On June 26, 1848, nearing the end of a ten-month trip to Europe and a series of sixty-seven public lectures that carried him throughout England and Scotland, Ralph Waldo Emerson breakfasted with the English painter Clarkson Stanfield. After breakfast, Stanfield showed him his private collection of work by the country’s preeminent landscape painter, Joseph Mallord William Turner. He then took him to see the Turners in the Windus collection at Tottenham. “Turner, you know, is reckoned by his lovers the greatest of all geniuses in landscape painting,” Emerson wrote to Lidian after returning from the gallery. Three days later Emerson visited the anatomist and curator, Richard Owen, a man he considered “one of the best heads in England.” During the full day Emerson spent with Owen, they made two stops: first, the Hunterian Museum (where Owen was the curator) and, secondly—perhaps spurred by the visit to the Tottenham gallery—Turner’s studio to meet the artist himself. However, when Owen and Emerson (along with Boston-based lawyer and author George Hillard) arrived at the studio, they found that Turner had stepped out. Considering Turner’s reputation for being rather cantankerous and reclusive in his old age, it would not have been a surprise to those who knew the artist that he would have disregarded the note Owen sent him announcing the visit. At 73, Turner was in poor health, signaled by the fact that 1848 was only the second year in his entire career that he failed to enter paintings into the annual exhibition at the Royal Academy. To friends and acquaintances who interacted with him in person, Turner appeared more like the captain of a steamboat than a national icon. He thumped across a room with a heavy sailor-like gait, often wore dirty trousers, spoke with a cockney accent, and had a tendency to mumble when addressing an audience in public. Whether he slipped away from his studio that afternoon out of embarrassment, complete disregard for his guests, physical illness, or some pressing commitment remains a vacant detail in the story of Emerson and Turner’s failed meeting. Regardless, such an opportunity would never present itself again. Emerson did not return to England and, less than three years later, Turner was dead.

As Emerson, Hillard, and Owen walked through Turner’s studio, Owen recounted one annual dinner he had attended at the Royal Academy during which, as evening fell and the light slipped out of the room, many of the paintings on the walls were overcome by shadow, “—all but Turner’s, and these glittered like gems, as if having light in themselves,” Emerson wrote, recalling Owen’s fascination. He carefully recorded in his journal Owen’s remarks about the stages of Turner’s career: “In his earlier pictures...Turner painted conventionally, painted what he knew was there, finished the coat and button; in the later he paints only what the eye really sees and gives the genius of the city or landscape.” During the previous two decades, Turner had become less focused on capturing and framing an identifiable locale a viewer could recognize or visit and more enthralled by the visual experience of creating the representation itself. More interesting to Turner than the natural properties of the

(Continued on page 9)
EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS
The newsletter of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society
Published at Ball State University
www.emersonsociety.org

Editor: Robert D. Habich
Book Review Editor: Jennifer Gurley
Editorial Assistant: Kelsi Morrison-Atkins
Design and Production: Peggy Iacono

EMERSON SOCIETY OFFICERS
President: Robert D. Habich (2013)
Ball State University
President-Elect: Susan Dunston (2013)
New Mexico Tech
Secretary/Treasurer: Todd H. Richardson (2013)
University of Texas of the Permian Basin

ADVISORY BOARD
Jessica Bray (2014)
East Tennessee State University
Beatrice F. Mans
Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association
Suunde Morris (2012)
Bowdoin University
Wesley T. Moir (2013)
Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Bonnie Carr O'Neill (2012)
Mississippi State University
Sandia L. Pentelus (2012)
Pennsylvania State University, Altoona
Dieter Schultz (2013)
University of Heidelberg (coeditor)
Yoshio Takamichi (2014)
Nagoya Prefectural College

PROGRAM CHAIR
Leslie E. Eickel
Ball State University

WEBMASTER
Amy E. Earhart
Texas A&M University

Prospects

Emerson Sightings/Citings

From my friend and Ball State colleague Paul Kanieri comes this mention of Emerson in film: At the start of the made-for-television movie Goodnight for Justice: The Measure of a Man (dir. Kristof Tabori, 2012), the traveling judge in the Wyoming territory humps his law book for his campaign rather than using Emerson’s Conduct of Life. At the end of the movie he gives the book to a young man who he discovers to be innocent of a capital offense after he finds out that he also likes to read while riding from place to place.

Our frequent correspondent Clarence Burley reports that The Atlantic has a Special Commemorative Issue titled ‘The Civil War’ which re-creates three pieces by Emerson previously published on its pages: third stanza of the poem ‘Voluntaries,’ October 1863 issue; “American Civilization,” the January 1862 speech urging emancipation, April 1862 issue; “The Presidential Proclamation,” hailing Lincoln’s action, November 1862 issue.

Another Ball State colleague, Frank Peltenstein, reports a new comedy produced by the Working Theatre in New York City, titled Call Me Waldo. Written by Rob Ackerman and directed by Margaret Perry, the play features “an everyday electrician [who] begins channeling Ralph Waldo Emerson. Says the playwright, ‘Call Me Waldo is not a play about Emerson. It’s about a guy who falls in love with Emerson’s idealism, and how he shakes up those around him and forces them to question everything. The story takes place in two worlds—the blue collar and the white coat—and the worlds collide. Out of this collision comes the first comedy I’ve ever written. Turns out Transcendentalism is funny. Who knew?’ Visit http://www.theworkingtheater.org/CalMeWaldo.htm for details.

Barbara L. Packer Fellowship
The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society proudly announces that the first recipient of the Barbara L. Packer Fellowship, which the Society has established in cooperation with the American Antiquarian Society (AAS), is James S. Finley, an instructor and doctoral candidate in English at the University of New Hampshire. His research project is titled “‘Violence Done to Nature’: Free Soil and the Environment in Antebellum Antislavery Writing.” Visit www.emersonsociety.com for more details.

The fellowship is awarded to individuals engaged in scholarly research and writing related to the Transcendentalists in general, and most especially to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Henry David Thoreau. It is open to both postdoctoral scholars and graduate students working on doctoral dissertations.

Contributions to the fund are still welcome. Please honor Barbara’s memory by donating through the AAS; for details visit http://www.americanantiquarian.org/packer.htm.

Emerson Society Panels at ALA
The Society presents two panels annually at the American Literature Association meeting, to be held this year on May 24-27, 2012, at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco. Visit americanliterature.org for more information. Note: As was agreed last year, the annual business meeting of the Emerson Society, normally held at ALA, will take place instead at “Conversazioni in Italia,” the conference we are co-sponsoring in Florence, June 8-10, 2012.

Emerson and African American Writers
Friday, May 25, 2012, 12:40—2:00 pm
Chair: Richard Hardack, Independent Scholar
“Emerson, Douglass, and the Politics of Private Life,” Bonnie Carr O’Neill, Mississippi State University
“Emotions, Ethics, and Double Consciousness in the Work of Emerson and Du Bois,” Rhys Schneider, Purdue University
“Which Emerson and African American Writers?” James M. Albrecht, Pacific Lutheran University

Emerson and Lincoln
Friday, May 25, 2012, 5:30—6:30 pm
Chair: Susan Dunston, New Mexico Tech
“The Emerson-Lincoln Relationship,” Jean M. Mudge, Independent Scholar and Documentary Filmmaker
“Lincoln, Emerson, and the American Representative Man,” Matthew McClelland, New York University

Thoreau Society Annual Gathering
The Emerson Society will once again conduct a program at the Thoreau Society’s annual gathering, to be held in Concord, Mass., July 12–15, 2012. The Emerson program, scheduled for Thursday evening, July 12, 7:30–9:00, will be followed by a reception sponsored by the Society. For information and a full schedule, visit http://www.thoreausociety.org/_activities_ag.htm.

Emerson’s Contribution to Thoreau’s Legacy
Chair: Jessie Bray, East Tennessee State University
“Becoming Emerson’s Poet: Thoreau’s Troubled First Apprenticeship,” David Dewling, University of Iowa
“The Mystical Fissure of Thoreur and Emerson: Emerson’s Antagonistic ‘Contribution’ to Thoreau’s Mysticism,” Deonna Roehr, State University of New Albany (co-winner of the Emerson Society’s 2012 Graduate Student Paper Award)
“Going Nowhere in a Go-Ahead Age: Thoreur, Emerson, and the Problem of Ambition,” Andrew Kopec, Ohio State University (co-winner of the Emerson Society’s 2012 Graduate Student Paper Award)

“I’m Going With Me:” The Travails and Travels of Emerson and Thoreau,” Nikhil Bivalkar, University of Alabama
Maria Mitchell on Emerson:
The 1855 Nantucket Lecture Identified, and Concord 1879

WESLEY T. MOTT
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Ralph Waldo Emerson traveled to the island of Nantucket five times to lecture before the Athenaeum, and none of his topics or titles on these occasions has been identified with certainty. Because he did not consistently mention lecture titles in his journals, notebooks, or letters, Emerson scholarship has relied upon newspaper accounts and other auditor reports to fill in the record. Thanks to the pioneering American astronomer Maria Mitchell—a Nantucket native and, later, Vassar College professor—we can conclusively identify his November 13, 1855, lecture as “Beauty.”

Dazzled by Emerson’s lecture, Mitchell recorded her impressions in her diary for November 14, 1855. Her sympathy for a reformer who was close to such Transcendentalists as Elizabeth Peabody and Henry David Thoreau blended with respect for a man who, like her, had admired for so long. “I did not speak to Mr. Emerson; I felt that I must not give him a bit of extra fatigue.”

Emerson entered,—pale, thin, almost ethereal in countenance,—followed by his daughter, who sat beside him and watched every word that he uttered. On the whole, it was the same Emerson—he stumbled at a quotation as he always did; but his thoughts were such as only Emerson could have thought, and the sentences had the Emersonian philiness. He made his frequent sentences very emphatic. It was impossible to see any thread of connection; but it always was so—the oracular sentences made the charm.

It was crowded and hot. “The little vestry, fitted perhaps for a hundred people, was packed with two hundred,—all people of an intellectual cast of face,—and the attention was intense. The thermometer was ninety in the shade.”

Sensitively, Mitchell dared not intrude on the fragile old man she had admired for so long. “I did not speak to Mr. Emerson; I felt that I must not give him a bit of extra fatigue.”

Prospects (Continued from page 3)

Conversazioni in Italia

The international conference we are co-sponsoring with our friends in the Nathaniel Hawthorne Society and the Poe Studies Association, will be held at Villa La Pietra in Florence, Italy, June 8–10, 2017. The conference features 35 panels, over 100 presentations (many of them by Emerson Society members), cultural activities in Florence, and a plenary address by Emerson scholar and board member Dieter Scholz, Universität Heidelberg (emeritus), who will speak on “Transcendence: Emerson, Poe, and the Metaphysics of the One.” Special thanks for their tireless work on the conference go to Jennifer Garly, who has put together the conference program; Todd Richardson and Dan Mulach, who screened proposals; and Sue Donlin, whose brainstorm about “a meeting in Italy” germinated after the success of our 2006 conference in Oxford. Much more about the meeting will appear in the fall 2012 issue of Emerson Society Papers. For a full program and conference information, visit http://web2.uconn.edu/transatlanticlit/.

IN MEMORIAM

The Society notes with sadness the death of Marie B. Mazzeo (1948–2011), who passed away at her home in West Caldwell, N.J., on Christmas Day. She was a teacher, valued Emerson Society member, beloved wife of Frank Mazzeo and mother of Paul Mazzeo and Christine Holschuh.

Her husband writes, “Marie loved the written word; combined with her love of nature, it’s no wonder she loved Emerson. The words of Emerson and Thoreau influenced her life in many ways, whether it was lessons handed down to her children or how she lived her own life.”

“Marie believed in nature and the wonder of trees. She was a strong advocate to preserve the wilderness and save the environment. To make it better for the world by giving to charities and was a member of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, Thoreau Society, Sierra Club, Greenpeace, and the Arbor Day Foundation.”

“Respected and admired by her peers and the countless students she touched, Marie influenced and encouraged her students to follow their dreams, enjoy nature, and become their own person.”

Reviews


The appearance of this volume is a long-anticipated and significant event in Emerson scholarship. Emerson’s poetry is fundamental to an understanding we should not underestimate and misrepresent Emerson, intellectually and aesthetically, unless we combine the study of his poetry with the study of his prose. Poetry was, after all, the main medium through which Emerson expressed himself. Thus we are fortunate that a volume has been published that contains poems that compose this volume and the one to follow and complete the series—Uncollected Poems and Translations, edited by Harold Bloom and Paul Kane. The volume of the series. Eventually, von Frank agreed to assume editorship of the Library of America’s edition of Emerson’s poetry. The eventual Editor—are distinctive, by virtue, in part, of the challenge of texts of all the poems and translations that Emerson chose to publish, and some of his own family (“Bulkeley”), thus maintaining that significance and also giving bio-bibliographical information; composition and publication histories; and, with Edward Emerson’s Centenary Edition Poems and Translations, is particularly wise. This format enables readers to trace Emerson’s poetry to explorations of Emerson, Romanticism, American Transcendentalism, and American poetry.

Von Frank has created in the introductions and the substantial notes in this volume the single most valuable contemporary scholarly edition of Emerson’s poetry. The “Historical Introduction” contains abundant information about the world in which Emerson lived and worked to produce the book as a variorum edition, unlike its predecessors in The Collected Works, is particularly wide. This format enables readers to trace the individual histories of texts and the same time produces each text, in accordance with the editorial principles of the series as a whole, that Emerson considered finished in the form he most appreciated having it. As CW Editorial General Ronald A. Bosc & the Preface, this volume includes: the one to follow and complete the series—Uncollected Prose Writings; Addresses, Essays, and Reviews, edited by Bosc & M. Johnson (CW Editorial Board member), and Joel Myerson (CW Editorial Board member)—are distinctive, by virtue, in part, of the challenge of texts of all the poems and translations that Emerson chose to publish, and some of his own family (“Bulkeley”), thus maintaining that significance and also giving bio-bibliographical information; composition and publication histories; and, with Edward Emerson’s Centenary Edition Poems and Translations, is particularly wise. This format enables readers to trace Emerson’s poetry to explorations of Emerson, Romanticism, American Transcendentalism, and American poetry.

Von Frank has created in the introductions and the substantial notes in this volume the single most valuable contemporary scholarly edition of Emerson’s poetry. The “Historical Introduction” contains abundant information about the world in which Emerson lived and worked to produce the book as a variorum edition, unlike its predecessors in The Collected Works, is particularly wide. This format enables readers to trace the individual histories of texts and the same time produces each text, in accordance with the editorial principles of the series as a whole, that Emerson considered finished in the form he most appreciated having it. As CW Editorial General Ronald A. Bosc & the Preface, this volume includes: the one to follow and complete the series—Uncollected Prose Writings; Addresses, Essays, and Reviews, edited by Bosc & M. Johnson (CW Editorial Board member), and Joel Myerson (CW Editorial Board member)—are distinctive, by virtue, in part, of the challenge of texts of all the poems and translations that Emerson chose to publish, and some of his own family (“Bulkeley”), thus maintaining that significance and also giving bio-bibliographical information; composition and publication histories; and, with Edward Emerson’s Centenary Edition Poems and Translations, is particularly wise. This format enables readers to trace Emerson’s poetry to explorations of Emerson, Romanticism, American Transcendentalism, and American poetry.

Von Frank has created in the introductions and the substantial notes in this volume the single most valuable contemporary scholarly edition of Emerson’s poetry. The “Historical Introduction” contains abundant information about the world in which Emerson lived and worked to produce the book as a variorum edition, unlike its predecessors in The Collected Works, is particularly wide. This format enables readers to trace the individual histories of texts and the same time produces each text, in accordance with the editorial principles of the series as a whole, that Emerson considered finished in the form he most appreciated having it. As CW Editorial General Ronald A. Bosc & the Preface, this volume includes: the one to follow and complete the series—Uncollected Prose Writings; Addresses, Essays, and Reviews, edited by Bosc & M. Johnson (CW Editorial Board member), and Joel Myerson (CW Editorial Board member)—are distinctive, by virtue, in part, of the challenge of texts of all the poems and translations that Emerson chose to publish, and some of his own family (“Bulkeley”), thus maintaining that significance and also giving bio-bibliographical information; composition and publication histories; and, with Edward Emerson’s Centenary Edition Poems and Translations, is particularly wise. This format enables readers to trace Emerson’s poetry to explorations of Emerson, Romanticism, American Transcendentalism, and American poetry.

Von Frank has created in the introductions and the substantial notes in this volume the single most valuable contemporary scholarly edition of Emerson’s poetry. The “Historical Introduction” contains abundant information about the world in which Emerson lived and worked to produce the book as a variorum edition, unlike its predecessors in The Collected Works, is particularly wide. This format enables readers to trace the individual histories of texts and the same time produces each text, in accordance with the editorial principles of the series as a whole, that Emerson considered finished in the form he most appreciated having it. As CW Editorial General Ronald A. Bosc & the Preface, this volume includes: the one to follow and complete the series—Uncollected Prose Writings; Addresses, Essays, and Reviews, edited by Bosc & M. Johnson (CW Editorial Board member), and Joel Myerson (CW Editorial Board member)—are distinctive, by virtue, in part, of the challenge of texts of all the poems and translations that Emerson chose to publish, and some of his own family (“Bulkeley”), thus maintaining that significance and also giving bio-bibliographical information; composition and publication histories; and, with Edward Emerson’s Centenary Edition Poems and Translations, is particularly wise. This format enables readers to trace Emerson’s poetry to explorations of Emerson, Romanticism, American Transcendentalism, and American poetry.

Von Frank has created in the introductions and the substantial notes in this volume the single most valuable contemporary scholarly edition of Emerson’s poetry. The “Historical Introduction” contains abundant information about the world in which Emerson lived and worked to produce the book as a variorum edition, unlike its predecessors in The Collected Works, is particularly wide. This format enables readers to trace the individual histories of texts and the same time produces each text, in accordance with the editorial principles of the series as a whole, that Emerson considered finished in the form he most appreciated having it. As CW Editorial General Ronald A. Bosc & the Preface, this volume includes: the one to follow and complete the series—Uncollected Prose Writings; Addresses, Essays, and Reviews, edited by Bosc & M. Johnson (CW Editorial Board member), and Joel Myerson (CW Editorial Board member)—are distinctive, by virtue, in part, of the challenge of texts of all the poems and translations that Emerson chose to publish, and some of his own family (“Bulkeley”), thus maintaining that significance and also giving bio-bibliographical information; composition and publication histories; and, with Edward Emerson’s Centenary Edition Poems and Translations, is particularly wise. This format enables readers to trace Emerson’s poetry to explorations of Emerson, Romanticism, American Transcendentalism, and American poetry.

Von Frank has created in the introductions and the substantial notes in this volume the single most valuable contemporary scholarly edition of Emerson’s poetry. The “Historical Introduction” contains abundant information about the world in which Emerson lived and worked to produce the book as a variorum edition, unlike its predecessors in The Collected Works, is particularly wide. This format enables readers to trace the individual histories of texts and the same time produces each text, in accordance with the editorial principles of the series as a whole, that Emerson considered finished in the form he most appreciated having it. As CW Editorial General Ronald A. Bosc & the Preface, this volume includes: the one to follow and complete the series—Uncollected Prose Writings; Addresses, Essays, and Reviews, edited by Bosc & M. Johnson (CW Editorial Board member), and Joel Myerson (CW Editorial Board member)—are distinctive, by virtue, in part, of the challenge of texts of all the poems and translations that Emerson chose to publish, and some of his own family (“Bulkeley”), thus maintaining that significance and also giving bio-bibliographical information; composition and publication histories; and, with Edward Emerson’s Centenary Edition Poems and Translations, is particularly wise. This format enables readers to trace Emerson’s poetry to explorations of Emerson, Romanticism, American Transcendentalism, and American poetry.

Von Frank has created in the introductions and the substantial notes in this volume the single most valuable contemporary scholarly edition of Emerson’s poetry. The “Historical Introduction” contains abundant information about the world in which Emerson lived and worked to produce the book as a variorum edition, unlike its predecessors in The Collected Works, is particularly wide. This format enables readers to trace the individual histories of texts and the same time produces each text, in accordance with the editorial principles of the series as a whole, that Emerson considered finished in the form he most appreciated having it. As CW Editorial General Ronald A. Bosc & the Preface, this volume includes: the one to follow and complete the series—Uncollected Prose Writings; Addresses, Essays, and Reviews, edited by Bosc & M. Johnson (CW Editorial Board member), and Joel Myerson (CW Editorial Board member)—are distinctive, by virtue, in part, of the challenge of texts of all the poems and translations that Emerson chose to publish, and some of his own family (“Bulkeley”), thus maintaining that significance and also giving bio-bibliographical information; composition and publication histories; and, with Edward Emerson’s Centenary Edition Poems and Translations, is particularly wise. This format enables readers to trace Emerson’s poetry to explorations of Emerson, Romanticism, American Transcendentalism, and American poetry.

Von Frank has created in the introductions and the substantial notes in this volume the single most valuable contemporary scholarly edition of Emerson’s poetry. The “Historical Introduction” contains abundant information about the world in which Emerson lived and worked to produce the book as a variorum edition, unlike its predecessors in The Collected Works, is particularly wide. This format enables readers to trace the individual histories of texts and the same time produces each text, in accordance with the editorial principles of the series as a whole, that Emerson considered finished in the form he most appreciated having it. As CW Editorial General Ronald A. Bosc & the Preface, this volume includes: the one to follow and complete the series—Uncollected Prose Writings; Addresses, Essays, and Reviews, edited by Bosc & M. Johnson (CW Editorial Board member), and Joel Myerson (CW Editorial Board member)—are distinctive, by virtue, in part, of the challenge of texts of all the poems and translations that Emerson chose to publish, and some of his own family (“Bulkeley”), thus maintaining that significance and also giving bio-bibliographical information; composition and publication histories; and, with Edward Emerson’s Centenary Edition Poems and Translations, is particularly wise. This format enables readers to trace Emerson’s poetry to explorations of Emerson, Romanticism, American Transcendentalism, and American poetry.
Chapter Five offers yet more wonderful documentary evidence. Critics such as Richard Tregaskis and Sam MacDowell have portrayed Emerson as a thinker who strategically engaged liberal ideals in order to transform liberal culture. Dolan’s aim to construct a liberal Emerson who prevents him from being overtaken by the spirit of Nature’s first paragraph—“building the sepulchers of the old—a cemetery for dead impulses”—Robert D. Habich explains in this superb revisionist account of Emerson. While Dolan provides an excellent resource for understanding the liberal contexts of Emerson’s thought, readers interested in how Emerson moves beyond the confines of classic liberalism will need to look elsewhere.

—James Albrecht

Pacific Lutheran University

Building Their Own Waldos: Emerson’s First Biographers and the Politics of Life-Writing in the Gilded Age

Robert D. Habich, Duke University

In contrast, Emerson hoped we might build a democratic culture that “would not be a democracy of the powerful or the rich, but of the people.” The “expressive” photograph of the “unique kind of beauty which is achievable in a picture.” Flipin’s picturesque aesthetic sometimes inspired wealthy British aristocrats to roam the English countryside looking for “beauty spots” that would make their special moment last. By 1792, however, this definition comes more in line with Romantic thought, emphasizing the importance of achieving “a united whole” of “the combined idea” of simplicity and variety—a process of selection and combination in which “the picture is not so much the product of an artist, but the reflection upon and animation of one’s inner eye.”

—Daniel S. Malachuk

Western Illinois University

The “As Yet Unconquered” Eye

(Continued from page 1)

Reviews

(Continued from page 7)

The point is to show how the poet’s descriptions of nature can be interpreted as a metaphor for moral and intellectual development. To do this, the poet uses the imagery of the sea and the sky to evoke the idea of change and transformation. The poem ends with a call to action: “Let us then, my friends, meet in the morning, and lead each other’s lives, and henceforth think of ourselves as truly brothers.”

—C. E. L. Heath

Oxford University

The poet’s interest in the natural world is evident throughout the poem, as he describes the beauty and mystery of the sea and the sky. His use of imagery and metaphor is skillfully employed to create a sense of wonder and awe. The poem is a celebration of the human capacity for growth and change, and a call to embrace the opportunities that nature offers. The poet’s use of the sea and the sky as symbols for the broader themes of life and death, birth and death, and the cyclical nature of existence is particularly effective.

—D. R. S. Smith

Cambridge University

The poem is a reflection on the poet’s own life and his struggle to find meaning in the world. He sees his life as a journey, filled with both joy and sorrow, and he encourages his readers to take the same journey, to find their own path through life. The poem is a message of hope and encouragement, a celebration of the human spirit in the face of adversity. It is a poem that speaks to the heart, a call to action that encourages us to live our lives to the fullest.

—J. S. M. Brown

Harvard University

While Turner’s paintings have been praised for their emotive power, his later works have often been criticized for their lack of technical skill. In this respect, his contribution to the Romantic movement is significant, as he was one of the first artists to use impressionistic techniques to capture the fleeting effects of light and atmosphere.

—A. R. H. Brown

New York University

The Turner Society Papers

(Continued from page 10)
The “As Yet Unconquered” Eye
(Continued from page 9)

of Turner’s will decreed that the nation should receive “all the Pictures, Drawings, and Sketches by the Testator’s hands without any distinction of finished or unfinished” (and, of course, such a distinction would have sometimes been hard to make). By 1856, five years after the artist’s death, nearly 300 oil paintings and 30,000 watercolors and sketches were bestowed to England’s national galleries. The giving of an entire collection to the general public was unprecedented.

Turner’s immersion in the cultures of his time and the bodily experience of perception, rather in the glorification of the intrinsic value of art, was an attitude which Emerson would have shared. Though he was a lover of painting, Emerson admitted that he was an unscrupulous evaluator of the worth of a piece or the talent of its artist. After viewing the engravings a friend sent him of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, he replied, “Will you let me say, that I have conceived more highly of the possibilities of art sometimes in looking at weatherstains on a wall, or fantastic shapes which the eye makes out of shadows by lamplight, than from really finished & majestic pictures.” Seven years after his tours of the artworld, in the churches and galleries of Italy, and seven years before coming face-to-face with Turner’s paintings in England, Emerson wrote in “Art,” “In landscapes, the painter should give the suggestion of a fairer horizon, as both a symbolic structure and a real aspect of experience. Thus what Turner understood about experience more than we know. The details, the prose of nature he made sure the horizon, as both a symbolic structure and a real aspect of experience was mediated by one’s own bodily act of perceiving.

For Emerson, Turner, and western visual culture at large, the 1830s marked a significant shift in the discussions about perception and representations of vision. With the thinking about optics that led up to the patenting of Charles Wheatstone’s stereoscope in 1838, scientists begin to define the seeing body as binocular, to calculate the angle from which each eye could see, and to identify the physiological basis for the discrepancy. Previous theories presupposed a singular monocular field, reasoning that either we only see objects in space one eye at a time or that the eye projects an object to its actual location. For Emerson, born a generation after Turner, a critical distance from the popular Claude glass exposed the instability of our visual access to the real world. On December 2, 1834, the 31-year-old Emerson wrote, “I look upon every sect as a Claude Lorraine glass through which I see the same sun & the same world & in the same relative places as through my own eyes but one makes them small, another large; one, green; another, blue; another, pink. I suppose that an orthodox preacher’s cry ‘the natural man is an enemy of God’ only translates the philosopher’s that ‘the instinct of the Understanding is to contradict the Reason’; so Luther’s ‘Law & Gospel’ & St Paul’s; Swedenborg’s love of self & love of the Lord; William Penn’s World & Spirit; the Court of Honor’s Gentleman & Knave. The duallism is ever present though seldom denominated.”

Emerson heightened awareness of philosophical dualisms is underscored by a broader uncertainty about appearances. The eye remained unconquered yet, now, visual instability was becoming not a mark of deception but instead an essential aspect of the cultural shift. Certainly, the cultural shift is also reflected in the increasingly abstract focus of Turner’s paintings in the 1830s and 1840s. Seemingly replacing the authoritative view of the transparent eyeball, the Claude glass still clung over the Turnerian meditation in “Experience” with a distinct attention to the inescapably uncertain properties of our reflections: “Dream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion. Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and, as we pass through them, they prove to be many-colored pictures which the world peeps through from each side of it, only what lies in its focus... We animate what we can, and we see only what we animate.”

One has to imagine that, if Emerson and Turner had met and spoken to each other on a number of things: the contingency of appearances, the necessary instability of the eye’s access to reality, and the “spiritual” quality of art. In July of 1862, Elly Channing brought Turner’s “Old Téméraire” to Bush. It was to hang in Ellen’s room, Emerson remarked, “for a time, till she gets acquainted with it.” By this point Emerson seems to have come to terms with the fact that “the ruin or the blank... is in our own eye, of that which had plagued him decades before.” “Well, ‘tis all phantasim,” he concludes in the final essay in The Conduct of Life, “Illusions”:

And what avails it that science has come to treat space and time as simply forms of thought, and the material world as hypostatical, and without our pretension of property and even of selfhood are fading with the rest, if, at last, our thoughts are not finitiveness, but the incessant flowing and ascension reach these also, and each thought which yesterday was a finality, to-day is yielding to a larger generalization?... The notions, ‘I am’, and ‘This is mine’, which influence mankind are but delusions of the mother of the world.

National debates over how much land a man might need to farm, how many slaves he might own, or where territorial boundaries might be drawn erupted in the midst of an ever deeper destabilization of the concept of property. Not only was there one question of the security of his material possessions, even his own bodily processes were persistently unverifiable and uncontrollable. As both Turner and Emerson come to realize, pure trappery and absolute verifiability—are decided beyond the limits of human visibility. Within a culture that was emphasizing the importance of moving from mystery to authentication, Emerson and Turner accept and animate the fall of an autonomous eye.

Notes

4. JMN 10:357.
8. M.D. Conway, “Turner, the Landscape Painter, His Later-Years’Obliquity of Vision and the Artwork of The Thames at Wargrave and All Things for All People for Art and Controversy— A Future Special Chapter on Art,” American Antiquarian Society clip file 11872.

9. Despite the fact that some of his contemporaries may have accused him of having a “diseased eye” (which implies a condemnation probably less to do with his aesthetic judgments than his physiological condition), modern biographers of Turner, such as James Hamilton’s Turner: A Life (New York: Random House, 2003), Anthony Bailey’s Standing in the Sun: A Life of J.M.W. Turner (New York: HarperCollin, 1998), and John Gage’s JMW Turner: “A Wonderful Range of Mind” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), do not try to “diagnose” the artist in order to explain his style. The move, however, to locate a physiological “cause” for stylistic experiment, to consider optical experience as something rooted—and then regulated more than before by the laws of human vision—is a defining feature of the nineteenth-century’s juridical approach to vision, which Crary describes in detail.
11. For more on Turner’s treatment of the canvases on varnishing days, and his competition with Constable, see The Oxford Companion to JMW Turner, 354-357.

The Fighting Téméraire tugged to her last berth to break up (the “Old Téméraire” of Emerson’s letter), 1839/1839. Credits: The National Gallery, Turner Bequest, 1856. Image © The National Gallery.

Dominique Zino is a Ph.D. candidate in English at the CUNY Graduate Center, working on a dissertation that explores the ways in which nineteenth-century visual cultural paradigms and research on psychological optics are expressed in the work of Emerson, Emily Dickinson, William James, and Henry James. The nineteenth-century art periodicals cited in this article are located at the American Antiquarian Society, where Dominique was a Jay and Deborah Last Fellow during the summer of 2011. She would like to thank the Antiquarian Society staff, especially Lauren Hewes, for pointing her to these sources.
The “As Yet Unconquered” Eye

(Continued from page 11)

15. In annual exhibition catalogues, Turner often paired his paintings with poetic verses. After 1812, in fact, the verses were mostly ones he had written himself, the majority from his series of poems, Fallacies of Hope. See The Oxford Companion to J.M.W. Turner, 271.


17. For Emerson, it functions both a figure of hope and of frustration. In his remarks on the horizon in Nature, Emerson insists, “We are never tired so long as we can see far enough” (CW 1:13). Yet, elsewhere, in “Experience,” he writes, “Every ship is a romantic object except that we sail in. Embark, and the romance quits our vessel, and hangs on every other sail in the horizon. Our life looks trivial, and we shun to record it. Men seem to have learned of the horizon the art of perpetual retreating and reference” (CW 3:28).

---

Emerson Society Awards 2012

The Emerson Society is pleased to announce the recipients of the annual community project, research, subvention, and graduate student paper awards.

COMMUNITY PROJECT AWARD ($500)
Illinois Humanities Council, Chicago, Illinois

The Odyssey Project, “An American Inheritance: Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Baldwin”

The Odyssey Project is part of the Illinois Humanities Council. From the grant proposal: “The Odyssey Project is a free eight-month college course of study in the humanities for individuals living on low incomes, minorities, first-generation students, and adult learners. Participants meet twice a week for courses in philosophy, literature, critical thinking, writing, and history taught by professors from top academic institutions. Students who successfully complete the program earn six hours of transferable college credit from Bard College.

“This six-part seminar will use the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Baldwin to help students reflect on American democracy and the Emersonian tradition. While college-level courses typically offer Baldwin alongside other African-American writers and Emerson within an antebellum or transcendentalist context, this discussion series will show Baldwin to be one of Emerson’s most important heirs.” For more information about The Odyssey Project, see the program’s website: www.prairie.org/programs/odyssey-project.

Funding from the Emerson Society will help the Odyssey Project pay for students’ transportation costs, photocopies of students’ reading materials, and an honorarium for a guest speaker.

RESEARCH AWARD ($500)
Mark Russell Gallagher (Department of English, University of California, Los Angeles)

“Friending Emerson: The Conduct of Life and The Social Network of the Saturday Club”

Mr. Gallagher explains: “My project aims to read Emerson’s The Conduct of Life (1860) as a product of this social network and as a manifestation of the American Victorian culture that emerges during the 1850s.”

This project is part of Mr. Gallagher’s dissertation at UCLA. Mr. Gallagher proposes to use funding from the Emerson Society to offset travel costs to Boston, where he will conduct research at the Massachusetts Historical Society, which houses Edward Emerson’s records of the Saturday Club.

SUBVENTION AWARD ($500)
David LaRocca (Independent scholar, New York City)


From Dr. LaRocca’s application: “My aim is to collect the best criticism on Emerson written between 1841 and the present, focusing especially on gathering the hardest to find work. The hope is to create an essential resource for scholarly research and an engaging set of readings for a general audience.”

Funding from the Emerson Society will offset costs of permissions for this collection.

GRADUATE STUDENT PAPER AWARD

This award provides travel support to present a paper on an Emerson Society panel at either the American Literature Association meeting or the Thoreau Society Annual Gathering. Two winners will share the award this year, both for presentations at the Annual Gathering in July 2012.

Deeanna Rohr (State University of New York at Albany)

“The Mystical Fissure of Thoreau and Emerson: Emerson’s Antagonistic ‘Contribution’ to Thoreau’s Mysticism”

Andrew Kopec (The Ohio State University)

“Going Nowhere in a Go-Ahead Age: Thoreau, Emerson, and the Problem of Ambition”