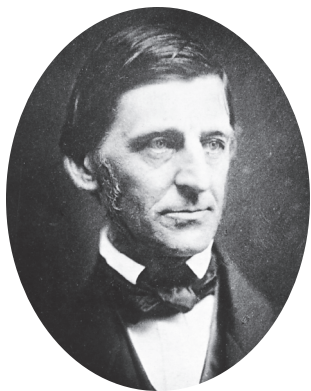




R.W.E.

Volume 33, Number 2

Fall 2022

EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

Distinguished Achievement Award Presented to David LaRocca

David LaRocca (www.davidlarocca.org), recipient of the 2022 Ralph Waldo Emerson Society Distinguished Achievement Award, joins a group of individuals distinguished by their formative contributions to the study of Emerson, contributions that not only put students and scholars in “a working mood,” as Emerson might say, but also in many cases make work possible.

In 2009 Stanley Cavell received the award at the ALA annual meeting in Boston. When I self-consciously asked him to sign my tattered, coffee-stained, dog-eared copy of his book *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford 2003)—a book edited by LaRocca under the name David Justin Hodge—Cavell said, “I love beat-up books.” My copy of LaRocca's *Estimating Emerson: Criticism from Carlyle to Cavell* (Bloomsbury 2012), is equally beat up; or put otherwise, well loved. An invaluable resource, it compiles substantive portions of texts written by poets, philosophers, artists, and critics from the nineteenth century to now, who provoked—or were provoked by—Emerson. LaRocca's concise and helpfully contextualizing introductions accompany each selection. This book in many ways embodies what distinguishes LaRocca's contribution to Emerson studies: His work, in breadth and depth alike, enables us to better see the many circles of conversation in which Emerson participates, circles that extend far beyond nineteenth-century Concord and well beyond the often-narrow parameters of specialized disciplines, methodological conventions, and academia more generally.

An overview of LaRocca's scholarship on Emerson offers a partial portrait of this achievement. His books focused on Emerson include the intellectual biography *On Emerson* (Wadsworth 2003, published under the name David Justin Hodge) and *Emerson's English Traits and the Natural History of Metaphor* (Bloomsbury 2013). His edited books include *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* by Stanley Cavell (Stanford 2003), *Estimating Emerson: An Anthology of Criticism from Carlyle to Cavell* (Bloomsbury 2012), *A Power to Translate the World: New Essays on*

Emerson and International Culture co-edited with Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso (Dartmouth College Press 2015), and *The Bloomsbury Anthology of Transcendental Thought: From Antiquity to the Anthropocene* (Bloomsbury 2017). His articles on Emerson range from “Reforming Emerson: A Review of Recent Scholarship” (*Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 2001), to “Not Following Emerson: Intelligibility and Identity in the Authorship of Literature, Science, and Philosophy” (*The Midwest Quarterly* 2013), to “Translating Carlyle: Ruminating on the Models of Metafiction at the Emergence of an Emersonian Vernacular” (Religions 2017). His book chapters highlight varieties of Emerson's reception and influence: Emerson and *The Gates* in Central Park; Emerson and film; Emerson and Nietzsche; Emerson and John Stuart Mill; Emerson and Maurice Maeterlinck. Taken as a living body of thinking, LaRocca's scholarship demonstrates, in Emerson's words, the “broad, radiating, immensely distributive action of nature and of mind.”

In fact, one might say of LaRocca's scholarship what LaRocca says of the commonplace book for Emerson: it “is not a repository of finished thoughts ... but an atmosphere in which to think. Possessing an idea does not come from jotting it down under some heading but from perceiving its connection to other terms and fields, concepts and features” (*Emerson's English* 149). LaRocca's *Emerson's English Traits and the Natural History of Metaphor* (Bloomsbury 2013) is an exemplar of a book that provides “an atmosphere in which to think.” It's a capacious, engaging, and much-needed study of Emerson's *English Traits* and of what this “uncharacteristic hybrid, [this] unique specimen” (1) in Emerson's oeuvre teaches us about Emerson's (and our own) ways of thinking. In LaRocca's account, *English Traits* is a “work about the interaction between a concept and a country—about how we know a place by name, and understand its people by their characteristics” yet it takes the form of “a kaleidoscopic, interdisciplinary account” (2). A “hybridized mode of cultural critique” (2), it occasions

(Continued on page 4)

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ESP welcomes notes and short articles (up to eight double-spaced, typed pages) on Emerson-related topics. Manuscripts are blind refereed. On matters of style, consult previous issues. We also solicit news about Emerson-related community, school, and other projects; information about editions, publications, and research in progress on Emerson and his circle; queries and requests for information in aid of research in these fields; and significant news of Emersonian scholars. Send manuscripts to the editor, Michael Weisenburg, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina, 1322 Greene Street, Columbia, SC 29208, or emersonsocietypapers.editor@gmail.com (email submissions are much preferred).

Review copies of books on Emerson should be sent to book reviews editor Krissie West at Kristina.west@btopenworld.com; please email regarding address for physical copies.

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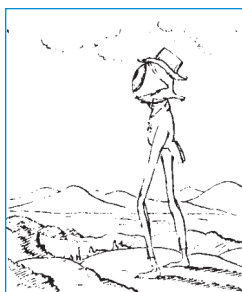
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PROSPECTS



RWES panels for ALA 2023

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society will sponsor two panels at the 34th Annual Conference of the American Literature Association, to be held May 25–28, 2023, at the Westin Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston. Both panels will honor the contributions of the late Professor Joel Myerson.

“Editing Emerson”

The Society welcomes proposals concerning the theory and practice of editing Emerson. The *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, one of the first scholarly editions of a major American literary figure, remains to this day a remarkable achievement. The Belknap series of the *Collected Works*, fifty years in the making, provides the complete standard edition of Emerson’s writing. It therefore seems appropriate to ask if the study of Emerson has entered a new phase. Does the completion of the scholarly editions of public and private writing foreclose certain forms of scholarly attention? Or do they provide insights and opportunities for younger scholars interested in working on digital editions? How might digital editions reimagine or refigure the *JMN* or the *Collected Works*? Proposals might also explore current editorial efforts related to Emerson, such as *The Almanacks of Mary Moody Emerson: A Scholarly Digital Edition* or consider diverse archives still in need of scholarly editions.

“Emerson in Conversation”

The Society seeks papers that place Emerson in conversation with new and unexpected interlocutors. “In excited conversation we have glimpses of the universe,” Emerson notes; elsewhere, in “Circles,” he observes the tendency of conversationalists to outgrow one another.

We welcome papers that imagine Emerson in “excited conversation” across diverse time periods, geographies, media, and cultures. We also welcome papers in which conversationalists probe the limitations of Emersonian

thought on their way to other discussions. Send 300-word abstracts by 15 January 2023 to Randall Fuller (randall-fuller@ku.edu). Membership in the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society is required of presenters.

More details about the ALA may be found here: <https://americanliteratureassociation.org>.

RWES panel for TAG 2023

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society will sponsor a panel at the 82nd Annual Gathering of the Thoreau Society (July 12–16, 2023) exploring the themes of Thoreau, politics, and extinction.

“Fates, Fortunes, and Resources in the Postbellum Republic”

In his 1863 lecture “Fortune of the Republic,” and at the peak of his lecture career after the Civil War, Emerson sounded the poles of hope and despair as he surveyed the state of the nation. He anticipated “a new era of equal rights” (*LL* II: 334), yet in his journal he remarked, “We hoped that in the Peace, after such a war, a great expansion would follow in the mind of the country: grand views in every direction,—true freedom in politics, in religion, in social science, in thought. But the energy of the nation seems to have expended itself in the war, and every interest is found as sectional & timorous as before” (*JMN* XV: 77–8).

This panel invites papers that explore how Emerson figures the fate of the nation and its resources, broadly defined, in the wake of the Civil War. How does he reassess, revise, and/or elaborate on his thinking about nature, technology, economy, and/or power? In what ways does he grapple with “extinction” events—personal, political, philosophical—and/or attempt to defy them? This panel is especially interested in papers that engage with Emerson’s later work, such as “American Civilization” (1862), “Fortune of the Republic” (1863), “Resources” (1864), “Progress of Culture” (1867), “Farming” (1870), and *Natural History of Intellect* (1870–71), and papers that reflect on continuities, shifts, and/or changes in Emerson’s thinking as he confronts the fates, fortunes, and resources of the postwar American landscape. Send 300-word abstracts by 15 January 2023 to Peter Balaam (pbalaam@carleton.edu).

More details about the TAG may be found here: <https://thoreausociety.org/events/annual-gathering-2023-thoreau-the-politics-of-extinction>.

DAA TO DAVID LARocca

(Continued from page 1)

reflection on what counts as cultural critique, what we mean by it, and how we practice it. “Can the achievement of *English Traits*—its metaphors, associations, combinations and methods—transfer intelligibly and intuitively to the present—that is, become pertinent for contemporary readers?” LaRocca asks. “Can a contemporary reader take away more than just an appreciation for the novelty of [Emerson’s] style, the richness of his examples and allusions, and the interdisciplinary inventiveness of his methodology?” (70). These questions prompt us to engage creatively with *English Traits* and with our own habits of reading, thinking, and writing, a provocation alive throughout LaRocca’s scholarship and inheritance of Emerson.

For example, in “Not Following Emerson: Intelligibility and Identity in the Authorship of Literature, Science, and Philosophy” (*The Midwest Quarterly* 2013), he describes how “Emerson’s influence on his best readers becomes invisible because in following him well, they no longer recognize him, but rather themselves” (132). In other words, “better known to themselves ... such readers become unknown to the rest of us. We can’t see them because instead of announcing affiliations and stipulating creeds that make them apparent they are in front of us doing their own work” (“Not Following” 132). LaRocca’s body of Emerson scholarship helps to make visible these readers and their work, a contribution that enriches Emerson studies, in particular, and by extension, the way we think about and pursue intellectual inquiry more generally.

A “closer look at Emerson’s writing,” LaRocca suggests, “and the way it gets read, appears to provide occasion for the fresh consideration of the promise involved in accepting and exploring the permeability and coherency of intellectual inquiry, however it takes up the mantle” (117). “Part of what the inheritance of Emerson’s work highlights for us,” he says, “—that is, for everyone thinking about or contributing to the range of humanistic and scientific endeavors; for poets and physicists, literary critics and philosophers, technology theorists, historians, artists, and educators—is how discerning radical variability is not necessarily at odds with the continuity of inquiry” (116). Today’s crises, both globally and locally within what is called higher education, require this approach to intellectual inquiry, as Emerson’s writing, in LaRocca’s account, makes clear.

“Emerson has long provoked scholars to explore the meanings of academic discourse and the role the academy plays in intellectual and everyday life,” LaRocca writes in his introduction to *Estimating Emerson*.

Several of the most prominent academic critics of Emerson’s work undertake metacritical reflections of the academic profession—including its conceptual categories, assigned titles, and accepted disciplines and fields of inquiry.

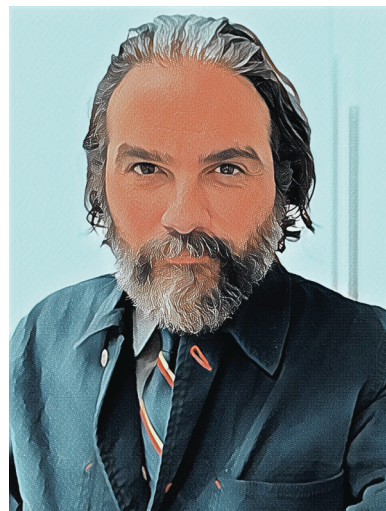
In this way, Emerson’s writing retains its ongoing challenge—truly a perpetual provocation—to any mode of complacency over the meaning and relevance of the academy. (19-20)

LaRocca’s scholarship cheers, raises, and guides us toward seeing and taking up the perpetual challenge of Emerson’s writing, writing that indeed “remains of vital significance to the ongoing evolution of thinking” (“Not Following” 134). Thank you, David, for work that opens possibilities for further reading, thinking, and writing—“with much effort and joy” (“Not Following” 134)—and for the lasting provocation that “there is yet so much left to say, to write, and to read about Emerson” (*Estimating* 21).

—Prentiss Clark, Associate Professor
Department of English, University of South Dakota

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Was Emerson a Relativist?

JEFF WIEAND

Emerson once wrote that “in all nations” there are minds that “incline to dwell in the conception of fundamental Unity” (CW IV: 28). One of these minds was Emerson himself. He famously maintained, for example, that there is one mind common to all individual persons, and, just to make sure no one thought there could be several such minds, he declared that “the mind that made the world is not one mind, but the mind” (CW VII: 25, emphasis added). This mind, which he also refers to as Spirit, the Universal Soul and various other appellations, is unitary and perfect, so that the ultimate fact that we reach on any subject is “the resolution of all into the ever-blessed ONE” (CW II: 40).

But it is a mistake to think that for Emerson, individual minds are a fantasy. And it is equally a mistake to say that the world created by the “one mind” (and that individual minds are part of) is an illusion. Though dazzled by the unitary perfection of Spirit, Emerson must also acknowledge the imperfect many. “Urged by an opposite necessity, the mind returns from the one to that which is not one...and affirms the necessary existence of variety” (CW IV: 28). Emerson describes the one and the many as strictly blended elements the existence of which are apparently mutually contradictory and exclusive. It is “the problem of thought to separate and to reconcile” them (28). This reconciliation will not name a victor; a balanced soul (like Plato) will be “perceptive of the two elements” (28) and show how they relate to one another. Put differently, as Joseph Urbas says, Emerson wants a synthesis; “he wants Nominalism and Realism, for he can accept neither of the doctrines in its starkest form” (83).

In this paper I will argue that in Emerson’s view, the many relates to the one *to the extent* it partakes of it. In other words, the nature and very existence of things is relative—relative to how close they come to Spirit, the One or All. To demonstrate this, we will consider how relativism plays out in the “eternal trinity” that Emerson says comprises Spirit: “Truth, Goodness and Beauty” (CW I: 214). “God is the all-fair,” he says. “Truth and goodness and beauty are but different faces of the same All” (CW I: 17). How do things in the world relate to these three faces?

To begin with beauty, which Emerson describes as the highest of the eternal trinity, the objective of the fine arts for Emerson is to make beautiful works that are *as close to* the absolute beauty of Spirit as possible. The artist is able to make a beautiful work through divine inspiration; the true work of art is the result of the artist listening to, and speaking for, Spirit. To do this, the artist must discard everything having to do with his or her particular circumstances—the things which make the artist an individual person distinct

from other persons and objects (and a part of the many)—and open him or herself to Spirit’s inspiration. By doing so, Spirit in effect becomes the artist, and the one mind common to all individual persons takes over the task of inspiring the art (i.e., the beauty) of the artwork.

However, the artist can only create another worldly object—a poem, a painting, a piano concerto; the artist cannot make a new perfectly beautiful being, of which there is and ever will be only one. As a result, the beauty of the artwork by definition falls short of the beauty of Spirit, that is, of absolute beauty. And here is where Emerson’s relativism becomes evident. “Every work of art,” says Emerson, “is *more or less* pure manifestation of” the mind that made the world (CW VII: 25, emphasis added). To the extent the manifestation is great, it is a great work of art, and if it lacks such manifestation altogether, the object is not a work of fine art at all. The existence of art or beauty in the world is entirely a question of degree, with the quality of the art in direct proportion to divine inspiration. Thus, in making art, “*so much as* we can shove aside our egotism, prejudice and will, and bring the omniscience of reason upon the subject before us, *so perfect is the work*” (24, emphasis added).

To achieve this is not a matter of talent or training, but rather of seeing or thinking deeply, and thus making contact with the universal mind. “Every composition proceeds out of a *greater or lesser depth* of thought” (CW X: 99, emphasis added). And this greater beauty and greater depth are perceived by and attract the audience for the artwork, and are the true goal of the artist. Art “should exhilarate, and throw down the walls of circumstance on every side, awakening in the beholder the same sense of universal relation and power which the work evinced in the artist” (CW II: 216). The artwork will never succeed in throwing down all of the walls, but the beauty of the work is nevertheless, to the extent successful, a vision of the beauty of Spirit.

Works of fine art, of course, are not the only beautiful things in the world. For Emerson, much of the inspiration to make beautiful artworks comes from the beauty of nature. Here, the real creator of beauty once again is Spirit, but its creation dates back to the origin of the cosmos. The beauty of individual things in nature is owing to what Spirit originally set in motion in creating the cosmos. But like the artwork, its beauty is a question of degree, the degree to which it participates and points to the beauty of Spirit. “Beauty in nature is not ultimate. It is the herald of inward and eternal beauty.... It must therefore stand as a part, and not as yet *the last or highest expression* of the final cause of Nature” (CW I: 17, emphasis added).

(Continued on page 6)

WAS EMERSON A RELATIVIST?

(Continued from page 5)

Another face of Spirit is “goodness.” Spirit is perfectly good, but as with beauty, the same cannot be said of the material world. The “many” are “good” *to the extent* that they partake of the divine nature. “Self-existence is the attribute of the Supreme Cause, and it constitutes the measure of good *by the degree* in which it enters into all other forms” (CW II: 40, emphasis added). Morality, like art, thus passes into metaphysics. “All things real are so by so much virtue as they contain” (40, emphasis added). Accordingly, “so much benevolence as a man hath, so much life hath he.” The opposite pole from absolute goodness is then non-existence. “Good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute: it is like cold, which is the privation of heat. All evil is so much death and nonentity. Benevolence is absolute and real” (CW I: 78).

Absolute badness is the opposite pole of absolute goodness, and we will never truly encounter either in the world. One is too perfect to be directly perceived; the other doesn’t exist. Good and bad actions do, however occur. Just as a “work of art” may be devoid of beauty without disappearing, so we do not disappear when we are sinful. In other words, the “evil” act we perceive occurs (it has an “objective existence”), but the evil that we hold accountable for the act does not; it is mere absence (CW III: 45).

Like everything else in the cosmos, the goodness of a thing can change; it can become more or less good. Things are not either perfect or sour; like a quart of milk in the refrigerator, they can deteriorate over time. When the milk becomes truly sour, its goodness is gone and it is undrinkable; before that, it is more or less so. Similarly, a person is made stronger by seeking good ends, “but *in so far as* he roves from these ends, he bereaves himself of power, of auxiliaries; *his being shrinks* out of all remote channels, he *becomes less and less*, a mote, a point, until absolute badness is absolute death” (79, emphasis added).

As noted earlier, nature is beautiful, but it is also good because it participates in absolute goodness. “All nature is the rapid efflux of goodness executing and organizing itself” (CW II: 184). Also like beauty, its presence in nature is the result of Spirit’s original creative act, not additional administration by Spirit, and depends on the organic development of this act for the good’s continued presence. Nature is thus not itself absolute goodness and “not alone a solid and satisfying good” (CW I: 17).

And finally, we have the face of truth. At first glance, truth appears less suited to a relativist treatment than the other two faces of Spirit. After all, if a proposition must be either true or false, can there be any room for degrees of truth?

The answer is “yes and no.” Emerson basically thinks there are two kinds of truth: As with beauty and goodness, Spirit, the One, the All, the perfect being, is absolute truth. There is no truth by degree in Spirit. But here in the world of the many--the universe--we often say that one thing “is closer to the truth” than another. If there are three quarts of milk in the refrigerator, the proposition that there are two, though false, is “more true” than the proposition that there is only one. Emerson speaks this way himself on occasion. He writes that Christianity in its current form, for example, can be said to be “relatively true” (L I: 179), and that we capture the world in our words “in proportion to” the truth we speak (JMN VII: 513).

Moreover, while Spirit sits in smiling repose, “truth” in the world of the many is constantly changing and advancing. As Emerson points out in his essay “Circles,” “there are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees” (CW II: 180). Thus, “every thing is medial” and “every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series” (181). We accept things as true today only to accept different truths tomorrow. This occurs when a person is shown a new idea that “commands” his or her existing idea. “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.” The extent to which it will go “depends on the force or truth of the individual soul” (180). But the perception of truth is not simply a matter of intellect (no more than beauty is a matter of talent, or goodness of virtue). Courage or valor help a person move forward to accept new truths. Valor for a person “consists in the power of self-recovery This can only be by his preferring truth to his past apprehension of truth, and his alert acceptance of it from whatever quarter;” (183).

The process of drawing circles never ends. “Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep, a lower deep opens” (CW II: 179). All things are thus “in a scale; and, begin where we will, ascend and ascend” (CW IV: 38). Indeed, life itself is a “scale of degrees” (12). It follows that, no matter where we are in the self-evolving circle, we will not have achieved absolute truth, no more than absolute virtue, goodness or beauty. Thus, we must be prepared constantly to revise our thinking. “He in whom the love of Truth predominates will keep himself aloof from all moorings and afloat. He will abstain from dogmatism” (JMN V: 112).

This abstention not only protects us from being trapped in the past; it opens our existing ideas to the new ideas of the future. Emerson’s real message regarding truth is that we obtain more of it to the extent we desire it and therefore

search for it. “A man has got to learn that he must embrace the truth or shall never know it, that to be thankful for *a little is a way to get more*” (JMN IV: 51, emphasis added). We must be open to increasing our knowledge and better appreciating the truth, beauty and goodness of Spirit.

In sum, Emerson was a relativist because he thought that qualities in the world exist to the extent they partake of Spirit and an absolutist because he thought that ultimate existence and perfection were only properties of the ever-blessed ONE.

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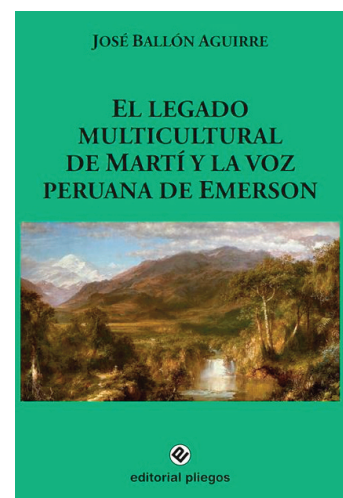
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Reviews

EL LEGADO MULTICULTURAL DE MARTÍ Y LA VOZ PERUANA DE EMERSON. José Ballón, Madrid: Editorial Pliegos, 2022. 767 pp.

José Ballón’s work discusses Emerson’s literary influence on the Cuban patriot and writer José Martí. His latest book, *El Legado Multicultural de Martí y la voz Peruana de Emerson* [José Martí’s Multicultural Legacy and Emerson’s Peruvian Voice], considers Emerson’s multicultural background, with a focus on Emerson’s early journals. Specifically, in Chapter II, Professor Ballón analyzes the presence of Emerson’s “Peruvian voice” in journal entries written during Emerson’s time at Harvard and shortly thereafter (1820–1822). Influenced by George Ticknor, Edward Everett, and the writings of Alexander

von Humboldt, Charles Sismondi and William Robertson, Emerson reimagines Shakespeare’s Ariel and Caliban in a poetic, counter-conquest. Other chapters address Martí’s readings of Emerson’s *Nature* (1836) as well as the later “Nature” from *Essays: Second Series* (1844), and the importance of Emerson and Martí from a hemispheric perspective.



(Continued on page 8)

REVIEWS

(Continued from page 7)

CARLYLE, EMERSON AND THE TRANSATLANTIC USES OF AUTHORITY: LITERATURE, PRINT, PERFORMANCE. Tim Sommer, Edinburgh University Press, 2021. 280 pp. £85 hardcover

The first part of Tim Sommer's title addresses one of the most time-honored connections in nineteenth-century literary studies: the friendship between Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle, arguably the century's two preeminent philosophical essayists writing in English. In the late 1820s and early 1830s, Ralph Waldo Emerson came across Thomas Carlyle's unsigned disquisitions on literature in *The Edinburgh Review* and other similar venues and in Carlyle he discovered an exemplar of his own aspirations. In a sense he took possession of him, calling him "my Germanick [*sic*] new-light writer" and he drew from his example an intellectual courage that would become a hallmark of his own works. "He gives us confidence in our principles," he wrote in his journal, feeling connected by the "perfect railroad" that literature sometimes makes possible between isolated readers. In 1833, three years prior to the publication of *Nature*, before he was anybody in the literary universe, Emerson made a pilgrimage to visit Carlyle at his home in Scotland. When he returned to New England, Emerson became an exponent of Carlyle's works, sharing his serialized copies of *Sartor Resartus* (1834) with his incipient literary/Transcendentalist circle and helping to arrange for its American publication in book-form. He found in Carlyle an exemplar of philosophical investigation and a stylistic model that allowed for a new kind of cultural critique that Emerson would soon make his own in the essays for which he is best remembered. As the nineteenth-century progressed, Emerson's star would rise instantiating his centrality to American literary and philosophical currents, influencing figures beyond Concord and Transcendentalism such as Whitman and Nietzsche, while Carlyle's star would glow and plateau and descend into a kind of melancholy moodiness that veered between a principled disgust with the quackery of the world and racially charged vitriol, making him an object of controversy, sympathy and abiding interest, such that the London-based American painter, James Abbott MacNeil Whistler, would portray the Scot in a similar pose to the one of his mother. Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 2: Portrait of Thomas Carlyle*, painted in the early 1870s, seemed to capture this mixture.

The second part of Sommer's title, "the Transatlantic Uses of Authority," has a more recent vintage. As comparative literature and cultural studies have sought since the 1980s to expand beyond and problematize the boundaries of nation and national literary histories, transoceanic and

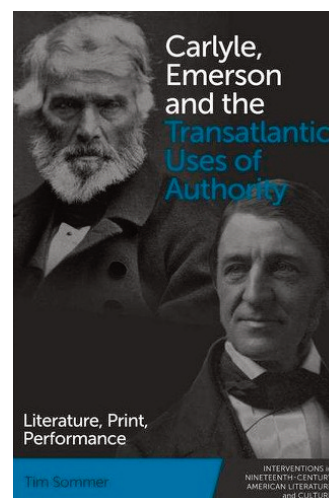
transnational studies have become more than sites of inquiry, but frameworks for cultural analysis. Sommer's monograph expresses its commitment this way:

Combining intellectual history with cultural sociology and book history, *Carlyle, Emerson and the Transatlantic Uses of Authority* argues for a transatlantic comparativism that—while retaining an interest in the mechanics of textual transfer and adaptation—aims at providing a thicker description of the discursive and institutional dimensions of nineteenth-century transnational exchange (3).

The Geertzian overtones of terms like "thicker description" might lead a reader to think that what follows is kind of cultural anthropology of the Anglo-American literary alliance that Emerson and Carlyle forged, but by "uses of authority"—a rather elusive and all-encompassing term—the author provides not so much a thick description but a meta-discursive analysis about the ways that Carlyle and Emerson's works were received, disseminated, marketed, and, as the two became public figures and national emblems, how they themselves came to circulate as public speakers, taking on in the process iconic and canonical stature. The uses of authority turn out to be the ideological concepts, marketing strategies, and discursive patterns that served as binding agents that linked Carlyle and Emerson. There are paired chapters on race and nationhood; national literature, patriotism, and cosmopolitanism; the marketing and literary promotion of Carlyle in the American 1830s for which Emerson was crucial, and, after a certain amount of success on that front, it's return stroke—the middling promotion of Carlyle in Britain as an author who had

obtained influence if not exactly popularity in the United States; the cultural implications of Emerson's career as a lecturer in Britain and Europe, and the reverberations of Carlyle's much scantier public-speaking appearances. Using these pairings, Sommer seeks to capture the transatlantic fields in which these two figures operated and circulated and then to analyze the ways in which their shared and mutual authority recirculated.

Sommer's erudite monograph provides nuanced discussions of the use of such terms as Anglo-Saxon as a racial, philological, and stylistic marker. A strong chapter on nationalism and literature does a fine job of locating Carlyle and Emerson on a nationalistic spectrum that ranges from



jingoistic patriotism to transnational patriotism. Surprisingly, he finds that Emerson and Carlyle tend to adhere to an “genuinely Hederian” variety (76) that tries to balance the commitments to individual creativity with the imperatives of the nation, what Kwame Anthony Appiah has called “rooted cosmopolitanism.” (qtd. 77). Those interested in book history and the literary marketplace will find wide-ranging discussions of how the careers of the two main figures under scrutiny exploited and were subject to the vagaries of market forces, copyright law, and the biases of transnational reading publics.

As illuminating as the mapping of Emerson and Carlyle across a nineteenth-century transatlantic field can be, at times this approach can flatten out these two figures, as if they were at every turn the functions of the domains in which they circulated. While it is helpful to see Emerson as a self-styled North American Anglo-Saxon (no mention of New England or Concord in that sense!) in tandem with Carlyle as a hyper-Germanized Anglicized Scot, it would be equally helpful to give some direct examples alongside the well-known critical opinion that surrounds their works. On the important questions of race, abolition, democracy in the United States, especially with respect to Emerson and the test of friendship these commitments must have exerted on his relationship to his old literary hero, I think this study could have been more direct, or perhaps more direct than the transatlantic frame allows.

Despite Carlyle’s vitriol toward the United States and its democratic institutions, his thorough-going unreconstructed Pro-Slavery positions, and his arrant racism, in the end as exhibited in his notorious essay “Shooting Niagara and After?” (1867), Sommers offers no new insights as to why Emerson “remained unwavering in his lenience” (227) toward Carlyle on these topics. After their deaths, Sommers charts the canonization of the Carlyle-Emerson relationship as if it was a literary accord anticipating the “special relationship” between the United States and Great Britain invoked by Churchill and FDR. Robert Weisbuch in his classic study *Transatlantic Double-Cross* suggests that Whitman in *Democratic Vistas*, which was among other things a rejoinder to Carlyle’s “Shooting Niagara,” was being polite in his dismissal of “Emerson’s English hero” (86).

In Sommer’s reckoning we gain less of a sense of how the transatlantic perspective gives us access to Emerson’s moral calculus on the subject. Perhaps in such transatlantic alliances such differences must be set aside in a show of unity. Nonetheless this question, Sommers has produced a strong and valuable comparative study.

—Stephen Rachman
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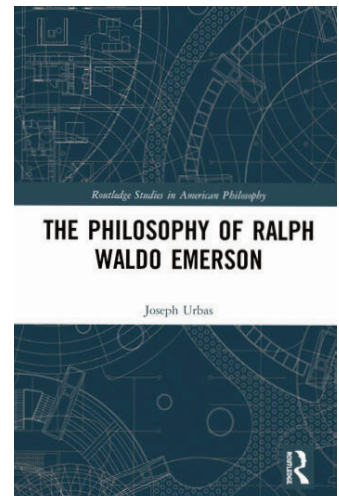
THE PHILOSOPHY OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON. Joseph Urbas, Routledge Studies in American Philosophy, 2021. 316 pp. \$39 paper.

Joseph Urbas has written another learned, careful, patient exposition of Emerson’s thought, recalling us to the Emerson who boldly posits startling claims about the nature of reality, knowledge, morality, and so forth. Any reader of Emerson should benefit from the breadth of his readings and his synoptic ability. I did, and I expect to continue rereading the book as I reread and teach Emerson.

The book tracks several areas of interest, building from Emerson’s consistent belief that an identity underwrites the full surfeit of changes that bloom and buzz across nature. But it does more than remake Urbas’s argument from *Emerson’s Metaphysics* (2016). Epistemology, ethics, esthetics, religion, and politics also receive chapter-length treatment, although Urbas treats Emerson’s conception of identity through metamorphosis as the lynchpin of his philosophy, and Emerson as a process philosopher across many of the subfields surveyed.

Many who already regard Emerson as a philosopher are likely to appreciate Urbas’s reconstruction, although some will wonder: but is he a good philosopher? Urbas sticks to exposition via reconstruction, but if we are going to read Emerson as a philosopher, we eventually need to assess him as such. But some, like me, remain uncertain that a self-described poet in prose should be read as a philosopher, at least in any simple sense. I know that some find the issue tiresome, but the question helps one think about what to prioritize when reading. It also opens possibilities for what philosophy can be. Is this philosophizing of a new order? Finally, Emerson often distances himself from philosophy. Speaking of nature, he says: “It will not be dissected, nor unraveled, nor shown. Away profane philosopher! Known it will not be, but gladly beloved and enjoyed.” (CW 1, 125) This and other passages suggest that Emerson also wondered about his place in “philosophy.”

Urbas reconstructs Emerson’s philosophy by weighing the “weight of textual evidence drawn from the entire Emerson corpus, including the poetry and sermons, since there is a great deal of philosophy in those writings too.” (6) Such a path rests on content-analysis, organizing it within typical sub-disciplinary fields, much as we find in Van Leer’s *Emerson’s Epistemology* (1986) and Van Cromphout’s



(Continued on page 10)

REVIEWS

(Continued from page 9)

Emerson's Ethics (1999). Urbas supplements this with comparisons to figures such as Bacon, James, Montaigne, Plato, and Schelling, and in this his study is akin to Goodman's *American Philosophy before Pragmatism* (2015). But these contextualizations serve the larger project of reconstructing of Emerson's beliefs about the nature of reality, knowledge, and so forth.

I find such an approach insufficient. I could imagine a prayer that includes metaphysical, ethical, epistemological, and political themes. Does that render the prayer an instance of philosophy? But maybe "instance," suggesting a Platonist terrain of universals and particulars, is the wrong word. If, like me, you consider writing a praxis, you might ask: do those themes render the prayer an act of philosophy? These questions are not rhetorical, although my potential counterexample does press the following: is philosophy reducible to a belief system, or is it also a matter of how that system is presented and justified?

Emerson also considered questions of presentation and justification, and it was at these very junctures that he tended to distance himself from philosophy, whether by favoring intuition over analysis, metaphor over inference, or provocation over demonstration. Consider an extended passage that Urbas cites as the "most detailed account of [Emerson's] bipolar metaphysics ..." (17). In his Plato essay, Emerson presents philosophy as the "account which the human mind gives to itself of the constitution of the world," asserting that it "is impossible to speak, or to think without embracing ..." two cardinal facts, Oneness and Otherness. (ibid) The passage is curious because the necessity that Emerson invokes actually comes from the mind. Urbas observes this but insists that the "necessities he refers to are not of mind only; they are also true of reality as a whole." (ibid) But has Emerson demonstrated this, or even tried to? The passage cited asserts: "The mind is *urged* to ask for one cause of many effects; then for the cause of that; and again the cause, diving still into the profound; *self-assured* that it shall arrive at an absolute and sufficient One, a One that shall be All." (ibid—emphases added) I italicized "*urged*" and "*self-assured*" because one could easily read them as a refusal of philosophy akin to what one finds in "Self-Reliance," where Emerson terms involuntary perceptions the "last fact behind which analysis cannot go," adding: "If we ask whence this comes, if we seek to pry into the soul that causes, all philosophy is at fault." (CW2, 37) Note also that the passage Urbas cites describes philosophy, what it does, and what propels it. Does this indicate that the speaker is working within philosophy? Does the passage enact philosophy?

Reading Emerson is a tricky affair. Different approaches pay different dividends. My own work eschews historicism, and at some cost, although I defend my approach in

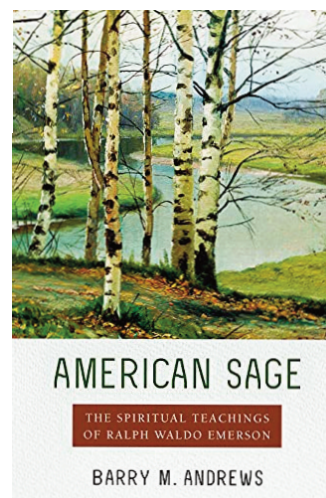
Emerson & Self-Culture. With regard to the issue of Emerson's "philosophy," I wish Urbas had accounted more thoroughly for what the term entails and where and how one locates it in texts as rhetorically diverse as Emerson's, particularly when one reads from essay into sermon into note-book and poem. This is not to deny the book's achievements: those interested in the subject areas covered will find readings aplenty to entertain and weigh. But I think Emerson's contribution to philosophy, which is, in the least, also a profound challenge, demands a more reflective and systematic approach to "philosophy" as a phenomenon.

—John Lysaker,
Emory University

AMERICAN SAGE: THE SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON. Barry M. Andrews. University of Massachusetts Press, 2021, 237 pp. \$26.95 paper.

With *American Sage*, Barry M. Andrews presents an engaging and highly readable overview of Emerson's spiritual teachings. It may seem odd, given that Emerson founded no school and claimed no disciples, that Andrews, a retired Universalist Unitarian minister and author, presents Emerson's writings as "teachings." The book proceeds chronologically, for the most part, and Andrews does a good job of correlating advances in Emerson's thinking with developments in Emerson's professional life as minister, essayist, and lecturer. The teachings cast a double light: Emerson's spiritual influence on his age, as well as, in chapter-ending practical analyses, Andrews's application of Emersonian thought today.

Andrews seeks to qualify Emerson as a "sage" as the concept is described by classicist Julia Annas. A sage is one who exhibits a life of *eudaimonia*, or "flourishing" as a way of living: "What is good for us to do is that which is conducive to human flourishing or living virtuously," writes Andrews. A sage is no different from anyone else, but serves as an example of the virtuous life: self-improvement, self-reliance, and, significantly for Andrews, self-culture. Annas describes a double conception of the sage: a "person living according to an ideal which transcends the everyday ... rising above it and regarding ordinary life, its concerns and troubles, as petty and fleeting" as well as a "person whose ideal virtue is displayed not in raising above the everyday but precisely in staying at that level and dealing with it."



"Over the years," Andrews writes, "Emerson's spirituality developed from the providential Deism of his youth to a form of deep pantheism later in life." Andrews traces this development through Emerson's writings, paying particular attention to moments of crisis (such as his decision to leave active ministry in 1832). Andrews succeeds admirably in this, though more recognition of events in Emerson's personal life may have been offered that had profound consequences for the development of his spirituality (the death of his first wife, Ellen, for example, or the death of his brother Edward). These events compromised, confused, and in some ways perhaps liberated Emerson's career (as well as qualifying Emerson as a sage in Annas' second definition of the concept).

A particular strength of Andrews's book is the author's clear, distinct definitions of terms, which lends the book a greater sense of readability. For scholars, it's good to have specific terms qualified in the sense Andrews believes Emerson's work articulates them; for general readers (who should as well benefit from this book), concepts are defined in the context of discussion, avoiding necessary outside reference (or flipping to notes at the back of the book). Andrews here performs a merciful service for his readers. That being said, one feels a lack of clarity in the distinction between "spiritual" and "religious." In my own reading of Emerson's work and biography, I sense a distinction between "religious" writing (that is, institutional, doctrinal) and "spiritual" writing (poetic, transcendental). Andrews does qualify the terms in his Introduction, noting that in Emerson's era "spirituality" referred to a religious tradition, writing that for Emerson, "spirituality" is "the essence of religion." One senses an overlap here. If Emerson's essence of religion amplifies specific religious practice, then it seems that the concept "spirituality" is in a sense a measure of the authentic viability of religious forms. (A still larger concern lies in determining what writing of Emerson is *not* spiritual.) Still, Andrews admirably leads the reader through Emerson's best known, and most often cited, essays to outline the development of Emerson's thought.

Andrews demonstrates Emerson's movement toward a religious naturalism: the capacity to experience the divine within a natural framework. In this sense, Emerson's development leads to a state which Andrews, drawing on the work of Jerome Stone and Robert Corrington, calls "deep pantheism," an ecstatic form of naturalism, a key transition of Emerson's spiritual thought from objective idealism ("the idea that the universe is a creation of God's mind") to subjective idealism ("the idea that the universe is a creation of the human mind"). Andrews prepares the way earlier in the book by detailing Emerson's readings in Plato, Kant, and Coleridge. Deep pantheism (as opposed to pantheism, the idea that God exists outside the universe but contains all of the universe), for Andrews, represents the fullness of Emerson's spiritual thought.

Andrews's book is a systematic overview of an encompassing theme of Emerson's writing. However, I find a lack of attention to poetry / poetics in relation to Emerson's spiritual modality. Andrews limits his consideration of Emerson's poetics solely to his versifying. In a February 1835 letter to Lydian, Emerson wrote, "I am born a poet, of a low class without doubt yet a poet. That is my nature & vocation. My singing be sure is very 'husky,' & is for the most part in prose. Still I am a poet in the sense of a perceiver & dear lover of the harmonies that are in the soul & in matter, & specially of the correspondences between these & those" (*L* I:435). He writes in "The Poet" that "The world being ... put under the mind for verb and noun, the poet is he who can articulate it" (*CW* III:12). Taking 'world' as antecedent of the pronoun, we see that Emerson's poet is a type of ideal writer. I would suggest that poetry is the mode of Emerson's spiritual writing.

Moreover, Andrews states that "in Whitman, Emerson found the poet he had been looking for." Emerson's call is for an *ideal* poet (Emerson writes of Shakespeare, his "representative poet," "It is easy to see that what is best written or done by genius, in the world, was no man's work, but came by wide social labor, when a thousand wrought like one, sharing the same impulse" [*CW* IV: 114]). Given Emerson's outlook as subjective idealism, we might think of his "ideal poet" as one who intuits the divine in his or her expression. As Andrews quotes from "The Transcendentalist" (and notes that we should think of Emerson himself as the "Transcendentalist youth" imagined here): "There is a wide difference between my faith and other faith; and mine is a certain brief experience which surprised me in the highway or in the market, in some place, at some time, — whether in the body or out of the body—God knoweth—and made me aware that I had played the fool with fools all this time, but that the law existed for me *and for all*; that to me belonged trust, a child's trust and obedience, and the worship of ideas, and I should never be fool more" (*CW* I:213) (emphasis added). Whitman is the kind of ideal poet Emerson hoped to see, but not the single, definitive poet; rather, poetry is the definitive *mode* of the Transcendentalist.

It may be argued that this emphasis of poetics falls outside the scope of Andrews' book on Emerson's spiritual writing, but I'm not sure it does. Given Emerson's claim that "poetry was all written before time was" (*CW* III:5), poetry seems the ideal modality for expression of the divine. As Robert Richardson has noted, Emerson did not make a firm distinction between poetry and prose; he used the terms poet to mean either verse maker or writer (*Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, 179). But, overall Andrews's book is finely executed. *American Sage* is a welcome addition to the Emerson bookshelf.

—Bill Scalia
St Mary's Seminary and University

Emerson's 'Believing Love' in *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*

TODD H. RICHARDSON

Ralph Waldo Emerson's words have brought peace and gentle guidance to many spiritual seekers over many years. Far from "acquiescing" to despair after the devastating loss of Ellen Tucker Emerson, brothers Charles and Edward, and his son Waldo, as Stephen Whicher has argued, Emerson manifested a remarkable capacity to transform personal loss into a public message of hope, life purpose, and resilience accessible to anyone who had experienced similar devastation.¹ Among those who have found great moral purpose in Emerson's writings are friends and family members of alcoholics who have watched helplessly as their loved ones are slowly destroyed by the ravages of their addiction. Happily, some find their way to a program called Al-Anon, a twelve-step fellowship where members "share their experience, strength, and hope in order to solve their common problems."² One of the common texts, *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* (*ODAT* for short), first published in 1968, consists of 366 daily readings with edifying content on coming to terms with family alcoholism supported by a quote from a philosopher, religious text, or theologian. Emerson's words are quoted for seven readings, far more than any other source except the Bible and Thomas à Kempis, medieval author of *The Imitation of Christ* (c. 1418-1427).

The emotional and spiritual impact of living with alcoholism is clear. As one member puts it in another standard text, *How Al-Anon Works: for Families and Friends of Alcoholics*, "We let our personalities slip away until we were emotionally numb."³ Another writes, "We have lost track of the separation between ourselves and others, especially the alcoholic.... We have become so enmeshed with another person's life and problems that we have lost the knowledge that we are separate individuals."⁴ Yet another observes that "We have been profoundly affected by the disease of alcoholism ... All of our energy is wasted on hopeless endeavor until there is nothing left over for attending to our own needs."⁵ While many would recognize obvious losses that come with alcoholism, such as financial security, marriage, and family, these quotes suggest that the loss of *self* is the most devastating loss of all. Reclaiming self, then, is the focal point of Al-Anon's program of recovery. As *How Al-Anon Works* puts it, "Taking the [twelve] steps is an ongoing learning experience in which every action brings us a new awareness of ourselves."⁶

Readers of Emerson understand that reclaiming the lost or unknown self, even when it means separation from others, is central to his work as a cultural leader. Eminently quotable lines from his work make that point evident. As he writes in "Self-Reliance," "I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you" (CW II: 42) and "Nothing can bring you

peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles" (CW II: 51). In "Circles" he writes, "But the heart refuses to be imprisoned" (CW II: 181). It would seem apparent why early members of Al-Anon would draw so heavily upon Emerson's message of self-culture for *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*.

The beginnings of Al-Anon and *ODAT* date back to 1939, when families of alcoholics started attending meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous to better understand how they could help their loved ones.⁷ It soon became clear that they needed a fellowship of their own for their unique struggles. Lois W., married to one of A.A.'s founders, Bill W., was instrumental in the foundation of Al-Anon.⁸ Shortly after, members began authoring common texts to help members on the pathway to recovery of self. In 1966, Alice B., chair of the Literature Committee, was appointed by Al-Anon's World Service Organization to assemble, write, and edit *ODAT*, which she accomplished in two years with the help of six other members.⁹ As she later explained in *Many Voices, One Journey: Al-Anon Family Groups*, the standard history of the organization, "Al-Anon literature is not signed by any one person because it reflects the thoughts of so many people."¹⁰ Certainly this approach toward authorship has helped *ODAT* resonate with so many for so long.

In the same history, Alice B. explains that the quotations at the end of each daily reading, including those from Emerson, "involved much source-searching, and a heavy load of correspondence with writers and publishers responsible for protecting their copyrights."¹¹ While she and her committee remained largely faithful to the original quotations, they sometimes tweaked the wording to make a passage accessible to a modern audience with considerable variation in education level. In a 1968 letter to Bob P. about a selection from Emerson's "Spiritual Laws" that reads "If we will not be mar-plots with our miserable interferences" (CW II 81-2), Alice B. wrote,

Your kidding about the marplot led me to tamper with Mr. Emerson's immortal words—to their improvement, I flatter myself. I had misgivings about it too – it's so quaint as to be lost on many people. I changed it to "If it were not for our miserable interferences ...": That IS better, don't you think? I'm sure Ralph Waldo won't mind.¹²

Alice B.'s rationale for revision is clear. It also seems clear that she does not undertake such revision lightly. Despite her playful quip that she is "improving" on "Emerson's immortal words," she is apprehensive that she is merely "tampering." Although there is no known record of who drew so heavily upon Emerson for *ODAT*, it is entirely

possible that Alice B. herself selected the seven quotations given her obvious knowledge of and respect for Emerson.

Although this selection from “Spiritual Laws” did not appear in the final version of *ODAT*, two others from the essay did, along with two each from “Compensation” and “Self-Reliance,” and one from “Considerations by the Way.” All seven of the quotations reinforce Al-Anon’s fundamental message – members are best served when they give up their misery-inducing desire to control what is uncontrollable and instead search for guidance and life purpose from a divine source. Only then are they free to make meaningful contributions to the world.

The first two Emerson selections, one each from “Compensation” and “Considerations by the Way,” admonish readers to take responsibility for their own unhappiness. Although *ODAT* attributes both of these readings to Emerson, he drew them from other writers. Nevertheless, Emerson made them his own just as Al-Anon made Emerson their own. The first selection, from St. Bernard as quoted in “Compensation,” reads: “Nothing can work damage to me except myself; the harm that I sustain I carry about with me and never am a real sufferer except by my own fault.” As the daily reading preceding the quotation explains, readers become mired in “spiritual standstill” when they blame problems on circumstances outside themselves, such as someone else’s addiction, and actually become co-creators of their misery. Instead, they should learn to be the “captains” of their “souls” to find life direction free of despair.¹³ The Al-Anon message certainly resonates with a central theme running through Emerson’s “Compensation,” that habits of true life expression free of blame, self-gratification, and need for control establish the pathway of an unencumbered self. As Emerson puts it, “Under all this running sea of circumstance, whose waters ebb and flow with perfect balance, lies the aboriginal abyss of real Being” (*CW* II 70).

Much the same message appears in the second selection, this one from “Considerations by the Way.” According to Albert J. von Frank, the verse was likely authored by Stanislas, Chevalier de Boufflers (*CW* IX 527). It reads as follows:

Some of your hurts you have cured,
And the sharpest you’ve even survived,
But what torments of grief you’ve endured,
From evils which never arrived.¹⁴

While the first selection chastises readers for indulging in blame, the second holds readers accountable for their anxiety. The verse fits well with Emerson’s purpose in “Considerations by the Way,” which is to “school” the “masses.” “I wish not to concede anything to them,” Emerson continues, “but to tame, drill, divide and break them up, and draw individuals out of them” (*CW* IX 132). In turn, that message is well adapted to Al-Anon’s as articulated in the reading preceding the verse selection, which, again, is to teach readers to stop creating their own misery through

useless worry. “We suffer more than we need to,” the text begins, “and often, perhaps, because we really want to.”¹⁵

How, then, are readers to avoid such avoidable misery? According to both Emerson and Al-Anon, through a relationship with the divinity. This is the subject of the next two selections, both from “Spiritual Laws.” The first reads, “A little consideration of what takes place around us every day, would show us that a higher law than that of our will, regulates events; that our painful experiences are not necessary. A believing love will relieve us of a vast load of care. Oh, my brothers, God exists!” A “believing love” in a “higher law,” then, is the means to transform the “painful experiences” generated by unnecessary blame and fear. Emerson’s message meshes well with the Al-Anon daily reading. For those immiserated by others’ drinking, belief in this “higher law” can “set [their] feet on firm ground” and show them the way to spiritual transformation and renewed life purpose.¹⁶

The second selection from “Spiritual Laws” offers more clues as to how this “higher law” is prepared to offer instruction. It reads, “There is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening, we shall hear the right word. Certainly there is a right for you that needs no choice on your part. Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which flows into your life. Then, without effort, you are impelled to truth and to perfect contentment.” Spiritual surrender, presented as an abstract possibility in the first reading, now takes shape as something rich to yearn for—a “stream of power and wisdom” eminently accessible to anyone. Even those whose lives have been devastated by addiction can realize “truth and perfect contentment” by “lowly listening” to currents of gentle divinity. The Al-Anon text preceding that from Emerson recognizes that the program’s teaching is a “distillation of the central thought of philosophers through the centuries”; it is therefore “wise to accept their wisdom as greater than my own.”¹⁷ Where the philosophical selections throughout *ODAT* usually only reinforce Al-Anon teaching, here it seems that the Emerson selection, a “distilled ... thought” from a “philosopher,” actually gives shape to it.

With divine agency’s release of misery-inducing behaviors comes effective life purpose. Here *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* finds inspiration in three selections from Emerson. Two are from “Self-Reliance,” an essay famous, as we know, for exhorting readers to forego all false influences, both internal and external, that would lead them astray from true being and true calling. The first counsels readers that significant work for the good of others is essential. To become ready, hearts must be transformed. Emerson writes, “Men imagine they communicate their virtue ... only by overt actions and words. They do not see that virtue or its opposite emits a breath at every moment.” The upshot both for Emerson and Al-Anon is to take the inward process of transformation (“self-culture” for Emerson and “recovery” for Al-Anon) very seriously. Only then will readers have

(Continued on page 14)

EMERSON'S BELIEVING LOVE

(Continued from page 13)

something substantial to offer the world. As the passage before the Emerson quotation advises, “The regeneration must be a true spiritual rebirth. It must go very deep, with each character flaw replaced by a new and good quality.”¹⁸

The second selection from “Self-Reliance” suggests that “A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done otherwise shall give him no peace.” The quotation is paired with an Al-Anon passage that warns against “irrational or false accusations by the alcoholic.” Internalizing such abuse creates “trouble” and “weight” that prevents readers from “putting into [their] day all [they] are capable of.” Learning to be free of such abuse allows them to “have something worthwhile to give others.”¹⁹ Like Emerson, Al-Anon teaches that transformation of personal flaws and assiduous uncovering and expression of life purpose are essential not only for peace of mind but for the good of the larger world. Any deleterious influences must be rejected.

The final quotation, another from “Compensation,” serves well as a culmination of Emerson’s philosophy in Al-Anon. It reads, “Has a man gained anything who has received a hundred favors and rendered none? He is great who confers the most benefits.” According to Emerson and Al-Anon, as we have seen, we are to engage in disciplines of personal transformation for our own peace of mind and well-being. But the true test of effective transformation is an increased capacity to serve others. The accompanying Al-Anon text sums it up this way: “It is through giving love, freely and without expectation of return, that we find ourselves, build ourselves spiritually.”²⁰ And that’s a pretty good way of putting it.

What of the long-term impact of *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*? As of 2020, more than 6.1 million copies of have appeared in English through multiple editions and printings. An unknown number have been translated into seventeen languages including Russian, Hebrew, Dutch, and Afrikaans.²¹ As one Al-Anon member has affirmed, *ODAT* “showed me that I was not alone. I became a real person because of the wisdom I have received. ... After 37 years, it continues to speak to me.”²² Emerson scholars are well aware of the long history of misappropriations and misreadings of Emerson, from genteel critics who sanitized Emerson’s radical thought to Donald Trump who finds permission for brutal self interest in “Self-Reliance.”²³ Yet Al-Anon’s use of Emerson’s words seems remarkably faithful to his original purpose – to assist readers in becoming the truest and freest expression of themselves.

—Todd H. Richardson, Professor of English
University of Texas Permian Basin

Special thanks to Susan Dunston for early feedback on this essay and to Joe T., Al-Anon’s archivist, and Tom C., Al-Anon’s Associate Director of Communications, for history of *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*.

¹ Stephen E. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953.

² From the “Preamble,” which is read before Al-Anon meetings. *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* (New York: Al-Anon Family Groups, 1968), p. iv.

³ *How Al-Anon Works: for Families and Friends of Alcoholics*. (Virginia Beach, VA: Al-Anon Family Groups, 1995), p. 23.

⁴ *How Al-Anon Works*, 82.

⁵ *How Al-Anon Works*, 45.

⁶ *How Al-Anon Works*, 43.

⁷ *Many Voices, One Journey: Al-Anon Family Groups* (Virginia Beach, VA: Al-Anon Family Groups, 2011), 13.

⁸ Al-Anon asks that members’ anonymity be observed, so last names are not included here.

⁹ *Many Voices, One Journey*, 143–44.

¹⁰ *Many Voices, One Journey*, 185.

¹¹ *Many Voices, One Journey*, 144.

¹² Alice B. Letter to Bob P. 28 February 1968. B-06. Archives, Al-Anon Family Groups, Virginia Beach, VA.

¹³ *ODAT*, 347. The original text from Emerson reads: “Nothing can work me damage except myself; the harm that I sustain I carry about with me, and never am a real sufferer but by my own fault” (*CW* II 71).

¹⁴ *ODAT*, 226. The original text from Emerson reads:

Some of your griefs you have cured,
And the sharpest you still have survived;
But what torments of pain you endured
From evils that never arrived! (*CW* 6:141)

The selection also appears as “Borrowing. From the French” in *May-Day and Other Pieces* (*CW* IX 527).

¹⁵ *ODAT*, 226.

¹⁶ *ODAT*, 168. The original text from Emerson reads: “A little consideration of what takes place around us every day would show us, that a higher law than that of our will regulates events; that our painful labors are unnecessary, and fruitless; that only in our easy, simple, spontaneous action are we strong, and by contenting ourselves with obedience we become divine. Belief and love, — a believing love will relieve us of a vast load of care. O my brothers, God exists” (*CW* II 81). This is the only apparent case where Al-Anon’s editing of Emerson’s words would appear to results from a desire to change his meaning. Emerson’s program of spiritual growth results in readers “becoming divine” — a concept too controversial for many conservatives in Al-Anon.

¹⁷ *ODAT*, 169. The original text from Emerson reads: “There is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening we shall hear the right word. Why need you choose so painfully your place, and occupation, and associates, and modes of action, and of entertainment? Certainly, there is a possible right for you that precludes the need of balance and willful election. For you there is a reality, a fit place and congenial duties. Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which animates all whom it floats, and you are without effort impelled to truth, to right, and a perfect contentment” (*CW* II 81).

¹⁸ *ODAT*, 280. The original text from Emerson reads: “Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment” (*CW* II 34).

¹⁹ *ODAT*, 199. The original from Emerson is very close to the *ODAT* text: “A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done otherwise, shall give him no peace” (*CW* II 28).

²⁰ *ODAT*, 160. The original text from Emerson reads, “Has a man gained any thing who has received a hundred favors and rendered none? [...] He is great who confers the most benefits” (*CW* II 65–66).

²¹ C., Tom. Telephone Interview. 9 August 2022.

²² *Many Voices, One Journey*, 144.

²³ For genteel critics’ misreadings, see Len Gougeon *Virtue’s Hero: Emerson, Antislavery, and Reform*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1990. For the misreadings of capitalists, Michael C. Weisenburg, “Uses of Great Men: Donald J. Trump, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the Limits of Self-Reliance in Twenty-First Century Popular Culture,” paper delivered at the 30th Annual Conference of the American Literature Association, Boston, Mass., May 2019.

May / October 2022 Board Meeting Minutes

VIA ZOOM

MAY 2022

Prentiss Clark, presiding. In attendance: Austin Bailey, Peter Balaam, Bonnie Carr O'Neill, Christina Katopodis, Anita Patterson, Christopher Scanlon, Tim Sommer, Michael Weisenburg, Krissie West

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

SECRETARY TREASURER'S REPORT (Peter)

ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPDATES

1. Plans for a Joel Myerson Memorial publication; also, in lieu of annual ice cream social at the TAG, the Society will sponsor an evening reception in honor of Joel Myerson

2. Awards Updates (Tim, Prentiss, Austin, Krissie)

Graduate Student Award to Daphne Orlandi (Univs. Dortmund and Rome)

Packer Award to Keegan O'Connor

Distinguished Achievement Award to David LaRocca

RWES Special Awards (Krissie, Austin)

Undergraduate Essay Prize to Owen Polley

Subvention Award to Cecily Brem

Pedagogy or Community Project Award to Joan Wry

3. Program Chair Report (Tim)

Thanks to Joseph Urbas for keeping program going during pandemic disruptions and to Yves Gardes for recent collaborations on the program committee

The Society is sponsoring a panel at the Thoreau Annual Gathering with the 4 grad student applicants offering papers

Program committee has been invited to sponsor a panel at the

PAMLA in Los Angeles in November of this year

(Conference topic: Geographies of the Fantastic and the Quotidian /

Panel Title: Transcendentalist Geographies)

4. Media Committee Report (Michael)

Though ESP is largely membership driven, the quality of recent submissions seem to be improving with wider Social Media exposure. Numbers of visits to website are up; 3,000 followers on Facebook, 1,900 on Twitter; possibility of developing a presence on Instagram and of Peter joining Media Committee

Blog "The Transparent Eyeball"—5th issue now launching

BUSINESS & DISCUSSION

1. Membership numbers fairly stable as we emerge from pandemic disruptions, but we might find consider new ways and efforts to reach out to members / Many new student members to be reached out to / Peter as new Sec/Tr asked for patience as he gets up to speed understanding the Membership roles / Michael suggested it may be time for a full membership audit this summer?

Board Membership / Thanks to Chris Hanlon and Phillip Loeffler, now cycling off the Board / A vote to be taken at the Business Meeting later in the day to accept onto the Board Nicholas Guardiano and Georgia Walton / A pressing need for more core contributors in leadership positions and committees, especially as many of the core group already serve in multiple roles / Our most immediate needs are for new contributors to the Awards and Media Committees.

2. Austin suggested the need to iron out the whole calendar of awards, including definitions, submission due-dates, and distinguishing awards from Calls for Papers.

3. After Report of the Media Committee, President Prentiss Clark suggested that the Board table other business to give attention to Chris's and Michael's proposal for a new open-source journal, *The Dial*, in addition to or replacing *ESP* / The appeal to members to consider the proposal and share responses had generated a lot of interest on both sides of the issues / Many concerned members feel uneasy, the proposal proposes *The Dial* as an innovative way for the Emerson Society to serve not just its membership and not the general public (as the Blog does) but the academic field in a peer reviewed publication. / A Mission Statement called for, and Chris offered one that he had drafted. / Not only is our Membership possibly a little "conservative" or "nostalgic" on this front, but we are ourselves already spread thin—caught between ideals and ambitions and realities. / We acknowledged that this same issue would be a significant item on the agenda for the Business Meeting in the afternoon and Prentiss proposed a follow-up meeting on *The Dial* next week.

ACTION: Board approved \$250 donation to TAG for reception in honor of Joel Myerson

Respectfully submitted,
Peter Balaam. Society Secretary/Treasurer

OCTOBER 2022

Prentiss Clark, presiding. In attendance: Austin Bailey, Peter Balaam, Bonnie Carr O'Neill, Nick Guardiano, Christina Katopodis, Anita Patterson, Christopher Hanlon, Michael Weisenburg, Krissie West

Welcome to new board members Nick Guardiano and Georgia Walton

Approval of Minutes of May 2022 Board Meeting

Secretary/Treasurer's Report (Peter)

Program Chair Update (Prentiss Clark) TimSommer, who cannot be here, has passed on the opportunity to fill program chair position

Yves Gardes has organized the PAMLA panel:

Transcendentalist Geographies

Former Board Member Martin Kevorkian will attend PAMLA and

chair the panel / panelists: P. Morgan,

E. Scofield, S. Menton

Nick Guardiano organizing panel at the SAAP (Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy) conference, (Denver / Mar 2023) "Emerson on Fate vs. Freedom"

Panelists: Roger Lopez, Joseph Urbas, and a third—Nick G will chair.

Society used to contribute a panel to SAAP more regularly when invited; the current president of the SAAP, Steven Fesmire, is interested in further collaboration with us.

Prentiss: Meanwhile, an urgent need for someone to organize panels for ALA in Spring and for TAG in July while we search for a new program chair and program committee members

Media Committee (Michael Weisenburg)

Transparent Eyeball blog, 5th Series now live; Series 6 will be "Emerson & Pedagogy" (Randy Fuller will edit); Michael reiterated report shared in Chicago in May that data tracking of visits to the Society webpage show that the blog is making a difference in who comes to the website and why. The more we do, the more people come to the website and the more papers are contributed to *ESP*.

BOARD MEETING MINUTES

(Continued from page 15)

- Website is out of date and needs to be rethought
- *ESP* issue: shall we determine question of who gets a print copy of *ESP* by membership levels? Michael proposes tying question of receiving hard copy of *ESP* to membership levels (e.g., members from Contributing level up would automatically receive a hard copy).

Related topic: question of Society “merch[andise]” – another means to draw attention

- Call for Persons (Michael Weisenburg)

We really need a new web-editor

Shall we look outside of our Membership? offer to pay the position a stipend for the labor involved? put out a broad call to see who salutes?

- Someone suggested Daphne Orlandi as a potential candidate for web-editor job. Prentiss: possible human resources in grad students at U of SD working under auspices of Astrophil Press could take it on.
- Chris H: Whoever we get, we should make sure of their skills in web editing Prentiss will reach out to Daphne Orlandi. If she is not qualified or declines, Prentiss and Michael will draft a call for a web editor (to be widely circulated).
- Another Call for Persons
Two years out, we will need a new Editor of *ESP*. Krissie West expressed interest, requesting a list of responsibilities.
- Thomas Howard will be joining the Media committee beginning in January / <https://www.twhoward.com>
Reiterated Call for Persons (Prentiss)
A pair of people to organize panel for the ALA (Boston in May) and TAG, the Thoreau Society Annual Gathering
- Bonnie Carr O’Neill suggested inviting other author societies into greater collaboration.
- Prentiss will circulate a call for two more program members and will contact the presidents of other author societies (Fuller, Thoreau, Child, Whitman, Melville, Poe, Hawthorne) in hopes of supporting collaboration between RWES and these scholarly societies.

To *The Dial* Proposal (C. Hanlon/M Weisenburg)

- Not replacing *ESP*
- A mission statement provided
- Clarification of the mode of publication: online only
- Proposers are recruiting members of a *Dial* Editorial Board, including (so far) Jeffrey Insko, Michael Yonik, Leslie Eccles, Christina Katopodis, Randy Fuller
- Question: the right degree of overlap between the Society board and *The Dial* editorial board
- A longer arc for the launch in 2024
- Wanting really superb graphics for the landing page
- Lining up contributors for first 3 issues
- Models for *The Dial*: Post 45, Resilience, Leviathan

With peer-reviewed pieces of 6–8,000 words and exploratory/creative pieces

- Right platform? Project MUSE is expensive
Leviathan has an endowment to help underwrite the production of the journal

- Question of the right platform and what *The Dial* will be able to afford

MW: time to think about a donor outreach campaign, in attempt to create an endowment

- Pricing out Project Muse

- Sketching a landing page

- Filling out the editorial board

Bonnie C-O: How to think about finances responsibly, given our size as a Society? Remember that paying a couple of annual awards costs something like 25% of cash holdings. Likely best to start in Digital Commons and then transition with some success and readership to something bigger.

- Debate ensued about both the Mission Statement and the Subtitle

- Questions of bigness vs going after the Public Good

- Questions of not relying on trendy language

- Trying to bust out, pushing limits, bringing the unconvinced in and persuading them

- Anita: the title, *The Dial* / pattern it on the original publication

- Prentiss: Other needs

- Codify 3 additional members to the Society Board who would overlap with *The Dial* Editorial Board

- We need to clarify a specific concrete plan for *ESP* future before allowing members to vote in order to help *Dial* skeptics to get there
MW: What’s a concrete plan?

Conversation followed about precise purviews for differing vehicles: *ESP*, serving the Society (like the Thoreau Society *Bulletin*)

- *Transparent Eyeball* blog, serving the public at large, bringing people into Society membership; could be even freer, less academic
The Dial, serving the Discipline, peer reviewed, etc. At end/ return to discussion of 3 New Board Members: how large should the Editorial Board be?

- Prentiss / the need to change the by-laws to add 3 more Board Members / we might consider tying 3 RWES board member positions to the *Dial* Editorial Board. Goal of ensuring that we have the person-power to support Society business as well as production needs of *The Dial*.

- MW / past-Presidents of the Society as ex-officio Editorial Board members?

Diversity of Board Members

Meeting adjourned at noon (Central)

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Balaam, Secretary/Treasurer