The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society is most pleased to present its 2009 Distinguished Achievement Award to Stanley Cavell, Walter M. Cabot Professor of Aesthetics and the General Theory of Value at Harvard University. Professor Cavell is a recent recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship and a Past President of the American Philosophical Association. Among his more than one dozen books are The Claim of Reason, The World Viewed, The Senses of Walden, and Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes. Stanford University Press, publishing the latter in 2003, announced, “This book is Stanley Cavell’s definitive expression on Emerson. Over the past thirty years, Cavell has demonstrated that he is the most emphatic and provocative philosophical critic of Emerson that America has yet known. The sustained effort of that labor is drawn together here for the first time into a single volume.”

To an extent, for more than two decades Professor Cavell’s concern as a philosopher has been Emerson—even when he appears to be focusing on other matters such as film or other philosophers such as Wittgenstein. Richard Deming asserts, speaking of Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes: “the process of reading has been Cavell’s focus for decades, and that focus explains, at least in part, his fascination with Emerson. The reason for this is clear: Cavell is best understood as a philosopher of reading, and reading was for Emerson, who insisted on ‘creative reading,’ a central trope.”

Lawrence Buell writes, “No one has come closer than Stanley Cavell to engaging Emerson’s work in such a way as simultaneously to illuminate and to rival its unique subtlety, boldness, and penetration.” In an NEH seminar at the University of New Mexico, where several of us had the opportunity to study with Cavell, the philosophers were taken with his view of Emerson as a philosopher of the ordinary and the personal. The literary scholars among us were taken by the ways he exhibited of taking Emerson’s language seriously. Cavell, in emphasizing Emerson’s prose in conversation with itself, enacting what it says, not just saying it, is himself enacting Emerson’s process, not only talking about Emerson but drawing the reader into Emerson’s process. Reading Emerson requires the active mind and soul, and so does reading Cavell reading Emerson.

And Cavell’s work may send a message we need now more than ever. One of my graduate students, working on Emerson’s poetry that same summer we were working with Cavell, helped me see how transformative Cavell could be. My student was acutely aware of the precarious state of the world, with nuclear war against Iran under consideration and the war in Iraq in full flow, and the value of Emerson’s poiesis as a valid resistance. Cavell in concentrating on the prose brought my student to the thought that “Emerson’s rhetorical output proceeds with a weedy resilience, and his ideas likewise being commonly weedy infiltrate all that is theoretically best about being human. Emerson becomes thereby ubiquitous.”

In “Hope Against Hope,” Cavell says, “for me Emerson’s prose enacts … the state of democracy—not because it praises the democratic condition we have so far achieved, but because its aversive stance toward our condition only makes sense on the assumption of democracy as our life and our aspiration. Only within such a life and aspiration is a continuity of dialogue with one another and with those in power over us, a possibility and

(Continued on page 16)
EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS
The newsletter of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society
published at Worcester Polytechnic Institute
www.emersonsociety.org

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2009 Emerson Society Patrons
Emerson Society members continue generously to join at various “patron” levels of membership. All donations above the $10 annual renewal membership go to support special programs of the Society. Dues categories are Life ($500), Sustaining ($50), Contributing ($25), and Regular ($10). Please refer to the following page for full listings. Emerson Society at 20 Years: Retrospects and Prospects
The Emerson Society is 20 years old, an appropriate time for exchange between Fuller and another member of the Transcendental Club, including those historically marginalized for their sex, race, or class. What did Emerson think about mentorship or about being a mentor? How did he respond to his novices’ needs and/or identify new directions for research. Email 500-word abstracts to Susan Dunston (sdunston@nmt.edu) by 20 December.

Prospects
Calls for Papers
Program Co-Chair Susan Dunston announces calls for three Emerson Society panels in 2010.

American Literature Association Conference, San Francisco, May 2010
The Emerson Society at 20 Years: Retrospects and Prospects
The Emerson Society is 20 years old, an appropriate time for reflection and projection. Emerson himself wrote that “each age must write its own books.” How and why does each age write its own Emerson? What are the key factors in the directions Emerson studies have taken or are assuming? The Emerson Society invites papers that foster reflection on the society’s history, survey changes in scholarly approaches, and/or identify new directions for research. Email 300-word abstracts to Susan Dunston (sdunston@nmt.edu) by 20 December.

Emerson as Mentor
The Emerson Society invites papers that consider Emerson’s abilities, motivations, characteristics, and/or legacies as a mentor to writers, philosophers, students, educators, political activists, whether members of his immediate circle or not, including those historically marginalized for their sex, race, or class. What did Emerson think about mentorship or about being a mentor? How did he respond to his novices’ needs and/or their neediness? How did/do novices seek his guidance and/or identify new directions for research. Email 300-word abstracts to Susan Dunston (sdunston@nmt.edu) by 20 December.

Thoreau Society Annual Gathering, July 2010, Concord
Transcendental “Conversations”
In honor of Margaret Fuller’s 200th bicentennial, the Emerson Society invites proposals for a roundtable discussion on the conversational character of Transcendentalism. Each participant should briefly frame an enlightening moment of dialogic exchange between Fuller and another member of the Transcendental Club (possibilities include Thoreau, Emerson, James Freeman Clarke, Bronson Alcott, Elizabeth Peabody, Caroline Sturgis Tappan, Frederic Henry Hedge, and Louisa May Alcott). Contexts might include meetings of the Transcendental Club and Fuller’s “Conversations” series, educational theory, women’s “self-reliance,” editorial work on The Dial, and experimental utopians. Email 300-word abstracts to Susan Dunston (sdunston@nmt.edu) by 20 December.

Graduate Student Paper Award
The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society Graduate Student Paper Award provides up to $750 of travel support to present a paper at one of the panels described above in the “Calls for Papers.” Submit your abstract by the appropriate date given above to Susan Dunston at sdunston@nmt.edu and indicate your desire for consideration.

Thompson on Tour for Iraq Book
Rogel Thompson has published a memoir with Shawn Meahan, a former student of his at VMI and a tank commander in Iraq. Beyond Duty: Life on the Frontlines of Iraq (Polity) details Shawn’s accidental killing of a group of children and confronts the difficult issue of civilian causalities in the war. Rogel began work on the Iraq book while he was researching Emerson’s rhetoric in the Houghton Library. The Emerson manuscript, however, now sits only a completed draft as the Iraq memoir took shape and assumed increasing meaning. He is currently on tour with Shawn, with stops at universities across the country, to discuss the tragedy of civilian deaths in Iraq.

Emerson Sightings/Citings
Joel J. Brattin writes that in her article “I.O.U.” Jill Lepore notes that debaters “like to recall the past: ‘The present generation is bankrupt of principles and hope, as of property,’ Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote. Mostly, though, we’re bankrupt of history” (The New Yorker, 13 April 2009, p. 35).

Sandy Mott finds Emerson invoked by John Garrity in Sports Illustrated in an article about the careers and recent marriage of superstar athletes Chris Evert (tennis) and Greg Norman (golf) (“Star Attraction,” 13 April 2009). “At 54,” Garrity writes, “Evert and Norman make each other feel like high school sweethearts, but can wedded bliss rejuvenate him enough to conquer Augusta National, the course that has haunted him?” (p. 59). “She says, ‘I just love the guy and respect him so much.’ He says, ‘I was searching until Chris write its own books.’ How and why does each age write its own Emerson? What are the key factors in the directions Emerson studies have taken or are assuming? The Emerson Society invites papers that foster reflection on the society’s history, survey changes in scholarly approaches, and/or identify new directions for research. Email 300-word abstracts to Susan Dunston (sdunston@nmt.edu) by 20 December.

Corinne Smith sends the audio clip from NPR’s “Writer’s Almanac” for 29 July, in which Garrison Keillor reads Emerson’s “Self-Reliance.” (Continued on page 4)
Emerson Society receives items associated with the Emerson family

Joan Fleming, Ed.D., of Prescott, Arizona, has given the Emerson's daughters, Ellen Tucker Emerson and Edith Emerson, 'Heaven,' by William Heyen, "appears in The Atlantic.

Clarence Burley writes that Biocentrism: How Life and Consciousness are the Keys to Understanding the True Nature of the Universe, by Robert Lanza, M.D., with Bob Berman (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2009), "has no fewer than ten citings from Liberty's in London."

On deaf ears. The proverbial handwriting was already on the wall months before the community was launched when, in October 1840, Ripley invited Ralph Waldo Emerson to participate. To be sure. Emerson anguished for six weeks after the meeting, but he finally notified Ripley in mid December that he would not support the venture. As it turned out, ironically, neither would forty-five of the other forty-seven participants in the Transcendental Club (1836-1840). The two exceptions were Ripley's Unitarian colleagues, such as Mr. Alcott. HawL, 15:539. ABA's first visit to Brook Farm (BF) was in April. 10 MAY. Margaret Fuller (MF) wrote: "Your letter, my dear friend [R.W. Emerson], was received just as I was on the wing to pass a few days with the fledglings of Community [BF]; and I have only this evening returned to answer it." Ful., 2:209. Emerson had written to MF on 6 May. See Eml., 2:298.

20 JUL. MF: "I had a very happy time at Spring St, health and sunshine were ours." Ful., 2:217. Whenever Fuller stayed with good friends and loyal BF supporters Francis and Sarah Shaw and George and Sarah Russell on Spring Street in West Roxbury she usually also visited the community.

17 AUG. Ralph Waldo Emerson (RWE). Lectures at BF. EChon, 16:3. This is Emerson's first known visit to BF.

28 SEPT. RWE: "I went to ride this day with [Margaret], Fuller to Brook Farm." EmJMN, 8:92. In his journal for 28 SEPT 1841 Hawthorne notes, "Meanwhile, Mr. Emerson and Miss Fuller, who had arrived an hour or two before, came forth into the little glade where we were assembled [for a masquerade]." HawAN, 202. See also Ful., 2:238.

1842

JAN [DEC 1841?]. Christopher Pearse Cranch (CPC). "On the dreariest of winter days, the omnibus arrived with... (Continued on page 6)
Brook Farm

(Continued from page 5)

30 JUL. MF: "You [Charles K. Newcomb] seemed quite unsuitable during my visit at Brook Farm." Fut., 7:37. Fuller's week-long stay at BF occurred sometime between the 5th and 25th of July.

[late] SEPT. MF: "I have your [Charles K. Newcomb] room here and think much of you. I have been every day to your pine wood." Fut., 3:94.

[11 DEC.] SEPT. MF: "While he [RWE] was here," a BFR reports, "there was a masquerading wood party." Codman, 260. Not in EC. The "masquerading party" was probably in late September or early October. See 28 SEP 1841, for example, about 16 Oct.

10 OCT. MF: "...I have told you [Emerson] nothing of my stay at Brook Farm [MF stayed one week on this visit, where I gave conversations on alternate evenings with the hammering partner]." Fut., 3:97. See also FutMEM, 2:269-74.

[4] NOV. ABA, Charles Lane, and Henry Wright spend day and night at BF. Edgell, 710; JBCBF, 413.

13 NOV. RWE: "I was at BF on Sunday [31 NOV] and everything was pleasant & substantial, which I was glad to see." EmL, 3:97. Kirby says, "During my second autumn at BF[1842]... Mr. Emerson came to us for a whole week, giving us two delectable discourses in that time" (141). RWE's visit, however, must have been less than a week because Emerson lectured in Concord on 18 NOV. ECHON, 175.

[11 DEC.] CPC substituted for Theodore Parker at the Second Sunday in West Roxbury. TP, 94. With BF so nearby, Francis likely would have visited Ripley at the community.

1844

26 JAN. ABA & Charles Lane. "Last evening [25 JAN] Mr. Alcott and Mr. Lane... were there and there was a conversation held in the Parlor of... the [Economy] Club." DPaul.

10 FEB-MAR. Orestes Brownson (OAB). Brownson "gave us as much favor in the dining-room and every person [at BF] was present." Sears, Alcott and Mr. Lane... were here and there was a conversation on alternate evenings with the husking parties." FutMEM, 2:274-75. See also EmL, 3:21 In; 215.

21 JUNE. RWE: "I was at Brook Farm, and had a cheerful visit." Fut., 3:168; Dark Side, 137-39. Fuller's last documented visit to BF occurred sometime between the 5th and 25th of June.

12 DEC. Henry David Thoreau. "We were quite indebted to Elizabeth Hoar's visit, however, must have been less than a week because Emerson lectured in Concord on 18 NOV. ECHON, 175.

13 DEC. ABA: "I speak to [George] Ripley about going to Brook Farm with my family." Edgell, 713. Festivals concluded in January 1844. See also 31 MAR 1844 below.

1845

1 JAN. MF. Fuller attended a social reform convention in Boston in late December 1843 and then spent New Year's Eve and Day at BF, Fut., 3:F; 168; Dark Side, 137-39.

28 JAN. RWE. "Mr. Emerson was here last week [22-26 JAN]." Marianne Ripley notes, "...& the night [after giving a lecture at BF]." KHi. This is RWE's last documented visit to BF, almost certainly because the community openly embraced Fourierism at the beginning of the month. Not in Chuvr.

31 MAR. MF. Fuller returned to Boston in late March, and wrote to Margaret Fuller, LBF/RALS, #103. On this date Fuller writes on 16 NOV, "all things much as they were." Fut., 6:168. MBF's brief visit to New England (she had been living in NYC since late 1844) included a stop at BF, evidently when WHC was there because Kirby quotes from a letter Fuller wrote to her in DEC 1845: "I saw the B.F. people... it was affecting to see them to the preaching of Whm." (1846).

1846

11 JAN. Convers Francis. Francis substituted for Theodore Parker in West Roxbury, TP, 94. With BF so nearby, Francis likely would have visited Ripley at the community.


17 MAR. HC. "WHC came last evening." Fut., 143.

17 MAR. WHC. ENCOURAGES BFR to "go on," despite the recent destruction of the newly completed Phalanstery by fire on 15 MAR, LBF, 135; [Spring]. "WHC. The general council [at BF] are [sic] in session and WHC with them." LBF, 155.


15-16 MAY. WHC. MHL. Marianne Diane to Frank Dwight. WHC visits BF school.

2 JUN. WHC. [James Freeman Clarke]. "BFR, and others were inspired at a festival held at BF," LBF; 107. The 306 of Clarke's name that suggests it might have been at the time Freeman Clarke purchased BF after his failure.

[12 JUL. Caleb Stowe. Stowe substituted for Theodore Parker in West Roxbury, TP, 94. With BF so nearby, Stowe likely would have visited Ripley at the community.]


6 AUG. WHC. LBF, 108.

7 SEP. WHC. CBC, LF/BFC, 5.

"The last day of summer." WHC; CPC. "Gave us a pictorial sermon, a sketch of a temple of worship to be raised here on Brook Farm.... C. P. Cranch is with us now." LBF, 114-15.

[late SEPT.] CPC. "C. P. Cranch leaves us today." LBF, 117.

4 OCT. WHC. "WHC and Mr. [Albert] Brisbane both are here." LBF, 119. On this WHC also substituted for Theodore Parker in West Roxbury, which he does again on 12 & 19 OCT, and again on 2 & 9 NOV. TP, 93.

19 OCT. WHC. Channing spoke "with much warmth and enthusiasm... much power and eloquence, of the religious movement now taking place here [at BF]." LBF, 122.

19 OCT. MF: "...I had a pleasant time at West Roxbury." Fuller writes on 16 NOV, "all things much as they were." Fut., 6:168. MBF's brief visit to New England (she had been living in NYC since late 1844) included a stop at BF, evidently when WHC was there because Kirby quotes from a letter Fuller wrote to her in DEC 1845: "I saw the B.F. people... it was affecting to see them to the preaching of Whm." (1846).

Even though Brook Farm did not officially collapse until October 1847, it was moribund many months earlier. In 1847 there were few remaining members, students, or boarders at the community, and even fewer visitors. By 1847 too, the so-called Transcendental movement itself was already becoming a fading memory, as all the collapse of the Transcendental Club seven years earlier would suggest.

Abreviations and Works Cited


KHi: 'John Stillman Brown Papers.' Kansas Historical Society.


KHi: 'John Stillman Brown Papers.' Kansas Historical Society.

Kirby: Georgiana Bruce Kirby. Years of Experience. New York: G. P. Put-


MHL: "Brook Farm Papers." Massachusetts Historical Society.


Sears: John Van Der Zee Sears. My Friends at Brook Farm. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1912.


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Brook Farm (Continued from page 7)

Notes
Editor's note: Rick Delano is Professor of American Literature, Emeritus, at Villanova University.


2. Forty-eight people—forty-one men and seven women—attended one or more of the thirty known meetings of the Transcendental Club (records of attendance exist, however, only for twenty-five meetings). Only nine of these participants, however, attended ten or more meetings: Alcott (26 meetings), George Ripley (21), Emerson (20), Hedge (20), Station (18), Francis (15), Parker (15), Dwight (15), and Cyrus Bartol (13). Margaret Fuller attended eight meetings. Twenty-two of the "participants" attended just one meeting. See Joel Myerson, "A Calendar of Transcendental Club Meetings," American Literature 44 (May 1972): 197-207.

The Nantucket Atheneum Calls for Emerson in 1847 and 2009

WENDELL F. REPOR

After the Great Fire of 1846, which devastated the town on Nantucket, an island south of Cape Cod, officials of the newly rebuilt Nantucket Atheneum called on Ralph Waldo Emerson to be its first lyceum speaker for 1847. And this year, Amy Jenness, programming coordinator for the Nantucket Atheneum, called on me to portray Emerson in an oration performance to be given 29 June 2009. Emerson arrived on Nantucket on 4 May 1847 and stayed for two weeks, on his way to confer with his older brother, Concordian Henry David. Emerson's trip to Nantucket was the first public building completely reconstructed, according to Jenness. For this year's performance I chose to deliver the 15 February 1848 Emerson lecture "The Spirit of the Times," first delivered in Edinburgh, Scotland, under the title "Genius of the Present Age." My fifty-minute lecture was an attempt to pay tribute to the ideas and words of Ralph Waldo Emerson in the Great Hall of the Atheneum in our centenary 175th year. Emerson is a vital piece of our storied past and I find his views as relevant today as when he wrote them in the 19th century. On 9 May, at the seashore at Nantucket I saw the play of the Atlantic with the oration was my own shortened and abridged version of that lecture. The poster called the series "Ghosts of the Great Hall." A near-capacity crowd of about 100 vacationers and residents gave prolonged applause. Jenness reported afterward, "It was a treat to pay tribute to the ideas and words of Ralph Waldo Emerson in the Great Hall of the Atheneum in our centenary 175th year. Emerson is a vital piece of our storied past and I find his views as relevant today as when he wrote them in the 19th century."

Later in May, Emerson made fascinating Journal notes about Nantucket after his return to the mainland. "On the seashore at Nantucket I saw the play of the Atlantic with the

Oliver Wendell Holmes on Writing the Emerson Biography: A New Letter to Charles Dudley Warner

WEISLEY MCMASTERS, JEFFREY SEXTON, AND RICHARD KOPLEY

Penn State Dubois

"Mr. Houghton" is Henry Oscar Houghton (1823-1895), the founder of Houghton-Mifflin publishing house, and hence the publisher of the American Men of Letters series. Houghton would also be the responsible for the book with Holmes. As Habich has observed, Holmes enjoyed a retainer of "one thousand dollars per annum; after Holmes signed the AML contract, his annuity quadrupled to four thousand dollars." Edward Emerson (1844-1930), Walsho's son, was passed over by his father as literary executor in favor of Cabot. He did, however, assist the literary executor in the gathering and organization of Emerson's papers. "Eliot Cabot" is James Eliot Cabot (1821-1903), the executor of Emerson's literary estate. Cabot was the man who "made Emerson's work to work through in order to gain access to Emerson's papers."

This businesslike letter sheds light on the reluctance of Holmes to write the Emerson memoir. His initial language, even if half-humorous, indicates his anxiety: "I am in for it."

The biography Ralph Waldo Emerson (1884), by Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894), has been revered as a kind of contemplation by a friend of the subject and an understanding tongue for an aging doctor. As Robert Habich has observed, Holmes was overwhelmed writing the biography; in fact, at one point he "re-luctantly gave up the project." Also, as Habich notes, letters from Holmes showed his qualified regard for the work. An excerpt from one of his letters (quoted by Habich) reads, "I have contributed a certain amount of ground in the neutral tint of fact and ideas, pieces of light and shade and some patches of color. I have succeeded at least in not exasperating the most devout Emersonians so far as I know." The selection of Holmes to write for the American Men of Letters series (in which the biography of Emerson appeared) and the writing of which was well executed. What may still be clarified is the attitude of Holmes when he decided to take on this task. Our understanding of his original stance may be enhanced by examining a newly discovered letter from Holmes to Charles Dudley Warner (1829-1900) regarding the anticipated Emerson biography.

Although Holmes and Emerson could not be described as close friends, they were often together in both professional and social situations, most notably their meetings at the Saturday Club, of which the two were avid members. Frequenting the same events, Holmes and Emerson were sometimes both asked to contribute in some way. As Augustus Strong states, "The intercourse of the two men had never been frequent or intimate. They understood one another, only as occasional guests at the same table lean of their companions from the talk of the dinner."

The letter from Holmes to Warner, from the collection of Richard Kopley, is written on a piece of paper measuring 8 1/2 inches long by 6 7/8 inches wide, which is folded in half vertically and then, for insertion into an envelope, horizontally. The embossed letterhead reads in red, "296, Beacon Street." The faint watermark in the middle of the unfolded paper reads "Royal Irish Linen" above an emblem, and below it "Marcus Ward & Co." The letter is addressed to Charles Dudley Warner, the general editor of the American Men of Letters series. The letter—never before published—reads:

"Dear Mr. Warner,

I am in for it, I have told Mr. Houghton that I will write the Emerson Memoir, with his willing consent, with the approval of Edward Emerson and Eliot Cabot, I feel authorized to undertake it and will do my best."

With your selection, with his willing consent, with the approval of Edward Emerson and Eliot Cabot, I feel authorized to undertake it and will do my best."

His dependence on others' approval regarding the enterprise points towards a lack of conviction about his own authority. The closing, "I . . . will do my best," suggests that Holmes feels that his work might not be good enough.

Holmes's fear may have been warranted. The memoir, approaching eulogy, highlights works by Emerson that were not controversial. We can recognize that Habich might not fully appreciate the spirituality of Emerson, nor adequately respect the Transcendentalist movement that he led. Furthermore, "the autocriticism of the breakfast table" had not kept up with the evolving New England culture. As S. I. Hayakawa wrote, "The true weakness of Holmes was not that he failed to understand Emerson or Wendell Phillips; his true weakness was that he failed to understand Boston—the Boston that was undergoing profoundly significant social changes under its very eyes."

Despite his anxiety—perhaps even aided by it as anor as it prompted for Emhers—there was that his desire to write a biography. As Houghton had observed, the memoir with his willing consent, with the approval of Edward Emerson and Eliot Cabot, I feel authorized to undertake it and will do my best."

Faithfully yours

O. W. Holmes

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Oliver Wendell Holmes (Continued from page 9)

series, selling 3,882 copies in 1844" couldn't be considered less than a success. If Emerson, described by Holmes in his poem "At the Saturday Club" as "the Buddha of the West," who "is born to unlock the secrets of the skies," was in some ways out of reach of the author and biographer, at least Holmes did his best to reach out to Emerson.

Notes


6. Habich, p. 11.


Nantucket Athenaeum (Continued from page 8)

cost. Here was wealth[,] every wave reached quarter of a mile along shore as it broke. There are no rich men. I said to compare with these. Every wave is a fortune." Emerson's reflections then turned toward uses of the sea and implications for man. "One thinks of Etzlers and great projectors who will yet turn this immense waste strength to account and save the limbs of human slaves. Ah what freedom & grace & beauty with all this might. The wind blew back the foam from the top of each rolling wave, yet could not create the outburst of foam that characterizes our expression. Its structure is so slender, thin, & cramped; can we not articulate, then "Experience" at once speaks Nature's skepticism and rationality-driven Survey of American Literature. It provokes their thinking by opening new vistas in readings that give history and allegory, letter and spirit, full play, as this paper seeks to show.

The Return of the Repressed: Cavell and Emerson

Joan Richardson, The Graduate Center, CSIY [Abstract not available at press time.]

Abstracts of Boston ALA Papers

The following panels were presented by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society at the eleventh annual conference of the American Literature Association on 22 May 2009 in Boston, Massachusetts.

SESSION I: Emerson after Cavell

Chair, Elizabeth Addison, Western Carolina University

Romancing the World: Emerson, Nature, and the Voice of "Experience"

Pattie Clark, SUNY-Buffalo

One age is retrospective. Where do we find ourselves? In "Finding as Founding: Taking Steps in Emerson's Experience," Stanley Cavell commences the work of "measuring Emerson's philosophicality", with a note on why such work, for him, does not begin with Nature. He finds the book "not yet to constitute the Emersonian philosophical voice but to be the place from which... voice departs, and he goes on to say that "in Nature Emerson is taking the issue of skepticism as soluble or controllable whereas after he takes its unsolvability to be the heart of his thinking." Thinking skepticism in terms of relation as such, however,—relation, say, between self and self, world and word, and thing—Nature fails to embody the "Emersonian philosophical voice" precisely because rather than a "controllable" issue, skepticism runs so rampant as to be unspeakable? What account might we make of "Experience," and of Emerson's philosophical project more generally, when we approach Emerson's career from this angle?

This essay follows the intuition that Nature's desire for "original relation," from Emerson to Cavell to our moment's philosophical question ("Let us inquire, to what end is nature?"). Emerson's "Experience," Emersonian skepticism of relation as such, and skepticism "Experience" converts into the fullest expression of Emersonian philosophical call. "Nature need be no more the devil; she need not the defeat: up again old heart!... there is victory yet for all justnes." Emerson's "experience" voices that which Nature cannot yet articulate, then "Experience" at once speaks Nature's skepticism and articulates it in the very ground, the human condition, from which the way toward relation is to be delivered. Committed to our singular common human condition, Emerson gives his self over, to the world, for the world. After Cavell, might reading Nature and "Experience" together, from another step further sound Emerson's inheritance?

The Great Fire of 1846

Newspaper headlines and reports appeared nationally following the 13-14 July 1846 Fire. A sampling: "[Nantucket, Tuesday, July 14] Great Fire at Nantucket—The Wonder—Awful Calamity—Existent of blowing up houses was reported... More than twenty buildings were thus destroyed" (Boston Daily Atlas, 15 July 1846).

The fire was fueled by sperm oil harvested by Nantucket's large whaling industry. "The Exeter News Letter has a letter from a correspondent who was at Nantucket during the recent conflagration, which gives a vivid account of that disastrous catastrophe: 'Along the path of the flames were stored many thousands of barrels of oil, and tons of spermatic oil. The casks were burned through, and the liquid ran down the streets, converting them into perfect rivers of fire'" (The Liberator, Boston, 7 August 1846, p. 121). "The Government of the U.S. has assumed the loss of about $15,000, occasioned by the destruction of 500 bbls. of Sperm Oil... [pegged for fueling] several Light Houses of the United States" (Boston Daily Atlas, Friday, 24 July 1846).

News reports ending with appeals for help were widespread. "Awful Conflagration—The Best Part of Nantucket Burned—Near 200 Buildings Destroyed and the Flames Not Arrested...AN APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC" (The North American, Philadelphia, June 17 1846). Letters to the Editors asking for financial aid to rebuild were sent to other major cities, from Milwaukee and Cleveland to Philadelphia.

Emerson Society Papers

Emerson Society Papers
observing nature, reading books, bringing in the "new age." But also not. They are barred from the university and careers fundamentally criti-
ticated here. The oration aims to renew masculinity; it even classes women with children as a "protected class," but not the brave speakers Emerson calls for.

Women did respond to Emerson's call, but only by appropriation on their own. Moving to selections from Fuller's Woman in the Nine-
teenth Century, we find that "Man" is divided by gender rather than profession, and the new age will come through recovery of what Man's female half has lost. Books are actively seized and devoured, the priv-
ileges of university and professional claimed, individual "thinking" achieved through lesseened dependence on men. Indeed, women must "represent themselves"—since even men's works expressing the "the [human] experiences" use the "contemptuous phrase 'women and chil-
dren.'"

But lately I have begun to attack the problem directly, in a seminar for students. For years I would guide students away from the false Emerson in their heads by enumerating misreadings of his concept of "self-
realization"—that is, we read comparatively the founding thinkers in Chinese philosophy (Confucius and his disciples) and their U.S. "dis-
ciples" (Emerson and Thoreau)—and "vertically"—that is, we com-
pare the uses and deploy the research of their technology designs, from their own intellectual passions, and even Emersonian responsibility. Like Emer-
son, many of my students worry about the "half-life of science" and the deleterious effects of "distract[ing] and deny[ing] inwardly our
sympathy with nature." They are aware that what often they are taught that knowledge comes only from "free[ing] their subject
under the wintry light of the understanding." But then do they not have any sense that these concerns can be curricular; they have been trained to keep them extracurricular and personal rather than central to the pro-
fession and of collective import. Teaching Emerson to these students affords a splendid opportunity to make these issues curricular, appro-
priate to debate intellectually in an academic setting and to consider as they think and write in practice in their disciplines.

They saw and how exactly they responded to various moments in the text in order to bring to life an Emerson essay in a literally unique and unrepeatable way. In short, they were to remake precisely the drama of their actual conversations with these essays, explaining not what Emer-
son claims, but what he makes happen. In this way, they imagined themselves in conversation with him and produced descriptive essay-
atical accounts of the ways Emerson's texts can work on a reading con-
sciousness.

The Way to Learn Grammar: Teaching Emerson's School

The final chapter of Emerson, Lawrence Buell considers a challenge
that all who teach Emerson must face: Emerson as "anti-mentor." How
might we teach this anti-mentor without institutionalizing a kind of
system he seems to lack, indeed, resist? Can an Emerson, inspired by
his own teachings, be taught? I argue that we can locate insights for
teaching Emerson, and best understand what makes this teaching ex-
emplifying and deeply challenging, by focusing attention on Emerson's
interested engagement with the practice and theory of education.
Teaching Emerson needs to reckon with, and can learn from, Emer-
son's teaching.

I do so in an undergraduate seminar I have titled "Emerson's School." In this capstone/major-author seminar, students explore the
school of Emerson's thought and writing, becoming Emerson's scholar
by giving more thought to what becomes Emerson's scholar. Rather
than assume this implication of learning and schooling (Emerson's "teaching"). I foreground it to re-focus attention on how we study and
learn Emerson. I "draw new attention to the subject of Education" in
Emerson. The line comes from Emerson's "Address on Education"
given in June of 1837 at the dedication of the Greene Street School in
Providence, where Emerson spoke for Bronson Alcott. Along with the
journal from July and August of 1837, we read this address in con-
nection with the more famous "American Scholar" that follows it two
months later. Contextual readings around "American Scholar" high-
light a pedagogical theory of context and connection in Emerson's
thinking—and for our reading and reception of that thinking. This ped-
agogically-oriented essay, "Experience, Imagination," manifesto: "All
thinking is analogizing and it is the use of life to learn metonymy.

Concord 2009: "Emerson's Politics"

Daniel S. Malachuk (Western Illinois University),
right, led a lively discussion exploring Emerson's
politics on Friday, 10 July, at the Thoreau Society
Annual Gathering in Concord, Mass. Program chair
Todd H. Richardson (University of Texas of the Per-
mian Basin), left, chaired the session for the Emer-
son Society, which has presented a program in
Concord each July since 1991.

"Mr. Emerson" Lectures in Concord

Ralph Waldo Emerson (channled by re-enactor
Wendell Refior) made a return appearance at the
Concord Lyceum on 19 and 26 May, delivering his
stirring lecture "The Protest."

Mr. Emerson" Lectures in Concord

Forty-seven community college teachers from
across the United States attended two separate
weeklong NEH seminars titled "The American
Lyceum and Public Culture: The oracy of Ideol-
ISM, Opportunity, and Abolition in the 19th Century."

The seminars, organized by Richard A. Katala,
professor of communications studies at Northeast-
ern University, bring to life the power of platform
element during this formative period in U.S. his-
ory. Each professional re-enactor is paired with a
scholar: Wendell was joined by Wes Mott,
who lectured on Emerson as orator. The seminars
included visits to historic sites, archival repositories,
and lyceum venues.

From left, front row, Sean Meehan, Susan Dunston, Phyllis Cole; 
second row, Todd Richardson, Jennifer Gurley, Willinm Day
An Emerson Bibliography, 2008

DavM M. Robinson
Oregon State University

Stanley Cavell
(Continued from page 1)

duty.” He continues, “It gives me hope, if small in our dangerous world, still concrete, clear, persistent, as large as my difficult sensibility can absorb. He tells me that those who have power over us who do not communicate to us their persistent hope of peace are despairing of peace, and are placing what they call their hope in a favorable roll of scientific or magic dice. This is no more genuine hope than praying for such a favorable outcome is genuine prayer. They are caught by their power, by their images of themselves, by what they believe to be their public’s expectations of them, our expectations. We must help to teach them otherwise, teach them hope, and first one another.”

Thank you, Stanley, for helping to teach us hope and for renewing Emerson’s promise to the coming generations.

—Elizabeth Addison

FROM THE EDITOR

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society celebrates its twentieth birthday on 29 December 2009! As we prepare to reflect next year on our two decades of achievements as a community of Emersonians, the society begins several transitions.

As occurs each 31 December, while chimes and fireworks usher in the New Year, our society will quietly manage its peaceful succession of officers and advisory board members. Meanwhile, this is the fortieth issue of Emerson Society Papers that I have published at Worcester Polytechnic Institute over twenty years—fifteen as managing editor to Douglas Emory Wilson, and five as editor—and it is my last. Here too is the last annual Emerson bibliography by the incomparable David Robinson, who compiled his first—covering 1989—for our Spring 1991 issue.

Two fine scholars and friends assume new duties at midnight on New Year’s Eve: Bob Habich, presently our secretary/treasurer, becomes editor of ESP. (Jennifer Gurley, who as book review editor in 2004 inherited a massive backlog of unreviewed books, has caught us up with a burgeoning list of Emerson titles and will continue in that important post.) And Todd Richardson, who has served so ably as program chair, becomes secretary/treasurer. Our 2010 dues-renewal notice already lists Todd as our contact for membership matters.

Space here doesn’t permit personally thanking the scores of people to whom I have been indebted at ESP for these two decades: officers, board members, program chairs, committee members, wonderful essayists, reviewers, eagle-eyed spotters of Emerson “Sightings/Citings,” photographers, editorial assistants, and, most important, our readers. Now a society of well over 200 members in some 15 countries, we began with 27 Emersonians gathering in Joel Myerson’s suite at the 1989 MLA convention in Washington, D.C., for our founding meeting—where T. Paul Kane suggested the name Emerson Society Papers (enabling us to keep the acronym ESP when our planned name, Emerson Society Prospects, was deemed too close to that of an existing journal).

Several colleagues at WPI, however, must be publicly acknowledged. The WPI Research Development Council provided a grant to establish ESP in 1989, and since then the Emerson Society has enjoyed uninterrupted annual awards from WPI provosts Diran Apelian, Jack Carney, Carol Simpson, and John Orr. Mike Sherman designed our logo. Chad Farrell has printed ESP on campus since 2002. Margaret Brodmerkle, Mary Cotnoir, Karen Hassett, and Penny Rock—past and present administrative assistants for the Department of Humanities and Arts—have helped with all manner of financial and distribution issues. My colleagues Joel Brattin and Kent Ljungquist have been steady sources of advice and support. My greatest debt at WPI is to graphic designer and editor Peggy Isaacson, who is responsible for the handsome appearance of ESP. Since 1992 Peggy has cheerfully and professionally supervised design and production, along the way saving me from numerous errors and suggesting the best ways to get things done.

Though turning over the blue pencil, I’m not exactly taking in sail. Almost every wave at ESP has been charmed (to coin a phrase), but I’m not cruising into port—just taking a different tack as Emerson Society president as well as starting some new projects (and finishing some old ones). Self-reliance is so often misunderstood as a stance of chilly independence: Emersonians are a congenial crew, and I look forward to many more years of collaborations and friendships.

—WTM

Emerson Society Papers