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## EMERSON SOCIETY PAPERS

### Distinguished Achievement Awards

— RALPH HARRY ORTH —

In presenting the 1996 Distinguished Achievement Award to Ralph Harry Orth, the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society recognizes the extraordinary contribution to modern scholarship of Professor Orth's devotion to teaching, writing on, and editing Emerson and his works throughout his professional career. Educated in New York City elementary and high schools, Professor Orth received his B.A. from Queens College, New York, in 1956, and his Ph.D. from the University of Rochester in 1960. Leaving the "Empire State" in his last year of doctoral study, Professor Orth sought out his yet-more-Yankee roots in Burlington, Vermont. Beginning his teaching career at the University of Vermont in 1959, he rose through Vermont's professorial ranks from Instructor to Full Professor, and retired in 1995 as the Frederick M. and Fannie C. P. Corse Professor of English Language and Literature. Along the way, he graced Vermont's classrooms with undergraduate and graduate courses in virtually every major field of American Literature, served as Vermont's University Scholar in 1987-88 and as Visiting Research Professor at the University of Bristol (England) in 1982 and at Stanford University in 1988, and edited or co-edited four substantial volumes of Emerson manuscripts: volume 6 of the *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson (JMN)* in 1966; with the late Alfred R. Ferguson, volumes 9 and 13 of the *JMN* in 1971 and 1977, respectively; and with Albert J. von Frank, Linda Allardt, and David W. Hill, the *Poetry Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* in 1986. A Founding Member of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, Professor Orth served as the first President of the Society in 1990-91.

Affectionately known as "the Chief" to many current Emersonians, Professor Orth continues to fill generously the valuable role of mentor and friend to the generation of Emerson editors and scholars who entered the profession of English Studies in the 1970s. Indeed, Professor Orth's

(Continued on page 2)

— JOSEPH SLATER —

It is impossible for me to write impersonally about someone whom I have known as a friend for almost half a century, and with whom I have worked on a joint project for the last twenty-one years. I can only say how delighted I am that the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society has given its Distinguished Achievement Award to my friend Joe Slater.

I first knew Joe Slater in 1948, when we were both junior members of the English Department at Rutgers University (New Brunswick, N.J.). Our families lived across the road from each other in the housing project that Rutgers provided for its less affluent faculty. Our wives visited back and forth; our children played together; and Joe and I rode to work together in the English Department car pool. The Slaters were wonderful neighbors; and after I left Rutgers in 1951, I continued to visit them whenever I came to New Brunswick, and later, during my summer travels, at their home in Poolville, New York, near Colgate University.

Joseph [Locke] Slater was born in Elyria, Ohio, on 17 July 1916. His wife, Vivien Harvey Slater, whom he married in 1939, is a distinguished concert pianist, recording artist, and piano teacher. They have a daughter, Lydia, and a son, John. Joe was graduated (summa cum laude) from Colgate University in 1937, and went on to earn an M.A. from Columbia University in 1939 and (after interruptions for teaching and for wartime service in the U.S. Navy) a Ph. D., also from Columbia, in 1956. His dissertation, an edition of *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, was published by the Columbia University Press in 1964. It became at once the standard edition of these letters, supplementing (but not duplicating) the edition of Emerson's letters by Ralph L. Rusk (1939). When Eleanor Tilton issued four additional volumes of Emerson's letters (1990-95), she chose not to reprint any of those in the Slater edition, but only to print corrections based on the post-1964 discovery of a few holograph materials that Slater had not

(Continued on page 2)

# ABSTRACTS OF SAN DIEGO ALA PAPERS

The following panels were presented by the Emerson Society  
at the seventh annual conference of the American Literature Association on 1 June in San Diego, California

## SESSION 1: *Emerson I.*

CHAIR, DANIEL SHEALY, *Univ. of North Carolina—Charlotte*

### “The wells where the coy truth lies hid’: Emerson on ‘Fate’ and ‘The Rule of Life’”

RONALD A. BOSCO  
*University at Albany—SUNY*

As his extended, but unacknowledged, personal response to the dark side of the human condition which he recognized readers could draw from “Fate,” Emerson’s unpublished late lecture “The Rule of Life” (1867) answers “Fate” by reprising several themes from his early idealist works, particularly from “Self-Reliance” and “Circles.” In “The Rule of Life,” Emerson’s “moral element” provides illustrations of heroes and makes heroes; argues continuity between individual experience and history, and facilitates continuity; and yields inspiration—inspiration poetical, inspiration political as in national, and inspiration in the spiritual sense where “anecdotes of virtue in peace and in private ... keep [one’s] heart warm ... [and] happen every day.” “[N]ever extinct,” the “moral element” contributes to the melioration of the human condition—both for individuals and national cultures. Looking to the vast American landscape over which he had traversed on the lecture circuit for many years, Emerson finds that poverty and wealth are relative terms reinforced by an artificial social order, but through labor and wisdom one can displace the apparently negative “fate” or “destiny” of social ordered poverty with a positive one—as in someone building a new life in the American wilds. Perhaps most important of all, the “moral element” defies the need for institutions such as organized religions and for the national past which Americans were ever frustrated at not having in the nineteenth century. In one of the grand concluding gestures of “The Rule of Life,” the lack of personal and national past enhances the freedom of the individual who lives in a kind of eternal moral now where consolations, if not answers, to the dark thoughts of “Fate” reside in familial relations, noble friendships, generous citizenship, and casual encounters with fellow men. In the “moral element,” then, Emerson found rescue from the fatal; in the personal, Emerson discovered, as he wrote, the well where the coy truth of freedom against fate lay hidden within the “moral element.”

### “Slave Revolt, Representative Men, and Emerson’s ‘Conversion’ to Abolitionism”

AMY EARHART  
*Texas A&M University*

In his recent book *Virtue’s Hero: Emerson, Antislavery and Reform* (1990), Len Gougeon suggests that during the summer of 1844 Emerson “made the transition from antislavery to abolition” with his 1 August “Address on the Emancipation of the

Negroes in the British West Indies.” Emerson’s “conversion,” which was more tortured and tentative than Gougeon allows, resulted from a number of contemporary historical developments, including slave insurrection in Haiti and Cuba that was receiving extensive coverage in New England periodicals as Emerson was preparing his address. These revolts were linked by many Americans, including Emerson, to the potential explosion within the United States itself as a result of Southern slavery. Events in Haiti and Cuba gave credence to conspiracy theories that abounded in the national consciousness, and they encouraged Emerson to reconsider his position with regard to the abolition movement.

When Emerson considered the insurrections in light of the abolition texts he was reading that summer in preparation for the emancipation address, he came to understand that emancipation was the only way to stop insurrection and ensure safety for whites. Ample evidence also suggests that his reconsideration drew upon his recent thought on the “representative man,” that is, the individual who radiates the values and vigor of a historical period. The circularity of his thinking on this topic allowed him to imagine that a great representative man, perhaps himself, could stir the populace to find the truth—in this case, the dangers and wrongs of slavery—and the populace, in turn, would “vote right,” negating the necessity for group reform efforts, such as abolitionism. Emerson thus justified preparing a moving, emotionally charged, pro-abolition speech, because it supported his lifelong belief in the power of the individual and coincided with his emerging concept of the representative man.

### “‘Pierced by the Thorns of Reform’: The Woman’s Suffrage Movement on Emerson”

ARMIDA J. GILBERT  
*Kent State University*

Several recent commentators have begun to analyze aspects of Emerson’s reaction to the woman’s suffrage movement. These critics have generally concluded that Emerson was not a feminist in the sense in which the late twentieth century would use the term, emphasizing his apparent deep ambivalence with regard to women’s issues. While this conclusion may seem obvious to contemporary readers, the issue has been made more complex by consideration of the historical context, and particularly by the fact that in Emerson’s own time, many women tended to regard him as a staunch friend of women’s rights. Indeed, women, and particularly the suffragists themselves, were the most outspoken in their praise and gratitude to Emerson for what they perceived to be his efforts on behalf of women’s empowerment, education, and equality. These tributes appeared mainly in two areas: literary journals and memoirs, where well-known women writers of the period honored Emerson’s influence on women’s self-esteem and self-reliance, and the suffragist organ, *The Woman’s Journal*, in which the leaders of the suffragist movement specifically addressed Emerson’s role, as they saw it, in the women’s movement.

The response of nineteenth-century women writers, and particularly the suffragist writers, to Emerson, then, suggests another facet that has been thus far overlooked in the ongoing debate over Emerson’s response to women’s issues. Like Margaret Fuller before them, the suffragists saw Emerson as one who had encouraged women’s intellectual independence and honored their literary status on fully equal terms with men. They appreciated his reverence for the women and young people in his audience and his efforts to recruit brilliant women for his Concord coterie. They had no difficulty in reconciling his respect for women’s spiritual endowments with his awareness of their need for entitlement and empowerment in society, since they themselves performed the same balancing act. While they recognized that he would himself prefer to cultivate both men and women’s souls even at the cost of their social participation, they knew that he understood their need and right to make that decision for themselves and would support their choice.

Further, as more critics of nineteenth-century women writers are becoming cognizant, they were deeply aware of stylistic concerns. They thus comprehended Emerson’s typical technique of laying forth all the negative sides of an idea before the positive, and recognized that he applied this technique even-handedly, as much for Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth as for women. Indeed, they recognized, as few contemporary readers have, Emerson’s strategy in using this advanced argumentation form to lure opponents of his ideas, then trap them into considering reforms. There was no question in their minds that Emerson was, as they would have phrased it, a true friend and proponent of women’s rights.

### *Emersonian Circles Dedicated to Joel Myerson*

Wes Mott made the following announcement between the two Emerson Society sessions. A discount flyer for the book described is enclosed in this issue of ESP.

Bob Burkholder and I have edited a collection of new essays entitled *Emersonian Circles* that will appear this fall. I mention it now not because, Bronson Alcott-like, I want to add “pedlar” to “teacher” and “Transcendentalist” on my resume, but because the subtitle carries a dedication, and we want the honoree to hear about it not from a catalog but among Emersonians.

Presses (and a couple of readers) told us that you simply don’t prepare such a tribute for a scholar years away from retirement. We rest our case on this man’s incredible accomplishments

Presses also told us that “festschrifts” don’t sell anymore, and that a collection of essays therefore must have virtually the coherence of a monograph to be accepted. We think we met that requirement, but at a cost: Many other Emersonians—and many other American Renaissance specialists who are indebted to and admire our man—wanted to contribute, and we would have been proud to include their work. I know we all share the sentiments I read from the Introduction:

“These essays represent a circle of scholars at mid-career whose work has been ‘energized,’ to use Emerson’s

term, by being drawn at various points within the orbit of one scholar—a scholar of the same generation who has opened new vistas for lasting kinds of scholarship that have weathered the fashions of recent years. His own prolific contributions to literary history, textual editing, and bibliographical and biographical study are of permanent value. These extraordinary achievements are matched only by the generous opportunities he has given others to serve as graduate assistants, to publish important empirical research, to participate at professional meetings, and to share in his own major research projects.

“Though in paraphrasing Emerson’s famous remark to Walt Whitman we reverse the roles of novice and mentor, we declare, ‘We Greet You at the Mid-Point of a Great Career.’ This volume is dedicated with admiration, gratitude, and affection to Joel Myerson.”

## SESSION 2: *Emerson II.*

CHAIR, WESLEY T. MOTT, *Worcester Polytechnic Institute*

### “Emerson, Friendship, and the Problem of Alcott’s ‘Psyche’”

LARRY A. CARLSON  
*College of Charleston*

Emerson’s two-and-a-half-year involvement (1836-38) with Bronson Alcott’s voluminous manuscript entitled “Psyche” dramatically illustrates the painful difficulty that Emerson had in trying to be both friend and literary critic of the person with whom he ultimately had a half-century friendship. Indeed, the frustrations that he felt in giving Alcott detailed appraisals of “Psyche” clearly dramatize the impossibility of meeting the two-fold obligation that Emerson later set forth in his essay on “Friendship” in *Essays, First Series* (1841)—truth and tenderness.

The manuscript, which Emerson repeatedly promised to publish at his own risk and which grew out of Alcott’s “observations” of the early years of Anna and Louisa May, is a record of the physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual development of his third daughter, Elizabeth (b. 1835). As Alcott’s experimental Temple School (1834-38) was being ferociously attacked, and as Alcott himself (“a world-builder” with “Olympian dreams,” Emerson felt) was being pilloried in the press and consequently plunged into debt and near-suicidal despair because of the publication of his controversial *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* (2 vols., 1836-37), Emerson proved to be an important source of public and private encouragement. He felt great compassion for Alcott, who believed that “Psyche” would convince society of the validity of the radical ideas about children and education that underpinned the Temple School.

However, despite detailed editing suggestions from Emerson, Alcott proved to be an ineffective writer. His prose was, as Emerson several times remarked to no avail, inflated, affected, verbose, and unfocused. Even a totally revised second version of “Psyche” failed to convince Emerson that the manuscript was worthy of publishing; yet he told Alcott that he would, as promised, make appropriate arrangements with Metcalf and Company if Alcott insisted. Alcott quietly accepted his friend’s

(Continued on page 8)