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EMERSON at 200

*Proceedings of the International
Bicentennial Conference*

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Abbreviations

- AW* *Emerson's Antislavery Writings*, ed Len Gougeon and Joel Myerson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1995).
- CEC* *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, ed. Joseph Slater (New York: Columbia UP, 1964).
- CS* *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 4 vols., ed. Albert J. von Frank et al. (Columbia: Missouri UP, 1989-1992).
- CW* *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 6 vols. to Date, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson, Joseph Slater, and Douglas Emory Wilson, et al. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971-).
- EP* *Essays and Poems*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1996).
- EsL* *Emerson's Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983).
- J* *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 10 vols., ed. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co.), 1910.
- JMN* *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 16 vols., ed. William H. Gilman, Ralph H. Orth, et al. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1960-1982).
- LL* *The Later Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1843-1871*, ed. Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson, 2 vols. (Athens, GA: Georgia UP, 2001).
- LSA* *Letters and Social Aims*, ed. J. E. Cabot. Vol VII of *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1883.
- PN* *The Poetry Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Ralph H. Orth, et al. (Columbia: Missouri UP, 1986).
- PP* *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

- Selections* *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).
- SW* *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1950).
- TN* *The Topical Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 3 vols., ed. Ralph H. Orth et al. (Columbia: Missouri UPm 90-1994).
- TR* *Transcendentalism: A Reader*, ed. Joel Myerson (New York: Oxford UP, 2000).
- UP* *Uncollected Prose, Dial Essays 1840. Ralph Waldo Emerson Home Page.* http://rwe.org/works/Uncollected_Prose_Dial-Essays_1840_2_Thoughts.htm>
- W* *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 12 vols., ed. Edward Waldo Emerson (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1903-1904).

Foreword

This volume brings together the lectures and papers delivered at *Emerson 2003. An International Celebration of the Emerson Bicentennial*, which was a conference held in Rome on October 16-18, 2003. Authors were given a chance to revise and somewhat expand the arguments of the papers they actually delivered at the conference. The major difference between this book and the format of the conference concerns the grouping of the various papers. We have chosen to open the volume with the four stream lectures, which were originally delivered on separate days, during the mornings sessions (Richard Poirier's on October 16; Joel Myerson's and Anita Patterson's on October 17; Vito Amoruso's on October 18). The other contributions have been distributed into five sections: «Emerson's Italy and Italy's Emerson»; «Emerson and American Literature»; «Conversing with Emerson»; «Emerson and Teaching»; «Emerson Between Ethics and Science». We realize that these section-headings do not encompass the variety of topics, references, and critical angles developed in the papers. They are simply one of the many ways the materials could have been arranged. We are well aware that an essay falling under one label could have been placed with equal justice in a different section. Just to offer one example, Joel Myerson's lecture in the «stream» section, given its emphasis on the pedagogical dimension of Emerson's thought, could just as well be placed in the section «Emerson and Teaching».

The editors of this volume wish to thank Masturah Alatas, Jonathan Finch, Lewis Fried and Edward Lynch for helping them revise a number of essays by writers whose first language is not English.

Introductory Remarks*

Emerson 2003:
An International Celebration
of the Emerson Bicentennial

GIORGIO MARIANI

Organizing Committee Coordinator
Università di Roma 1, «La Sapienza»

One hundred years ago, the «Società Italiana degli Autori», whose president was the Principe Scalea, celebrated here in Rome the Emerson Centennial. The main speaker on that occasion was the writer, critic, and journalist Fanny Zampini Salazar. Although the text of her lecture has not survived, judging from what she wrote in her 1905 study of Emerson — the first and to this day one of the very few book-length studies on Emerson by an Italian — we can safely assume that she must have enthusiastically praised Emerson's work, recommending that Italians learn from the extraordinary energies and insights of this great American thinker. The Emerson centennial was also marked in Italy by Andrea Lo Forte Randi's essay in the journal *La Nuova Parola*. Also Lo Forte Randi had practically only words of praise for Emerson, and if we keep in mind that the issue of the journal opened with a piece celebrating Theodore Roosevelt as a Great American who had translated on a practical level Emerson's lesson of self-reliance, we cannot but conclude that in Italy Emerson was at the time not only one of the most famous, but one of the most revered American writers.

* This is a slightly touched-up version of the welcome address read by the Conference coordinator on the morning of October 16, 2003 at the Centro Studi Americani in Palazzo Antichi-Mattei, Rome.

The promoters of this conference do not feel nostalgic about the good old days of the «Società Italiana degli Autori», when Emerson was nearly idolized. Yet they do believe that in the one hundred years after the centennial, especially in light of the enormous popularity enjoyed in our country by United States literature and culture, Emerson has hardly received the attention he deserves. This is not to say that we are all of one mind concerning the significance of Emerson and Emersonianism. Behind our common interest in Emerson lie different motivations. Moreover, I guess it is only fair to say that I don't think any of the members of the organizing committee of this conference would describe himself or herself as an Emerson scholar. As Professor Joel Myerson has recently remarked, «anyone wishing to read all of Emerson's work is faced with the daunting prospect of some fifty volumes of primary texts»: I will shamelessly confess that what I have read of Emerson probably amounts to a rather small percentage of his formidable literary output. However, both I and the colleagues with whom I have had the pleasure of working over the last couple of years in preparing this conference believe in the importance of studying and teaching Emerson to our Italian students. Overall, we thought of this conference as a challenge — as a *scommessa* as we say in Italian — a wager, a risk we were taking to see whether we could bring together a large enough number of people willing to engage in a discussion of Emerson and his legacy that would elicit a renewed attention to his works. Judging from the number of people gathered here today I would venture to say that we have won our bet.

Emerson's significance within, and probably beyond, American literature and culture can be hardly overestimated. Allow me to resort once again to Joel Myerson's words. I would like to read out to you the first paragraph of his introduction to the *Historical Guide to RWE*, published in 2000 by Oxford University Press, because I think it nicely captures Emerson's centrality in American culture.

RWE's reputation has never been as unshakable as it is today. Modern editions of his writings — letters, journals, notebooks, and published works — comprise nearly fifty volumes, with even more in preparation. In the last decade alone, nearly one thousand articles and books have been published discussing his life, ideas, and writings. He has been seen as beginning a line in American poetry that runs from him to Walt Whitman to Allen Ginsberg; his educational ideas were an

important influence on Charles W. Eliot when he was president of Harvard; and he is viewed as the progenitor of a line of pragmatism in American intellectual life that was filtered through William James. In his own life he was a minister, a lecturer, a professional author, an agent for other authors (including Thomas Carlyle, Margaret Fuller, and Henry David Thoreau) and a traveler through America and Europe; modern studies of all these occupations mention Emerson as a serious and often important practitioner of them. Every major critical trend in American literary study since 1900 has dealt with Emerson in some fashion. He is here to stay — and the bicentennial celebration in 2003 of his birth will undoubtedly set off another round of reevaluations of this seminal figure in American literature and thought.

The aim of *Emerson 2003: An International Celebration of the Emerson Bicentennial* is precisely to offer yet another round of reevaluations of Emerson's work. Even though a great deal has been written about Emerson, a lot remains to be done. I am confident that our conference will, among other things, give to all of us a sense of some of the new, promising directions taken by Emerson studies especially over the last decades. Moreover, while Emerson's reputation is, and perhaps always was, unshakable, it seems to me that the image of Emerson prevailing outside the field of Emerson studies still needs to be corrected. As Prof. Ron Bosco has noticed in an essay included in the same *Historical Guide* I referred to a moment ago, the Emerson to be found in the 1998 *Norton Anthology of American Literature* «is barely distinguishable from the one anthologized by [Stephen] Whicher in 1957». In other words, while Emerson's canonical status remains virtually unchallenged, little or no account is taken of the great amount of work done on him over the last thirty years. A similar problem can be detected in most Italian manuals of American literature still in print today. Emerson is too often described as an abstract thinker with no sense of evil, whose main value was to inspire writers like Melville, Whitman, and Hawthorne. This is not to say that in the last one hundred years Italian critics have never contributed anything of interest on Emerson. What I am saying is that the hegemonic image of Emerson in contemporary Italian American studies is to a fairly large extent a replica of the Emerson to be found in the pages of F. O. Matthiessen's 1941 *American Renaissance* or Stephen Whicher's 1953 *Freedom and Fate*. We hope that, among other things, our conference will encourage a revision of this image of Emerson. Judging

from both the enthusiastic response of many of our Italian colleagues to the conference Call for Papers and the kind of work on Emerson recently published in our country, our impression is that also in the field of Italian American studies the times are ripe for a long-overdue re-thinking of Emerson's importance.

We feel confident that, thanks to the diverse backgrounds of the participants, and thanks also the fact that this conference brings together scholars from different generations, the two and a half days we will be spending together will be a fruitful intellectual experience for all of us. And, as far as Italian American Studies are concerned, we sincerely hope to convince more people of the importance of studying, engaging with, and teaching Emerson. We are of course under no obligation to like him, or to like all of what he has written or has, over the years, come to represent. Although the word «celebration» in the title of our conference may mislead some to think that our purpose in getting together is to strengthen the cult of Emerson as one of the key figures within a larger American literary mythology, this is definitely not what the organizers of this conference had in mind. «People wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them»: Emerson's own words in his essay «Circles» best capture the perhaps Utopian wish of this conference. We hope that all participants will be in one way or another productively challenged and unsettled. We feel that this would probably be the best way to celebrate a writer and thinker who claimed to be only an experimenter, and who repeatedly warned his readers (and his listeners) not to be the parrots of other men's thinking. Also, we hope that, by bringing together students of Emerson from different cultural and institutional contexts in a place that is — not only in miles — far away from Concord, we can move in the direction of that «comparative and relational refocusing of America in the larger world context» advocated by Djelal Kadir in a recent special issue of *PMLA*. In this regard I am particularly glad that one of the conference participants — Professor Shoji Goto — is joining us all the way from Japan — a reminder of the fact that if Emerson and some of his contemporaries were fascinated by Eastern culture, some eastern scholars have shown in their turn a great deal of interest in Emerson. It is no surprise that another international conference on Emerson should have taken place in Beijing, only to be can-

ceeded due to the SARS epidemic. Who knows, a transnational Emerson may well be the Emerson of the tricentennial.

Our conference has been made possible by the generosity and the help of many people and institutions. Also on behalf of the Emerson 2003 organizing committee, please allow me to thank the American Embassy of the US in Italy, and in particular the minister counselor John Dwyer, the cultural attaché Anne Callaghan, and Paola Pierini of the US Embassy Cultural Office. They have been simply wonderful and supportive of this project from the very start. I hope that they will be pleased with the results. Many thanks go also to the Naples-based «Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici», and to my friend Annalisa Goldoni, who suggested that we apply to the institute for financial support. I think it is quite fitting that such a prestigious philosophical institute has expressed an interest in our project. It is no accident that Italian philosophers have been perhaps more responsive to Emerson than literary critics. As we have learned over the last decades thanks to people like Stanley Cavell and Cornel West, Emerson may well be considered the founding father of American philosophy. We are very grateful to the Istituto, and we are also very grateful to the English Department of the University of Rome «La Sapienza» — many thanks to the faculty, the staff, the secretaries: they have all helped in manifold ways to make this event possible. A special thanks goes to the former director of the department, professor Agostino Lombardo, who encouraged our project all along and who has also graciously agreed to be here today to inaugurate our conference with some opening remarks on «Emerson e l'arte americana». And of course we must thank the Centro Studi Americani: it is both an honor and a pleasure to open our conference as guests of an institution which, for many decades now, has had a key role in keeping intellectual exchanges between Italy and the US alive and thriving. Finally, we are also grateful to the Banca di Roma and the Maggiore Group for donating to us the materials you were given when you registered this morning.

Please, let me just take another couple of minutes to thank some other people without whose help this conference would have not been possible. When we first toyed with the idea of the conference we had the good fortune of finding in Myra Jehlen a helpful adviser, and we immediately agreed with her that a lecture by Professor Richard Poir-

ier would have been an excellent way to open the conference. If I can get a little autobiographical here, as a graduate student at Rutgers University in the 1980's I had the opportunity to meet, through Prof. Poirier's classes, lectures and books — especially his Emersonian Reflections in *The Renewal of Literature* — an Emerson I had never known before and when I returned to Italy I made it a point to introduce this “new” Emerson to my best friends and colleagues, thus helping to disseminate an Emerson rather different from the one most of them had been exposed to. So thanks Myra, and thanks Professor Poirier, for agreeing to be with us today.

Equally important and indeed crucial was the support we received right from the start from two of the greatest Emerson scholars of all times — who are also here today and who are indeed the co-chairs of the bicentennial celebrations sponsored by the Emerson society. When I first got an e-mail from Joel Myerson expressing his and Ron Bosco's interest in our project I was so delighted that I took the liberty of immediately forwarding his message to all members of the recently formed Emerson 2003 organizing committee. Whatever other support we could generate, we had words of encouragement and sympathy from two scholars who had literally devoted a life time to the study of Emerson and Transcendentalism. So, Professor Myerson and Professor Bosco thank you so much for your support.

I also wish to thank Professor Anita Patterson for accepting the invitation to be one of our keynote speakers. After I read her wonderful book *From Emerson to King* I realized that this was the kind of book that many of my students and colleagues should read — a book that shows very well how you can read Emerson and assess his significance without having to simply celebrate him. Many thanks also to Vito Amoroso, who will be the keynote speaker on the last day of our conference and whom I consider something of an exception among Italian students of American literature because of his long-standing interest in Emerson. We are grateful to Vito, who back in 1963, at the suggestion of Professor Lombardo, translated a landmark selection of Emerson's journals. Last, but as they say certainly not least, I wish to thank the many people who submitted papers for this conference and without whose dedication we would not be here today. To all of you thank you very much, and to those who have come from far away —

from the East Coast, the South, and the Midwest, and, as I said before, from the Far East — a special thanks: we sincerely hope that this conference will live up to your expectations and repay you for the long journey.

I wish to all of you, to all of us, a good conference, in the hope that our collective efforts will draw many new circles around Emerson's own words.