"An Etching of Emerson" (1853) and the Problem of Attribution

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"An Etching of Emerson," a chapter in the anonymous Transatlantic Tracings and Popular Pictures from American Subjects (London: W. Tweedie, 1853 [pp. 123-33]), is a clever and witty English account of Ralph Waldo Emerson at the height of his fame as lecturer. The sketch, reprinted below, describes Emerson as "a double man"—illogical and mystifying yet appealingly honest, an ineffective speaker but an engaging man.

The authorship of the "Etching" has been a matter of much confusion. The piece has been attributed to George Searle Phillips, who under the pseudonym "January Searle" wrote what is considered the first biography of Emerson (Emerson, His Life and Writings [London: Holyoake, 1855]). The National Union Catalog (456:97-98), however, attributes Transatlantic Tracings to John Ross Dix, a designation followed by the American Antiquarian Society. Adding to the confusion is that Dix's obituary in the New York Times (10 November 1865) identifies his real name as George Spencer Phillips—amazingly close to the real name of "January Searle."

The biographical record, scant and sometimes ambiguous, does point to two distinct writers, albeit with astonishingly parallel lives and careers. (The Dictionary of National Biography has separate—but not wholly reliable—entries on John Ross Dix and George Searle Phillips. For the sake of convenient distinction, the two will be referred to as "Dix" and "Searle." Both were born in England, Dix in Bristol in 1800, Searle in Peterborough in 1815 (or 1816). Both came to the United States in the early 1840s; Dix appears to have stayed on, while Searle returned to England to pursue a career as a newspaper editor and lecturer before returning to the States around 1860 as a journalist. Both were prolific writers. Dix wrote a controversial Life of Chatterton, books on travel and temperance, and sketches of English and American personalities including Pulpit Portraits, or Pen-Pictures of Distinguished American Divines (1854); besides the little book on Emerson, Searle wrote sketches of rural life and such notable works as The Life, Character, and Genius of Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn-Law Rhymer (1850) and Memoirs of William Wordsworth (1852). Listings of works on title pages do not overlap, supporting the notion that Dix and Searle were distinct persons.

January Searle is best known in Emersonian circles for his ironic sketch, in his 1855 book, of a dinner Emerson gave for some English admirers at his quarters in Manchester in the winter of 1848, an affair to which Searle walked some twenty-five miles in inclement weather. Searle had arranged lectures by Emerson at Huddersfield the previous December. The "Etching" suggests at several points a social acquaintance with Emerson. Yet the author claims to have heard him in Pennsylvania—there is no mention of the Manchester event, and the lectures referred to ("Fate," "Culture," and "Worship") were not given at Huddersfield (indeed, as Douglas Emory Wilson points out, they had not even been written at that time); according to Albert J. von Frank's An Emerson Chronology, Emerson's topics there were "Napoleon" and "Domestic Life." Clues from the lecture circuit are inconclusive but hint at Dix as author of the "Etching."

William Charvat's Emerson's American Lecture Engagements (1961) notes that Emerson gave a series on "New England" in Philadelphia in January 1843 (Dix, in the 1854 Pulpit Portraits [p. 21], states that he had briefly lived in that city "some ten years since"); in the spring of 1851 Emerson lectured on "Culture" and "Worship" in Pittsburgh; according to von Frank, he seems not to have given "Fate," "Culture," and "Worship" as a series until January 1853 in St. Louis—perhaps the author of "Etching" is conflating times and places.

Further internal evidence points to Dix as the author of the "Etching." The "Preface. To the Reader" of Transatlantic Tracings is signed "D." The author notes that he was residing in Brooklyn in 1852 (p. 88) and refers to a trip to the Great Lakes the previous October (p. 134), a period during which Searle seems to have been active in England. A tantalizing piece of counterevidence is that the author boasts
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(Continued from page 1)

...and he who seems so ethereal and spiritualized in his Essay can tell you the precise difference between a chop at "The Rainbow," and one at its opposite rival, "The Cock," and seizes a Turfman and Cantankerous expatriate on the verge of converting his powers of converse, but who are most sterile in the social circle, or from whom one hardly expects anything but monosyllables, but who are most sterile in the social circle, or from whom one hardly expects anything but monosyllables, no considerable powers in anything strong or isolated world out of which they speak, but finds them overwhelming like a spring stream, at home in common and uncom- mended states that has got this ease in their society that has got this ease in their society, but finds them overwhelming like a spring stream, at home in common and uncommon states (p. 307) of having been given a letter of introduction to Longfellow by Lewis Gaylord Clark, editor of the New York Times notice reprints a letter from a Mrs. Ross Dix and/or George Searle Phillips/January Searle are...
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and feels the bond uniting him to the common herd.

In his Lecture on Culture, I think it was, he spoke of this
relationship to man. He talked of our egotism, as the vice of
certain scholars, those who spin round and round on one
point of opinion, having a word or sphere of their own, regardless
of their relation to reality. He makes a difference between
egotism without prejudice, &c. And in this connection he reminded
me, that he who has a work to accomplish, "sacrificed prejudice to performance," too
well may do so. On this principle he spoke. His Lecture I heard,
also his concluding Lecture on Worship. The former I think
was greater satisfaction than any other of the course. Designed to
follow after Fate, it developed the idea that Culture, training,
education, triumphed over human limitations, and that the world
was one great school of Culture, where a man soon found out what
was real. Some thought the Lectures conflicted with the previous
one, though perhaps Mr. E. would say he was but presenting two
sides of the truth. He shows that appearance of contradiction,
leaves his hearers or reader to reconcile matters as they can. It
will not be difficult for any one to find what ordinary
minds would pronounce irreconcilable contradictions in his writ-
ings. I should think he wrote always, what he thought in some hours of
reverie, regardless of what he had thought or written before.

Logical connection he evidences does not affect.

His lecture on Fate gave less satisfaction than any. It was
spiritless, without variety, and disappointed high expectations.
Starts out with remarks on scepticism, and his fearlessness of the
imputation of it, he "jumped in" all religions, from Offo and
Hengist, down as common superstitions. He then brachied
off upon an elaborate discussion of the point that what was a man in
what a man is, will come out. Coming back upon religion again, to probe
whether the religious instinct is, also the expression of the national
development of the religious idea—asserting that religion cannot
be grafted, but must be of the "crab" stock—making some admi-
rable clippings, parings, and shreds of his thoughts.' If
Swedenborg be the Shakspeare of theology, Emerson is
the Swedenborg of philosophy. Even his incongruous
agglomerations are brilliant as they are incompreh-
sible. Read the following as a specimen of that style:

"The Gothic cathedral is a blossoming in stone, subdued
of granite blooms into an eternal flower, with the
lightness and delicate finish as well as the aerial propor-
tions of veritiable vegetable beauty. In like manner all
public acts are to be individualized, all private acts are
to be generalized. Then at once history becomes fluid
and biographic deep and poetic flat, the creation of
"Mr. Emerson is a poetical as well as a prose writer,
but there is more poetry in his prose than in his poems.
In Europe he is regarded as the exponent of American
spirit, and in his tour through Great Britain, he met with a cordial
reception, and his lectures were numerously attended. He is
by no means such a "caricature of America," but he is
evitably a better and a greater man than Carlyle.
The pupil is wiser than the teacher. The chip is larger than the
block. He has a more opulent intellect, much better taste,
and higher and holier aims, than the snarling, cynical
philosopher of the Old World.

Spring 1995

Emerson Society Papers

PROSPECTS.

American Literature Association Conference

The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society will present two panels at
the sixth annual conference of the American Literature Asso-
ciation in Baltimore, Maryland, on Friday, 26 May 1995:

Prospects. Emerson's Later Work. Chair, David M. Robinson (Oregon
State Univ.)

"The Conduct of Life: The Seductions of Necessity," Bar-
bara Packer (Univ. of California, Los Angeles)

"Emerson's Tears," Julie Ellison (Univ. of Michigan)

"Fate, Freedom, and Foreknowledge": Assent, Stoical Belief and Reformed Theology in Emerson's The Conduct of Life,” Robin Grey (Univ. of Illinois-Chicago)

Emerson in Recent Criticism. Chair, Gary L. Collision (Penn State-York Campus)

"Emerson's Centrality to American Literary Studies: Will It Endure?," Lawrence Buell (Harvard Univ.)

Radical Humanism?: Stanley Cavell's Emerson, "Cary Wolfle (Indiana Univ.)

"Art, Language, and Mind: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Transcendentalism," Gayle Smith (Penn State—Worthington
Scarlett Campus)

The panels, at 2:30 and 4:00 p.m., will be preceded by
the Society's annual business meeting at noon.

The ALA conference will be held at the Stouffer Harbo-Top Hotel. Preregistration conference fees will be
$40 (with a $10 surcharge for independent scholars;
retired individuals, and students). The hotel is offering a conference rate of $79 a night (single) or $89 (double). A welcoming party will be held on Thursday evening, 25 May. Inquiries should be sent to the conference director, Professor
Glora Cronin, English Dept., Brigham Young University,
Provo, UT 84602, FAX: 801-373-4661, Internet:
cronin@j(0k.blueyew.com.

New Books

Emerson's Antislavery Writings, edited by Len Gougeon and
Joel Myerson, has been published in January 1995 by the
Yale University Press. It contains 18 items (14 public
speeches, 4 published letters), one never published before.
Six are printed from manuscripts, and four from contempo-
rary newspaper accounts.

Emerson: The Mind on Fire, an intellectual biography by
Robert D. Richardson, Jr., has recently been published
by the University of California Press. A 20% discount
order form—benefit to members of the Emerson Society—
may be found in this newsletter.

Status Report on Emerson Editions

The editorial work on Society and Solitude (Volume 7 of the
Collected Works) was completed by the late Susan Smith
1994, and her work at the Massachusetts Historical Society
for that volume-three of the journals and the correspond-
ence of Caroline Healey Dall.

Helen Dee Wins Research Award

Helen E. Dees, Professor of English at Tennessee Techno-
logical University and a member of the Advisory Board
of the Emerson Society, has been named recipient of the
Caplenor Faculty Research Award at Tennessee Tech. Pro-
ductor Dees, a familiar panelist at sessions sponsored by
the Emerson Society, was cited for her wide-ranging studies
of American Transcendentalism, particularly her edition of
Jones Very: The Complete Poems (Univ. of Georgia Press,
1994) and her work at the Massachusetts Historical Society
for that volume-three of the journals and the correspon-
dence of Caroline Healey Dall.

Rhyl H. swells Research Collection

Nearly 100 books and recordings by and about Emerson and
other Transcendentalists have been given to the Emerson
Society's Research Collection by Professor Ralph H. Orth of
the University of Vermont. Chief Editor of The Journals and
Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson as well
as Emerson's Poetry Notebooks and Topical Notebooks,
Harry Orth served as first President of the Emerson Society
and initiated our Scholarship Fund.

News from Kobe, Japan

With every indication that Emerson Society member
Yoshitaka Aoyama, of Kobe, Japan, has written to ESP
following the devastating 17 January earthquake that
centered on Kobe. Professor Aoyama writes, "I sincerely thank
you for your kind inquiry after our safety. We escaped
without harm and now are managing to cope with this
dreadful calamity."

Emerson House Hours for 1995

The Ralph Waldo Emerson House reopened on 20 April
and will close on 29 October, reports Director Barbara A. Morgan.
Hours are Thursday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to
4:30 p.m., and Sunday and Monday holidays from 2:00 to
4:30 p.m.

Admission is $3.50 for adults, $2 for students ages 6-17;
children under 6 are admitted free of charge. Special rates
are available for groups of 10 or more. The Emerson House is
located at 28 Cambridge Turnpike in Concord, Mass.
For more information in season, call 508-369-2236.
Goethe was one of many influences on Emerson, that Goethean book is more than the sum of its individual parts. Completely Emersonian” (10). This he does most convincingly, of the modern focus on the self and self-consciousness, and the is as lucid as it is because it follows, among other things, discussion the dilemmas, convictions, and tensions central to nineteenth-century, “dealing with what “modern” meant to Goethe and Emerson. anyone interested in picking up where he leaves off, charting the way the chapters complement and expand upon each other, the rather than what it may mean to us today (ix). He makes it clear too that it was possible to validate nature without denying spirit” (43). He explores the implications of this perspective for Emerson’s ideas on action, the eternal moment, and micro/macrocosm. “The Cri- tique of Idealism” is the pivotal chapter in the sense that Van Cromphout shows repeatedly how Goethe’s influence tended to strengthen Emerson’s appreciation of concrete reality. In the chapter on the visual arts, he cautions that while Goethe’s aesthetic theories changed considerably over time, Emerson adopted and adapted whichever ideas suited his needs, with familiar disregard for any particular system. For both Goethe and Emerson, of course, the crucial question was the appropriate relation of art to nature, and Van Cromphout finds Emerson’s, which tend to be “transparent” and “transferable” (69-70). He associates this difference with Emerson’s desire to merge the poet and the thinker, a move that made clarity of ideas more important than sensuous immediacy of the literary symbol. In an all too brief discussion of literary subjectivity and objectivity, Van Cromphout again credits Goethe’s example with increasing Emerson’s “respect for objectivity, for the actual, for the fact” (77). Moving to questions of style, he sees Emerson admiring and generally practicing the concise, concrete, even common style, although he sometimes found Goethe’s style too common, too realistic. Defending Emerson’s poetic practice from the criticism of David Porter, he stresses, with Carl Strauch, Emerson’s “poetry of action, the eternal moment, and micro/macrocosm. “The Cri...
Concord Program

Anniversary Celebration
July Fourth marks the 150th anniversary of Henry Thoreau’s move to Walden. In deference to the special programs planned to commemorate this event, the Emerson Society—for the first time in five years—will not present a panel in Concord in July. For details on the Thoreau Society’s annual meeting and other sesquicentennial activities, contact Bradley P. Dean, Secretary, at the English Department, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina 27858-4353; e-mail endean@ecuvm.cis.ecu.edu.

“Emerson and Women II”
More than 40 Emersonians enjoyed the Emerson Society’s panel discussion “Emerson and Women” at the Concord Academy on 9 July 1994. New speakers revisited the theme that generated such interest at the 1993 session. Both programs were offered in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Thoreau Society. Pictured are Ron Bosco (moderator), Dan Shealy, Helen Deese, and Phyllis Cole.

In Memoriam
Susan Sutton Smith
1943-1994

Susan Sutton Smith, who died on 17 November 1994 at the age of 51, was a remarkable individual who evoked the respect and affection of everyone who knew her. Familiar to Emersonians as co-editor (with Harrison Hayford) of volume 14 of The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks and as editor of volume 1 of The Topical Notebooks, she was also an expert on the poet Adelaide Crapsey and author of seventeen critical biographies for the encyclopedia American Woman Writers. At her death she was working on the correspondence of Harriet Jane Hanson Robinson, a self-educated Lowell mill girl, and her journalist husband.

A graduate of Vassar College, she received her master’s degree from the University of California at Berkeley and her Ph.D. from the University of Rochester. She spent her academic career at the State University of New York at Oneonta, where she rose to the rank of Professor of English. In an episode unique among Emerson scholars, in 1972 she was an undefeated champion on the information quiz show Jeopardy.

Afflicted by a debilitating disease while still young, she spent many years as a dialysis patient, a circumstance which evoked in her not self-pity but a sturdy determination to persevere in her work and live her life as fully as she could. She spent many summers doing research at the Houghton Library at Harvard, having arranged for dialysis treatment at nearby hospitals, and, when portable dialysis machines became common, traveled to such distant places as the Grand Canyon and Hawaii. Her indomitable spirit defined the term “grace under pressure.” Susan, we will miss you.

—Ralph H. Orth