and there is never any illusion of bathing at length in the blithe air, floating up into infinite space. You float on the upbeat and crash on the down. Walking or skating on ice brings you back to the physiological challenges of first steps. Indeed, the art of skating is something we learn when we don’t exactly know what we’re doing. We find ourselves skating when our possessions—and, in a properly Emersonian vein, our possession of nature—exceeds our willing grasp. This is, at least in part, what “Experience” is about. It’s about our quickly shifting relationship to the world into which we continuously fall. I’ve always thought winter is the essay’s barely disguised theme, with Emerson’s Concord and my Essex rough invariants underlying its revised ontology. Here his prose is icier, more slippery than it once was, perhaps, though shot through with an underlying warmth that comes with retreat indoors, with the moment (feet back on the ground) when you can finally articulate the uncomfortable truth: “Nature, as we know her, is no saint.”

I’ve since been drawn to skating motifs in literature. In Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, the poet’s younger self engages in “boyish sports” with his friends, and nature appears to move with them as they glide. “We had given our bodies to the wind,” he writes, and when he stops short (a hockey stop, I like to think, though it seems unlikely) the world continues to whirl around him. Dickens, in *The Pickwick Papers*, gives an acute sense of the ice’s resistance to those who struggle on it, while expert skaters draw “complicated problems on the ice” all around, as Mr. Winkle’s “un-swan-like manner”

comically suggests. Jump ahead to John Ashbery, one of my greatest undergraduate loves, whose skaters barely disguise the world-dissolving rhythm of the poem, of the ebbs and flows of intelligibility in discourse, “parallel / With the kind of rhythm substituting for ‘meaning.’” In an elegiac mode (or mood), the rhythms of skating are temporary solutions to unsolvable problems, a way of accepting and submitting to the natural world’s surface or skin for an instant of time. The more you think about your movements on the ice, the more likely you are to break something, or so I’ve found.

If ice is like the groundless ground of experience, we’re thrown upon it from the beginning and struggle to come to a safe stop. “We wake and find ourselves on a stair,” Emerson writes, the experience of the child as well as many a college student. Indeed, what stuns me now about “Experience” is how it can be so innocent, mature, and adolescent at the same time. Or, more accurately, at different times. “Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and, as we pass through them, they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus.” Moods are actually what ground us, though we tend to think the contrary. They’re what lend a slippery life its regulative fictions and temporary frictions.

Frictions? Yes, like the thin sliver of the blade that touches the frozen pond. If “Experience” is above all a meditation on grief (and beneath all, the author’s loss of his son Waldo), then Emerson takes grief to be the most meditative of moods, the most tactile or the one that, in touching one small part of the world, touches the world entire. For philosophers like Kierkegaard and Heidegger, anxiety would be the master mood because it throws us out of the everyday and reveals our dizzy condition most acutely. But for Emerson, skating is not dizziness but a kind of natural grace: “There are moods in which we court suffering, in the hope that here, at least, we shall find reality, sharp peaks and edges of truth. But it turns out to be scene-painting and counterfeit. The only thing grief has taught me, is to know how shallow it is. That, like all the rest, plays about the surface, and never introduces me into the reality, for contact with which, we would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers.” Grief, because it at first seems like the deepest abyss, is the key that unlocks the surface play that life most certainly is, just like when we fall on the ice and we know (as a condition of our bodies, not just propositionally) how amazing it is that we’ve been gliding smoothly all this time. To repeat what I’ve already said in a different way: what’s stunning about *this* Emerson, *my* Emerson (or so I like to think),

is that in his writing the depths of experience turn right around into the surface of innocence. He skates along a Möbius strip.

I'm lucky enough to say that, until last fall, I hadn't lost anyone closer to me than my childhood dog. When my grandfather Gus died, I recited Whitman at his funeral because that's what cheered my family up. Gus was a fisherman, not a skater. I don't know if he ever skated in his life, in fact. And the slow, heavy affect of grief and mourning seems to fit more readily with the cosmological attitude, the regenerative pantheism we might strain to see in "the beautiful uncut hair of



graves." But time, the stream my grandfather went a-fishing in, only seems to halt. The real *real* thing, I find, is in Emerson's moods, in grief's unique ability to break through the pasteboard mask for an interval as thin as a sharpened blade. Or maybe there's just an Emersonian mood, one that I know I flit in and out of. Fall and break your arm in the winter in Vermont, mourn the death of a man who's been a constant presence in your life from the beginning, begin and complete a dissertation on American literature: an Emersonian checklist if I've ever known one.

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## IN MEMORIAM

### Maurice Gonnaud 1925 – 2017

Maurice Gonnaud, the doyen of Emerson scholars in France, died on August 16, 2017, at the age of 92. With his passing, Emerson colleagues the world over, and especially in Europe and the United States, have lost a dear friend, a distinguished colleague, and a living embodiment of the transatlantic spirit in American studies.

What brought this native of the Lyonnais region of France to the United States in the early 1950s and from there to a career as a scholar of nineteenth-century American literature and Emerson in particular?

As friends and colleagues in France have observed in their tributes, Maurice Gonnaud's passion for Anglo-American culture and his constant commitment to international outreach came in large part as a reaction to his traumatic experience as a high school student in Lyon living under the Vichy government. The years immediately following the *Libération* took him to Paris, where he was admitted to the prestigious *Ecole normale supérieure* as an English major. In the late 40s he studied and taught in Great Britain (Edinburgh and Reading), before returning to France to take his *agrégation* teaching-certificate exam. In the early fifties he taught in Casablanca, before taking up a position as teaching assistant in French literature at Bryn Mawr College. It was during his time at Bryn Mawr that he came to know

two scholars who would have a decisive influence on his future career: Warner Berthoff, then a young Ph.D. from Harvard, who became his initiator into American literature and lifelong friend; and Robert Spiller, of the University of Pennsylvania, who encouraged the young Frenchman's interest in Transcendentalism and set him on the path of his doctoral dissertation on Emerson.

After these decisive years in the United States, Maurice Gonnaud returned to France to teach in Dijon, before taking up a research position at the CNRS. In 1961, he landed a job back in his home region, at the *Université de Lyon*, one of the rare universities in France with a long, pre-War tradition of course-offerings in American literature. He taught in Lyon for 25 years, returning to the United States regularly for visiting professorships, his last being at Harvard in 1985, the year before his retirement from teaching. It is a credit to his teaching, too, that his students—and now *their* students' students—have given Transcendentalism studies in France their characteristic vigor and originality. His efforts also reached outside of the classroom. Over the course of his career he helped found both the French and the European Associations of American Studies and served as president in both organizations. He was also a founder of the *Revue française d'études américaines*.

*(Continued on page 12)*



## In Memoriam

(Continued from page 11)

While Maurice Gonnaud co-authored with Jean Béranger, another eminent French Americanist of his generation, an excellent survey of American literature up to the end of the Civil War (*La littérature américaine jusqu'en 1865*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1976), Emerson scholars will remember him above all for his 1964 doctoral dissertation, *Individu et société dans l'oeuvre de Ralph Waldo Emerson: essai de biographie spirituelle* (Paris: Didier, 1987), a massive study published in English in 2014, in Lawrence Rosenwald's superb translation (*An Uneasy Solitude: Individual and Society in the Work of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Princeton University Press). Gonnaud's book has become a classic of Emerson scholarship, worthy of placement alongside the work of mentors and friends such as Robert Spiller, Kenneth Cameron, Stephen Whicher, and Joel Porte.

In Maurice Gonnaud's study of Emerson, two qualities in particular stand out and help to explain the enduring value of his approach. One is his insistence that we understand Emerson's writings *in context*, by which he meant the family, social, and intellectual circles, of course, but also the political and economic world at large. In retrospect, one can only admire the unshakeable conviction, acquired so early on in his career and in the history of Emerson studies, that a free-floating, dehistoricized, decontextualized Emerson was no longer a valid option for interpretation. Most notably, this conviction led him to criticize his friend and precursor Stephen Whicher—despite sincere admiration for the ground-breaking character of Whicher's 1953 study—for “his neglect of social factors in his picture of Emerson's intellectual and spiritual development” (“Introduction to the Second Edition,” *Freedom and Fate*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971, x). However, in a move typical of Maurice Gonnaud's dialectical method and of his desire for balance and fairness in intellectual life, this criticism is itself contextualized and tempered by appeal to the state of the Emerson corpus in the early 1950s and to Whicher's own role in improving it. Gonnaud takes the early lectures as a case in point, in order to correct Whicher's image of an early Emerson leading “a purely inner life” (x), far removed from broader social concerns. Though Whicher “had access to the bulk of Emerson's manuscripts deposited at the Houghton Library” and “quotes from [the early lectures] on several occasions,” Gonnaud points out that “only the publication, still in process, of the lectures themselves, has revealed the range of Emerson's interests during those years, particularly his concern for the changing life of his country and the difficulties confronting young men

when called upon to choose an occupation. His own problems appear intimately bound up with those of a whole generation” (xi). For Gonnaud, Whicher's subsequent labors on the first two volumes of the *Early Lectures* provided the crucial context with which to criticize his earlier work. *Always contextualize*: such was the motto Maurice Gonnaud lived by.

This example points to a second salient quality of Maurice Gonnaud's approach: his insistence that we must strive to read Emerson's writings not only in context but *in totality*. He maintained, as a regulative ideal for Emerson scholars and the *raison d'être* for the new standard editions he was delighted to see coming into print, that “the totality of his written utterances” is the soundest basis for “the enterprise of critical interpretation” (*An Uneasy Solitude*, “Author's Preface,” xxii). This ideal made him exceedingly impatient with certain new American readings of Emerson—and with their uncritical adoption in France. While he saw much to admire in recent scholarship on Emerson and his circle, he had no time for commentators making grand claims based on a handful of the major essays.

If I may add a personal note to this homage, to put Maurice Gonnaud's life in context once more: the starting-point of my own friendship with him, which spanned the last two decades of his life, had nothing to do with Emerson. What brought us together was opposition to French education policy. I had written an op-ed piece in *Le Monde* in 1998 denouncing Education Ministry plans to dumb-down the high school curriculum in France, on the pretext of “reform” and “modernization.” A few days later, out of the blue, I received in the mail a letter of enthusiastic support, postmarked “Ecully” (a town just outside of Lyon) and signed “Maurice Gonnaud.” Thus, nearly a decade and a half into retirement, he still showed no signs of diminishing “concern for the changing life of his country”—or for that of the rest of the world either (he would go on to publish his personal reflections on 9/11 in the online American studies review *Atlantica*). Maurice Gonnaud was, to the end, a man of broad vision, sterling character, and uncompromising principle—a steadfast and *cher ami* to us all.

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