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## EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

### Emerson and the *North American Review*: New Letters

WESLEY T. MOTT

*Worcester Polytechnic Institute*

A new letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Loretta Sutton Metcalf, managing editor of the *North American Review*, and two letters by Metcalf concerning the same matter, shed new light on Emerson's compositional practices in his declining years. The letters help document an extended awkward episode revealing the confusion that sometimes resulted from the editorial collaboration—in this case from three separate locations—of Ellen Tucker Emerson, James Elliot Cabot, and Emerson himself.

On 7 June 1877, Cabot arrived in Concord to help Ellen work on her father's manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> At least one of the tasks presumably was preparation for publication of "Perpetual Forces," the title of a lecture Emerson had given frequently between 18 November 1862 and 19 November 1863.<sup>2</sup> This was the manuscript referred to in Emerson's own disjointed Pocket Diary notes at the end of July 1877: "[Fri., July 27] <Carry MSS to Osgood> <ask send proofs to care of W[illiam] H[athaway] F[orbes] Woods Hole>"; "[Sat., July 28] 10.30 o'clock from Concord . . . 'North American' <paper> article"<sup>3</sup>; James R. Osgood was publisher of the *North American Review*, and Ellen was spending much of that summer with her sister and brother-in-law, Edith and Will Forbes, on the island of Naushon, across from the mainland village of Woods Hole. Emerson evidently took the train to Boston to deliver the manuscript himself, among other errands, but Ellen wished to oversee the editorial process.

A tangle of misdirected mailings, conflicting editorial judgments, and general miscommunication began when Forbes "intercepted" the proofs of "Perpetual Forces" in Woods Hole and forwarded them directly to Waldo in Concord instead of first giving them to Ellen for review. She writes her father from Naushon on 9 August, urging him to keep the proofs until she can see them, or to send

them to Cabot in Beverly for correction. She is worried that Emerson's use of the word "crown" is inappropriate, that an allusion to Bonaparte is too "elliptical," and especially that the beginning of the essay is "confusingly abrupt and varied."<sup>4</sup> But Ellen is too late. Waldo writes her from Boston on 16 August that he returned his "corrected sheets to Osgood & Co, immediately; & only yesterday received your lines & Mr Cabot's corrections." He goes on to complain about cuts in the manuscript, including a quotation by Michael Faraday, but promises, "I shall obey your united opinion with thanks & trust."<sup>5</sup>

"Perpetual Forces" was published in the September-October issue of the *North American Review*. The Faraday quotation was restored, satisfying Emerson's complaint, but evident from new letters is that Ellen's and J. E. Cabot's concerns would not be addressed until they later prepared the essay for inclusion in *Lectures and Biographical Sketches* (1883).<sup>6</sup> Two letters from L. S. Metcalf to H. H. Clark, evidently written sometime in September, indicate that Emerson wanted the proofs of the article returned. Implicit in Emerson's request is Ellen's and Cabot's frustration with the article as published, and Emerson's request likely was made at Ellen's insistence. Both Metcalf letters are on *North American Review* letterhead<sup>7</sup>:

Mr. Clark:

Mr. Emerson now calls and asks that he may have the copy of his article, & also the proof which he examined. He desires to preserve the article as originally written, for future use. Please send both to me again and I will deliver them to him.

[Two paragraphs of other business are deleted.]

Metcalf

Frid. P.M.

(Continued on page 2)



Mr. Clark:

Please remember to send me again the copy and second proof of Mr. Emerson's article. Am sorry to bother you, but make the request at Mr. Emerson's earnest desire.

Respectfully,  
Metcalf

Sat. eve.

Emerson cordially acknowledged receipt of the proofs. This letter is owned by Mr. Michael Muir, of Worcester, Massachusetts, and is published here with his kind permission.<sup>8</sup>

Concord  
Sept 77

Dear Sir

I am informed by my daughter that she recieved the proofs in my absence & has them safely placed for such perouse of comparison with other pages as we may herafter wish to make.

With thanks to your kind care, Yours,

R. W Emerson

Mr L. S. Metcalf—

Comparison of the magazine version of "Perpetual Forces" with that published in *Lectures and Biographical Sketches* reveals that Ellen and Cabot finally exerted editorial control over that "confusingly abrupt and varied" opening: In the 1883 Riverside Edition of the *Complete Works*, the first two paragraphs are reversed; the third paragraph and most of the fourth are deleted, with the last two sentences of the fourth paragraph and the entire fifth paragraph (with its Faraday quotation) moved; five sentences are deleted from the sixth paragraph; and all but the last two sentences of the seventh paragraph are deleted. The rest of the essay is marked by minor deletions and by changes in punctuation and paragraphing. (Emerson's use of the word "crown" and his Bonaparte allusion are allowed to stand, despite Ellen's earlier objections.)

But before this outcome, an aftermath of Emerson's venture with the *North American Review* caused Ellen both great embarrassment and an occasion to be frank about the origins of the article. On 29 January 1878, Charles Allen Thorndike Rice, the editor of the *North American Review*, visited at the Emerson home, "in the happy belief that Father wrote Perpetual Forces last summer fresh for the Review," as Ellen wrote to her sister, Edith; "this belief I meant to leave flourishing, but Father innocently chopped it down and let every cat in the house out of the bag, told him he never did anything about it, that Mr Cabot & I compiled these things etc. etc. And I sat quite peacefully & listened but within I was stamping wildly about, tearing my hair & uttering ever new shrieks of surprise & dismay. Still it was all true & truth does no real harm."<sup>9</sup>

Concord  
Sept 77

Dear Sir

I am informed  
by my daughter that  
she recieved the  
proofs in my absence  
& has them safely  
placed for such per-  
pouse of Comparison  
with other pages

as we may herafter  
wish to make.

With thanks to your  
kind care, Yours,  
R. W Emerson

Per L. S. Metcalf

R. W. Emerson to L. S. Metcalf  
Courtesy Michael Muir

## EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

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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 36207-3924.

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I am grateful to Michael Muir for calling the Emerson letter to my attention, and to Joel Myerson for his advice on this essay.

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of Ellen Tucker Emerson*, ed. Edith E. W. Gregg, 2 vols. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1982), 2:255.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Waldo Emerson wrote that the published essay was a synthesis of this lecture, another called "Moral Forces," and journal notes. See *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Centenary Edition, 12 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903-04), 10:526-27.

<sup>3</sup> *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 16, ed. Ronald A. Bosco and Glen M. Johnson (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), 496.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of Ellen Tucker Emerson*, 2:259-60.

<sup>5</sup> *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vols. 1-6 ed. Ralph L. Rusk; vols. 7-10 ed. Eleanor M. Tilton (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1939, 1990-95), 6:307.

<sup>6</sup> *North American Review* (September-October 1877), 271-82; *Lectures and Biographical Sketches* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), 71-89; cf. Centenary Edition, 10:69-88. Emerson himself was expecting "to correct it & print it in a new book of my own"; see *Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 10:203.

## Notes

<sup>7</sup> Quotation is by courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library. Loretta Sutton Metcalf (1837-1920) was managing editor of the *North American Review* from 1876 to 1885. He later founded and edited both *The Forum* (1886-91) and the *Florida Daily Citizen* (in Jacksonville, 1893-97) before settling in Los Angeles (*Who Was Who in America*, vol. 1, 1897-1942 [Chicago: The A. N. Marquis Company, 1943]).

<sup>8</sup> Mr. Muir, a member of the Emerson Society, is accounting manager for the Community Newspaper Company in Needham, Massachusetts.

<sup>9</sup> *Letters of Ellen Tucker Emerson*, 2:283. Eleanor M. Tilton believed that "the Manuscript of my article for the *North American Review*" enclosed with Emerson's 13 February 1877 letter to J. R. Osgood & Co. (*Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 10:195) was that of "Perpetual Forces." Given Rice's and Ellen's recollections that the "Perpetual Forces" manuscript emerged in the summer of 1877, and Emerson's own notes about delivering the manuscript at the end of July (see note 3, above), it seems more likely that the manuscript Emerson referred to on 13 February 1877 was that of "Demonology," which was published in the March 1877 issue of the *North American Review*.



# Seneca's Epistle 12 and Emerson's "Circles"

MICHELE VALERIE RONNICK  
Wayne State University

Emerson's essay "Circles" has been described in summary as "the heart of Emerson's problem and the theme of many of his writings in the later 1840's, that of finding a stable center and authoritative moment, expression, or mode of action in a centrifugal field."<sup>1</sup> Other scholarly opinions have been offered as to specific influences upon and symbolism of Emerson's essay.<sup>2</sup> The significance, for example, of the circle in Christian Neo-Platonic philosophy and Emerson's symbolic use of it has been pointed out.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Emerson's declaration concerning this essay stated in a letter written to Elizabeth Hoar on 12 September 1840 that he will "write like a Latin Father" has suggested a connection with Augustine.<sup>4</sup> I here suggest that Emerson's "Circles" reveals a connection with yet another Latin author, and that is Seneca the Younger.

In the twelfth letter of his collection of moral epistles, Seneca describes a trip he made in his maturity out to his suburban villa.<sup>5</sup> After seeing the marks of neglect everywhere he turned on the grounds of his estate, Seneca finally came to realize that they were simply the result of age, and not due to the fault of careless caretakers (*debeo hoc suburbano meo, quod mihi senectus mea, quocumque adverteram, apparuit*, 12.4).<sup>6</sup> He then turns to a discussion of the stages of life, which he describes in terms of a circle:

Tota aetas partibus constat et orbes habet circumductos maiores minoribus. Est aliquis, qui omnis complectatur et cingat; his pertinet a natali ad diem extremum. Est alter, qui annos adulescentiae cludit. Est qui totam pueritiam ambitu suo adstringit. Est deinde per se annus in se omnia continens tempora, quorum multiplicatione vita componitur. Mensis artiore praecingitur circulo. Angustissimum habet dies gyrum, sed et hic ab initio ad exitum venit, ab ortu ad occasum. (12.6)

(Our life span is divided into sections; it consists of larger circles enclosing smaller ones. One circle holds and surrounds the rest; it reaches from the day of birth to the day of death. The next circle encompasses the time of youth. The third holds all of childhood in its circumference. Next there is the year, which through and by itself holds all the sections of time by whose multiplication the whole of life is arranged. The month is bound by a narrower circle. The day is the smallest circle of all; but the day comes out of a beginning and [moves] to an end, from a rising to a setting.)

Seneca employs the idea of this "smallest circle" in the second half of his letter in an attempt to convince his readers to use their days well, for they are finite in number. Thus every day, according to Seneca, must be organized as if it closed off

the multitude [of days], and as if it completed and finished existence (*itaque sic ordinandus est dies omnis, tamquam cogat agmen et consummet atque expleat vitam*, 12.8).

Emerson, for his part, tells us that "the life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end" (180). Unlike Seneca, Emerson continues to structure his entire essay specifically in terms of circles. To Emerson, "conversation is a game of circles" (184). "Literature," to Emerson, "is a point outside of our hodiernal circle" (185). Emerson finally declares that "the natural world may be conceived of as a system of concentric circles" (186).

Clearly both men are instructing their readers to realize that life is not a static affair. It moves in a series of constantly changing circles, and so do we, whether we like it or not. Seneca's likening of human life to a set of concentric circles occurs nowhere else among the writers of Graeco-Roman antiquity.<sup>7</sup> That this striking image should appear in this essay by Emerson suggests that Emerson had a better knowledge of Seneca than we have heretofore thought.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Leonard N. Neufeldt and Christopher Barr, "'I Shall Write Like a Latin Father': Emerson's 'Circles,'" *New England Quarterly* 59 (1986): 92.

<sup>2</sup> See for example James M. Cox, "R.W. Emerson: The Circles of the Eye," in *Emerson: Prophecy, Metamorphosis and Influence*, ed. David Levin (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 57-81; Jack Null, "Strategies of Imagery in 'Circles,'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 18 (1972): 265-70; David Robinson, "Emerson and the Challenge of the Future: The Paradox of the Unachieved in 'Circles,'" *Philological Quarterly* 57 (1978): 243-53; and David M. Wyatt, "Spelling Time: The Reader in Emerson's 'Circles,'" *American Literature* 48 (1976-77): 140-51.

<sup>3</sup> Albert H. Tricomi, "The Rhetoric of Aspiring Circularity in Emerson's 'Circles,'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 18 (1972): 382, note 3; and Joseph Slater's note in *Essays, First Series* (Vol. II of *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979], pp. 253-54). For more information see Richard C. Tuerk, "Circle Imagery in the Prose of Emerson and Thoreau from *Nature* (1836) to *Walden* (1854)," Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins Univ., 1967.

<sup>4</sup> Neufeldt and Barr, "'I Shall Write Like a Latin Father,'" p. 92. For the full text of this letter see *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Ralph L. Rusk, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1939), 2:331.

<sup>5</sup> For information on this letter see Paolo Gagliardi, "Lingua e stile nell'epistola 12 di Seneca," *Vichiana* (1988): 163-73, and Thomas Habinek, "Seneca's Circles: Ep. 12.6-9," *Classical Antiquity* 1 (1982): 66-69.

<sup>6</sup> The Latin text of Seneca here used is that of Richard M. Gummere, *Seneca ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961). Quotations from Emerson's "Circles" have been taken from the second volume of *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, eds. Joseph Slater, Alfred R. Ferguson, and Jean Ferguson Carr (see note 3 above).

(Continued on page 8)

## PROSPECTS.



### American Literature Association Conference

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society will present two panels at the seventh annual conference of the American Literature Association in San Diego, California, on 1 June:

**Emerson I.** Chair, Daniel Shealy (Univ. of North Carolina-Charlotte)

"'The wells where the coy truth lies hid': Emerson's 'Fate' and 'The Rule of Life,'" Ronald A. Bosco (Univ. at Albany, SUNY)

"Slave Revolt, Representative Men, and Emerson's 'Conversion' to Abolitionism," Amy Earhart (Texas A&M Univ.)

"'Pierced with the thorns of reform': The Response of the Woman's Suffrage Movement to Emerson," Armida J. Gilbert (Kent State Univ.)

**Emerson II.** Chair, Wesley T. Mott (Worcester Polytechnic Inst.)

"Emerson, Friendship, and the Problem of Alcott's 'Psyche,'" Larry Carlson (Coll. of Charleston)

"Emerson and Nineteenth-Century Discourse on Race in America," Nadya J. Lawson (Univ. at Albany, SUNY)

"Hedge's Emerson and Emerson's Hedge: Reminiscences and Recollections of a Lifelong Friendship," Guy Litton (Texas Woman's Univ.)

The ALA conference will be held at the Bahia Hotel from 30 May to 2 June, with an opening reception on the 29th. Preregistration conference fees will be \$40 (with a special rate of \$10 for independent scholars, retired individuals, and students). The hotel is offering a conference rate of \$77 a night (single) or \$82 (double). Inquiries should be sent to the conference director, Professor Susan Belasco Smith, Dept. of English, University of Tulsa, 600 S. College Ave., Tulsa, OK 74104-3189; e-mail smithsb@utulsa.edu; fax 918-631-3033; phone 918-631-2685.

### Richardson and McAleer Featured in Concord

Robert D. Richardson, Jr., author of *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (1995) as well as of *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (1986), and John McAleer, author of *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Days of Encounter* (1984), will be featured at the Emerson Society program "Emerson and Biography" in Concord at 1:30 p.m. on Saturday, 13 July.

Formal presentations will be brief, allowing for extensive questions and answers, moderated by Dan Shealy. The session will be the fifth sponsored by the Emerson Society in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Thoreau Society. (Last year we did not present a program because of special events commemorating the 150th anniversary of Thoreau's move to Walden.) For registration information, phone the Thoreau Society at 617-259-9411; fax 617-259-1470; or e-mail Tsattip@aol.com

### Change of Editorship

The Editorial Board of *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Harvard University Press, in progress) have announced that Joseph Slater, because of trouble with his eyesight, has retired from the post of General Editor of this edition, but will remain as Associate General Editor. Douglas Emory Wilson has been appointed General Editor in addition to his duties as Textual Editor.

### Request for Comments

The editors of *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* would like to know whether scholars and readers of Emerson have found useful, in their research or otherwise, the "Parallel Passages" sections of the volumes in that edition so far published; and if so, in what ways and to what extent. I believe that ours is the only edition of an author's collected works that provides this type of information; it has seemed especially pertinent to Emerson because he recycled so much of his material through his journals, notebooks, sermons, and lectures into his published works. If you have any comments or suggestions on this matter, please send them to me at the address shown on page 2 above.

—Douglas Emory Wilson

### John Brown Symposium

"John Brown: the Man, the Legend, the Legacy," a multidisciplinary symposium, will be held at the Penn State Mont Alto Campus, 24-27 July 1996. Plenary lecturers will include Paul Finkelman, Bruce Olds, and Edward Renehan, Jr. For more information, call Professor Peggy A. Russo, 717-749-6231; e-mail u7k@psuvm.psu.edu

### "Esoteric" Studies of Emerson Available

Twenty-one paperback Emerson-inspired works by the late Esoteric writers Harry Lewis Custard and Edith May Custard are available. For a descriptive price list of the works, published between 1940 and 1981, write Steven Patascher, Ph.D., 6505 E. Osborn Rd., Suite 107, Scottsdale, AZ 85251; phone 602-947-6954, or, outside Arizona, 1-800-798-1955; fax 602-423-1823.

### Thoreau's Birthplace Threatened

Loretta Sawyer, an Emerson Society member from Chicago, writes that Emerson once said that Henry Thoreau was "deeply attached to the place where he first saw the light."

(Continued on page 6)



## PROSPECTS

(Continued from page 5)

Now that place—a farmhouse owned by his grandmother on Virginia Road in Concord, where Thoreau was born on 12 July 1817—is threatened. "Thoreau is widely recognized," writes Ms. Sawyer, "as the father of American conservation. In his writing he argued for the preservation of wildness. Today, his writings take on an even greater meaning in a world struggling to cope with land preservation issues. Thoreau's ideas of land preservation are now hitting home 'literally' ... his home.

"His birthplace, a 300-year-old farmhouse on 18.4 acres of agricultural land, is now up for sale by the current owners. Several developers have made bids on this historic, natural setting. Concerned people of Concord have organized the Save the Thoreau Birthplace Foundation with hope to raise funds to preserve this historic farm from urbanization." To make a donation or for more information, please contact Save the Thoreau Birthplace Foundation, Mrs. Doris Smith, 295 Virginia Road, Concord, MA 01742; 508-369-7185.

### Emerson House Hours for 1996

The Ralph Waldo Emerson House reopens on 18 April and will close on 27 October, reports Director Barbara A. Mongan. Hours are Thursday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Sunday and Monday holidays from 2:00 to 4:30 p.m.

Admission is \$4.50 for adults, \$3 for seniors and for students ages 6-17; children under 6 are admitted free of charge. Special rates are available for groups of 10 or more. The Emerson House is located at 28 Cambridge Turnpike in Concord, Mass. For more information in season, call 508-369-2236.

## REVIEW

**Emerson and Thoreau: The Contemporary Reviews.** Edited by JOEL MYERSON. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. xxvii, 450 pp. \$90.00.

This volume fills a significant gap in the scholarship on Emerson and Thoreau. There are several other collections of reviews and essays on these writers, including *The Recognition of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Milton R. Konvitz (1972); *Critical Essays on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Robert E. Burkholder and Joel Myerson (1983); and *The Recognition of Henry David Thoreau*, edited by Wendell Glick (1969). But those collections devoted far more space to later critical estimates than to contemporary reviews: Konvitz included roughly 60 pages of "Contemporaneous Criticism," while Glick included only a handful of reviews (amounting to only 14 pages of text) published before Thoreau's death in 1862. The contemporary reviews in Burkholder and Myerson, though more extensive, still comprise only about one-third of the volume. In contrast, *Emerson*

*and Thoreau: The Contemporary Reviews* contains 445 double-column pages of criticism, including extended essays by such prominent figures as Orestes Brownson, William Henry Channing, James Freeman Clarke, Margaret Fuller, Horace Greeley, James Russell Lowell, Richard Monckton Milnes, and Theodore Parker. The collection also contains briefer pieces by numerous other writers, among them some delightful surprises like Bret Harte, who in 1870 reviewed *Society and Solitude* for the *Overland Monthly*, and Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard, who recommended *Walden* "as a study to all fops, male and female" (p. 395). In fact, the intelligence, vigor, and wit of the reviewers often equalled that of Emerson and Thoreau.

The value of this collection is enhanced by Joel Myerson's superb editorial work. He has included reviews of sixteen works by Emerson—from *Nature* (1836) through *Letters and Social Aims* (1876)—and of the two books Thoreau published during his lifetime, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) and *Walden* (1854). Myerson's selection of reviews for each work strikes me as balanced and judicious, representing a wide range of literary, philosophical, and religious perspectives. Moreover, virtually everything about this collection is user-friendly. Following the reviews of each work, Myerson includes a "Checklist of Additional Reviews," and he concludes the section on Emerson with a checklist of reviews of works not covered in the volume. In a headnote to each review, Myerson gives full bibliographical information. Although most of the reviews were anonymous, or were signed only with initials, he has identified many of the authors, scrupulously placing their names (or his attribution) in square brackets. He prints the complete texts of the reviews, omitting only extended extracts from the work under review. (He identifies those extracts by page and line numbers in volumes of the standard editions of Emerson and Thoreau.) Where a reviewer also discussed works by other authors, Myerson prints only the section of the review concerning Emerson or Thoreau, identifying the other works in a note. He also provides an index of the names of reviewers and the periodicals in which their reviews appeared, including a fascinating array of newspapers and journals on both sides of the Atlantic.

In his excellent introduction, Myerson effectively summarizes the reception of works by Emerson and Thoreau, but neither that summary nor this review can indicate the richness and range of *Contemporary Reviews*. The reviews of Emerson's *Poems* (1847) suggest the kinds of insights into antebellum culture to be gained in every section. For example, Myerson's notes indicate that Emerson's collection was part of a bumper crop of *Poems*, the title of contemporaneous collections of verse by Frances Elizabeth Browne, William Ellery Channing (which Emerson insisted Munroe and Company publish along with his own volume), Thomas Buchanan Read, and William Wetmore Story. Emerson's volume was also compared with several other, more venturesomely entitled collections, including C. G. Fenner's *Poems of Many Moods*, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Estray*,

James F. Colman's *The Island Bride*, Epes Sargent's *Songs of the Sea*, and (my favorite title among the sea-and-shore group) Harriet Farley's *Shells from the Strand of the Sea of Genius*. Given that competition, it is perhaps not altogether surprising that the reviewer for the New York *Daily Tribune* regarded Emerson "as one of America's greatest Poets if not absolutely her greatest Poet," though the reviewer acknowledged that "he can never be deemed such by those who do not share and rejoice in his defiance of prescription and formula" (p. 150).

In fact, Emerson's defiance of both literary and religious conventions generated some spirited attacks on *Poems*, anticipating by nearly a decade similar assaults on the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855). Emerson was treated with greater respect than Whitman, who "is as unacquainted with art as a hog is with mathematics," a reviewer contemptuously observed in the *Critic* (London, 1 April 1856). But Emerson, too, received a fair number of thumps, especially from his theological opponents. He was one of "Nine New Poets" Francis Bowen discussed in the prestigious *North American Review*. Bowen, however, was obviously less interested in making comparisons than in continuing the attack on the "New School" he had launched ten years earlier in a review of *Nature* (pp. 5-13). Observing that Emerson's poems could hardly be called *verse*, since they put "at defiance all the laws of rhythm, metre, grammar, and common sense," Bowen added that most of them had originally been published in the *Dial*, "a strange periodical work, which is now withdrawn from sunlight into the utter darkness that it always coveted" (p. 165). Like Bowen, Orestes Brownson had earlier reviewed *Nature*, commending Emerson's "book—his poem we might say—to every lover of the True, the Beautiful and the Good" (p. 4). Brownson had also reviewed the "Divinity School Address" (1838), which he admired for "its life and freshness, its freedom and independence, its richness and beauty" (p. 42), and *Essays* (1841), which, he presciently declared, "will survive the day; for it is full of sincerity, truth, beauty" (p. 94). After his conversion to Catholicism in 1844, however, Brownson had turned sharply against his former associates among the Transcendentalists. In his review of *Poems* in *Brownson's Quarterly*, he observed that they "embody a doctrine essentially false, a morality essentially unsound, and at best a beauty which is partial, individual" (p. 159). "We know these poems; we understand them," Brownson ominously declared near the end of his extensive critique: "They are not sacred chants; they are hymns to the devil. Not God, but Satan, do they praise, and they can be relished only by devil-worshippers" (p. 164).

As I hope even such a brief discussion of only one section indicates, Myerson presents a veritable treasure trove of material. Nonetheless, I wish space had permitted him to include additional reviews of Thoreau's writings, or, better yet, that it had been possible for him to edit a separate volume on Thoreau. As it is, Myerson devotes nearly four times as much space to Emerson as he does to Thoreau, a disparity that "reflects both their relative importance as seen

by their contemporaries and the length of their careers" (p. ix). But their "relative importance" has changed a good deal, though perhaps less dramatically among members of the Emerson Society. In any case, *Contemporary Reviews* is of somewhat lesser value to students of Thoreau. Myerson includes several reviews of posthumous editions of *A Week* and *Walden*, as well as three retrospective essays by Thoreau's contemporaries: Emerson's famous eulogy (1862); a tribute by "A Parish Priest" (1864); and James Russell Lowell's infamous review of *Letters to Various Persons* (1865), a volume edited by Emerson which, ironically, did significant damage to Thoreau's reputation. Myerson, however, does not include reviews of the other volumes edited by Thoreau's friends and published in swift succession after his death in 1862: *Excursions* (1863), *The Maine Woods* (1864), *Cape Cod* (1865), and *A Yankee in Canada, with Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers* (1866). Together with new editions of *A Week* and *Walden*, those volumes generated a good deal of interest in Thoreau—as a reviewer in the *New York Times* remarked, "Mr. Thoreau's friends are doing good service to his memory and to American literature by the collection and preservation of his remains" (2 May 1865). Indeed, those volumes helped pave the way for his later emergence, which was given added impetus by the publication of H. G. O. Blake's selections from Thoreau's Journal: *Early Spring in Massachusetts* (1881), *Summer* (1884), *Winter* (1888), and *Autumn* (1892). Since Myerson includes a review of *A Week* published as late as 1889, such posthumous publications fall within the time frame of *Contemporary Reviews*, and I very much wish he had been in a position to collect and reprint some of the reviews they generated.

It is, however, no doubt churlish to ask for more, when Myerson has given so much, and in so usable a format. Whatever limitations this volume may have for those primarily interested in contemporary responses to Thoreau's writings, Myerson's collection is of vital interest, not only to students of Emerson, but to all those who are interested in the culture in which both writers were so deeply rooted. Moreover, contemporary reviews pose a fruitful challenge to our own readings of the texts, reminding us that all readings are historically contingent. This collection also reminds us of how seriously certain aesthetic, philosophical, and theological issues were taken during the antebellum period. Attacks on Emerson and Thoreau by conservative critics now seem retrograde and rather quaint, as statements by those on the losing side of a historical debate must almost inevitably appear to us. But the issues that preoccupied such critics were of equal interest to Emerson, Thoreau, and their many defenders, whose fundamental concerns were far closer to those of their adversaries than they are to our own. In fact, among many other things, *Emerson and Thoreau: The Contemporary Reviews* teaches us that those writers are not our contemporaries, however much we may seek to claim them and to make their writings our own.

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# Emerson in the Corporate World

LEN GOUGEON  
*University of Scranton*

*Forbes* magazine, that bastion of American business savvy and corporate consciousness, recently introduced a new monthly "Department" which has been given a most unlikely title, "Transparent Eyeball." How is it that the pundits of Wall Street came to adopt this quintessential Emersonian image, indeed, the very logo of the Emerson Society itself, for their latest offering? The editor, James W. Michaels, offers the following explanation in the 22 January 1996 issue, in a note titled, "With thanks to Ralph Waldo Emerson":

When we had to pick a name for the new feature that appears on page 37, Nina Munk remembered an essay she read in college: "Nature," written in 1836 by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Recalls Munk: "Emerson describes walking across Boston Common at twilight under a cloudy sky with snow on the ground. He suddenly feels exhilarated, illuminated: He understands his place in the universe. He wrote: 'I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all.'"

The phrase "transparent eyeball" catches the

sense of what Munk is trying to achieve—reporting small events to illuminate general business principles. Or, as Munk says, "To show the big picture through the small picture."

The items discussed in the first Transparent Eyeball offering (p. 37) include "Learning from Kodak," which describes vast improvements in New York State's Department of Motor Vehicles due to customer-friendly innovations provided by Eastman Kodak Co. The second is titled "You've got spam!" and describes the irritation e-mail users have experienced due to the increasing flow of advertising directed towards subscribers to such services as America on Line. What Emerson's reactions to these issues might be is anybody's guess, but he would undoubtedly be pleased to be remembered almost 200 years after his birth by a magazine with such a friendly and familiar name. If this proves popular we might consider suggesting yet another Emerson-inspired department name to Mr. Michaels, perhaps something like "SUCCESS," or "POWER," or "WEALTH."

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## New "Transparent Eye-ball" Tee-Shirts

A fourth edition of Emerson Society tee-shirts is hot off the press. Made of heavy-weight, pre-shrunk, 100% cotton, the shirts are available in navy and in "sunset red" (an "earth color"), both with white ink. Sizes are L and XL. Price is \$12 each, plus \$2 postage/handling for the first shirt and \$1 for each additional shirt. Because supplies are limited, call the secretary, Wes Mott, at 508-696-7472, to order.

## Annual Meeting

The 1996 annual meeting of The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, Inc. will be held at 12 noon on Saturday, 1 June, at the American Literature Association conference in San Diego, California. The room location, at the Bahia Hotel, will be announced later. For details on the conference, see "PROSPECTS."

## Seneca's Epistle 12

(Continued from page 4)

<sup>7</sup> Habinek, "Seneca's Circles: Ep. 12.6-9," p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> Emerson did own a copy of Sir Roger L'Estrange's translation of Seneca, *Morals by Way of Abstract* (Keene, N.H.: John Prentiss, 1806), which paraphrases portions of this letter. It does not specifically mention circles, however. For the bibliographical details consult Walter Harding, *Emerson's Library* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1967), p. 245.

Let this small note begin to acknowledge my enormous debt to Dr. Anna Lydia Motto, Professor of Greek and Latin, and to her husband, Dr. Jack Clark, Professor of English, who taught me how to think about literature.