



*R.W.E.*

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## EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

### Distinguished Achievement Award Presented to Douglas Emory Wilson

In honoring Douglas Emory Wilson with the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society Distinguished Achievement Award, the Society recognizes a person whose literary expertise and devotion to the textual reconstruction of Emerson's writings have served as models of scholarship for the present generation of Emersonian editors and scholars. Born in Washington, D.C., and educated in the District's public schools, Colonel Wilson stands apart from his contemporaries as having enjoyed a distinctly non-traditional academic career. He received his A.B. from Dartmouth College in 1931 and A.M. in English from Harvard University in 1933, and he pursued additional graduate studies in English at Harvard into the late 1930s. Between 1934 and 1951, he taught English at George Washington University, Rice Institute (now University), Harvard, and Rutgers University. However, with the intervention of World War II and the Korean Conflict, Colonel Wilson's academic plans were temporarily displaced first with tours of active and reserve duty in the U.S. Army from 1941 to 1970, and then with U.S. Civil Service posts from 1956 to 1973. Over the years, his duties included service as the Executive Officer of the Army Chemical Corps School and Chief of Programs and Administration, Combat Developments Command C-B-R Agency, at Ft. McClellan, Alabama.

Colonel Wilson retired from the Army with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 1970 and from the Civil Service in 1973, yet all who know him,

know that "retirement" is not a word that occurs too often in his personal vocabulary. Since 1975, he has assumed significant responsibilities in several Emerson projects. As Textual Editor of the Harvard *Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (CWRWE)* series, he supervised textual work on volumes 2 and 3, and is the Textual Editor of volumes 4 through 7, and 9 and 10. In 1996, he succeeded Joseph Slater as General Editor of the *CWRWE*. Along the way to his current position, he served as Contributing Editor for volumes 3 and 4 of *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* published by the University of Missouri Press, and Consulting Editor for volumes 2 and 3 of *The Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, also from Missouri. In addition, since 1977 he has inspected volumes of the writings of Thoreau, Harold Frederic, Cooper, Howells, John Dewey, and C. S. Peirce, among others, for the MLA Committee on Scholarly Editions.

A Founding Member of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, Colonel Wilson has been Editor of the *Emerson Society Papers* since 1990. For his ever enthusiastic support of the Society, for his generous service as an intellectual and technical resource for editors of Emerson, and for his record of textual scholarship, the Society warmly acknowledges Douglas Emory Wilson with our Distinguished Achievement Award.

—Ronald A. Bosco



# Abstracts of Baltimore ALA Papers

The following panels were presented by The Emerson Society  
at the eighth annual conference of the American Literature Association on 23 and 24 May in Baltimore, Maryland.

## SESSION I: Emerson and His Lectures Chair, Daniel Shealy, Univ. of North Carolina–Charlotte

### Emerson's First "Representative Men" Lecture Series (1845-46) and the Boston Press

WESLEY T. MOTT  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

In studying Emerson's career as a lecturer, we can (with apologies to Henry Thoreau) profitably Read the Times even while Reading the Eternities. How Emerson's first "Representative Men" lecture series was promoted and reviewed by the Boston press tells us a great deal both about how Emerson was popularly perceived in the mid-1840s and about the role of newspapers in shaping contemporary taste and culture. Newspapers yield a treasury of details about Emerson (he was "troubled by a cold" during his first lecture) as well as important critical opinions. The sequence of lectures differed from that published in 1850; Emerson was judged, and in part judged himself, against competing lecturers on similar topics; certain Emerson phrases gained instant currency; as might be expected, "Napoleon" was the most popular of the seven lectures, with "Montaigne" second.

Much of the reaction to Emerson was along political and theological lines. Indeed, in a skirmish that resembles the controversy following the Divinity School Address of 1838, James Freeman Clarke's *Christian World* defended Emerson against attacks in the *New*

*England Puritan* and *Christian Reflector*, Emerson provoking outrage at his alleged blasphemy but preferring not to fight back, while others took up the cudgels on his behalf. The *Boston Daily Star*, seeking a niche in an intensely competitive market by covering cultural events such as the lyceum, reported the series in particular detail. The highly touted reform in shorthand called phonography promised to revolutionize such reporting. Emerson must have been deeply ambivalent about this particular reformist dream, since he objected to having his lectures published in the press, fearing that it would cut attendance at subsequent performances.

### "Gazing After the Illuminati": Mary Moody Emerson and the Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson

NANCY CRAIG SIMMONS  
Virginia Tech

Although Mary Moody Emerson plays an increasingly important role in our understanding of the young Emerson's intellectual and psychological development, typically that role ceases after he left the pulpit. Following the disagreement that drove her from Concord in 1836, she virtually drops out of most biographies of her nephew. Though disappointed by his move, she respected the intellectual honesty that prompted his decision, and for over two decades she eagerly followed his new career, usually from afar. Theirs was a mutually supportive intellectual relationship. This paper documents connec-

tions between Mary and Waldo's lectures over two decades, details Mary's role in the period of crisis that culminated in "The Method of Nature," and explores Emerson's use of his aunt in other lectures. It suggests that the role of the "true orator" that Emerson described for himself in his journal about 1841 was much influenced by Mary Emerson's hopes and method as Emerson understood them.

Her letters contain references and responses to all of Emerson's lecture series and many other addresses, beginning in 1834 when she was visiting in Concord. At that time she discovered the antislavery movement and hoped Waldo would exchange decorous lecturing for this worthy cause. Ten years later she was rewarded by his "Emancipation" address and pushed him to offer more in this vein. Lectures that disturb her prompt her most substantive comments; rather than berating Waldo for unorthodox ideas, she expresses concern for the state of mind such ideas suggest. Her extreme reaction to the essay "Self-Reliance" led to the only known occasion when Mary was in his audience, at Waterville, Maine, for "The Method of Nature," an address whose genesis and central ideas are deeply embedded in Waldo's relationship with his aunt.

"The Method of Nature" is one of several lectures in which Mary figures; in the Present Age introduction she represents the religious occupation of pious New Englanders; and in the New England introduction she figures as the natural transmitter of ideas between generations.

### Emerson as Lecturer: Orality, Editing, and the Text

RONALD A. BOSCO  
University at Albany–SUNY  
JOEL MYERSON  
University of South Carolina

This paper explores the contemporary context(s) for the 47 complete and previously unpublished Emerson lectures we are including in "The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1843-1867," forthcoming in 1999 from the University of Georgia Press. In the course of the paper, we consider Emerson's compositional and lecturing practices and the relation between lectures such as those we are printing and Emerson's rise to prominence in America during this period as a lecturer, writer—in sum, as an intellectual and cultural presence. We also set forth those principles that have guided our selection of materials to include in this edition and our rationale for presenting texts in a clear text format, acknowledging in both instances our debt to the policies established for the presentation of comparable materials by the editors of Emerson's *Early Lectures* and, especially, *Complete Sermons*, as well as our departure from some of those policies.

## SESSION II: Emerson and Nature Chair, Len Gougeon, Univ. of Scranton

### Emerson, England, and the End of Nature

ROBERT E. BURKHOLDER  
Penn State University

Emerson is rarely given due credit for either his contributions to American literary naturism or for his own commitment to the natural world. Most often he appears in studies of American nature writing as Thoreau's pale precursor, and even a reader as astute as Max Oelschlaeger can misuse Emerson as a strawman to make Thoreau's naturism seem that much more prescient and important than it is already understood to be. In reality, though, Emerson proclaimed

himself a naturalist in 1832 and rather consistently found in nature a basis for an ethics that informs all of his work. To demonstrate this point, we might take the case of *English Traits*, a work often overlooked or ignored exactly because it seems so anomalous. It has been dismissed as a travelogue or ignored because Emerson's apparent praise of English factitiousness seems so at odds with the canonical Emerson of "The American Scholar" and "Self-Reliance." However, to read *English Traits* in that way is to misunderstand Emerson's message. Indeed, he does seem to praise all sorts of English technological advances, from the genetic engineering of superior breeds of cattle to the draining of wetlands, and yet in the late chapter "Literature," he clearly places all such advances in an historical frame in which Sir Francis Bacon is depicted as the apogee of English civilization. In Bacon, Emerson recognized an intellect where Platonism and materialism existed in a rough balance. However, after Bacon came Locke and his followers, who poisoned English civilization through a worldview that produced a science motivated by a desire for material success and the pursuit of use-value and lacking in Platonism's capacity to analogize. The absence of this capacity, Emerson holds, robs science of both its humanity and its poetry and, therefore, makes it false. While Emerson is clearly impressed with some or most of the technology that English science created, he also, just as clearly, believed that the future of English civilization lay in North American wilderness, where the grandeur of the landscape held the potential to condition the observer to consider it as inherently valuable and not just valuable for the uses it might be put to by humans. In the sense that Emerson faults science and technology for its inability to consider the inherent value of nature, he prefigures the arguments of contemporary apocalypticists such as Bill McKibben.

### Emerson on Wilderness as Aesthetic Object

GAYLE L. SMITH  
Penn State Worthington Scranton

Emerson's close depiction of the homelier and wilder aspects of nature and landscape occurs more often in his prose—lectures, essays, and journals—than most readers realize. Not only do these passages reveal a deeply experiential basis for Emerson's philosophical conclusions about the relations of nature to mind, but they also suggest a deliberate decision to transgress the aesthetic conventions of the time, to achieve a truly representative, holistic vision, and to explore the analogous mysteries of the imagination and literary composition.

The underlying identity Emerson perceives beneath all the various forms and appearances dictates, at least in theory, the importance of any and all objects of nature. Ordinary or rare, refined or wild, each should be a potential means to experiencing, understanding, and admiring the whole. Thus, alongside more conventionally beautiful, sublime, and picturesque references and images, he celebrates the beauty and significance of crows, scorpions, and centipedes, storms, hail, and sleet, the polar regions and our own familiar hillside. Just as Emerson refused to be constrained by limits to his formal choices, he seems to have included images of nature that were either too wild or too homely to be expected in the art and literature of the time. Finally, wilderness landscapes suggested the ideal model for the operations of the Reason and the literary artist.

### Selected Poems and the "Emerson Factory"

J.M. THOMAS  
Sam Houston State University

Because Emerson's final decade was marked by dwindling activity and acuity, it has received scant attention from critics and biogra-

## EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

The newsletter of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society  
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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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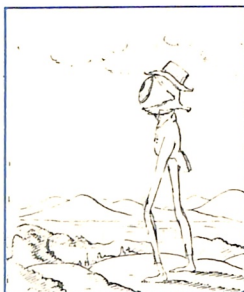


## Abstracts

(Continued from page 3)

phers. In 1983, however, Nancy Craig Simmons analyzed the evidence for something scholars had long known: because of his failing abilities, virtually all of Emerson's lectures and essays after 1872 were produced by a remarkable editorial collaboration initiated by his daughter Ellen and presided over by James Elliot Cabot, a collaboration in which Emerson usually played only a nominal role. Simmons dubbed their editorial workshop "the Emerson factory" and observed that the prose it produced has "never seemed completely authentic." Emerson's last book, the 1876 *Selected Poems*, has typically been dismissed as another "factory" product, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Instead this book should be taken into account both as an "authentic" part of his canon and as a window on his authorship at the end of his career.

*Selected Poems* was part of James R. Osgood and Co.'s "Little Classic" edition of Emerson's works, and included poetry culled from the earlier *Poems* (1847) and *May-Day and Other Pieces* (1867), along with a few additions. An 1874 letter to William Forbes (his son-in-law and attorney) shows a clear conception of the planned book, which would omit what he deemed his weaker pieces and add several others. Relevant testimony concerning the volume and Emerson's work on it also survives in the letters of Ellen Emerson and those of her brother Edward. The most important record, howev-



## PROSPECTS.

### ESQ Discount

*ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* is pleased to offer subscriptions at a 20% discount to members of the Emerson Society: \$14.40 for one year and \$25.60 for two years. Upcoming features in *ESQ* will include a special issue on the Emerson/Nietzsche relationship (four numbers guest edited by Michael Lopez and bound together as a single volume), followed by an issue on Margaret Fuller.

### Scholars Sought

Authors are sought for biographical essays for new, significantly expanded editions of the *DICTIONARY OF LITERARY BIOGRAPHY: The American Renaissance in New England* (Vol. 1), edited by Wes Mott, and *Antebellum Writers in New York and the South* (Vol. 3), edited by Kent Ljungquist; Joel Myerson, editor of the original editions, is consulting editor. For details, write either editor at WPI, Dept. of Humanities and Arts, 100 Institute Road, Worcester, MA 01609-2280; or e-mail [wmott@wpi.edu](mailto:wmott@wpi.edu) or [kpl@wpi.edu](mailto:kpl@wpi.edu).

er, consists of Emerson's own heavily annotated copies of his earlier books of poetry and the surviving lists exploring possible contents for the new book. The first hard evidence of his efforts comes in 1873, when he worked diligently with a copy of his *Poems* while in Florence, making selections and revisions.

Unlike her role in producing the prose, Ellen Emerson's involvement in this project was primarily administrative, including gathering advice about the contents from family friends like F.B. Sanborn and James Russell Lowell. Cabot was hardly involved at all with the poetry, though he offered some opinions. Emerson's selections did not always agree with the advice Ellen garnered, however, and he was responsible for both selecting the works and revising the texts to be published. There is one exception, the poem "May-Day," whose text in *Selected Poems* was rebuilt by Ellen and the "factory" after Emerson excluded it because unable to revise it to his satisfaction. The nature of his difficulty is telling. The structural problems of long poems gave Emerson the most trouble in revising, and "May-Day" was his longest; working on such poems strained the limits imposed by his weakened abilities, blurring the line that separated his continued competence with poetry from his increasing trouble with prose.

Unlike his prose, Emerson's poetry seems to have been his final refuge as a writer during his final decade, and *Selected Poems* should be considered a legitimate, if relatively minor, part of his canon. Re-evaluating his role in creating this volume and the choices he made in doing so can give both commentators and editors a more accurate view of Emerson's authorship during his last years as a writer.

### Call for Papers

Anyone interested in presenting a paper on Emerson, either at the ALA conference in May '98 or the annual Thoreau Society gathering in July '98, should send a proposal or paper to Prof. Len Gougeon, Dept. of English, Univ. of Scranton, Scranton, PA 18510. There are no restrictions on topics but you must be a member of the Emerson Society to participate. Deadlines for submission are: ALA, 31 January; Thoreau meeting, 15 April.

### Teacher's Guide Available

*A Teacher's Guide to Transcendentalism* has been prepared by Michael F. Crim. The 100 pages include background information, unit and lesson plans, and handouts for English and social studies classes. The *Guide* is ready to use and designed for convenient re-use. Cost is \$20, plus \$4 S&H. Contact Mr. Crim at 23250 Laurel Hill Drive, California, MD 20619. Tel. 301-863-0249, [mcrim@eagle1.eaglenet.com](mailto:mcrim@eagle1.eaglenet.com).

### "Biography" of Brook Farm

Sterling F. Delano is writing a biography of the utopian Brook Farm (1841-47) community and seeks any relevant information—beyond the usual sources—about any aspect of the community. He is particularly interested in background on individual members, especially the less celebrated ones. He may be contacted at the Department of English, Villanova University, 800 Lancaster Ave., Villanova, PA 19085, and by telephone: 610-519-4654.

## An Emerson Bibliography, 1996

DAVID M. ROBINSON

Oregon State University

New editions and critical studies from 1996, including items missed in the 1995 bibliography (ESP 7, ii [1996]:7-8).

✓ Baker, Carlos. *Emerson Among the Eccentrics: A Group Portrait*. Viking. [Emerson in his Concord circle.]

✓ Branch, Michael P. "Ralph Waldo Emerson." *American Nature Writers, Volume I*. Ed. John Elder. Scribner's. Pp. 287-307. [Emerson's founding voice in American nature writing.]

✓ Bufkin, Kathryn. "'By Their Fruits, Ye Shall Know Them': The Theological Background of Emerson's 'Thoreau.'" *ESQ* 42:51-67. [Reconsideration of Emerson's purposes in his eulogy for Thoreau.]

✓ Deese, Helen. "Transcendental Gen(d)erations: Caroline Healey Dall and Ralph Waldo Emerson." *Tennessee Philological Bulletin* 31 [1994]:6-21. [Dall's relationship with Emerson in her role as second generation Transcendentalist and women's rights advocate.]

Delano, Sterling F. "The Boston Union of Associationists (1846-1851): 'Association Is to Me the Great Hope of the World.'" *SAR* 1996, pp. 5-40. [Chronicle of this important reform organization.]

— "Brook Farm and Concord: Transit Between Celebrated Communities." *CS* 4:23-43. [Brook Farmers who eventually settled and worked in Concord, including Minot and Maria Pratt, George W. Curtis, and George P. Bradford.]

✓ Duffy, Edward. "Stanley Cavell's Redemptive Reading: A Philosophical Labour in Progress." *UTQ* 65:561-83. [Places the work on Emerson in the context of Cavell's larger philosophical project.]

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Representative Men*. Ed. Douglas Emory Wilson. Introduction by Andrew Delbanco. Harvard. [The text of the *Collected Works* edition published with a new introduction.]

✓ Foster, Edward Halsey. "Teaching American Poetry in Context: Emerson and the Non-American Reader." Ed. Meta Grosman. *American Literature for Non-American Readers: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on American Literature*. Peter Lang, 1995. Pp. 87-94. [Emerson as a source for differing strands of modern American poetry.]

✓ Frome, Keith., ed. *Hitch Your Wagon to a Star, And Other Quotations from Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Columbia.

✓ Gura, Philip F. *The Crossroads of American History and Literature*. Pennsylvania State. [Essays on Puritanism and Transcendentalism, including treatments of language theory.]

✓ Hall, Dewey W. "From Edwards to Emerson: A Study of the Teleology of Nature." *SPAS* 5 [1995]:123-47. [Compares their attempts to account for natural phenomena.]

Hodder, Alan D. "Jones Very's Season in Heaven." *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 25, no. 2/3, 14-17. [Reconsiders Very's career and religious context.]

✓ Hudnut, Robert K. *The Aesthetics of Ralph Waldo Emerson: The Materials and Methods of His Poetry*. Edwin Mellen. [Exposition of Emerson's poetic theory.]

✓ Kern, Robert. *Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem*. Cambridge. [Emerson's interest in an image-oriented language, and its impact on Pound and Snyder.]

✓ Lopez, Michael. *Emerson and Power: Creative Antagonism in the Nineteenth Century*. Northern Illinois. [Emerson as a philosopher of "power" and "use," akin with Nietzsche.]

✓ Makarushka, Irene S. M. *Religious Imagination and Language in Emerson and Nietzsche*. St. Martin's, 1994. [Emerson and Nietzsche as progenitors of the anti-foundationalist impulse in modern theology.]

✓ — "Emerson and Nietzsche on History: Lesson for the Next Millennium." *Literature and Theology at Century's End*. Ed. Gregory Salyer and Robert Detweiler. Scholar's Press, 1995. Pp. 89-101. [Their shared sense of the individual's capacity to shape and influence history.]

✓ Martin, Terence. *Parables of Possibility: The American Need for Beginnings*. Columbia, 1995. [The role of Emerson and Thoreau in American cultural self-definition.]

✓ McMillin, T. S. "Consuming Text: Transubstantiation and Ingestion in the Interpretation of Emerson." *Criticism* 38:85-114. [The appropriation of Emerson by American popular culture.]

✓ Mott, Wesley T., ed. *Biographical Dictionary of Transcendentalism*. Greenwood. [Comprehensive reference collection of biographical essays on Transcendentalism.]

✓ — "Emerson and the *North American Review*: New Letters." *ESP* 7, no. 1:1-3. [On the publication of "Perpetual Forces."]

✓ — ed. *Encyclopedia of Transcendentalism*. Greenwood. [Comprehensive reference collection of essays on themes, events and organizations connected with Transcendentalism.]

✓ Myerson, Joel. "Ralph Waldo Emerson's Income from His Books." *The Professions of Authorship: Essays in Honor of Matthew J. Bruccoli*. Ed. Richard Layman and Joel Myerson. South Carolina. Pp. 135-49. [Emerson's dealings with his publishers, and his sense of the literary market.]

✓ Newfield, Christopher. *The Emerson Effect: Individualism and Submission in America*. Chicago. [The process by which Emerson's individualism devolves into a submission to authority.]

✓ Petrucci, Anthony P. "Emerson, Disclosure, and the Experiencing Self." *P & R* 29:51-64. [Uses Heidegger to explain Emerson's resistance to systematic structures of knowledge.]

✓ Robinson, David M. "Emerson, Thoreau, Fuller and Transcendentalism." *American Literary Scholarship* 1994. Ed. David J. Nordloh. Duke. Pp. 3-23. [Annual review of scholarship in the field.]

Ronnick, Michele Valerie. "Seneca's Epistle 12 and Emerson's 'Circles.'" *ESP* 7, no. 1:4,8. [Seneca's use of the circle metaphor.]

✓ Rowland, William G. *Literature and the Marketplace: Romantic Writers and Their Audiences in Great Britain and the United States*. Nebraska. [The relation of Emerson and other Romantics with the literary market.]

Scheese, Don. *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America*. Twayne. [The development of literary pastoralism in America.]

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(Continued from page 5)

- Sealts, Merton M., Jr. *Beyond the Classroom: Essays on American Authors*. Missouri. [Essays on the interpretation and teaching of nineteenth-century American authors.]
- Smith, Jillian. "A New Letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Edward A. Washburn." *NEQ* 69:627-30. [Refers to Mary Moody Emerson.]
- Smith, Susan Belasco. "Margaret Fuller in New York: Private Letters, Public Texts." *Documentary Editing* 18:63-67,80. [Fuller's redefinition of Emersonian individualism during her work at the *Tribune*.]
- Teichgraber, Richard F., III. *Sublime Thoughts/Penny Wisdom: Situating Emerson and Thoreau in the American Market*. Johns Hopkins, 1995. [The response of Emerson and Thoreau to evolving social and cultural forces, including the rise of antislavery and the changing literary market.]
- Thomas, Joseph M. "The Property of My Own Book: Emerson's *Poems* (1847) and the Literary Marketplace." *NEQ* 69:406-25. [The publication history of *Poems* with attention to Emerson's stance toward the literary market.]

- Tuttleton, James W. *Vital Signs: Essays on American Literature and Criticism*. Ivan R. Dee. [Includes essays on Emerson and Fuller.]
- von Frank, Albert. "The Composition of *Nature*: Writing and the Self in the Launching of a Career." *Biographies of Books: The Compositional Histories of Notable American Writings*. Ed. James Barbour and Tom Quirk. Missouri. Pp. 11-40. [Reexamination of *Nature*'s genesis and structure, emphasizing Emerson's divided purposes, and the competing influences of Carlyle and Alcott.]
- Westling, Louise. *The Green Breast of the New World: Landscape, Gender, and American Fiction*. Georgia. [Critique of the patriarchal assumptions of the pastoral tradition.]
- Wilson, Eric. "Emerson and Electromagnetism." *ESQ* 42:93-124. [Emerson's interest in the electromagnetic theories of Michael Faraday and Sir Humphry Davy.]
- Wilson, Eric. "Weaving: Breathing: Thinking: The Poetics of Emerson's *Nature*." *ATQ* 10:5-24. [Emerson's open, process-oriented language.]
- Winterowd, W. Ross. "Emerson and the Death of Pathos." *JAC* 16:27-40. [Emerson's self-expressive, solipsistic rhetoric.]
- Zwarg, Christina. "The Storied Facts of Margaret Fuller." *NEQ* 69:128-42. [Response to Charles Capper's biography, stressing the importance of Fuller's concept of translation.]

from his studies at Harvard with Dugald Stewart's attempt to reestablish philosophical discourse on new grounds, Emerson "confronted and recognized the potential for nihilism in Hume" (31) in working out his earliest religious and philosophical positions. This need to overcome the threat of nihilism fuelled Emerson's thinking throughout his career. The death of Ellen in 1831 added a deep emotional shock that brought these philosophical questions vividly to life for Emerson. He eventually developed his response less in the rational and empirical mode of Stewart and the common sense philosophers than in the traditions of mysticism and idealism that were opening to him. In the work of Joseph de Gerando, whom he read "just when Ellen's life was ebbing away," Emerson found "new possibilities for belief with which to fight his despair" (102), especially in Gerando's "defense of idealism against Scottish Common Sense" (103). From Victor Cousin, whom he read just after Ellen's death, Emerson "learned that India possessed powerful and sophisticated scriptures of its own" (114), and began to understand that there were possibilities for the spiritual life beyond the confines of New England Protestant Christianity.

Richardson's presentation of Emerson's philosophical struggles and breakthroughs makes it clear—clearer than it has ever been made before—that such intellectual grappling was not a coldly rational exercise, but a contest for emotional wholeness and psychic survival. This theme continues throughout Richardson's account of Emerson's life and accomplishment, giving us a fresh perspective on the importance of Emerson's closest relationships and emotional bonds. After the death of his brother Charles, the one "who could make Emerson laugh more than anyone else," Emerson was again "stricken" (224) with emotional pain, toiling through his grief by the antidote of creative

expression in his first book *Nature*. We have come to know this work as an initiating text for Transcendentalism and a book fundamental to American intellectual culture. Richardson reminds us that it was also "Emerson's open letter to the world on behalf of Charles" (225), a work that emphasized the survival and triumph of ideals, and the open possibility that the world represented. It was as if Emerson had, through that work, deliberately resolved that no loss could permanently erode the faith in spiritual revelation that he had witnessed. Charles' death thus became the painful occasion for his most assured and buoyant statement of optimistic faith.

Richardson's work is sure to complicate any simple notions that still might exist about Emerson's optimism, for though the assured statements of faith continue in the late 1830s after *Nature*, establishing Emerson's public identity, they are never divorced from a severe testing, and never separated fully from the shadow of nihilistic skepticism. This, certainly, helps to account for his continuing appeal to modern readers. Richardson's presentation of the real Emerson as less the formal public voice we find in the essays, and more a vulnerable, surprising, and resilient man of his century, underlines the interest that readers in our era can take in Emerson's life and accomplishment.

Richardson's account of Emerson's troubled but durable marriage with Lidian, of his "anger and shock and bitterness" (359) over the death of his son Waldo, of his profound and complex bonds with Henry Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Caroline Sturgis and others, establish this book as a telling portrait of the inner Emerson, an individual who cannot be understood outside the web of relations that he cultivated over the years in his life in Concord.

As a sourcebook of information on Emerson's reading and his reaction to it, an illuminating analysis of his emotional life and his inner doubts and drives, a reconstruction of the network of friendships that molded him over the years, and a persuasive interpretation of his philosophical accomplishment and importance, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* is a signal accomplishment. While providing us with many answers and insights into Emerson's life and work, it will also stimulate continuing interest in his cultural importance and in the historical impact on the New England Transcendentalist movement. The Emerson who had become by the 1860s "an inescapable part—a fixture—of American public life" (551) continues to be a fixture of American literary and cultural studies. Richardson's work takes us further than any previous work toward an understanding of the complex interaction between the private man and his public importance.

—DAVID M. ROBINSON  
Oregon State University

### Emerson in His Sermons: A Man-Made Self.

By SUSAN L. ROBERSON. Columbia: University of Missouri, 1995. 240 pp. \$39.95.

Emerson understood that a great career had to have "a long foreground somewhere"—as he famously said to Walt Whitman—yet his own apprentice years and first career would remain largely unexamined for a century and a half, important all that while mainly for its dramatic finale. The Lord's Supper Sermon, Emerson's 1832 farewell to his Second Church congregation,

was the only relic of his ministerial life to gain inclusion in the standard Works, with the result that his most vital relation to the church has seemed to consist in his leaving it. A better or at least a fuller understanding was made possible by the publication of Emerson's *Complete Sermons* in four volumes (1989-1992) with its introduction by David Robinson and by two fine critical studies that have appeared since—Wesley Mott's *Strains of Eloquence* and Susan Roberson's *Emerson in His Sermons*.

The fascination of Emerson's sermons lies in their strangely familiar inauthenticity. Their meanings are not quite Emersonian, yet they invite us—virtually demand us—to fold them in with the canon of his works. We are not wrong to suspect that we can never quite understand Emerson without this cycle of sermons (his most extensive and sustained investigation of the moral life), yet their author time and again puts us off with half-formed thoughts and preacherly conventionalities.

It makes some sense to suppose that Emerson worked through a youthful period of relative religious orthodoxy, that he cast off the black robe in 1832, and emerged in 1836 as Psyche, the butterfly, in all the colors of *Nature*. Or that after a few years of selfless caring for the souls of an urban congregation (all the time he could spare), he saw an unroutine future for himself as an I-ball in Concord. Or that despair over the death of his first wife in 1831 challenged, revised, and deepened his sense of the inward and spiritual. Or that by a systematic course of talking (to himself as much as to others) he came to appreciate that his meanings were, after all, frictional and antisystematic. However we view Emerson's career at the Second Church, it is the tin mould of the professional context that lends shape and interest to the tentative, self-determining speculation in the sermons.

Roberson's controlling insight is that this first career is autobiography. We find here a young uncertain Emerson determined to use the profession of the ministry to work a regeneration of his own personality, sensitive always to the eclipsing force of God, whose central and exclusive position in the popular theology threatened to leave no residue of freedom and authenticity—and hence no real selfhood—to dependent man. Christians seemed to have forgotten that "the kingdom of God is within you," a proposition that ought, as Emerson felt, to place the divine seal on self-reliance and to set the individual in a profound and critical opposition to all external authority. If authority is suspect to the degree that it is external (that is, lacking internal corroboration—the soul's free consent), then the problem was not so much with authority as with externality itself. This was the concurrent lesson, Roberson argues, that Emerson learned through the death of Ellen, in the self-consolatory gesture of identifying her with what remained to him after her failing body had failed for good. A prejudice for the permanent led Emerson if not to reject, then to subordinate the body—the physical, the social, the religious body—to the unincarnated spirit that was the life (or all) of each.

Roberson's illuminating tour of Emerson's first career and first deliberate shaping of his character—in presenting the audience in the pews as the speaker's faulty alter ego, in finding hypothetical Emersons in the fictive characters of the sermons, serving there a personal and therapeutic purpose—ironically yet beautifully proceeds by a method exactly the reverse of Emerson's. In stressing the personal or autobiographical dimensions of that process whereby Emerson depersonalized the Godhead and came to value ideas for their abstract, eternal, and

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## Abstracts

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unhistorical qualities, Roberson knows what Emerson also knew: that the world is still lively and dramatic in the record of its coming to be.

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### The Selected Letters of Mary Moody Emerson.

Edited by NANCY CRAIG SIMMONS. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993. li, 622 pp. \$65.

Nancy Craig Simmons' superb edition of the letters of Mary Moody Emerson is a milestone in Transcendentalist studies, partly for the light it sheds on the development of Mary Emerson's more famous nephew, but more importantly for throwing a whole new character onto the Transcendentalist stage. Mary Emerson was eulogized by nephew Waldo and has been mentioned in all decent accounts of his life and education—though usually in passing—as a major influence on him. But until now, the general impression many readers have had of Mary Emerson has been of a “character,” an eccentric and exasperating maiden aunt. Now, with the publication of her letters—more than a third of them in this scrupulously edited volume—we have the woman herself, a woman who will surprise many students of the period. Mary Emerson stands revealed at last in these letters as a profoundly learned person, as a major intellectual force, a Socratic dreadnaught, a teacher at the center of an impressive circle, an impassioned writer of force and imagination who reaches at times the high tablelands of prophecy itself. This American Isaiah comes through, in Nancy Simmons' judicious selections, as a force—and I want the emphasis to fall on that word force—for directness, for personal witness, for intellectual immediacy. She is the most important of R.W. Emerson's teachers and interlocutors, a major source of Transcendentalism, and a significant post-Calvinist religious thinker in her own right.

She knew a great many people. She knew Hannah Adams, who wrote the first American history of the Jewish people, and she knew Thoreau's paternal grandfather's second wife. These letters jump with energy; the pages fairly rattle in the elegant white binding provided by the University of Georgia Press. Mary requests, via Ruth Emerson, information from brother William: “I wish him to explain the 73<sup>d</sup> proposition of Dr. Jebb's in the 2<sup>d</sup> vol. respecting the philosophy of prayer” (50). She hammers away at nineteen year old Waldo: “Are you well versed in *Stewart* & his host of noble predecessors—have you read *all* of Brown's three vols of lectures...?” (160). She takes the short way with her nephew's failings. “You write sneaking short letters,” she tells him (161). She holds nothing back. To Waldo's brother Charles, perhaps her favorite young Emerson, she writes, “It is certain that not any Emerson is capable of deep investigation—long continued thought” (254).

She despised the beaten track, calling it “the safe guard of mediocrity” (182) and her own disdain for standard English is a perpetual reminder to the reader that she practiced what she preached. When Waldo's older brother William fell off the path to the ministry, Mary Emerson, citing the precedent of Roman women, invoked her right to call him to account, and tried to nail the exact cause. “Do you doubt of the origin of xianity? Dislike its purpose—perplexed with its wonders—at a loss

about its nature?... Tell me truly, and I will respect your confidence” (202).

As Waldo and his friends began to be called Transcendentalists in public, Mary Emerson writes Frederic Hedge bluntly asking about a movement she had had a major hand in shaping. “I am obtuse by reason of age,” she told Hedge with something less than candor, adding “and Waldo is no explainer. I have often wished to ask you for what may be the leading principles of transcendental philosophy” (400).

She nursed the highest imaginable ambitions for Waldo along with a persistent habit of devastating frankness about his many shortcomings. When Waldo lost his eyesight at Divinity School, she prayed for his recovery. When he recovered she told him “you are getting well too soon—before you have seen the mystic visions w'h visit the soul.” She wanted everything. “But tell me, like a true man, your feelings” (196). When Waldo sent her a copy of his 1847 *Poems*, she wrote back saying “I wish that you could get into Milton's old room and blind yourself to all but real poetry.” She reports that she told “Miss Pea [Elizabeth Peabody] that if you were blind and fixed in good faith you could write ‘Paradise Lost’ and avoid the wearisome parts.” But, alas for poor Waldo, the *Poems* as printed “have led me to think of their defects and the injustice you have done to the unique lady above named [the Muse]” (496). Later, in 1855, Mary Emerson took unconcealed and unqualified pleasure in Waldo's anti-slavery speeches and told him “you must value the delight it gave to a solitary who loves her country and kind” (568).

Mary Emerson's full impact on American thought and expression is only now beginning to be felt as it rises like the morning star at the end of *Walden*. There is much in her legacy yet to puzzle out, but now at least we have her voice, which is all the more valuable for its unpredictable syntax and for its not having been smoothed out by copy editors. Perhaps we can leave her, for the moment, as Nancy Simmons does, with the cryptic benediction she gave Sarah Bradford Ripley in the last letter she ever wrote. “May the God of love and wisdom draw you so near to communion with him that you may long remain to bless your gifts of children” (600). It goes without saying that all self-respecting American libraries should have a copy of this book.

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## 1997 ANNUAL MEETING

President Ronald Bosco presided over the 1997 annual meeting of the Emerson Society in Baltimore, Md., on 23 May. Elected by acclamation were Len Gougeon as president-elect, and Barbara Powell and Laura Dassow Walls as members of the Advisory Board. Douglas Emory Wilson was named the sixth recipient of the Distinguished Achievement Award in Emerson Studies. Ron Bosco proposed a new dues structure to take effect in 1998 and reported on plans for the 2003 Emerson Bicentennial. Doug Wilson reported on progress with *The Collected Works*. Secretary/Treasurer Wes Mott reported that at the end of 1996, the Society's savings account had a balance of \$4,814.48. Secretary's and Treasurer's Reports for 1996 (distributed at the meeting) may be obtained by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Professor Mott, Dept. of Humanities and Arts, WPI, Worcester, MA 01609-2280.