One of the most striking quotations in Emerson's Nature has been consistently misattributed to Coleridge. The quotation occurs in the last paragraph of the “Language” chapter: “every object rightly seen, unlocks a new faculty of the soul” (The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I [1971]: 23). Emerson first quoted this statement in a journal entry of 12 August 1836 (The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson [JMN], 5 [1965]: 189). The editor of JMN, 5 footnotes the quotation thus: “Cf. Coleridge’s observation on the discoveries of scientific men, Aids to Reflection, 1829, pp. 150-151; previously paraphrased in JMN, III, 283.” In JMN, 3 [1963]:283 we find, in quotation marks, the statement “that every truth you receive prepares the mind for the reception of unknown truth.” The editors comment (n. 54) that this statement “seems to be a paraphrase of Coleridge’s ‘every new truth discovered by them [scientific men] has either added to its [Christianity’s] evidence, or prepared the mind for its reception.’ See Aids to Reflection...” (The square brackets are the editors’). Although there is some real resemblance between Emerson’s statement and the passage quoted from Coleridge, the editors were, it seems to me, appropriately cautious (“seems to be a paraphrase...”).

Where I fail to see any real resemblance, however, is between the Coleridge passage (or, for that matter, Emerson’s “paraphrase” of it) and the crucial quotation in Nature and in JMN, 5:189: “every object rightly seen unlocks a new faculty of the Soul.” As the context both in the journal and in the last paragraph of the “Language” chapter in Nature indicates, Emerson is concerned here with the mind’s education through its encounters with nature. Not surprisingly, the editor of JMN, 5 was, in his turn, duly cautious (see above: “Cf. Coleridge’s observation...”).

The editors of volume one (1971) of the Collected Works, however, abandoned such caution. In reference to the quotation in the final paragraph of the “Language” chapter, they state flatly: “Emerson’s source is Coleridge, Aids to Reflection...” (250n23. 17). Given the prestige of the new Collected Works edition, it was not surprising that Coleridge became generally accepted as the source of the quotation. The next step was almost inevitable: not only was Coleridge regarded as the source (which may, after all, refer only to the general idea behind the statement), but the very words of the quotation were asserted to be his. This is now the generally accepted view. Books on Emerson that refer to the quotation and anthologies that bother to identify its source routinely assume that Emerson is quoting Coleridge’s Aids to Reflection. To take some distinguished examples, in Robert Richardson’s Emerson: The Mind on Fire (1995) we read about Emerson’s interpretation of “Coleridge’s saying ‘Every object rightly seen unlocks a new faculty of the Soul’” (241); and two exceptionally fine recent anthologies—one of Transcendentalism (2000), the other of Emerson’s prose and poetry (2001)—annotate the relevant quotation as “Quoted from Aids to Reflection, by Coleridge” and “Quoted from Coleridge’s Aids to Reflection, a religious and philosophical treatise.”

As I pointed out in 1990 (see my Emerson’s Modernity and the Example of Goethe [1990], 32 and n14), the quotation in the last paragraph of the “Language” chapter is Emerson’s almost verbatim translation of Goethe’s “Jeder neue Gegenstand, wohl beschaut, schließt ein neues Organ in uns auf” (from Goethe’s 1823 essay “Bedeutende Fördernis durch ein einziges geistreiches Wort,” Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche [1948-71], 16:880). This statement voices the fundamental Goethean principle that, whatever their ontological status, mind and nature are epistemologically interdependent—that only the mind grants nature the status of “object of knowledge” and that only through its encounters with the objects of nature does the mind attain knowledge of its potential and faculties (“Der Mensch kennt nur sich selbst, insofern er die Welt kennt, die er nur in sich und sich nur

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EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

The newsletter of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society
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EMERSON IN 2003 CHAIRS
Ronald A. Bosco

EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

Spring 2002

“EMerson in 2003” Calendar

With the bicentennial celebration of Emerson’s birth now one year away, several organizations, including the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, are preparing special programs, events, and publications. Joel Myerson and Ron Bosco, co-chairs of the Emerson Society’s “Emerson in 2003” offerings, announce the following calendar events. Events organized by the Emerson Society are indicated by an asterisk (*). If you know of other Emerson-related happenings scheduled for 2003, please notify our editor. The full issue of ESP will provide an updated calendar.

Jan/Feb

- Emerson featured in Unitarian Universalist World
- Opening of Harvard exhibition in Houston
- Opening of Concord Free Public Library exhibition on Emerson
- Exhibit of Emerson materials at 25 Beacon St., Boston (UUA) in conjunction with the exhibit that tentatively will include talks by Wesley Mott and David Robinson on Emerson’s ministry and connection to Unitarianism
- Opening of University of South Carolina library exhibition of Emerson
- Mid-April
- Official announcement of Emerson Society Web site

26 March

- Conference at Massachusetts Historical Society, co-sponsored by the Emerson Society and exhibition of Emerson materials at the MHS.
- Reception at Concord Museum and opening of Emerson House to guests

30 May-2 June

- Emerson sessions at Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly meeting in Boston
- Early April
- Reception at Emerson House

11-14 July


- Spring Exhibit of Emerson materials at 25 Beacon St., Boston (UUA) in conjunction with the exhibit that tentatively will include talks by Wesley Mott and David Robinson on Emerson’s ministry and connection to Unitarianism

- Mid-April
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- 11-14 July


PROSPECTS.

American Literature Association Conference

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society will present two panels at the thirteenth annual conference of the American Literature Association, to be held on 30 May–2 June in Long Beach, California. Exact times are not yet available.

SESSION I (THURSDAY, 30 MAY)

Emerson and the Matter of War.
Chair: Jennifer Garley (University of California, Berkeley)
“War and Emerson’s Language of Revolution,” Jean Darcy (CUNY)
“Emerson’s Self and Another Self,” Shoji Goto (Rikkyo University)
“A War on Words: Sincerity and Emerson’s Antislavery Writing,” T. Gregory Garvey (SUNY-Brockport)

SESSION II (FRIDAY, 31 MAY)

Engendering Transcendentalism.
Chair: Sarah Ann Wider (Colgate University)
Christina Zwarg (Haverford College), Caleb Crain (Writer, Brooklyn), Phyllis Cole (Penn State). Panel discussion, no papers given.

The ALA conference will be held at the Hyatt Regency, 200 Pine Avenue, Long Beach on 30 May–2 June. An opening reception will be held on Thursday evening beginning at 7:00 p.m. The conference fee is still only $50 (with a special rate of $10 for graduate students, independent scholars, high school teachers, and retired faculty).

The Hyatt Long Beach features water views from almost all the rooms, excellent meeting space, and a superb location. The hotel is within an easy walk of several excellent restaurants and many of the local attractions, including the new aquarium; the city offers a free shuttle that makes it easy to explore a variety of cultural resources. It is also within a day’s drive of the major tourist attractions of Southern California and of some valuable scholarly resources, such as the Huntington Library.

The hotel offers a conference rate of $120 for a single or double room. For reservations, please call 1-800-233-1234 before 15 January. To receive the special open foom on “Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Wisdom”—the 2002 session will consist of brief statements by a panel of Emerson Society members, after which the audience will be invited to ask questions and express their own views. Len Gougeon will serve as moderator. About 200 people attended the 2001 program. The theme of the 2002 Thoreau Society Annual Gathering is “The Spiritual and Political Mind of Thoreau.” Mark your calendar for 11-14 July.

Spring 2002
forced to flee the town by his irate Concord neighbors after the battle began. Throughout this century of masculine strife, the women of the families formed a network of conductors that kept alive several different religious traditions—and passed them down through generations. Phyllis Cole shows exactly how it was possible for a reliance on the “inner light” and justification by faith to pass from Jonathan Edwards to Emerson, though Emerson’s own father, the Rev. William Emerson, professed a faith that had rejected all forms of “enthusiasm.”

In the later chapters of the book we follow Mary Moody Emerson from the exhilarating 1830s, when she was briefly part of the Concord community in which Transcendentalism was being hatched, through her isolated Maine life of the 1840s, to the sad wanderings of her later years, increasingly eccentric and driven, determined to maintain her independence until she could no longer care for herself. Her story is one of brilliance frustrated by poverty, lack of opportunity, and unhappy temperament; but it is also an important testimony to courage and to the determination not to be shut out from the world’s great thought. Phyllis Cole has contributed greatly to our understanding of New England history, and she makes clear that the lives of men cannot be understood in isolation from the lives of the women who raised and educated them.

—BARBARA PACKER
University of California, Los Angeles
Oxford volume, which includes a "Bibliographic Essay" noting not only works on Emerson but also works on the reform movements of the day" (16-17).

In a complementary essay, "The Radical Emerson?" Robert Milder, Emerson's successor as "editor" of the essays present revisi

Cave. Overall, the image of Emerson that emerges from these twenty essays is markedly different from the staid, serene, self-effacing Emerson of the Cambridge Companions. Instead, he is portrayed as a radical individual, engaged in intellectual and reformist projects, and his writing is characterized by a "featureless" quality that is not evident in the essays published over a period of several decades, all of which seem to be fresh. It should be noted, however, that for Emerson scholars, there is little here that is completely new. And that's just fine. In most cases the essays aim to recontextualize Emerson's work, rather than to provide a critique of it. As a means toward this end, both texts include a detailed "chronology," and both offer extensive bibliographical apparatus, especially the Oxford volume, which includes an "Introduction" to the Cambridge Companion.

The New Critical "mismatch" with Emerson's rhetoric and experimental forms began to give way even in the 1950s, and Wider offers telling reassessments of Stephen Whitelock's and his generation. Wider notes, that year has receded into just one more marker of achievement. Gougeon's study led directly to an edition of antislavery speeches, which, in contrast to the essays, are at once moving, and erudite, and so would certainly be the case. In "Ralph Waldo Emerson in His Family," Phyllis Cole acquaints us with the interesting history of the Emerson family, both paternal and maternal, a family in which it turns out, Ralph Waldo was not the only radical thinker. Her particular focus on the unconventional and highly influential (on young Ralph Waldo, at least) Mary Moody Emerson reflects insights originating in her groundbreaking Mary Moody Emerson and The Origins of Transcendentalism (1998).

Finally, Jeffrey Steele offers a very interesting take on personal relationships among the three of the period’s most independent thinkers in his "Transcendental Friendship: Fuller, and Thoreau." Steele points out that all three considered friendship from a Transcendental (i.e., ideal) perspective and, not surprisingly, none of the three could envision a stable model of friendship in which the demands of direction and friendship did not contradict one another (136).

The Oxford text begins with Joel Myerson’s brief Introduction, which, among other things, points out the rather remarkable fact that "in the last decade alone, nearly one thousand articles and books have been published discussing Emerson's life, ideas, and writings" (3). Ronald Bosco then provides a brief but surprisingly circumstantial biographical sketch of the man, touching upon the primary formative events in his long and decidedly active life and their literary results.

In his detailed and insightful "The Age of the First Person Singular": Emerson and Individualism, "Wellesley extends the revisionism noted earlier by arguing persuasive ly that Emerson’s individualism was not a philosophy of withdrawal and aloofness, or class "rugged individualism." In fact, it was just the opposite. As he notes, "For Emerson ... genuine individualism was not narcissism, monomania, or isolation. Indeed, it was the answer to these diseases of the self as well as the remedy for the "excess evils" of institutional and social life." (91).

Yet further proof of this activist puckering is provided in... (Continued on page 8)
Reviews

(Continued from page 7)

Gary Collison’s “Emerson and Antislavery” and Armida Gilbert’s “Emerson in the Context of the Woman’s Rights Movement.” The former presents a broad and detailed overview of Emerson’s many contributions to the antislavery movement. The latter presents a cogent argument that, viewed from the perspective of his time, Emerson was, contrary to some recent feminist criticism, “a true friend and proponent of woman’s rights” and that he was seen by the women of his time as “one who encouraged women’s intellectual independence” (241, 240). “Self-Reliance,” it seems, inspired a multitude of readers, regardless of gender, or race.

David Robinson sees this liberating quality in Emerson as stemming from his religious ethics. In “Emerson and Religion,” he outlines the evolution of Emerson’s religious thought from his early Unitarianism to his Transcendental conversion. This highly compact and cogent essay argues that Emerson’s social engagement derived, ultimately, from his religious thinking. “During the late 1840s and early 1850s,” Robinson argues, Emerson “elevated ethical work over mystical vision as the focus of the spiritual life and preached a religion of action” (168), thus complementing Milder’s argument, noted earlier, which describes a similar movement.

And finally, to end where we began, in a concluding essay on “We Find What We Seek: Emerson and His Biographers,” Ronald Bosco points out that, while Whicher’s Freedom and Fate (1955) misled many readers by, among other things, putting “a rather narrow and... undeserved negative spin on Emerson’s significance,” “his recent biographers and critics are providing us with a more complete and reliable Emerson than has been seen in a while” (278, 283). These two fine collections of essays certainly bear eloquent testimony to that.

—LEN GOUGEON
University of Scranton

Goethe, not Coleridge

(Continued from page 1)

in ihr gewahr wird”—ibid.). Emerson returned to this Goethean idea a couple of months after the publication of Nature. Commenting once more upon the mind-nature relationship, he put it thus: “Each demands the other: the faculty the object, and the object the faculty.... Each object unlocks that faculty which is exercised upon it and makes it for the first time known to us” (The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 2 [1964]: 18).

Goethe could not have said it better.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Two final points:

1. What I have drawn attention to is a very minor matter that in no way lessens my admiration for the outstanding scholarly achievement represented by each of the volumes to which I have referred. Still, I thought it was a matter significant enough to be worth calling to the attention of my fellow students of Emerson. And I also wanted to render unto Goethe the things which are Goethe’s.

2. I have no illusion that this intervention will make much of a difference. Given the prestige and influence of the works mentioned, and the reach of anthologies, I am sure that the important quotation here discussed will continue to be misattributed to Coleridge. But I just wanted to raise one feeble voice in protest.

Concordance to Later Lectures

Brad Dean, director of The Media Center at the Thoreau Institute in Lincoln, Mass., has mounted a concordance to The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson on the Web at www.walden.org/emerson/Lectures_Conc. The Emerson Society is grateful to Dr. Dean for making available this valuable resource.