

*R.W.E.*

Volume 3, Number 1

Spring 1992

## EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

### Emerson and Brook Farm

LEN GOUGEON

*University of Scranton*

Readers of Henry Nash Smith's classic essay "Emerson's Problem of Vocation" may be misled concerning Emerson's attitude toward one of the most famous experiments in Utopian living of his age, Brook Farm.<sup>1</sup> Emersonians may recall that in his essay Smith asserts that Emerson, after leaving the ministry, concluded that the lecture platform was "the new pulpit of the age," and dedicated himself to the vocation of the lecturer as the best means of serving his fellow man. Smith goes on to suggest that the contemplation necessary for such a vocation "seemed possible only through a complete withdrawal from the busy life of the community." He then points to Emerson's rejection of George Ripley's invitation to join the transcendental Brook Farm enterprise in 1840 as evidence of his now firm preference for the "cult of solitude and contemplation." Smith thereby creates the impression that henceforth Emerson would approach the question of social reform only through the abstracted role of scholar and that he would consciously avoid the "strenuous role of a reformer." The historical record, however, here made more complete by the addition of a letter from Emerson's brother William, indicates that the bard's attitude toward Brook Farm, and social reform generally, was much more complex than Smith would have us believe, and that his consideration of Ripley's offer was serious and extensive.

Emerson apparently began actively considering Brook Farm in mid-November of 1840. At this time he wrote to Lidian, who was visiting with her brother in Boston, that "the 'Community' question is in full agitation betwixt Mr. Ripley, Mr. Alcott & me & if you wish to have a voice in it & not to find your house sold over your head or perhaps a troop of new tenants suddenly into it you must come & counsel your dangerous husband."<sup>2</sup>

One can only guess what advice Lidian offered her husband at this time, but in early December he was still considering the matter. He wrote his brother William on 2 December that "We are absorbed here at home in discussions of George Ripley's Community. . . . He is very anxious to enrol me in his company, & that I should subscribe money to its funds. I am very discontented with many of my present ways & bent on mending them; but not as favorably disposed to his Community of 10 or 12

families as to a more private reform." However, after providing some of the specific financial details of the scheme Emerson adds, "The families who shall come are to do their own work which a studied cooperation is to make easier & simpler. . . . If I should go there I get rid of menial labor: I learn to work on a farm under skillful direction; I am provided with many means & opportunities of such literary labor as I may wish. Can I not get the same advantage at home without pulling down my house? Ah my dear brother that is the very question we now consider" (*Letters* 2:365).

William, who was practicing law in New York City at the time, took his brother's comments very seriously and responded with an emphatic criticism of the scheme. His letter, dated 13 December 1840, states in part:

But our pleasure was not a little dashed, in this instance, by these schemes of Utopian communities which you mention. We are such plain matter of fact people that we look with distrust & suspicion upon the Lebanons & New Harmonys which Fanaticism or Philosophy builds up from time to time. We are so old fashioned as to think that, however humane & republican it might be to do away with all menial labor & perform ourselves all that is needful, habit still is second nature, & when Lidian is unwell, you would find it quite irksome to do the cooking & the washing of your family, & when you chance to be rheumatic she might find it beyond her strength to split all the wood, milk the cow, make paths in the snow, & the thousand etceteras which would of course fall within your province when well.<sup>3</sup>

Emerson's final decision was, as we know, not to join the community. In the draft of his letter to Ripley he states that "The design appears to me so noble & humane, proceeding, as I plainly see, from a manly & expanding heart & mind that it makes me & all men its friends & debtors. It becomes a matter of conscience to entertain it friendly & examine what it has for us," something which Emerson most certainly did (*Letters* 2:368-69).

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(continued on page 2)



#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>*New England Quarterly* 12 (March 1939): 52-67.

<sup>2</sup>*The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 6 vols., ed. Ralph L. Rusk (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1939), 2:360. Subsequent references will appear parenthetically as *Letters*.

<sup>3</sup>MS. Houghton Library, Harvard University. Quoted with permission.

*Rev'd*

#### Annual Meeting

The 1992 annual meeting of The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, Inc. will be held during the American Literature Association conference in San Diego, Calif. (see "*Prospects*"). The exact time and location will be announced at both sessions presented by The Emerson Society.

#### Call for Papers

The Emerson Society is organizing two panels on Emerson for the 1993 conference of the American Literature Association, to be held in Baltimore. At least one of the panels will be devoted to the topic "Teaching Emerson." Interested persons should send proposals for sessions or papers no later than 15 November to Professor Ronald A. Bosco, Department of English, State University of New York at Albany, Albany, NY 12222.

#### Dues Reminder

Society members who have not yet renewed for 1992 will find a blue membership form included with this issue of *ESP*. Remember that membership is on a calendar-year basis. Members, however, automatically receive the Spring issue of *ESP* for the following year, along with a dues reminder.

To renew or begin membership in the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, send a check for \$10 (U.S.)—payable to "The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, Inc."—to Wesley T. Mott, Secretary/Treasurer, Dept. of Humanities, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA 01609.

### EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

The newsletter of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society  
Published at Worcester Polytechnic Institute  
Editor: Douglas Emory Wilson  
Managing Editor: Wesley T. Mott  
Book Review Editor: Sarah Wider, *Colgate University*  
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*Emerson Society Papers* is published twice a year. Subscriptions, which include membership in the Society, are \$10 a year (students \$5). Send checks for membership (calendar year) and back issues (\$5 each) to Wesley T. Mott, Department Humanities, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA 01609-2280.

For future issues of *Emerson Society Papers* we solicit 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 (promotions, transfers, retirements, deaths, etc.) of Emersonian scholars. We will also consider notes and short articles (about 4 to 5 double-spaced typewritten pages, or less) on subjects of interest to our membership. MLA stylesheet is preferred. Send manuscripts to the editor, Douglas Emory Wilson, 1404 Christine Ave., Anniston, AL 36201.

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## Emerson and the New Bedford Affair in Boston Newspapers

WESLEY T. MOTT  
*Worcester Polytechnic Institute*

Emerson's refusal to lecture before the New Bedford Lyceum in 1845 because it denied membership to blacks was a significant milestone in his evolution as an abolitionist. That he joined Charles Sumner in this gesture only sharpened public perception that the Concord intellectual was willing to be associated with reformers and firebrands. The controversy ignited by the Scholar's activism was reflected in the variety of opinion in the Boston press.

As might be expected, William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* was eager to embrace Emerson in its cause. As early as 31 October 1845, it published a letter from [Joseph or Daniel] "R.[icketson]" under the title "LYCEUM LECTURES CLOSED AGAINST THE POOR IN NEW BEDFORD." "Will J. O. Choules,<sup>1</sup> R. W. Emerson, and Charles Sumner, come here," Ricketson asked, "and lecture to these people, who are making color their test of character? I hope not. I hope they will spurn the paltry twenty dollars, and tell them to send South of Mason & Dixon's line after men who are slaveholders, to cater to their tastes!" The letter was followed by an editorial note:

We blush to record this new instance of the vulgar and heathenish proscription of a portion of our fellow-citizens, on account of their complexion. It is in the highest degree discreditable to those who claim to be civilized, much more Christianized. We unite in the hope expressed by our correspondent, that such noble men as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Charles Sumner will, on ascertaining the facts in the case, decline lecturing before the New Bedford Lyceum, or else improve the occasion to rebuke the foul spirit of complexional caste.

Len Gougeon, in his superb *Virtue's Hero: Emerson, Anti-slavery, and Reform*, thoroughly explores the importance of what he calls the New Bedford Affair to Emerson's life and career, and documents the *Liberator's* continuing coverage of the episode.<sup>2</sup> The *Liberator* reprinted from the *New Bedford Register* a letter of "PROTEST" signed by the Ricketsons and nine others (28 November); on 5 December it printed an article by "W. P." (likely Wendell Phillips) praising "the generous and noble refusal" of Emerson and Sumner; on the 19th, an article on "THE NEW-BEDFORD LYCEUM" by "D[aniel]. R[icketson]."; and on 16 January 1846, the texts of both Emerson's and Sumner's letters of refusal.

But the Boston press was not united in praise of this gesture. The *Boston Daily Star*, which prided itself on full and accurate reporting of Emerson's "Representative Men" lectures, was now annoyed.<sup>3</sup> On Thursday, 22 January 1846 the *Star* reported:

#### A Flare Up.

Something of an amusing "flare up" has occurred between the New Bedford Lyceum, and Messrs. R. W. Emerson and Charles Sumner, of this city. These gen-

tlemen had been invited to lecture before that body. The Lyceum, however, chanced to decline a proposition to receive colored folks as members, upon the usual terms, although they prepared a place for them to be present, if they wished, free of charge. Hereupon Messrs. Emerson and Sumner take fire, and decline lecturing before the Lyceum. Mr. Emerson says his duty is to instruct the ignorant; and if any are excluded, it should be the learned. But it seems that the ignorant, as he terms them, had a chance to hear—and therefore his real position is that of dictation. He desires to order the Lyceum as to what its members shall prefer, and what not. Mr. Sumner does the same. He recounts his association with colored people, on honorable terms, in Europe, and infers that the Lyceum members should abandon their own tastes, and sense of propriety, under pain of his mighty displeasure.

All this is not only exceedingly silly, but it is essentially wrong. If those who prefer the larger freedom between colors and classes, are permitted to act as they please, then those who chance to think differently should be allowed equal right to do as they prefer—and such acts as Mr. Emerson and Mr. Sumner have done in this case, under the affected love of freedom, are essentially tyrannical and very foolish.

The *Liberator* derisively reprinted proslavery, antiabolition letters and articles from other newspapers in a regular front-page feature titled "Refuge of Oppression"; the entire *Star* article (with a typo, three punctuation changes, and omission of the next-to-last word) found its way into this column of infamy on 30 January.

On the same day the *Boston Daily Times* echoed the reverberations of the New Bedford Affair at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. The three-paragraph report begins:

MASS. ANTI SLAVERY SOCIETY.—The Massachusetts Anti Slavery Society continued its sessions yesterday morning and afternoon at the Tremont Temple. There was a tolerably full attendance, and considerable excitement. The morning was principally consumed by several speakers in lauding Rev. Ralph W. Emerson and Charles Sumner, Esq. for their refusing to lecture before the New Bedford Lyceum, on account of its excluding colored people, and in lashing the citizens of New Bedford, for their inveterate prejudice against color.<sup>4</sup>

A rather objective report of a controversial episode, considering that the "Times" was for Thoreau a byword for journalistic cowardice and irrelevance.

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## New Bedford Affair

(continued from page 3)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>John O. Choules, pastor of the First Baptist Church in New Bedford from 1833 to 1838, went on to serve churches in Buffalo and Newport, Rhode Island. He died in New York on 5 January 1856 at the age of 55. (*Worcester Palladium*, 16 January 1856).

<sup>2</sup>Gougeon, *Virtue's Hero: Emerson, Antislavery, and Reform* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 101-107, 367-368 nn.

<sup>3</sup>The author is preparing a critical study of the *Star's* accounts of the "Representative Men" lectures.

<sup>4</sup>The Society's formal resolution at this 29 January session is included in the *Liberator's* extensive coverage of the annual meeting in the 6 February issue:

Daniel Ricketson presented the following, which was discussed by W. L. Garrison, C. C. Burleigh, P. Pillsbury, Rev. Mr. Russell of Hingham, Charles L. Remond, Ricketson, J. B. Sanderson of Lynn, and adopted:

Resolved, That Charles Sumner and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who have refused to lecture before the New-Bedford Lyceum, on account of the exclusion of colored persons, deserve the warmest thanks of every friend of justice and humanity; and we rejoice that the testimony thus nobly borne comes from a quarter, which must strike a strong blow against the prejudice of color, and carry home a severe rebuke to those who, by their acts, have yielded to the base and wicked spirit of the South, and violated the boasted principles of Northern liberty.



## PROSPECTS.

### Status Report on Emerson Editions

Volume 2 of *The Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Ronald A. Bosco, Editor; Ralph H. Orth, General Editor) is expected to be published by the University of Missouri Press later in 1992.

Volume 4 of *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Wesley T. Mott, Editor; Albert J. von Frank, Chief Editor) is also expected to be published by the University of Missouri Press later this year.

### Work in Progress

Nancy Craig Simmons reports that she has completed her final editing of the *Selected Letters of Mary Moody Emerson* (1774-1863), to be published by the University of Georgia Press later this year. The edition will print (mostly for the first time) 330 of the 890 manuscript letters that survive in eight U.S. repositories. Written to fifty correspondents over a period of seventy years, the letters record the spiritual and intellectual journey of the woman who most significantly influenced the thought and style of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The letters are conservatively edited, to preserve the unique features of Mary Emerson's style. Extensive biographical and other information—in the form of introductions, notes, calendars of residences, and illustrations—creates a new context for appreciating these texts even beyond their obvious influence on

Waldo. For the first time we will be able to see Mary Moody Emerson on her own terms.

### American Literature Association Conference

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society will present two panels at the third annual conference of the American Literature Association in San Diego, California, on 28-31 May 1992. Both sessions will be held on Thursday, the 28th:

**SESSION 1: *Rereading Emerson*.** Chair, David M. Robinson (Oregon State Univ.)

"Emerson's 'Woman': Another View of Self-Reliance," Irene Williams (Univ. of San Diego)

"The Anarchy of Material Culture: An Unspoken Side of Emerson's Nationalism," Ronald A. Bosco (Univ. at Albany, State Univ. of New York)

"'Dogmatism and the Spirit of Innovation': Emerson and the *Christian Examiner*," Guy Litton (Univ. of South Carolina)

**SESSION 2: *Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism: A Sesquicentennial Celebration*.** Chair, Wesley T. Mott (Worcester Polytechnic Inst.)

"Theodore Parker's Transcendentalism," Dean Grodzins (Harvard Univ.)

"Parker and Emerson After 1842," Gary Collison (Penn State—York)

"Caroline Dall on Theodore Parker," Helen R. Deese (Tennessee Technological Univ.)

The ALA conference will be held at the Bahia Resort Hotel on Mission Bay. Preregistration conference fees will be \$35 (with a special rate of \$10 for independent scholars, retired individuals, and students). The hotel is offering a conference rate of \$74 a night (single) or \$80 a night (double). To register or obtain housing information, write to Professor Alfred Bendixen, English Dept., California State University, Los Angeles, CA 90032-8110.



Concord, Massachusetts, ca. 1840. On the left are part of the Court House and Burying-ground Hill; on the right are the old Wright Tavern, the Unitarian Church, and the Middlesex Hotel. (Drawn by J. W. Barber. Engraved by J. Downes, Worcester.)

### Special Concord Session: "Emerson and Concord: A Sense of Place"

The Emerson Society will present a special session on "Emerson and Concord: A Sense of Place" in Concord, Mass., on Sunday, 12 July 1992. Like the successful session on "Emerson & Thoreau" presented last year, the 1992 program will be offered the day after The Thoreau Society's annual meeting.

The panel, moderated by Joel Myerson (Univ. of South Carolina), features "The Squire of Coolidge Castle," Robert Gross (College of William and Mary); "Emerson and Concord History," Robert E. Burkholder (Pennsylvania State Univ.); "Emerson as Neighbor," Daniel Shealy (Univ. of North Carolina-Charlotte); and "Emerson's Twentieth-Century Visitors," Jayne K. Gordon (The Concord Museum). Lawrence Buell (Harvard Univ.) will serve as respondent.

The program will be held, once again, in the French Gallery of The Concord Museum, across from the Emerson House, from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m. Plenty of time will be allowed for questions and discussion by the audience. The session is in conjunction with "Concord: A Sense of Place," an NEH grant awarded this

year to the newly renovated Museum. Society members are invited to a special, informal tour of the Ralph Waldo Emerson House beginning at 1 p.m.

### Emerson House Hours for 1992

The Ralph Waldo Emerson House reopens on 16 April and will close on 31 October, reports Director Nancy S. Shackford. Hours are Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Sunday and Holidays from 2:00 to 4:30 p.m. (4:30 being the time of last entrance).

The Society is grateful to Nancy Shackford for arranging the special tour for members only at 1 p.m. on Sunday, 12 July (see item above). The Emerson House is located at 28 Cambridge Turnpike in Concord, Mass. For more information in season, call 508-369-2236.

### Walk for Walden Woods

The Emerson Society joined the Thoreau Society and several environmental and civic organizations in endorsing "The Walk for Walden Woods" in Concord on 12 April 1992. The Walk was a major fund-raising event of The Walden Woods



Project, which is seeking to purchase two sites associated with Thoreau's Walden experiment and with other Concord writers, and now threatened with commercial development.

The 6.2-mile walk—led by Grammy Award-winning recording artist Don Henley (a co-founder of The Walden Woods Project) and a variety of celebrities including Kirstie Alley, Ed Begley, Jr., and Harry Hamlin—drew an estimated 7,000-10,000 walkers, who raised pledges. Several student groups helped to organize the event, which started at Concord-Carlisle Regional High School and proceeded past the homes of Emerson, the Alcotts, and Hawthorne, past the Old Manse, and over the Old North Bridge before finishing at the high school.

For more information about The Walden Woods Project, call 617-367-3787.

### Society Sponsors Emerson Reprints

The Emerson Society is sponsoring a project by Hampton-Roads Publishing Company, Inc., of Norfolk, Va., to identify and reprint hard-to-come-by books important for Emerson scholarship. Members of the Society are encouraged to sug-

gest such titles to any officer or advisory board member, and to volunteer, or recommend others, to write introductions to the volumes. The first title planned is James Elliot Cabot's *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Nancy Craig Simmons (Virginia Tech) is writing the Introduction.

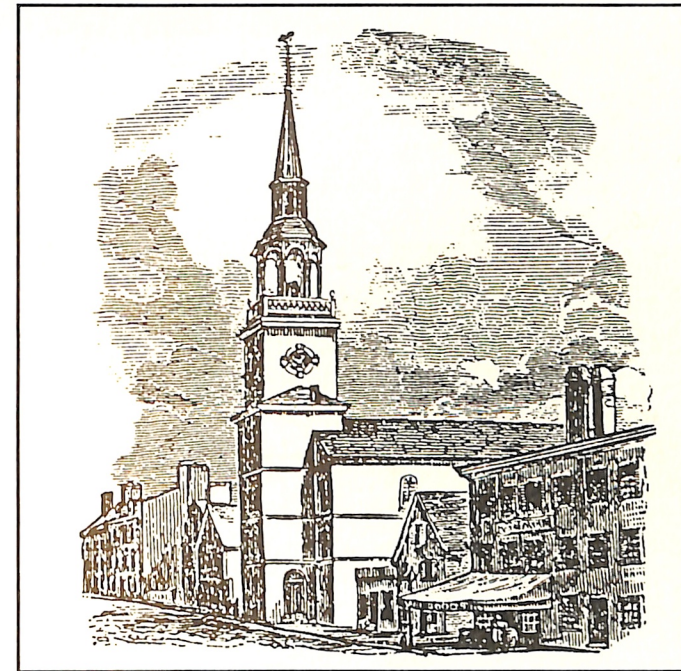
### Library of America Emerson Volumes

The Library of America now plans to add two volumes of selections from Emerson (instead of one, as announced earlier) to the volume of "Essays and Lectures" published in 1983 and edited by Joel Porte. The new volumes, edited by Harold Bloom and Paul Kane, will include the following: almost all the additional prose published in Emerson's lifetime, including some previously uncollected; selections from the sermons and the early lectures; all the poetry published by Emerson; and much of the unpublished verse. They will not include any prose selections from the journals or any letters (except perhaps a few of a public nature). Publication is planned for the fall of 1994.

thus imagine ourselves as part of the congregation which heard, say, Sermon 25 at the Second Church in Boston on 2 November 1828, and react correspondingly. At the end of each volume, as one might expect in a definitive edition, is an extensive section of "Textual and Manuscript Notes" which gives a complete genetic transcription of all alterations in the manuscripts for those who wish to reconstruct how Emerson wrote his sermons and revised them for the different audiences that heard them. It is hard to see how this method of presenting the sermons could have been improved. Although reviewers are wary of saying things like this, it's clear that *this* particular job will not have to be done again.

The developing interest in Emerson's sermons has given rise to several recent studies, the most significant of which are books by David M. Robinson, Teresa Toulouse, and Wesley T. Mott. Robinson also contributes an introductory historical essay to the *Sermons* edition in which he argues the currently influential view that Emerson's fundamental attitudes carried over from his religious to his secular career. Thoroughly believing in the liberal Unitarian conviction that the goal of life was to develop the individual soul to a spiritual state through self-awareness and service to others, Emerson saw each sermon as another opportunity to inculcate that view. Thus he approached each in a spirit of high seriousness, determined not only to be intellectually respectable, as his educated parishioners had a right to expect, but also to share his own attempts at spiritual growth with them. These sermons give us the opportunity to see for ourselves the extent to which Emerson was successful in achieving these two goals.

Not having had a religious upbringing, I am not particularly a student of the sermon genre. Moreover, a number of the sermons I have heard through the years have resembled those of the Reverend Barzillai Frost, of whom Emerson said that he



Second Church in Boston

"sorely tempted me to say, I would go to church no more." So I was particularly interested to see what kind of an impression Emerson the pulpit orator would make on me. This was more than a matter of spotting resemblances to ideas and turns of phrase familiar to readers of the essays: the emphasis in Sermon 85 on the liberal and the rigid religious factions in Unitarianism, which recalls the discussion of political parties in "Politics," or the resonant phrase "In this grateful season" in Sermon 39, with its echoes of the Divinity School Address. My interest was more personal, to see whether the personality so familiar to us from the essays existed as early as the ministerial phase of Emerson's career.

My impression of the young Reverend Mr. Emerson is of a highly earnest, intellectual, somewhat reserved young man who has, nevertheless, a deep interest in other people which he can express only through a sort of abstracted benevolence. Almost everything he says is interesting and deeply felt, but there is seldom any real fire in these sermons; at best we get a warm ember-like glow. The effect is not displeasing, although it can best be appreciated at intervals—in other words, it doesn't do to read too many of these sermons at once. And unlike the essays, which continually fascinate by their play of ideas and the brilliance of their images and metaphors, the sermons engage the intellect much more strongly than they do the esthetic sense. Was it that Emerson had not yet developed his more poetic style, or was he consciously reining himself in to fulfill the expectations of his hearers? Whatever the reason, the sermons are deeply satisfying only in their pastoral context; the Emerson of a few years later, who so often persuades us by the sheer force of his language, is seldom in evidence. We must be grateful to this superb edition for allowing us to see the "long foreground" that led to the emergence of that Emerson.

RALPH H. ORTH  
University of Vermont

### Emerson: The Roots of Prophecy.

By EVELYN BARISH. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1989. xvi, 267 pp. \$29.50.

Evelyn Barish's *Emerson: The Roots of Prophecy* is a study that begged to be undertaken. Despite the thousands of articles and books that have taken Emerson for their subject, very few have had much to say about the ways in which Emerson's early life contributed to the development of the powerful and original voice we find in his published writings. Certainly both Gay Wilson Allen's *Waldo Emerson* (1982) and, to a lesser extent, Eric Cheyfitz's *The Trans-Parent: Sexual Politics in the Language of Emerson* (1981) prefigure Barish in their concern with the young Emerson, but neither Allen nor Cheyfitz, both of whom have other focuses in mind for their studies, treats Emerson's life through the publication of *Nature* as thoroughly as does Barish. The result of this completeness is a study that organizes and explains Emerson's first 33 years in a manner comparable in its effect to Stephen Whicher's explanation of Emerson's development from the late 1830s through the early 1850s. In fact, we might pay Barish the same compliment that she gives to Whicher and say that *Emerson: The Roots of Prophecy* proves her to be "an original and influential reader" whose work will no doubt affect many who follow her.

But having said this, one should not mistakenly believe that Barish's study is anachronistic or that it suffers from the same sorts of limitations as *Freedom and Fate*. Nor should one expect from it the methodology of traditional biography. It is, in fact, a work that combines a number of methodologies—including women's history, psychoanalysis, and historical sociology—to argue that Emerson emerged in *Nature* as an "American prophet" "not of certainty but of flux" (4). As such, Barish's work might be thought of as articulating several series of developmental passages. For instance, Barish describes a succession of mentors, beginning most significantly with Mary Moody Emerson, then David Hume, and then Dugald Stewart. These mentors are, in turn, responsible for the modality of Emerson's thought in the various developmental stages of his youth, from the Romance Barish associates so closely with Aunt Mary to the history of Hume to the naturalism that evolves after Emerson was exposed to Kant through the writings of Stewart. The Emerson produced by this succession of passages is, according to Barish, a person who in *Nature* rejected two elements prominent in his early life—history and death—to urge "the absolute necessity of choosing to live now, not later, and at almost any risk; this became the single most fundamental message of Emerson's early writings, so pervasive—and persuasive—that it could supersede other demands for logical thematic structure" (244). In fact, to Barish, *Nature* itself, as the culmination of this developmental process, is a work that "shows us Emerson in the act of reworking himself" (257), and Emerson himself becomes, in Barish's view, Emerson's "most genuinely creative act" (256).

To praise Barish for her focus and for the potential influence of her general argument is not, however, to judge her work an unqualified success. There are problems, and some severe enough to do damage to Barish's ethos as one who bids us to

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## Reviews

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revise our notions of who Emerson was and how his sense of self affected his message. Some errors fall into the category of oversights or misstatements of fact, such as Barish's citation of the 18th volume of the *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* (32) or her apparent confusion over the ages of Ruth Emerson and Mary Moody Emerson (on p. 16 Mary is 3 years younger than Ruth, but on p. 40 she is 6 years younger). Other errors are more significant. For example, one of the progressions of development that interests Barish is that which one might call "turning points," from Emerson's early acceptance of his Aunt Mary as a mentor to his "conversion experience" on a beach in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1827 to the importance of his experiences in Italy during his first European trip in 1832-33. It is clear that Barish takes considerable pleasure in undoing commonplace notions about Emerson's development, and sometimes the exuberance of this revisionism and the priority that Barish claims for her "discoveries" results in a failure to acknowledge important prior treatments of several of these turning points that effec-

tively preempt Barish's implicit or explicit claims of priority. Barish's insistence that she has located David Hume's profound and lasting influence on Emerson's thought does not acknowledge the substantial consideration of that influence in John Michael's *Emerson and Skepticism: The Cipher of the Word* (1988). Similarly, in her discussion of Emerson's experiences in St. Augustine, Barish seems unaware of the prior treatment of those experiences in Robert Milder's essay, "Emerson's Two Conversions" (*ESQ*, 1987).

If these problems are considered with other difficulties in *Emerson: The Roots of Prophecy*, including categorical assertions sometimes based on precious little evidence, the effect is to undermine the authority that the success of Barish's revisionist agenda really demands of her. So Barish's work is an important initial study for understanding how the mature Emerson is a product of his foreground. It is, however, *only* an initial study; there is within it plenty of room for alternative, even more authoritative, interpretations of that foreground.

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