

From the Editor . . .

About five years ago I heard that there was a timeline to finish the Harvard University Press project of *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* by 2013. Since the project was originally conceived upwards of 50 years ago, and the first volume appeared in 1971, I was skeptical that four volumes would be completed by 2013, but I set about planning a special issue to celebrate the completion of what is arguably the twenty-first century's most important scholarly publishing event to date, on the most important figure of the American Renaissance. The centerpiece of the present celebratory issue of *Nineteenth-Century Prose* is Robert N. Hudspeth's review essay of the entire ten-volume *Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Originally, Bob Hudspeth projected a review of around 30 pages. I encouraged him to take as much space as he wished, and I stressed that my editorial policy has always been to allow unlimited space as long as the quality is there. For example, on one occasion in the recent past, I published an essay that was in excess of 70 pages. But at 104 pages, Hudspeth's review essay of *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* is not likely to be surpassed anytime soon – and the quality of the review essay well justifies the length. Hudspeth has produced what must be every author's and editor's dream: a judicious and thorough review of a literary work or edition that pays attention to the larger purposes and goals of a literary project, and at the same time is thorough enough to recognize and evaluate even subtle editorial decisions that occur during a major undertaking that involves many editors over a long period of time.

Hudspeth reviews each of the ten volumes of *The Collected Works* in turn, and he carefully explains the editorial decisions and differences among the volumes – especially the problematic first volume, which followed an editorial policy different from the volumes that followed. For example, Volume I of the Harvard *Collected Works* favors the text of Emerson's original 1836 *Nature* over the 1849 version that Emerson

personally edited and selected as part of the volume *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures*, which features the author's original six-line epigraph on material and spiritual evolution. Hudspeth carefully explains the editorial issues involved with the first volume, and with the benefit of editorial hindsight, which takes into account the intervening 40-plus years of scholarship, Hudspeth is able to tie the conclusion of Volume I to Emerson's progressive attitude toward social reform, which recent scholarship has made more apparent than ever before.

Following four pages of general introduction, Hudspeth reviews each of the ten volumes in self-contained essays that average five or six pages, with the exception of Volume IV, *Representative Men*, which receives ten pages; volumes VIII and IX, *Letters and Social Aims* and *Poems: A Variorum Edition* respectively, which receive about nine pages each, and Volume 10, *Uncollected Prose Writings*, which receives 19 pages of review because of the complexity of the editorial problems involved. The individual reviews are carefully composed, and each individual review section has its own epigraph ("I also will essay to be"; "I simply experiment, an endless seeker, with no Past at my back"; "Where do we find ourselves?" and so forth). These individual sections are then followed by ten pages that give an overview of previous reviews of the individual volumes, with a comment on the current state of scholarly reviewing; and the overall review essay concludes with more than ten pages on the significance of Ralph Waldo Emerson today. Robert N. Hudspeth has performed an invaluable service in his thorough and meticulous review of one of the most important and long-awaited conclusions of a scholarly edition in our time.

The rest of the current issue for Fall 2013 consists of a series of articles on Emerson, which of course make use of the riches contained in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. The first essay is a multifaceted and expansive essay by T.S. McMillin, "The Discipline of Abandonment: Emersonian Properties of Transdisciplinarity & the Nature of Method," which takes a broad view of interdisciplinarity and the relation between the sciences and the humanities, with special

attention to ecology, which springs from the author's previous study of rivers and his present study of the Los Angeles River. McMillin takes his cue from science and engineering – an article in the *Transdisciplinary Journal of Engineering and Science* to be exact – in order to investigate and transform our “traditional conceptions of nature” (107, below). With a quote from Henry David Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, McMillin suggests that our views of nature are actually “occluded” by “disciplinary specificity” (107) – of both science and literary texts. In a larger sense, the basic properties of Transdisciplinarity – “complex Nature, different ways of seeing, active intellectual movement” – can be found in American Transcendentalism, and especially through “the peculiar concept of ‘abandonment’ in Ralph Waldo Emerson's writings” (112). In the process of abandonment, one leaves what one has “taken to be oneself in order to recover one's lost self, in order to regain one's vitality” (118). McMillin pays careful attention to Emerson's essay “Spiritual Laws,” and especially “Circles,” where we discover that “The way of life is wonderful: it is by abandonment” (119). Ultimately, the project of abandonment is a poetic project, which is a kind of “Abandoning one's particular and peculiar self to the nature of things [which] empowers one to speak in a way resonant with nature” and “makes possible metamorphosis, the transformation of whatever we are now, into whatever we might be next” (121-22).

Following McMillin's expansive and multi- and trans-disciplinary essay, Sara Atwood provides us with a more traditional, but no less stimulating model of scholarship than McMillin's philosophically freewheeling approach to literature and life. That is, Atwood provides personal and philosophical grounding for the historical meeting between two great ‘Representative Men’ of the nineteenth century, Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Ruskin. In the process, we learn much about the similarities and important differences in perspective and temperament between these two great thinkers and, in their very different ways, social activists. Ruskin's theories and personal demonstrations of the function of art in the act of seeing and becoming a self is especially pertinent to

American transcendentalism, and the relatively greater role of art in the development of vision in British culture during the nineteenth century suggests important cultural and historical differences between England and America during this time. Both Ruskin and Emerson were teachers in the broadest sense, but Ruskin was a teacher in a more institutionalized sense, so that his “education of sight [which] was central to [his] teaching” sometimes took the form of classroom instruction, while Emerson – as ably demonstrated in “The American Scholar,” considers a direct contact with nature as a more important original teacher than classroom pedagogy. In addition, Ruskin on occasion appears more systematic and scholarly in an overt sense, as can be seen in some of his theorizing on imagination (155-56, n. 10, below). Nevertheless, both Ruskin and Emerson share a belief in the importance of “a similarly heightened awareness of the natural world” (137).

The next essay is by veteran Emersonian, David M. Robinson, who has been an important contributor, reviewer, and referee for *Nineteenth-Century Prose* over the years. His contribution to the present issue is on Goethe, who was important in the context of the early nineteenth-century awareness of German literature, philosophy, and culture in America – a cultural phenomenon that was furthered by Carlyle’s translation of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* novels and Margaret Fuller’s translation of Eckermann’s *Conversations with Goethe*. Usually the work and influence of Goethe in America is considered from a more strictly philosophical perspective, while Robinson gives both a broader and a more nuanced view of Goethe in America, including promoters of German literature like Margaret Fuller as well as those who opposed continental writers like Goethe on moral grounds. It may not be surprising that Emerson’s consideration of Goethe coincided with a “New England resistance to Goethe” (174) that was based on moral grounds, but it is pleasantly surprising to find that Emerson’s final criticism of Goethe is based on a lack of “hope”: Goethe is a conservative who cannot “inspire or stimulate reform in others” (175-76), so that as a result of his influence “We are never lifted above

ourselves" (176). Goethe's "Olympian self-complacency," which is consonant with "philosophical skepticism and determinism that saps the human mind of hope and motivation" (177), is at odds with "the bard figure" of the Divinity School "Address."

John Ronan's short essay on the development of Emerson's concept of self-reliance during the years of his pastorate at Boston's Second Church is a gem of concision. Ronan demonstrates how Emerson's own developing ideas of character formation, influenced by the central tenets of Unitarianism, become manifest through action that reveals one's character to oneself as well as to others. Along the way, while quoting passages from Emerson's Sermons, Ronan also shines rays of insight into important Emerson essays that were to follow later – not just "Self-Reliance," but also "Spiritual Laws," "The Oversoul," and "Circles."

The next two essays consider Emerson's poetry, which Sandra Morris describes as "among the most underappreciated poetry in American literature," which is itself an understatement. Emerson's friend W.H. Channing, to whom Emerson addressed his wonderful "Ode," thought that Emerson would eventually be remembered more for his poetry than for his essays. Perhaps he was thinking that contemporary estimates of Emerson's prose, bolstered by his famous skill of delivery in his orations and speeches, would fade when the living man was no longer available to bolster the ideas of the essays. Today, for a variety of reasons, Emerson's poetry has still not come into its own, but the new Volume IX, which is *A Variorum Edition* of Emerson's poetry that Robert Hudspeth refers to as "the jewel of the *Collected Works*" (58, below), brings us a step closer to a fuller realization of the importance of Emerson's poetry. Morris demonstrates how, bolstered by the historical background of Emerson's poetry that is conveniently provided by the new edition, the poetry can reinforce our awareness of Emerson's political activism, as well as the ways in which his politics are bolstered by his aesthetics. She accomplishes this through a judicious examination of some of Emerson's most well-known poems, including "The Rhodora," "The Snow-Storm," the "Ode" to W.H. Channing, "Concord

Hymn,” “Brahma,” and “Boston Hymn.” And Morris’s essay is followed by Harold Schweizer’s essay, “Are We Not Beautiful?” which is an in-depth examination of “The Rhodora” from the perspective of Kantian aesthetics, in which the bloom of the Rhodora becomes a trope for the aesthetic dimension of ourselves. Both the Morris and the Schweizer essays are good demonstrations of the kind of scholarship that is destined to follow from the inspiration provided by the *Variorum Edition* of *The Collected Works*.

The final essay in our current issue is David LaRocca’s “In the Place of Mourning: Questioning the Privations of the Private,” which is ostensibly about what Henry David Thoreau did with some of his mentor’s ideas, but can also be seen as a demonstration of Emersonian ‘resonance’ or a sort of “elective affinity” as he influences other writers, from near at hand to far away, and from a younger contemporary to thinkers far in the future, including Heidegger and Stanley Cavell. Along the way, LaRocca quotes from Emerson’s Divinity School “Address” and especially from “Compensation” and from “Experience.” In this way we conclude with a demonstration of the rays of Emersonian influence, emanations that occasionally return home to acknowledge their source.

The present issue of *Nineteenth-Century Prose* is a demonstration of the necessary painstaking scholarship that forms the foundation of a good scholarly edition, and the reverberations of influence that it can produce through the scholarship that follows from it. *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* is a monumental achievement produced by many editors over nearly half a century, and is especially a tribute to the work of the final Editor-in-Chief, Ronald Bosco, who with the help of Joel Myerson completed some of the most difficult editorial work of the entire edition in a timely manner.

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