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EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

Returning Emerson to Persia: Alireza Taghdarreh and His Translation of *Nature*

MARK GALLAGHER

By the time he published his essay on the subject in the *Atlantic Monthly* of April 1858, Ralph Waldo Emerson had long been an admirer of “Persian Poetry,” translating its verses while also drawing on its motifs and meters for his own poems. Chief among the poets in this classical Sufi tradition was Hafiz, the “prince of Persian poets,” as Emerson called him, possessing “the insight of a mystic” who “accosts all topics with an easy audacity” (*CW VII*, 129). In a journal entry written not long after Elizabeth Palmer Peabody had sold him his copy of Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall’s German translation of the *Divan*,¹ Emerson admires how Hafiz, “is not scared by a name or a religion. He fears nothing. He sees too far, he sees throughout; such is the only man I wish to see and to be” (*JMN X*, 165). That Emerson encountered Hafiz at two removes—that is, Persian into German into English—is, perhaps, a small irony from the author of *Nature*, who asked why we should be content to look at the world through another’s eyes rather than have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition. Nevertheless, Emerson praised Hafiz for a “perfect intellectual emancipation, which also he provokes in the reader”—the gift, that is, of an original relation to the universe arriving through the most retrospective of routes.

Emerson’s engagement with classical Persian literature has been well documented; less familiar is how Emerson and his circle have been read in modern Iran. For the past twenty years, one figure has done as much as anyone to shape that readership: the Iranian translator and independent scholar Alireza Taghdarreh.

Taghdarreh recently announced the publication of his Persian translation of Emerson’s *Nature* during what was a rare and politically fraught visit by the Iranian scholar

to the United States. On July 9, 2025, at the Walden Woods Project’s Library in Lincoln, Massachusetts, Taghdarreh spoke about his work as a translator of Emerson as well as of Henry David Thoreau. The talk was a return engagement; about a decade earlier on his first visit out of Iran, Taghderrah stood in the same room to announce the publication of his translation of *Walden*. This time he discussed his more recent project, one that he describes as the product of both deep deliberation and of an extended conversation with his friend, the late Robert D. Richardson. While working on his book *Nearer the Heart’s Desire: Poets of the Rubaiyat* (Bloomsbury 2016), Richardson had thanked Taghdarreh for showing him that “the Silk Road of the mind is now a two-way street.” Richardson completed an introduction to Taghdarreh’s translation of *Nature* that the author plans to publish through independent Persian-language press Diyar later this year.

Taghdarreh’s Persian translation of Emerson may not attract much notice outside of Iran. Nevertheless, the work deserves attention because, while he may not claim the title in any institutional sense, Taghdarreh is, in the Emersonian sense, a scholar. From outside the academy and across a geopolitical chasm that has only deepened in the past half century, this remarkable scholar has produced complete Persian translations of two foundational works of American Transcendentalism, not to mention a body of comparative commentary that returns Emerson’s Persian sources to a modern-day Iranian readership. Largely self-educated in English following the closure of Iranian universities during the Cultural Revolution of 1980, Taghdarreh taught himself the language from a one-dollar pocket radio tuned to the Voice of America and the BBC. It was on that radio

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PROSPECTS



Emerson Sightings/Citings

Harvard Divinity School's Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) convened a two-day workshop in Concord this past October to launch its new Transcendentalism Initiative, drawing nearly thirty scholars, practitioners, artists, and writers from across the United States as well as Sweden and Denmark. Hosted at the Concord Museum under the allusively Emersonian title "Expanding Circles," the summit featured short "seed talks," panels, small-group discussions, and experiential outings to Walden Pond, the Emerson House, the October Farm Riverfront Trail, and Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. CSWR Director Charles Stang framed the gathering around the conviction that Transcendentalism is "a living tradition" with much to offer the present moment, and praised the participants as "scholars of, but part of the tradition."

Robert A. Gross and Robert M. Thorson collaborated on the essay "Why Concord? The Geological Origins of the American Revolution" for the November 2025 special issue of *The Atlantic* commemorating the 250th anniversary of American independence. Drawing on Gross's *The Transcendentalists and Their World* (2021) and Thorson's books on the natural history of Walden Pond and Concord River, *Walden's Shore* (2014) and *The Boatman* (2019), the essay argues that Concord's centrality to both armed resistance in 1775 and the Transcendentalist movement decades later owes much to its physical landscape. Emerson's "shot heard round the world" finds an unexpected explanation in the geology of the Battle Road, where Minutemen took cover behind walls and outcrops that helped rout the British retreat.

Also in *The Atlantic*, devoted Emersonian John Kaag reviewed Lance Richardson's *True Nature: The Pilgrimage of Peter Matthiessen* (Pantheon 2025). Calling the biography "elegant and rigorous," Kaag situates Matthiessen's lifelong restlessness within an American mythology of seeking whose lineage runs through Emerson.

RWES life member Steve Wilson contributed the essay "Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'The American Scholar': The Thought Heard Round the World" to the collection *What the Presidents Read* (Rowman & Littlefield). The book, which explores the importance of reading among American presidents as well as the particular texts they admired, notes that former President Joseph Biden often mentioned "The American Scholar" as an important essay he has returned to throughout his life. Wilson sketches the nineteenth-century social contexts for the essay as an important and revolutionary expression of individualism, and also discusses its enduring impact as a cultural touchstone in the years since it was published.

Smithsonian Magazine online ran an article by James Deutsch on "The American Scholar" as part of the Smithsonian's America at 250 celebration. By revisiting the Phi Beta Kappa oration and tracing its influence on the writers of the American Renaissance, the Smithsonian recognizes Emerson's oration as the nation's intellectual declaration of independence. Oliver Wendell Holmes would have certainly approved.

Finally, audiences may recognize the voice of Ralph Waldo Emerson in a new PBS production as that of another Boston icon. Lending his familiar warm baritone to the Sage of Concord is none other than Ted Danson—yes, Sam Malone himself. The actor and environmentalist, who famously played the iconic Boston bartender on the legendary television series *Cheers*, voices Emerson in *Henry David Thoreau*. Directed by Chris and Erik Ewers and executive produced by Ken Burns and Don Henley, with Jeff Goldblum voicing Thoreau, George Clooney narrating, and Meryl Streep performing the roles of Lidian Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and other figures in Concord's orbit, the three-hour, three-part documentary premiered on March 30 and 31, 2026 on PBS.

Casting the tireless ocean advocate and co-founder of Oceana was an inspired decision on the part of the directors. Danson's activism is in going with the film's larger argument that Thoreau and Emerson are not merely books on a shelf but relevant voices who challenge us to take action on behalf of our world; or, in other words, to make our world "the good place" we hope it can be (kind of like a bar "where everybody knows your name?")

As for Emerson Society life member Don Henley, the film is the latest stop on a "long run" that began at Walden in 1990 with the founding of the Walden Woods

Project to protect the land Emerson and Thoreau once walked. As it turns out, Henley could have checked out of Walden Pond any time he liked, but he could never actually leave.

Meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society sponsored a panel at the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, March 12–14, 2026. exploring the themes of “Emerson and Power.” The panel featured two papers: one examining the metaphysical basis of power and agency, and the other exploring Emerson’s multivocal conception of power. The session was well attended and sparked lively discussion among participants, reaffirming the continuing relevance of Emerson’s thought to American philosophy.

Panel: “Emerson and Power”

Chair: John B. Min, College of Southern Nevada

“The Metaphysical Basis of Power and Agency in Emerson’s Thought”

Daniel Campana, University of La Verne

The locus of personal agency in Emerson’s thought is often portrayed as the individual ego, thus Emerson is popularly presented as the prophet of American individualism. I argue that a consistent thread running throughout Emerson’s works is his contrast between the popular view and the ideal view, and that seeing Emerson as situating personal agency in the individual ego is inconsistent with this central theme. In his earlier works this contrast is seen in the ideal view of All in Man (*Nature*), Man Thinking (“The American Scholar”), the great Thinker and Actor (“Self-Reliance”) versus the popular versions of these. In each case the popular view sees the ego as the ultimate source of agency and in need of validating itself in relation to that subject; on the ideal view the individual ego is always penultimate to the ideal of that subject: an ideal that is in each case grounded in the metaphysical unity of all natural and moral truths in the all-in-one. In his later works, Emerson expresses this notion in explicitly Vedantic language, presenting our human condition as mirrored in Arjuna’s plight in the Bhagavad Gita. The ideal view of our human condition is that human consciousness is the conduit through which nature proceeds from the One. With the ego always penultimate to the Unity/One that

transcends it, individual agency is then not located in a radical autonomy of the ego but always grounded in the faith apprehension of one’s secondary role as the vehicle of truth and of creation itself. Emerson was not so much the prophet of individualism, but of a living faith in which one experiences each moment as participation in the creative act of the One.

“Ralph Waldo Emerson on Power(s)”

John B. Min, College of Southern Nevada

In the essay “Power,” Ralph Waldo Emerson writes that “life is a search after power.” As Robert D. Richardson observes, “Emerson’s lifelong quest was for personal power.” This idea runs throughout his essays and journals, marking power as a prominent theme in Emerson’s middle and late career essays. If power is such a central concept in Emerson’s writings, a basic question remains insufficiently examined: What exactly does Emerson mean by power? This article reconstructs Emerson’s conception of power by tracing what he calls “a long logic” across his essays. I argue that Emerson conceives power as a dispositional potential within the self that becomes actual in moments of transition. This power manifests in multiple forms throughout Emerson’s essays and operates within the limits imposed by fate and moral law. I proceed in four steps. First, I interpret power as a form of dispositional potentiality. Second, I show how different forms of power are activated in moments of self-transformation. Third, I examine the limits that fate and moral law impose on the exercise of power. Finally, I address two objections to this interpretation.

American Literature Association Conference

The Emerson Society sponsored a panel at the 37th Annual Conference of the American Literature Association, held at the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago, Illinois, May 20–23, 2026. For more information, please visit americanliteratureassociation.org.

Panel: “Ralph Waldo Emerson: Engaging the Transcendental”

Moderator: Nicholas Guardiano, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

The “Transparent Eyeball” as a Democratic Instantiation of Platonic Illumination
Gary Ricketts, Independent Scholar

Ralph Waldo Emerson stands within the genealogy of Platonic illumination as an emanation of its enduring metaphysic—the revelation of truth through sudden vision. *Nature* (1836) fuses Platonic ideals and the successive generations of Platonic thought, from Plato to Plotinus through Augustine to Jonathan Edwards, and adopts a well-articulated epistemological epiphany: that knowledge in its purest form manifests in the Greek term ἐξαίφνης (*exaiphnēs*), which, as Joseph Cimasky puts it, “connotes illumination of the highest realities and philosophical conversion experience.” This essay reads *Nature*’s “transparent eyeball” passage as an American instantiation of this Platonic awakening, through which emanation becomes experiential, beautiful, and democratic, taking form as the Oversoul in *Essays: First Series* (1841). Emerson’s insight performs the very illumination it describes: a transfiguration of the visible into the intelligible, the natural into the divine, and the aesthetic vision of beauty into union with “the eternal ONE.”

“Emerson, Buddhism, and Daisaku Ikeda: Dialogues of the Heart”

Anita Patterson, Boston University

This paper explores the work of the Japanese Buddhist philosopher, poet, and global peacebuilder Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023) focusing on his engagements with Emerson. The importance of Ikeda’s reflections on Emerson is evident in the fact that his dialogue with Joel Myerson (1945–2021) and Ronald Bosco was published as *Creating Waldens: An East-West Conversation on the American Renaissance* in 2009. Ikeda’s engagements with American authors, which are central to his global peacebuilding and human rights agenda, are best understood when we consider how Emerson, Thoreau, and other nineteenth-century New Englanders turned to Buddhist scriptures in translation to critique the increasingly commercial and materialist realities of U.S. society. I begin with a discussion of how the sustained, varied engagement with Emerson in Ikeda’s writings forms part of a longstanding tradition of transpacific intercultural dialogue in American literature. I then consider how Ikeda’s awareness of Buddhist resonances in the writings of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and others fits with the findings in a growing body of American literary scholarship; the historical importance of fostering dialogue using the “soft power” of culture, which allows for volitional movement towards shared goals, in contrast to the hard power of military and

political coercion; and how Ikeda’s work sheds new light on the Emersonian legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Finally, I should mention that Ron Bosco is a contributor to a forthcoming essay collection that I edited, *Daisaku Ikeda, Transnationalism, and American Literature: Dialogues of the Heart* (Routledge 2026).

“The Rev. J. W. Loguen as a Transcendentalist Slave Narrative”

Aïcha Bouchelaghem, University of Geneva

This paper aims to provide deeper insight into Jermain Wesley Loguen’s little-studied slave narrative, *The Rev. J. W. Loguen, as a Slave and as a Freeman* (1859), which deserves attention by scholars of Transcendentalism and its convergences with abolitionist militancy. Since the late decades of the twentieth century, scholars have debated the authorial status of this slave narrative, the most recent intervention in which was Jennifer Williamson’s argument in favor of viewing Loguen as the writer of his own narrative (2016). In a 1993 biographical work on Loguen, Carol M. Hunter had argued in favor of treating the narrative as a biography rather than an autobiography, citing alongside other evidence the “abstruse question[s]” and “nature metaphors” featured in the text. I argue that such features actually support the autobiographical thesis if we read them, and the narrative as a whole, through a Transcendentalist lens.

That Loguen was familiar with Transcendentalist ideas is highly plausible considering his close ties to Douglass, whose own affinity with Emerson has been documented. Moreover, Loguen attended Oneida Institute while it was directed by Beriah Green. In a discussion of Alexander Crummell and Henry Highland Garnet, fellow abolitionists and Oneida students, Wirzbicki shows that Green likely instilled interest in English Romanticism in his students. For its part, Loguen’s narrative devises Transcendentalist tropes. For instance, the narrator reveres the spiritual current that flows throughout all of Nature. However, these tropes ultimately enhance the abolitionist politics of the text. Whereas morally credible characters are receptive to the inflow of spirit, enslavers are marked by their lack of self-reliance, inability to transcend, and cruelty to animals. The narrative’s investment in Transcendentalism does not refute the assumption that a Black abolitionist leader wrote it. Rather, this Transcendentalist register lays the spiritual ground for a distinctively militant ethos.

Thoreau Annual Gathering

The Emerson Society will sponsor a panel at the 85th Annual Gathering of the Thoreau Society in Concord, Massachusetts, July 8–12, 2026. This year's theme, "Living Well: Thoreau, Health, and Flourishing," asks the question, "What does it mean to be well in a troubled world?" as participants "consider the conditions that sustain well-being—and those that stand in its way—in both Thoreau's time and our own." For more information, please visit thoreausociety.org.

Panel: "Give me Health and a Day": Emerson and Health, Illness, and Unity"

Moderator: Austin Bailey, Hunter College (CUNY)

"Grows by decays": Physiology, Counter-Philosophy, and the Laws of Disease in Emerson"

Ross Martin, Harvard University

Ralph Waldo Emerson begins his essay "Spiritual Laws" (1841) with the cryptic statement that "intellectual life may be kept clean and healthful if man will live the life of nature." Most "people," Emerson claims, "are diseased with...theological problems...These are the soul's mumps, and measles, and whooping-coughs, and those who have not caught them cannot describe their health or prescribe a cure." Paradoxically, therefore, a healthy intellect is maintained only insofar as it experiences disease, so much so that illness becomes the path to health. In my talk, I take Emerson seriously and at his word that the "intellect," which might be supposed ideal and so beyond the realm of physical ailment, is, in fact, embodied to such a degree as to be subject to (and so its well being dependent upon) what he calls the "laws of disease." Unpacking "Spiritual Laws" though its pathological and nosological contexts, I highlight how Emerson writes in conversation with radical physicians of his day in order to make an intervention in philosophy by rendering the intellect physical, and thereby passing it between different modes of being, namely unwell and well. As physical, the intellect and a complete theory thereof must accommodate how thinking is based in involuntary movement and change. If, on the one hand, traditional philosophy seeks to decontaminate thinking and remedy its instability through a negative procedure of the dialectic, then Emerson, on the other hand, exposit how physical sciences invert our philosophical orientation to one whereby maladies are affirmed as part of a dynamic bodily-intellectual system. Ultimately, I argue that Emerson's writing sparks an upheaval in theories of the intellect with an aesthetic as well as ethical payoff, that "laws of disease,

physicians say are as beautiful as the law of health. Our philosophy is affirmative."

"Reading and Community Health: From 'The American Scholar' to Brook Farm"

Alice de Galzain, Sorbonne Université

In this paper I reflect on the feminist applications of "The American Scholar." Focusing on Emerson's statement in his famous 1837 Harvard lecture that "One must be an inventor to read well," I discuss how his reinvention of the act of reading as a process marked by individual agency may resonate with the initiatives led by the women of Brook Farm, the Transcendentalist utopian community founded in 1841. More specifically, I explore how the trailblazing forms of collective action undertaken by Marianne Dwight Orvis (1816–1901) and Anna Quincy Thaxter Parsons (1804–1906)—both fervent admirers of the Concord philosopher—might be viewed in light of Emerson's exhortation to become "readers-inventors." I examine how, by becoming "active readers" of Charles Fourier's socialist works, they became, in turn, early "inventors" of U.S. feminism, spearheading initiatives such as the establishment of a "fund for mutual support" aimed at providing "guarantees in cases of sickness or temporary embarrassment," which resembles modern-day health care. In so doing, I aim to connect these experiments in communal health to Emerson's reimagining of the act of reading.

"The Unclouded Eye/I: Vision as Vital Sympathy in Emerson"

Austin Bailey, Hunter College (CUNY)

Throughout his corpus, Emerson considers vision something vital and healthful. "Nothing can befall me in life," he writes, "(leaving me my eyes)." This talk considers Emerson's central and complementary metaphors of vision and transparency from a vitalist perspective. Yet rather than pursuing this vitalism along endogenous lines (confining it, in other words, to the boundaries of the organism), it instead explores a strain of Emersonian vitalism characterized by the molecular and affective crossings of boundaries. For Emerson, I argue, to see transparently, or with an unclouded eye/I, is to sympathize with life's vital movements (beyond its discrete, atomized forms). It is precisely this strain of vital-sympathetic thought, I suggest, that connects Emerson to the French philosopher Henri Bergson. After sketching Emersonian sight as a mode of vital sympathy, tilting the axis of his vision in a horizontal rather than vertical direction, I end by briefly considering some consequences of this axial tilt towards immanence over transcendence.

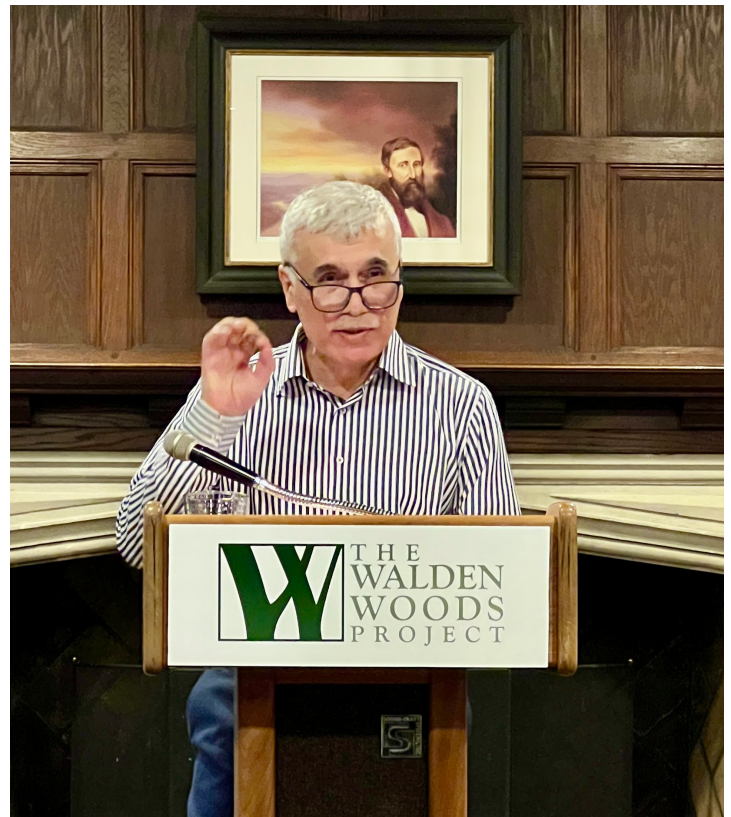
RETURNING EMERSON TO PERSIA

(Continued from page 1)

that he heard his first sentences from both Emerson and Thoreau. His Persian *Walden*, the product of ten years' labor and of an extended correspondence with American Thoreauvians, was published in Tehran in 2017.

Taghdarreh describes his work as not so much the product of research but rather the “echo of an ongoing meditation.” His method is like that of a comparative reader. He demonstrated his method during his talk at the Walden Woods Project by unlocking a parable from the life of Rumi with a hermeneutic key found in a single sentence from *Walden*: “If we respected what is inevitable and has a right to be, music and poetry would resound along the streets” (95). Taghdarreh takes Thoreau's sentence seriously as a metaphysical claim, which is then illuminated by means of a parable from Rumi's life, and vice versa. Taghdarreh explains how the poet, walking through the goldsmiths' bazaar in Konya, fell into mystical ecstasy at the rhythmic sound of the hammers and danced through the marketplace until the elder goldsmith ordered his workmen to keep hammering—at whatever cost in spoiled gold—for as long as Rumi continued to dance. The change Thoreau described, Taghdarreh proposed, is not a change in the street but a change in the listener. “That hammering noise was an ordinary sound,” he observed. “It turned into music in Thoreau's, in Rumi's mind,” and that such a “change should happen in us” as one becomes more attuned to life.²

That same conviction, that the work needs to happen within, sent Taghdarreh to the upstairs study of the Old Manse, where he began his translation of *Nature*, and in doing so, be inspired “in the very room Emerson wrote it.” His account of what a translator does turns on the same inwardness; that is to say, the work of translation affects a change in the translator. Taghdarreh makes a distinction between translators as messenger pigeons, carrying meaning inertly across linguistic frontiers, and translators as bees: “They observe carefully, choose with discernment, gather pollen, and transform it into honey within themselves. The message does not merely ride on. It passes through them in a transformative way.” This concept of translation-as-transformation departs from Emerson's analogy that makes translation an act of transportation. In “Books,” he says, “I should as soon think of swimming across Charles River, when I wish to go to Boston, as of reading all my books in originals, when I have them rendered for me in my



Alireza Taghdarreh speaks about his translation of Emerson and Thoreau at the Walden Woods Project Library in July 2025.

Photograph by Juliet Trofi, The Walden Woods Project

mother tongue,” in the commuter rail that is modern translations (*CW VII*, 103). Emerson defends translation against the purists with the claim that “what is really best in any book is translatable—any real insight or broad human sentiment.” Taghdarreh, working in the opposite direction, accepts Emerson's confidence in the translatability of essential thought and reproduces, as Emerson says, “the rhythm and music of the original into phrases of equal melody” expressed through the industrious and inspired bee that is the voice of the translator.

Upon returning to Tehran, Taghdarreh had intended to convene reading and writing circles around his new translation of *Nature* as well as pursuing other translations of Emerson. Those plans were overtaken by the present war. Taghdarreh and his wife, Maryam Ashoory, came home to a house damaged in the bombing of Tehran. While these past few months have been given over to repair rather than to the seminar table, the project of returning Emerson to Persia has acquired a greater urgency. The reading groups have been postponed, not cancelled, and the new translation of *Nature* will soon be in print.

Emerson, reflecting on the audacity of Hafiz, states that “The scholar’s courage is as distinct as the soldier’s and the stateman’s—and a man who has it not cannot write for me” (*JMN:X*, 165). The Persian translation of *Nature* is, among other things, the work of a scholar with a mettle tested over decades of dedicated work under hostile conditions. The book Emerson sent out in 1836 with the imperative “Build, therefore, your own world” (*CW I*, 45)—a statement made more poignant, one imagines, by its translation into Persian—has found a reader in Tehran who has taken it at its word by returning a new, translated Emerson to Persia.

Mark Gallagher teaches in the English Department at Chapman University.

Notes

1. The record, dated April 9, 1846, is found on page 89 of “Account Book 4” in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Notebooks*, MS Am 1280H, (112c), Volume 100. Houghton Library, Harvard College Library.
2. The parable of Rumi and the goldsmith Salāh al-Dīn Zarkūb in the bazaar of Konya is preserved in the hagiographical tradition. See English translation in John O’Kane, trans., *The Feats of the Knowers of God* (Brill, 2002). For the story’s place in the broader hagiographical tradition and its critical evaluation, see Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings, and Poetry of Jalāl al-Din Rumi*, rev. ed. (Oneworld, 2000), chapters 5–6.

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While sitting in a replica of Emerson’s desk chair in the same room where Emerson composed *Nature*, Taghdarreh commences his Persian translation during his visit to the Old Manse in 2015.

Photograph by Wallace Kaufman

“Nothing is at last sacred
but the integrity of your
own mind.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson
“Self-Reliance”(1841)

Ralph Waldo Emerson Society Annual Business Meeting

May 21, 2026

Meeting called to order by Society President Nicholas Guardiano at 5:30 p.m. at the 37th Annual American Literature Association Conference held at the Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, Illinois, with approximately a dozen in attendance both in person and online.

1. Two Advisory Board vacancies were announced for 2027–2029. Two nominees were discussed: Lise Chenal, PhD Candidate in English Literature at Université Paris Cité, nominated by Alice de Galzain; and Daniel Campana, Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of La Verne, nominated by John Min. There were no nominations from the floor. Outgoing Advisory Board members Alice de Galzain and John Lysaker were thanked for their service, which ends at the end of 2026.

Joseph Urbas asked whether there was a better method for voting, and Gary Ricketts proposed using Google Forms. It was suggested that the full-membership vote be conducted by Google Form. Gary will follow up with Nick, and Yafang Luo will look into setting up the online voting process, with support from Gary if needed.

2. Nick presented the Treasurer's Report. The Society currently has 104 members, its largest membership number in the past three years. Revenue for May 2025–2026 is \$3,212. The Society's projected expenses for 2026 total approximately \$7,050. The Society faces a projected deficit of approximately \$4,000 for 2026, requiring a draw from savings. The Advisory Board discussed finances at the Board meeting and will meet again this summer to discuss strategies for raising revenue and cutting expenses. There was a discussion on how to reduce current *ESP* costs to be followed up in the next board meeting. (Bonnie O'Neill noted that recent issues of *ESP* have been "very strong.") Roger Thompson suggested that one possibility for fundraising would be to solicit life members, sustaining members, or similar supporters to sponsor student memberships.

3. Upcoming panels and events were announced. An

RWES-sponsored panel, "'Give me Health and a Day': Emerson and Health, Illness, and Unity," will be held at the Thoreau Annual Gathering in Concord, Massachusetts, July 8–12, 2026. Thanks were given to Austin Bailey and John Min for organizing the panel. An online discussion session on Emerson and Dickinson, in collaboration with the Emily Dickinson International Society, will be held on June 6, 10:00–11:30AM ET. Thanks were given to Thomas Howard for organizing, and Nick confirmed that the event is open to the public. Nick reminded attendees to watch Bluesky and the website for news items. Facebook announcements have been discontinued because of account access issues and lack of personnel.

4. Awards were announced. The 2026 Barbara Packer Fellowship is awarded to Kristina West. The 2026 Distinguished Achievement Award will be given posthumously to David Dilworth. Dilworth passed away in February 2026 and taught widely in the field of philosophy. Nick has communicated with his former students, is in contact with David Dilworth's daughter, will notify her of the award, and will write a tribute for *ESP*. The Research Award, Outreach Award, and Undergraduate Student Essay Prize are currently being judged.

5. *Emerson Society Papers*. Thanks were given to Mark Gallagher and Kathleen Crosby for co-editing *Emerson Society Papers*. There have been conversations on whether to discontinue print copies of *ESP* because of printing and mailing costs, as well as concerns about losing the one tangible item that comes with membership and possible replacements for *ESP* as a tangible membership item. Prentiss Clark noted that most graduate students do not receive hard copies because they are not Sustaining or Life members. Nick noted the importance of brainstorming other possible tangible benefits for members. Gary noted that contributing authors to recent issues of *ESP* did not receive hard copies. If print copies continue, it was suggested that hard copies should be sent to life members, sustaining members, and contributing authors. Thanks were given to Todd Richardson

for serving as Book Review Editor for *ESP*. Todd Richardson will step down as Book Review Editor at the end of 2026. Nominations from the floor were invited for the position of Book Review Editor. None were forwarded.

6. *The Dial*. The Society discussed the selection of an Assistant Editor/Editor-Elect for *The Dial*. The service term as Editor would run from Spring/Summer 2028 through Fall/Winter 2030. The Advisory Board will elect. Two nominees were put forward by Nick. There were no nominations from the floor.

Christopher Hanlon suggested the following selection and election procedure: information about the nominees should first be circulated to the Board; the Board then fully discusses the nominees before voting, with the current editor providing a clear proposal explaining the reasoning behind the nominations; the final vote can be conducted remotely. Nick added that detailed descriptions of the nominees, including their CVs, can be circulated before the board discussion. The group discussed whether the candidate not selected might serve as a future successor. Nick clarified that the second nominee would not necessarily become the next candidate in a future recruitment cycle. Joseph suggested that the unchosen candidate could potentially serve as the next successor.

Joseph asked whether the model for *The Dial* editorship reflects the model for the RWES president, with a President-Elect learning from the President before transitioning into the role. Sue Dunston noted that overlapping terms are helpful, and Prentiss noted that the editorship model should in theory work this way, though Chris is currently working alone.

7. Proposed RWES Constitution Amendment. The proposed Constitution amendment concerning *The Dial* was read aloud:

JOURNAL: The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society journal, *The Dial*, is the scholarly publication of the Society. Published semiannually, it is financially supported by the Society. Features may include essays, review essays, and creative works related to Emerson, Transcendentalism,

and cultures of nineteenth-century America and beyond. An Editor is nominated and selected by the Officers and Advisory Board for a three-year term (with nominations also being accepted from the floor). An Assistant Editor may also be selected by the Officers and Advisory Board who would then succeed the Editor, serving in the main editorial position for a three-year term.

Bonnie asked why RWES is now looking to adopt this amendment. Nick explained that the amendment draws on language in *The Dial* proposal, which was approved by the Advisory Board and should have been approved as part of the Constitution along with the approval of *The Dial*. A full-membership vote on the Constitution amendment will be conducted by email.

Discussion focused on whether the amendment should say that an Assistant Editor “may” be selected or “will” be selected. Chris emphasized that even though the journal has been without an assistant editor, an assistant editor in the future is necessary to make the journal sustainable, especially given the amount of labor required and its interdisciplinary nature. Prentiss noted that codifying personnel is important for continuity and sustainability. Joseph noted high burnout and also recommended a guaranteed Assistant Editor position. Chris noted that *The Dial* proposal codifies these positions and that the RWES Constitution should reflect that. Nick noted that the word “may” preserves flexibility in case circumstances change. Mark Gallagher noted that while the review editor for *ESP* is not codified, publication of book reviews in *ESP* is codified.

The meeting adjourned at 6:32 p.m.

The next business meeting will take place at the 38th Annual American Literature Association Conference in Boston, Massachusetts, in May 2027.

Treasurer's Report, Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, Inc.

May 21, 2026

Membership and Comparisons¹

Membership	2022²	2023	2024	2025	2026³
Student	32	10	8	5	9
Regular	47	25	26	30	32
Contributing	18	13	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sustaining	44	33	14	17	17
Life	45	46	46	47	48 ⁴
Total	186	127	94	99	106
Revenue without new life members	\$3930	\$2655	\$2170	\$2525	\$2645
Revenue with new life members ⁵	\$5430	\$3155	\$2670 ⁵	\$3525	\$2645

1. Unless noted otherwise, membership counts and corresponding revenue estimates reflect the total membership over the calendar year, January–December.
2. Estimates are high because they include members in good-standing for 2022 plus legacy members from previous years. It is not possible to reconstruct the totals for only 2022 members in good-standing.
3. 2026 numbers reflect totals at the time of this report rather than the complete calendar year.
4. The addition of one life member reflects a records update rather than a new life membership payment. The individual was already a life member but had not previously been included in the membership roll.
5. Membership revenue estimates are gross amounts before PayPal transaction fee. See “Finances” table below for net amounts.
6. The 2024 estimate is approximate because the membership rate scheme changed around April 2024, and the report year includes payments at both the old and new rates.

Finances⁷

Finances	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Expenses	\$4756	\$6202 ⁸	\$2978	\$2840 ⁹	\$4644 ¹⁰
Revenues (total)	\$4305	\$4343	\$4733	\$5354	\$3308
Membership dues ¹¹	\$4305	\$3295	\$3051	\$3362	\$3212
Donations / other receipts	\$0	\$1048 ¹²	\$1681 ¹³	\$1992 ¹⁴	\$97 ¹⁵
BOA balances	\$9269	\$8616	\$8034	\$9681	\$5522
PayPal balances	\$3219	\$1834	\$3931	\$4706	\$7434
Balance combined	\$12488	\$10450	\$11965	\$14387	\$12956

7. Unless noted otherwise, totals are taken at the time of the secretary/treasurer reports in the spring and cover the report year, June–May.
8. Includes one-time costs of printing *In Memoriam: Joel Myerson* (\$2,074) and website redesign (\$2,120).
9. The total expenses this year are uncharacteristically low because of a delay in printing the ESP. Two issues were belatedly completed and paid for in January and March 2026.
10. The total expenses this year are uncharacteristically high because of the delay in printing the *ESP* (see note 7).
11. Revenue is net amount (not gross) based on BOA bank deposits and PayPal receipts.
12. Includes an unidentified \$1,000 BOA mobile deposit (April 25, 2023) and Robert H. Tribken's \$50 PayPal donation/\$48.06 net (May 31, 2023).
13. Includes \$1,000 RWE Memorial Association donation (October 10, 2023, BOA) and Kent Ljungquist's \$50 PayPal donation in addition to his regular membership payment (November 30, 2023).
14. Includes the unidentified BOA deposits of \$1,250 BOA (June 26, 2024) and \$500 (April 30, 2025), and a Jeffrey Wieand's \$250 PayPal donation/\$242.28 net (March 11, 2025).
15. Includes a \$100 PayPal donation/\$96.62 net by Roger Thompson (December 20, 2025).

Respectfully submitted,
Yafang Luo
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REVIEWS

Old England, New England, and the Civil War: How a Clash of Cultures Ignited a Global Campaign for Racial Equality and Civil Rights.

LEN GOUGEON. State University of New York Press, 2025. 368 pp. \$130 cloth.

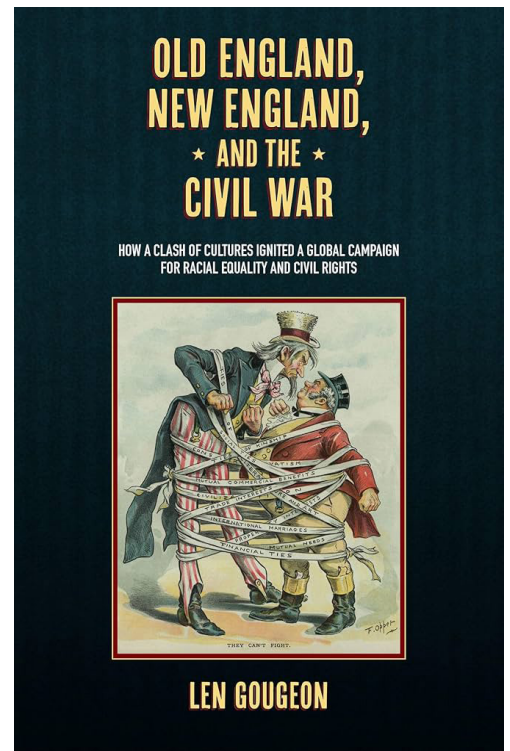
An author's note for Len Gougeon's 1989 article in the *New England Quarterly* on "Emerson, Carlyle, and the Civil War" reported that he was working on following his forthcoming *Virtue's Hero: Emerson, Antislavery, and Reform* (1990) with "a study of relationships between England and British authors as they were affected by the Civil War." Anyone familiar with trajectories of academic research careers will welcome the fulfillment of that promise in Gougeon's *Old England, New England, and the Civil War*. The strength of Gougeon's scholarship remains, as it has been for more than a half-century, an immersion in crucial primary sources. This monograph recreates the Civil War experience of a subscriber to the *Atlantic Monthly* who also read the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Economist*, the *Spectator*, the *Quarterly Review*, *Fraser's Magazine*, *Macmillan's Magazine*, *Punch*, and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, perhaps at the Boston Athenaeum, and cared deeply about the perspectives of the *Times* of London. Gougeon's research in both published and archival correspondence illuminates the vast network of transatlantic Victorian friendships. He logically puts Emerson at the center of the book, for no American thought more about the significance of England than Emerson. After the publication of *English Traits* (1856), Emerson maintained a topical notebook on "England and America" into the early 1870s in addition to raising the subject regularly in other journals. "To say the truth, England is never out of mind," he observed in his 1863 lecture "The Fortune of the Republic," which Gougeon and Joel Myerson brought to light in *Emerson's Antislavery Writings* (1995). "Nobody says it, but all think and feel it. England is the model in which they find their wishes expressed."

Gougeon's decision to structure his book as a narrative of events from 1861 to 1865 limits its application to some questions but makes it a valuable guide for other considerations. Martin Crawford warned forty years ago against focusing sharply on the war years without appreciation of Anglo-American relations in the 1850s, and Leslie Butler has carried transatlantic liberals' Civil War

forward to the end of the century to show how the crisis provided a foundation for community. Packed with political and military background, Gougeon's book also does not have space to look closely at the ideas of the New England intellectuals who identified

England as a national point of comparison. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Our Old Home* (1863), one of the most thoughtful wartime publications on the theme, receives two short paragraphs of summary and two short paragraphs on the British response. Few works get more thorough scrutiny as Gougeon cycles his large cast of characters across his stage. The compensating advantage is that the chronicle assembles a wealth of notable wartime statements and recaptures a world when leading journals and commentators engaged in genuine dialogue. For example, Emerson delivered his bitter attack on England in "The Fortune of the Republic" a few weeks after the *Christian Examiner* denounced the pro-Confederate views of Charles Kingsley and the *Commonwealth* made similar criticisms of William Makepeace Thackeray (243).

Gougeon's survey invites reflection on Emerson's version of a history recounted here with utmost generosity toward the egalitarian progressiveness of Emerson's thinking and the practical political influence he may have exerted. "Could we have believed that England should have disappointed us thus?" Emerson asked in a journal entry that Gougeon quotes in his closing pages. The indictment pointed toward several magazines, several politicians, and Alfred Tennyson, Thomas Carlyle, and Matthew Arnold to support a bewilderment that "no man in all that civil, reading, brave, cosmopolitan country, should have looked at our revolution as a student of history, as philanthropist, eager to see what new possi-



bilities for humanity were to begin” (288). As Gougeon thoroughly documents, Emerson had reason to know of many prominent counterexamples that disproved his broadbrush claim, including John Stuart Mill, John Elliott Cairnes, Charles Darwin, Goldwin Smith, Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Gaskell, Arthur Hugh Clough, Edward Dicey, Thomas Hughes, Leslie Stephen, John Bright, and Richard Cobden. Emerson’s simplification partly illustrates the greater prestige he attributed to the so-called “Lost Leaders” (244), to whom others would have added John Ruskin and Charles Dickens, but also demonstrates the importance he attached to England as a coherent symbol. Unlike postwar liberals, he was less invested at this point in ties to specific individuals than he was in an image. That field of comparison was a distinctive unifying framework for competing national visions within Emerson’s circle, and the summary of the Civil War as a failure for British intellectuals was a celebration of the war as a success for Boston intellectuals. Future historians who seek to test that claim of victory will benefit from Gougeon’s assiduous research.

Thomas J. Brown
University of South Carolina

Bright Circle: Five Remarkable Women in the Age of Transcendentalism.

RANDALL FULLER. Oxford University Press, 2024. 405 pp. \$29.99 cloth.

First the good news: Randall Fuller’s *Bright Circle* is a heartily rendered, highly readable, and above all else affectionate exploration of the lives of five fascinating women and their respective contributions to American Transcendentalism. The women—Mary Moody Emerson, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, Lydia Jackson Emerson, and Sarah Margaret Fuller Ossoli—are all highly deserving of the attention and admiration that Fuller has given them. Each is accorded a luxuriantly long and deep portrait, and the author amply succeeds in making all of them likable, even Ralph Waldo Emerson’s notably prickly Aunt Mary.

Their stories are told with freshness and verve; one need not be a prior convert to Transcendental thinking to feel at home in these pages and be emotionally moved by them. A trove of fascinating and little-known information, Fuller’s work is arguably the most complete and engaging treatment so far of the typically neglected distaff side of the Transcendentalist story and the best that we are likely

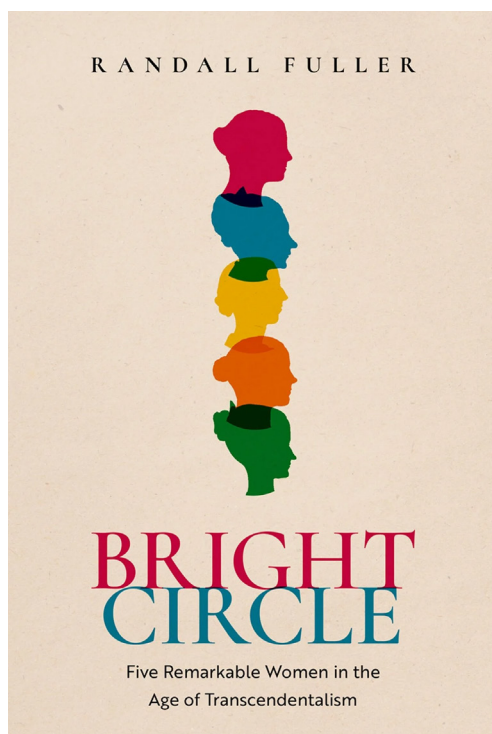
to have for quite some time. I am grateful for having read this book.

The principal figures in this volume shine in almost inverse proportion to the extent to which their lives have been traditionally overshadowed by an illustrious man. Especially engaging are the portraits of Sophia Hawthorne and Lydia Emerson. (The author gets points for insisting on calling the latter woman by her actual name, instead of the “Lidian” affixed to her by her husband Waldo, whose ears were strangely discomfited by “Lydia.”) The chapter “Sophia Peabody in Cuba” is simply enrapturing. Sophia regarded a sensuous appreciation of beauty as a pathway to God, and her visit to Cuba was an experience of boundless aesthetic joy. Fuller captures and communicates Peabody’s rapture with true artistry. Equally deft is the author’s depiction of the Emersons’ problematic but exquisitely balanced marriage. He understands perfectly the interplay of their respective worldviews. He notes, for example, that Lydia “was not Aunt Mary; she did not provide Waldo with a vocabulary—a way of seeing the world. But she offered him something else: a conscience. Lydia’s insistence on the rights of the most oppressed served as a constant friction to his individualism” (243). Reading such lines, devotees of the American Renaissance are likely to nod and murmur, “Bingo!”

Adding an important dimension to the book’s appeal are its ample, mostly color, illustrations. One envies Fuller for his publisher’s lavishness in allowing an average of an image every three or four pages.

Nevertheless, readers seeking flaws in this work will find them. In his generally laudable pursuit of a novelistic voice, Fuller occasionally steps over lines that are better left uncrossed. For instance, he imagines that, as she wrote, Mary Moody Emerson was “oblivious to the house beams creaking in the frosty winter night” (13). One grows sadly accustomed to biographers who speculate as to their subjects’ frames of mind. Fuller, in commenting on Mary’s “oblivious” state is the first in my experience to speculate as to the absence of a frame of mind—surely an even less provable and more prodigious leap of fancy. And, indeed, were the house beams creaking? If Emerson was oblivious to them, then so, assuredly, hundreds of years later, are we. Some other examples might be given of the book’s occasional enthusiasm for seemingly fabricated details.

A reader may also stumble a bit over the book’s inattention to small matters of usage: the text confuses “stationery” with “stationary,” “dove” with “dived,” and “hanged” with “hung.” One finds factual fumbles as well;



Fuller misclassifies *The Merchant of Venice* as a tragedy. He suggests that the navigational error that doomed Margaret Fuller was one of latitude, rather than longitude—the much more challenging calculation. He avers that “dozens of women” were hanged as a result of the Salem Witch Trials, whereas

only fourteen actually went to the scaffold (131). Margaret Fuller’s mother, whose maiden name was Margaret Crane, is re-christened “Sarah Crane Fuller.” The author writes that Ralph Waldo Emerson was “immediately charmed” by Margaret Fuller; Waldo’s first assessment of her was, in fact, “we shall never get on,” although he rapidly changed his mind (193). Two American sculptors are identified in the text as “Henrietta Hosmer” and “Lois Landers” but become “Harriet Goodhue Hosmer” and “Louisa Lander” in the illustration captions (surprisingly, it’s the captions that get the names right). The book presents a curious puzzle: Fuller is obviously passionate about his subject. Why then is he so often careless about details? A possible reason is that he is somewhat more concerned with the message of his text than with its absolute factual precision. This message—that American Transcendentalism owes the lion’s share of its spirit to an intense feminine energy—is an important and interesting one, though, paradoxically, such a message risks being weakened if it is urged with an excess of zeal.

Fuller seeks to establish that, far from acting only on the hazy periphery of the Transcendentalist movement, his female quintet stood firmly at its center. Indeed, a reader not previously versed in the intellectual history of the period might well come away from this study with the impression that it was the women who did virtually all the original thinking for the movement and that Emerson, Thoreau, and their male associates were mostly plagiarists and Johnny-come-latelies. William Ellery Chan-

ning’s 1819 sermon “Unitarian Christianity”? Elizabeth Palmer Peabody had had the same ideas at age thirteen. Emerson’s *Nature*? A “more pungent” expression of ideas already expressed in Sophia Peabody’s letters from Cuba, which are also claimed to have anticipated *Walden* (160). In its urge to connect almost every cultural edifice of the era to a female foundation, *Bright Circle* even insinuates that Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne and her illegitimate pregnancy are his refiguring of Margaret Fuller and her (probably within wedlock) bearing of a child in Italy—a leap that is nothing if not ambitious. Fuller’s enthusiasm on behalf of his quintet is palpable and, for the most part, invigorating. But there is sometimes a straining quality to this volume. It is the work of a writer who is trying awfully, awfully hard to reverse the common understanding of the era.

On and on, the scholarly pendulum swings. Without question, the almost exclusive primacy that generations of literary experts assigned to Emerson, Thoreau, and lesser gentlemen has long stood in need of considerable correction. Fuller has given the pendulum’s bob a hard push in the other direction; very arguably, such forceful shoves are needed. Yet moderate claims tend to be more persuasive than extravagant ones, and the enthusiastic extravagance of *Bright Circle* is both its hallmark and its most dubious feature.

John Matteson
John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Ralph Waldo Emerson, A Companion.

PRENTISS CLARK. McFarland, 2023. 301 pp. \$49.95 paperback.

In this stunningly comprehensive compendium, we see Emerson’s greatest ideas structured by topic in a way that makes them both digestible and meaningful. Emerson, a vast cosmos in himself, read, wrote, and gave lectures on nearly every topic of social and personal concern. We are invited to follow Emerson’s mind, with one topic adroitly organized and leading naturally to the next, in alphabetical order.

As a preacher, essayist, poet, lecturer, philosopher, and abolitionist in the mid-nineteenth century, Emerson perceived no theme as out of bounds. The most challenging and controversial themes most pressing in his time were first up for review. Clark does a meticulous job at seamlessly bringing together passages from Emerson’s oeuvre, those both little known and well-loved, with var-

ious historical and contemporary critics, reviewers, and biographers. Included in this companion are also a brief biography, a list of major publications, and an appendix with writing and research topics.

Clark does a masterful job of cataloguing the transitions of thought from Emerson's early lectures to his later more contemplative prose and poetry. Each topic gets its just due, and paragraphs become playgrounds for various scholars and individuals trying to comprehend the mind that was Emerson's. Topics for inquiry include America, democracy, education, ethics, moral sentiment, nature, science, politics, and race, to name a few.

From this companion we see not only Emerson's extensive knowledge but also his significant contacts as the father of Transcendentalism. We learn of his impact and influence on figures like Thomas Carlyle, Frederick Douglass, Emily Dickinson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Henry David Thoreau, Henry James Jr., and William James, to name a few. Much like an intellectual farmer, we see Emerson having planted seeds of insight into diverse and varying fields, which have grown over the years to be harvested by generations after him. We see his ethics, his moral philosophy, his conscience, his idealism, and his pragmatism at work in the world even up to this day.

We learn also that Emerson has not been universally loved or valued for his questioning of religion and society, even up to the present. Clark writes, "Emerson's reception abroad has been mixed, and while understandably less charged with nationalist concerns or shaped by the contexts of American history it often unfolds along lines similar to those in the United States" (205).

There is an instance where Clark contrasts Emerson's "Experience" and *Nature*, which offer two seemingly disparate viewpoints of the universe. Her accumulation of evidence points to polarities of perspective but also an overarching unity of thought. Clark unpacks Emerson's ideas in ways that help tease out the toughest ideological tangles to create new visions.

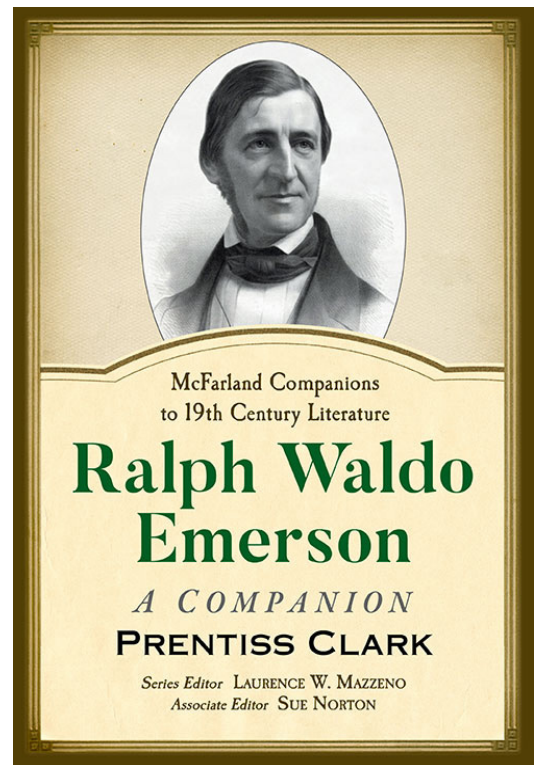
The companion is an impressive feat with winding hallways and turrets, garrets and wings, which all work to support the structural integrity of Emerson's works. Clark's meticulous research is clear with argumentation that links across texts in an imperceptibly fluid fashion. The significance of this companion can be found in Clark's own words when speaking of Emerson's: "Such books... are formative not so much in and of themselves, but rather because of what they make possible... which is to say, they free us to find our own way and our own words; they put us in a position to read ourselves and our world directly

and to write our own transcripts" (202).

Clark proves Emerson himself to be one of the *Representative Men* about which he writes. For Emerson, "the greatest persons teach human potential and possibility; they free individuals to

aspire, rather than bind individuals to hero worship" (215). Even so, through Clark's incisive detective work, we are reminded of the influence of female figures on Emerson's ideas. She notes the thread between some of his most significant thoughts and "his formative relationships with women including Mary Moody Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Caroline Sturgis" (205). As Clark writes, "Though men are the subjects of his chapters, the women he read and conversed with—particularly, at this time in his life, Margaret Fuller—significantly inform his thinking about the power of interpersonal exchange" (215).

Ralph Waldo Emerson: A Companion is a significant and compelling text for those who have come to Emerson fresh or have been studying him for years. While reading this work of exemplary scholarship, one can see the formative influence of Emerson's mind on the broader contours of American intellectual history. For the average curious soul all the way to the dedicated philosopher, Emerson's question of "How shall I live?" can begin to be formulated. As Clark says, the goal is that the truth of Emerson's insights "begins living in us" (101). The extensive research condensed into this volume can be a true companion to guide us into the mind of Emerson, the world in which he lived, and the one in which we live today.



Danica Cantrell
Independent Scholar

ORIGINAL HYMN.

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here, once, the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe, long since, in silence slept;
Alike, the conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We place with joy a votive stone,
That memory may their deed redeem,
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

O Thou who made those heroes dare
To die, or leave their children free,—
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
The shaft we raise to them and Thee.

The original broadside for Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Concord Hymn" printed for the July 4, 1837 dedication of the granite obelisk monument commemorating the North Bridge fight of April 19, 1775.

Courtesy of the Barrett Family Collection, Concord Free Public Library