This year’s recipient of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society’s Distinguished Achievement Award is Robert D. Richardson, Jr. He is, as the criteria for the award state, an individual who has “made sustained and important contributions to scholarship that have had a significant impact on the understanding of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s life and thought.”

Bob is no stranger to Emerson, Concord, and New England. He moved to Concord as a teenager with his parents when his father assumed a pulpit there. After receiving his A.B. (magna cum laude with highest honors in English) from Harvard University in 1956, Bob continued on to earn the Ph.D. degree there in 1961. He spent two years as an instructor at Harvard before moving to the University of Denver, where he taught from 1963 to 1987. After a brief stint at the University of Colorado, Bob returned to New England, teaching at Wesleyan until 1994. He has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Humanities Center.

Bob’s first books were on Literature and Film (Indiana, 1969) and The Rise of Modern Mythology (Indiana, 1972), but he hit his stride with Myth and Literature in the American Renaissance (Indiana, 1978) and Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind (California, 1986). The last two works shed light on Emerson; Bob’s Emerson: The Mind on Fire (California, 1995) has the effect of a solar flare in illuminating the reading patterns, philosophical development, and personal events that turned a minister’s son named Ralph into a seminal American writer and thinker named Waldo, all presented in graceful prose. Among the many awards the latter work received were the Francis Parkman Prize and the Washington Irving Award for Literary Excellence. In addition to numerous articles, public and professional presentations, and book chapters, Bob also edited with an introduction Emerson’s Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems (Bantam, 1990).

While Bob’s scholarly contributions are enormous, his personal contributions are equally valuable. In addition to the work he has done in support of the Emerson Society, he has given freely of his time and wide expertise to colleagues, graduate students, and lay people interested in the Concord circle. Many of us have profited from his readings of our manuscripts, which often mix unwarranted praise with much-needed and appreciated suggestions for revision. Bob’s wide range of interests is matched only by his enthusiasm, and he can pitch into a discussion of Schleiermacher with a passion usually reserved solely for college sporting events.

It is with great pleasure that the Emerson Society presents its Distinguished Achievement Award to Bob Richardson.

—Joel Myerson
2001 EMERSON SOCIETY PATRONS

Emerson Society members have responded generously to the appeal by Past President Ronald A. Bosco to join at new levels of membership. All donations above the $10 annual membership go to support the “Emerson in 2003” bicentennial celebration now being organized. Dues categories are Life ($500), Sustaining ($50), Contributing ($25), and Regular ($10). Please send check payable to The Emerson Society (U.S. dollars only) to Ronald A. Bosco, Secretary/Treasurer, Dept. of English, University at Albany—SUNY, Albany, NY 12222.

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The newsletter of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society

EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

The newsletter of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society Published at Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Editor: Douglas Emory Wilson
Managing Editor: Wesley T. Mott
Book Review Editor: T. Gregory Garvey
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Emerson Society Papers is published twice a year. Subscriptions, which include membership in the Society, are $10 a year (students $5). Send checks for membership (calendar year) and back issues ($5 each) to Ronald A. Bosco, Department of English, University at Albany—SUNY, Albany, NY 12222.

For future issues of Emerson Society Papers we solicit information about editions, publications, and research in progress on Emerson and his circle; queries and requests for information in aid of research in these fields; and significant news (promotions, transfers, retirements, deaths, etc.) of Emersonian scholars. We will also consider notes and short articles (about 4 to 5 double-spaced typewritten pages, or less) on subjects of interest to our members. MLA stylesheet is preferred. Send manuscripts to the editor, Douglas Emory Wilson, 1404 Christine Ave., Amstoria, AL 36207-3924.

Review copies of books on Emerson should be sent to book review editor T. Gregory Garvey, Department of English, SUNY-Brockport, Brockport, NY 14420-2608.

Takashashi Translates Whicher

Professor Yoshi Takashashi has translated Stephen E. Whicher's Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson into Japanese.

PROSPECTS.

New Dues Reminder Schedule

Beginning with this issue, dues-reminder notices for the next calendar year (in this case, 2002) will be inserted in the Fall issue of ESP Membership will continue to be based on the calendar year. Several of our members were confused by our past practice of including a dues notice in the Spring issue for the year already under way. Life members and members paid through 2002 and beyond should not receive a dues notice. Your membership expires at the end of the year indicated on your mailing label.

Emerson Society Page Available

Jeff Cramer, archivist of the Thoreau Institute, announces that a Ralph Waldo Emerson Society page is available on the Institute’s website at www.walden.info/collections/Emerson/EmersonSociety.htm. The Emerson Society’s collections are housed at the Thoreau Institute.

For Papers

Proposals are invited for the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society’s two sessions at the American Literature Association conference in Long Beach, Calif., 30 May–2 June 2002. Please send proposals to Program Chair Sarah Wider, Department of English, Colgate University, 13 Oak Drive, Hamilton, NY 13346, or fax to 315-228-7815 or e-mail to swider@mail.colgate.edu.

Session I: Engendering Transcendentalism. We invite papers on women’s role in creating, interpreting, perpetuating, and revising the set of ideas and societal critiques associate with American Transcendentalism. Especially welcome are discussions of writers/artists/reformers who have received very little consideration in Emersonian criticism (e.g., Eliza Lee Follen, Sarah Clarke, Ellen Sturgis Hooper) as well as gendered studies of the better-known Transcendentalists.

Session II: Emerson and the Matter of War. As the millennium opens with old wars continuing, other wars recurring (remember the war on poverty?), and new wars showing no signs of real conclusion, we invite papers for the 2002 A LA conference on any aspect of Emerson’s commentary on war.

Distinguished Achievement Award Policy

At its annual meeting on 28 May 1998, the Advisory Board of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society established guidelines for the composition of the society’s Distinguished Achievement Award Committee: "No later than October, the President will establish a sub-committee consisting of the current President and two others—Board members and/or previous award recipients, at least one of whom shall have been on the sub-committee the previous year, said committee to report to the Advisory Board at least 30 days before the annual meeting.” At this year’s Board Meeting, on 25 May, these guidelines were reaffirmed, and the ESP editors were directed to publish the Distinguished Achievement Award Policy:

The Distinguished Achievement Award is presented by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society to individuals who have made sustained and important contributions to scholarship that have had a significant impact on the understanding of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s life and thought. Such achievement may be represented in a single work or an exceptional body of work, or the accumulated impact of a series of works which, for example, explore the Emersonian subject from a single or multiple perspectives. Such studies might be biographical, bibliographical, editorial, or critical.

The award is not limited to American scholars. While frequently making awards on a yearly basis, the Society may choose to make multiple awards, or no awards, in a given year. A call for nominations for the award will be made at the Society’s annual business meeting at the A LA Conference and in the Society’s official publication Emerson Society Papers. The Distinguished Achievement Award Committee will present a nomination for final approval to the Board at least 30 days before the Board’s annual meeting.

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SESSION I: Emerson in New England.

Chairs, Phyllis Cole (Penn State Delaware County)

Emerson, Rhetoric and Eccasy
ROGER THOMPSON, Virginia Military Institute

Emerson's involvement in rhetorical theory is indicative of his desire to create a distinctly American expression in the arts. While Emerson's claim for a new American literature has been broadly dismissed, his conception of a new American rhetoric has received little attention, and the reason that Emerson's rhetorical theory so sharply differs from rhetorical theory of the time that it seems not to be a theory at all. New England educational culture in the early to mid-nineteenth century was dominated by rhetorical theory derived from Hugh Johnson's *The Elements of Rhetoric* and rational rhetoric that complemented the burgeoning sciences and industrialism. Indeed, following the tradition of Blair, many New England clergy and educators prepared rhetorics that were, at root, technical, reason-centered handbooks. Emerson was educated in Blair and the systematic, belles-lettres rhetoric, but just as he would eventually renounce imitation of European literature, he would renounce his British rhetorical forbears. In fact, Emerson formulated complex and subtle ideas on how rhetoric should function within the American culture in opposition to the belladonnaistic paradigm that he felt short of all the ultimate purpose of rhetoric: the movement of thought. Emerson's philosophy, reflecting the governing purpose of Plato's rhetoric: the desire to lift an audience to dialogue with the divine. Such a rhetoric breaks the assimilation of American into the composite of all the various elements of Emerson's thought.

Robert D. HARBIE, Ball State University

...[chapter summary]... 

Whose Walden? Emerson's New England Biographers, 1881-1889

ROBERT D. HARBIE, Ball State University

...[chapter summary]... 

Emerson's early reputation was thus shaped by the economics of publication and the personal agendas of his biographers. Just as important, it reflected a deep concern with the issues of authority and the individual's search for a private identity. The thousands of words expended on Emerson's life, ideals, and views by a dozen biographers, the preservation of his letters, the maintaining of his journal, the publication of his sermons, the biographies of his family, the exhibition of ornithological specimens, shells, insects, fishes, and even minerals in the first museum in the world that explicitly defined the idea of "life," the preservation of the most disparate species with one another and with the human race. This experience of the evolution of "life," the word which he suggests offers a hope of knowing the hidden link that gives the perceiving mind its sense of kinship to the natural world. He thought his most striking finding in this line of figure 1845, when he read a book entitled *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, published anonymously in London the year before. Its author (Robert Chambers, a Scottish antiquarian and bookseller) had pulled together Laplace's nebular hypothesis concerning the origin of the solar system, the researches of eminent geologists, archæologists, and natural historians, to come up with a theory of the origin and development of life on earth that stressed its gradual unfolding in accordance with a divinely ordained law of "Development." Emerson, like many of his contemporaries, was intoxicated with the sublime history of the universe offered in Vestiges, as well as the way it dispensed with the need for an intrinsically anthropomorphic creative. Emerson was undoubtedly eager to capture a copy of Darwin's *Origin of Species* when it appeared, yet he was unable to find any copy of the mysterious *Origin* before 1849. Yet Emerson's references to The Origin of Species, for all the fact of the first appearance of the universe for government by chance and struggle, producing "higher" forms but proceeding toward no goal, might convince the reason but could not please the imagination, for the proof of this divinity first suggested in nature (1836): "A man is a god in mini."  

The Transcendence of Physics: Science and Ethics in the Later Emerson

RONALD A. BOSCO, University of Albany-SUNY

...[chapter summary]... 

Emerson, as we know, was swift to condemn the "half-sight of science" and its ways. Each of these papers shows Emerson turned not to religious science for the means to address such ultimate questions as creation and the nature of nature. He was enabled to take this bold step by his own will, by his decisions about what was important to his faith in the universe as a single and legitimate Creation governed not by sympathy but by law. Yet, as our panelists show, this very law of science and law gave rise to deep dilemmas. Professor Packer points to both the importance, and the ultimate, irresistible appeal of science. Professor Emerson's response to God's creation. Professor Bosco offers the surprise of an Emerson who was willing to embrace the progress of science, no more so than in his final writings, which we mind and body not as dualistic oppositions but as necessary allies of each other. And Eric Wilson shows that Emerson's universe was a matrix of lush metaphors, in which he used the resources of physics to embrace spirit, to sense its spikes even in snow puddles, shining on a rare moment.


Bosco, Ronald A. “Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882: A Brief Biography.” Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson. 9-58. [See under Myerson] [Biographical overview]

Bosco, Ronald A. “We Find What We Seek: Emerson and His Biographers.” Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson. 269-90. [See under Myerson] [History of Emerson biography]


Collison, Gary. “Antislavery.” European Review 1:3-35. [Corrects a misattribution of a quotation in Nature]

March, Richard. “The Age of the First Person Singular.” Emerson and Individualism. Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 61-100. [See under Myerson] [Emerson’s individualism in historical context]


Myerson, Joel. “Emerson’s ‘Success’—Actually, It Is Not.” ESP 11, no. 1, 1-8. [The well-known passage is misattributed to Emerson]

Myerson, Joel. ed. Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson. Oxford. [New essays by several scholars on aspects of Emerson’s historical context—each essay is also separately listed here]

Myerson, Joel. ed. Transcendentalism: A Reader. Oxford. [Inclusive anthology of Transcendentalist texts]

Orth, Ralph H. “Emerson’s Visit to the Tomb of His First Wife.” ESP 11, no. 2, 3-8. [Emerson’s enactment of an established cultural pattern of grieving]

Packer, Barbara. “Dangerous Acquaintances: The Correspondence of Margaret Fuller and James Freeman Clarke.” ELJ 67:801-18. [The friendship of Transcendentalists Fuller and Clarke]


Sloan, Gary. “Emerson’s Cosmic Sophistries.” RE:AL The Journal of Liberal Arts 25:60-70. [Emerson’s flawed argument in “ Fate”]

Tanner, Tony. The American Mysteries: American Literature from Emerson to DeLillo. Cambridge. [Emerson’s development and influence]


Stick, Neil. Emersonian Transcendentalism in Frank Lloyd Wright’s Unity Temple. ISLE 7:95-113. [Wright’s use of Emersonian aesthetic principles]


In an age of e-mail exchange and instantaneous comment it seems retrograde to sing the praises of delay, and yet an occasional serendipity arises from the all too inevitable practice of putting something off until there is just a little more time at one’s disposal. This long overdue review is now the timely prelude of things to come. Published a good four years ago, Emersonian Circles: Essays in Honor of Joel Myerson, edited by Wesley T. Mott and Robert E. Burkholder, editors, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997. 284 pp. $59.95 cloth.

In bibliographies, in literary history, in the publication of manuscript material, Myerson has laid the vital groundwork for recent studies of Emerson’s development as a writer, studies of the vital conversations out of which Emerson’s ideas took shape, studies of Emerson’s influence upon his contemporaries as well as their influence upon him. As the essays in this volume amply show, old interpretations lose their force in light of new evidence. The shopworn myths of Emerson’s distance and of his virtual isolation as an original thinker collapse upon examination as we study yet another example of Emerson’s uncanny engagement in the issues of his day and his ongoing dialogue with those who constituted his world. Whether Len Gougeon asks the reader to think about Emerson’s biting criticism of Great Britain’s “neutrality” during the Civil War, Phyllis Coleman enabling us to see what an apparently tossaway phrase from “The American Scholar” might reflect from the real source and locus of idealism. With poetry, biography was made the work before 1836 virtually unreadable. His interaction with his contemporaries must be closely considered, as Wavey Carlson’s discussion of Emerson’s failed attempt to edit Bronson Alcott’s Psyche provides an example, in this case illuminating the lived reality behind the paired elements of “truth and tenderness” in Emerson’s essay “Friendship.” While the difference between editing an unwieldy manuscript and decrying slavery in public lectures may well seem a simple matter of fact, as work continues on Emerson’s role as editor and his complicated experiments in effecting societal change, revision and reform may well become synonymous.

In an essay that continues his ongoing project of reexamining Emerson’s involvement in anti-slavery work, Len Gougeon fleshes out the literary implications for Great Britain’s so-called neutrality. Discussing the well-respected British authors who disparaged the North, Gougeon delineates a kind of pamphlet war fought in the periodicals, a war in which Emerson was a major player. While Gougeon focuses on the specific events in a kind of play-by-play recreation of the time, Larry Buell offers his own version of contextualization. Reminding his readers that they play with the doctrine of the author for the society that produced a “great man” is impossible (the desires of a late-twentieth-century audience), he also takes us to the approach we know well: reading a particular essay by searching Emerson’s other writings. As he notes, the full-scale version lies beyond the scope of a single essay, but in the limited space he effective shows how far away are the old assumptions about Emerson’s privatism. Putting “Fate” back in the context of Emerson’s anti-slavery efforts as well as in the context of other discussions of the “times,” Buell reminds his reader that Emerson’s ever-persistent concern over vocation irrevocably brought the individual into active engagement with the world.

Buell’s remarks suggest Emersonian individualism breaks havoc with static categories of public and private. The topicality of biographical essays offers numerous opportunities for rethinking the nature of those categories. In the essay that opens the volume, Al von Frank cites Jurgen Habermas’s work on the emergence of modern bourgeois life and notes its likely appeal to those who study nineteenth-century American culture and its frequent iteration of “separate spheres.” Von Frank asks, “To what extent was Emerson’s idea of home precipitated at any given time on cultural standards or notions of privacy? To what extent could the concept of home be related to the public sphere, and with what results?” (5). His own interest lies in the “new biography,” but at the same time he illuminates other old assumptions, breathing new life into the often-quoted directive from the end of the essay, Von Frank’s discussion “Build therefore your own world!” becomes a counter-cultural statement against the public works of Emerson’s age. The world in need of construction was distinctly interior, decidedly private. It was in a word “home.”

Feminist scholarship has long noted the reconsidering the constructs called “home” in order to see them as a complex and integrated series of engagements with productive work rather than just the oppositional other half of the public sphere. Phyllis Coleman’s essay takes the concept of home directly into the Emerson household, illustrating how words spoken in public originated in familial conversation. Calling attention to the “other American Scholars” in the Emerson family (for the purposes of 1837 essentially Lidian Emerson, Mary Moody Emerson, and Elizabeth Hoar), she opens up a single phrase in “The American Scholar” so that we understand what was at stake for “men and women conversing.” Noting the epistolary conversations that were essential to Emerson’s addresses, she also illuminates the conversations in which Emerson was a different participant at best. When Lidian organized the dinner in the Emerson home for anti-slavery workers Angelina and Sarah Grimké, Emerson had little to say. As Cole remarks, “we would not know of the Grimké campaign or the Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society from his writing (55). However, if they come to us through a specific indignation at the church’s stifling of free speech” occurred only a few months later “in his first antislavery speech in November 1837” (155).

Several other essays also take us deeply into the highly relational world in which Emerson moved. As Cole notes, one of the languages shared within the Emerson household was a language of grief, a point Dan Shealy’s essay takes up in his description of the common ground of loss which both the Emerson and Alcott households often stood. Carlson offers a persuasive connection between Emerson’s difficult role in Alcott’s aborted dreams of publication and the key elements Emerson himself wrote into his essay on friendship. His discussion highlights the tension which is clear in Gay Collison’s thought-provoking discussion of the apparently similar, yet vastly different experience shown in the scavenging criticism both Emerson and Theodore Parker received from contemporaries. Collison’s essay, the nexus of support available to Emerson in the late 1830s was far different from the world Parker faced a scant three years later. Intersecting with the debate over the nature of public and private, his discussion highlights the basic differences in Emerson’s and Parker’s journal entries. Such difference also frames Kent Lijnquist’s lively discussion of the sharply contrasting responses to Poe’s and Emerson’s
Emerson's Ethics.

GUSTAF VAN CROMPHOUT

The word "ethics," like the word "philosophy," hardly has been the exclusive property of professional philosophers. Nor should it be. It is too valuable to be monopolized by any single academic discipline, even if we can distinguish between the ethics we live by and ethics as a body of philosophical thought that morally justifies a way of life. Emerson's ethics—the ethics he tried to live by and the ethics he articulated in his writings—is not so neatly compartmentalized. The compact volume Emerson's Ethics, by Gustaf Van Cromphout, remains true to this same complex ethical reality.

In reconstructing Emerson's ethics, Van Cromphout provides an organized, if not systematic, account of Emerson in a language that professional philosophers will find familiar. The ethics that Van Cromphout—guided by the work of philosophical critics of modernity such as Charles Taylor, Bernard Williams, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Richard Rorty—attributes to Emerson are broadly concerned with the original Socratic question of "valuation" (how we should live our entire lives) and not just narrow self-interest. In his undergraduate essays "The Character of Socrates" and "The Present State of Ethical Philosophy" Emerson professed a near-Stoic faith in "nature" as an empirical approach to literary texts. If the opposition between theory and other forms of criticism, or the most inadvertent circumstances'" (258).

On this foundation, then, Van Cromphout sketches a multi-tiered picture of Emerson's ethics. The "meta-ethical" foundation, he argues, is a set of intuitions about the possibility of ethics and religion, the naturalness of human moral "(It is human beings to be morally implicated)" (35)), and a Kantian understanding of the relationship between ethics and knowledge. Just how Kantian Emerson is at this level of abstraction is debatable. But Van Cromphout lays out a plausible argument that despite being enamored of Hutchesonian moral sense theory, Emerson shared with Kant a belief in the primacy of practical over theoretical reasons, and Van Cromphout's reconstruction of his ethical writings captures this distinct Emersonian quality. There are a loose ends, tensions, and fissures in this portrait of Emerson, but they are more than compensated for by Van Cromphout's wealth of learning and his mastery of the primary texts.

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Almost 200 people packed the Masonic Temple in Monument Square, Concord, on 13 July to hear a special panel discussion on "Emerson's Wisdom." The program was the Emerson Society's contribution to the 2001 Annual Gathering of the Thoreau Society. Four Emerson Society members briefly presented Emerson passages whose wisdom resonates in our time as in Emerson's, particularly as the passages embody his concerns with self-culture, education, and intellectual, emotional, and spiritual "provocation." An extended conversation with the audience followed the opening remarks. The panelists (with their topics) were, from left, the Rev. Barry Andrews (Emerson's Journal of 1835), Wendell Refior ("Experience"), Sarah Ann Wider (moderator), Richard Piccarreto ("The Over-Soul"), and Laura Dassow Walls (Emerson's Sermon #133, 1831).

Among many Emerson Society members participating in the Thoreau Society Annual Gathering were these officers and board members, shown on 14 July in front of the First Parish Church, Concord, with the historic Wright Tavern in the background: Wes Mott, Laura Dassow Walls, Bob Habich, Sarah Ann Wider, Joel Myerson, Ron Bosco, Bob Hudspeth, and Phyllis Cole.