

# Repair to the Lamps and Rake the Language

*Daniel Malachuk*

---

---

## ABSTRACT

Boatright and Faust rightly recommend Emerson's active reading style, but they misrepresent him as pragmatist who believed readers to be "makers of meaning." Emerson was a transcendentalist whose fundamental message was that moral "truth exists, though all men should deny it." Especially in his antislavery writings, Emerson teaches two ways for readers to find (not make) these moral truths in the texts they read: by reading with their souls, or intuitively ("repairing to the lamps"), and by reading for the facts ("raking the language") that will awaken moral sensibilities. Rather than continue to invent an Emerson who flatters our contemporary philosophical biases, let's ponder what Emerson actually advocates; his transcendental reading lessons may be just the ones that we require.

## **This article is a response to:**

Boatright, M. D. & Faust, M. A. (2013). *Emerson, Reading, and Democracy: Reading as Engaged*

truisms more generally) has charmed many of the late- 20th-century critics upon whom they rely. For critics like Jacobson, McMillin, and Cavell, all of whom Boatright and Faust enlist as guides to Emerson's writings, this irreverent Emerson anticipates Nietzsche. That great German philosopher who as early as 1873 audaciously defined "truths" as merely those "illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions" (146) was anticipated 30 years earlier by Emerson, these critics like to say, and together these two protopostmodernists began to unfix all of the stars in humanism's firmament, including the self ("nothing in Emerson is more constant than his scorn of the idea that any given state of what he calls the self is the last," Cavell asserts [3]) and a higher power (Emerson "dispos[es] . . . God under Man, and affirm[s] human will as the vehicle of highest reason," Jacobson contends [18]). Emerson and Nietzsche, these critics proclaim, led us out of a benighted world where truths are found and into a brave new one where truths are made, to recall the postmodern credo Rorty (1989, p. 3) made famous in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. This or something like it is the grand narrative underlying Boatright and Faust's

contention that Emerson's project is a version of Rorty's "edifying" rather than "systematic" philosophy (Rorty, 1989, p. 2).

According to Boatright and Faust (2013), the postmodern, or what they call pragmatist, Emerson teaches us not only about this "transient, constantly evolving quality of nature and of society" (p. 5) but also about the right kind of reading for such a world: that is, one reads not in search of objective truth but to cultivate subjective experience or "a flow of thought that varies from reader to reader" (p. 5). Concerned that the Common Core State Standards—now adopted by forty-five states and the District of Columbia—will put "increasing pressure on teachers to standardize learning" and treat "books as closed containers of meaning" (p. 1), Boatright and Faust recommend an Emerson who advocates reading "not to know with certainty but to know approximately, contingently" (p. 2). "Certified knowledge held little interest for Emerson," they write, "and the empowering act of reading infused his own mind and lived experience in order that they might be transformed or challenged by texts with which he engaged" (p. 4).

Students should of course be taught that reading offers them a "sense of agency" (p. 4). They should be "dare[d] to read counter to the assumption that the goal is to arrive at predetermined

---

---

DANIEL S. MALACHUK is an associate professor of English at Western Illinois University and the coeditor with Alan M. Levine of *A Political Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*.

meanings, intentions, or purposes” (p. 4). And Emerson’s moments of irreverence convey such lessons wonderfully, as when he warned a young admirer that “reading long at one time anything, no matter how it fascinates, destroys thought. Do not permit this. Stop if you find yourself becoming absorbed, at even the first paragraph” (as cited in Richardson, 1995, pp. 173–74). Obviously, Emerson excelled in the use of hyperbole, particularly when challenging conformist platitudes, and Boatright and Faust include in their essay many of Emerson’s hyperbolic assertions, such as his self-description in “Circles” (1841) as “an endless seeker.” The full sentence is even more audacious: “No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker, with no Past at my back” (Emerson, 1983, p. 412).

At the same time, a serious consideration of Emerson as a model reader in the era of the Common Core State Standards must also include the much more ubiquitous *reverent* moments in his writings. In the case of “Circles,” that reverence comes in the very next sentence: “Yet this incessant movement and progression which all things partake could never become sensible to us but by contrast to some principle of fixture or stability in the soul” (p. 412). Similarly, Emerson’s quip about books for idle times in “The American Scholar” comes in this context:

*Undoubtedly there is a right way of reading, so it be sternly subordinated. Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments. Books are for the scholar’s idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men’s transcripts of their readings. But when the intervals of darkness come, as come they must,—when the sun is hid and the stars withdraw their shining,—we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray, to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is. (p. 58)*

For Emerson, reading is indeed like thinking, as Boatright and Faust (2013) point out (3), but both activities lead us not to our own subjective “growth” or “reform,” as the authors like to claim, but to “God,” or “the East,” as above, or “the Over-Soul,” or “the soul,” in so many other essays of his. Good postsectarian public intellectual that he was, Emerson varies how he describes these fixed, transcendental truths. His conviction that reading and thinking lead to such truths, however, never altered. Thinking and reading are “instruments” that “Man Thinking” (Emerson, 1983, p. 58) uses to find such transcendental truths as the ensouled self and the existence of a higher power. Emerson often called these truths the “higher law” or “moral law.”

A cornerstone of the moral law for Emerson was that our equality as human beings is based upon our shared transcendental essence, “the doctrine of the indwelling of the Creator in man,” as he put it in the 1841 “Lecture on the Times” (Emerson, 1983, p. 167), and what I call “transcendental equality.” Contrary to Boatright and Faust’s (2013) assertion that “Emerson offered no program for ameliorating the ills of society” (p. 2), Emerson dedicated his life to promoting transcendental equality, not least through 30 years of antislavery activism, which has been well documented since the 1995 publication of *Emerson’s Antislavery Writings*. Unfortunately, too many readers of Emerson still look not to Emerson’s actual

writings but to the reinterpretation of those writings by Cavell and a few others, who through the 1980s and 1990s invented a fashionable postmodern Emerson. Theirs is a record of willful misreading of Emerson’s work, mainly by citing isolated sentences or passages without regard for their function within Emerson’s larger arguments. In “Emerson’s Politics, Retranscendentalized” (Malachuk, 2011), I document Emerson’s lifelong commitment to transcendental equality and illustrate these critics’ intentional disregard of it. Here, however, rather than dwell on how Boatright and Faust unfortunately perpetuate this misinterpretation of Emerson, I will show (a) how their defense of Emersonian reading as good for democracy is not (as they argue) because Emerson is a pragmatist but (as they inadvertently reveal) because Emerson is a transcendentalist and (b) how Emerson (especially in his antislavery writings) offers two provocative reading lessons that I’m calling “repairing to the lamps” and “raking the language.”

### Transcendentalism and Democracy

Boatright and Faust (2013) may or may not be fair when they insinuate that the call of the Common Core State Standards for “close reading” of “high-quality” texts using “cogent reasoning” bears within it “prevalent assumptions about textual objectivity” (p. 1) but, in any case, they are right to question such assumptions. And they are also right to turn to Emerson for help here. Like his pragmatist heirs, James and Dewey, Emerson in his portraits of reading shifted our focus from the text to “the power of the mind as that which exists through constantly reforming its understanding of the world” (p. 2). Further, reading should teach us not only that we as individuals are malleable but that democratic societies are as well; both are, in Boatright and Faust’s nice phrase, “work[s] in progress” (p. 2). For individuals as well as democracies interested in growth and reform, reading thus becomes an essential tool “for producing new ways of thinking and being” (p. 3). Boatright and Faust then examine three facets of this philosophy: how Emerson’s creative reading practice entails thinking as a form of action, how such reading also promotes “healthy” individuals who question authority, and how such reading is essential to “the health of a society conceived as constantly forming and reforming itself” (p. 3).

At this level of abstraction, Boatright and Faust’s account of Emerson’s philosophy is accurate and useful. However, they dodge the real question for all of us intrigued by Emerson’s potential relevance to democracy today, which is, if we choose to follow Emerson and start thinking of individuals and societies not as fixed entities but “as constantly forming and reforming” (p. 3), how do we ensure individuals and societies grow in directions good for democracy? Boatright and Faust point to Dewey, who also believed Emerson’s philosophy was good for democracy, but what makes Dewey right and Winters (another 20th-century commentator mentioned by the authors) wrong? As the authors note, Winters worried that Emerson’s democracy would be characterized by (in their words) “aimless individualism” and (in Winters’s) “perfectly unconscious imbeciles” (p. 7). Winters’s critique was actually even more biting. Zeroing in on Emerson’s praise for not just a subjective but an intuitional approach to books and any stimuli, Winters (1947) accused Emerson of celebrating our “unrevised reactions to

stimuli.” “Unrevised reactions are mechanical,” Winters reasoned, and thus Emerson’s “man in a state of perfection is an automaton; an automatic man is insane. Hence, Emerson’s perfect man is a madman” (pp. 54–55). Just like Winters, Dewey, in his 1903 tribute to Emerson as “the philosopher of Democracy,” singled out this same “reverence [in Emerson] for the instinct and impulse of our common nature” (pp. 412–413) but not to condemn it. On the contrary, Dewey praised Emerson for proclaiming this instinctive, impulsive “idealism” to be as much the province of “the common man” as of the elites; in so doing, Dewey wrote, Emerson “restor[ed] to the common man that which . . . has been embezzled from the common store and appropriated to sectarian and class use” (p. 411). Indeed, Emerson is “the only Christian [i.e., egalitarian] of the Intellect” (p. 412).

So, in promoting “new ways of thinking and being,” to recall Boatright and Faust’s (2013) words (p. 3) in our democracy, will Emersonian reading yield more idealists, as Dewey promised, or more imbeciles, as Winters charged? Boatright and Faust struggle to explain why Dewey’s interpretation is correct. They write that “reading democratically means acknowledging that readers are situated in a climate and are surrounded by a political landscape in which they have the responsibility to participate” (p. 7). But what is the origin of that “responsibility”? In the paeans to subjective reading that Boatright and Faust have curated—with the help of Cavell and the others—from Emerson’s oeuvre, they offer only one example of Emerson answering the question of responsibility. But, before turning to that example below, let’s first consider the evidence that Dewey himself provides, which is the real reason he remains a better reader of Emerson than Winters was. In the 1903 essay, to show that Emerson promotes a moral rather than amoral idealism, Dewey cites a couple sentences from Emerson’s late essay “Success” (1870):

*It is not . . . new dogmas and the logical exposition of the world that are our first need, but to watch and continually cherish the intellectual and moral sensibilities and woo them to stay and make their homes with us. Whilst they abide with us, we shall not think amiss.*  
(Emerson, 1903–1904, Volume 7, p. 301; as cited by Dewey, p. 412)

What Dewey identified—and Winters missed—in Emerson’s many celebrations of subjectivity is the “intellectual and moral sensibilities” that guide this subjectivity: Emerson likens these sensibilities in “Success” to important houseguests. What Dewey (the pragmatist) neglected to include, though, is a later passage from “Success,” where Emerson (the transcendentalist) contends finally that these sensibilities are not just houseguests but the house itself:

*But the inner life sits at home . . . T is a quiet, wise perception. It loves truth, because it is itself real; it loves right, it knows nothing else . . . This tranquil, well-founded, wide-seeing soul . . . lies in the sun and broods on the world. (Volume 7, p. 311).*

What Winters did not grasp at all and Dewey only partially grasped is that Emerson believed our subjectivity—and our

reading—to be housed within a moral soul. Each reader is indeed “situated” (Boatright & Faust, 2013, p. 7)—not in a “climate” or a “political landscape” but in a “tranquil, well-founded, wide-seeing soul.” Therefore, while Boatright and Faust (2013) are right to side with Dewey (rather than Winters) and contend that the “flow of . . . thought” that “varies from reader to reader . . . should never be perceived as random but rather as generative” (p. 5), they are wrong to eschew Dewey’s partial and Emerson’s complete explanation why this is so: that is, each reader generates ideal rather than imbecilic thoughts because he or she has a soul.

In fact, like Cavell and the others, Boatright and Faust studiously avoid Emerson’s transcendentalist explanations, as their one example shows. Emerson, Boatright and Faust (2013) argue, believed like Nietzsche that “a stagnant mind is a sick mind and the antidote to that sickness is to awaken to the transient, constantly evolving quality of nature and of society” (p. 5). What they skip over is that Nietzsche’s “healthy” society was hardly democratic; as Levine (2011) explains in a recent essay that will hopefully end the specious equating of these two thinkers, “The great moral difference between Emerson and Nietzsche is that . . . Nietzsche sacrifices the mass of mankind to promote a new race of Over-men [while] Emerson wants everyone to tap into the eternal Over-soul” (p. 257). Perhaps Boatright and Faust sensed “health” is not enough, for they quickly offer a quotation from Emerson that refers to “ethics and humanity” (p. 5), too, as guides to the direction of our growth. That passage is from Emerson’s “Power” in the 1860 *The Conduct of Life*. Here, they argue by way of Wider (2000), we see Emerson reject “an intellectual free-for-all” (Boatright & Faust, 2013, p. 5) and instead introduce an “ethical dimension to reading” (p. 5). Here is the passage from “Power”:

*Everything good in nature and the world is in that moment of transition, when the swarthy juices still flow plentifully from nature, but their astringency or acidity is got out by ethics and humanity.*  
(Emerson, 1983, p. 980, as cited by Boatright & Faust, 14–15)

Boatright and Faust are right that this passage shows “Emerson understood that there is an ethical dimension to reading” (p. 5), but they fail to elaborate upon it and instead race off to a different passage from a different essay, which is typical of the cherry-picking approach to Emerson modeled by Cavell and his allies. But let’s stick with “Power” to see what Emerson actually argues there. Later in that essay, which is a tribute to healthy power in human activity, Emerson admits that “I have not forgotten that there are [more] sublime considerations which limit the value of talent and superficial success [meaning “health”]”: In effect, Emerson has not forgotten that “ethics and humanity” are needed to dilute those “swarthy juices.” He adds, “I adjourn what I have to say on this topic to the chapters on Culture and Worship” (Emerson, 1983, p. 985), two other chapters in *Conduct*. Turn from “Power” to those chapters (as Emerson asks us to do) and, sure enough, we find Emerson’s “ethics and humanity” explicated. In “Culture,” Emerson reviews different ethical and humane methods of moderating our raw, healthy power. “The antidotes against this organic egotism” (i.e., healthy power) are “books, travel, society,

solitude” (Emerson, 1983, p. 1019). Emerson then recommends books in precisely that reverential mode neglected by Boatright and Faust:

*Books, as containing the finest records of human wit, must always enter into our notion of culture. The best heads that ever existed, Pericles, Plato, Julius Caesar, Shakspeare, Goethe, Milton, were well-read, universally educated men, and quite too wise to undervalue letters. . . . We look that a great man should be a good reader, or in proportion to the spontaneous power should be the assimilating power. (Emerson, 1983, p. 1020)*

Much more is stated in “Culture” about books “containing” truths, and reading’s passive “assimilating power” as a check on health or “the spontaneous power”; we are also urged to read specific authors of “transcendent superiority” (e.g., Shakespeare, Plato). All of this flies in the face of Boatright and Faust’s misleading suggestion that Emerson recommends only irreverent reading.

Finally, “Culture” itself ultimately recommends not just books but “solitude” as the most important check on the raw growth described in “Power.” Why? Because in private we can cultivate a self focused on the public: “The saint and poet seek privacy to ends the most public and universal,” he writes, “and it is the secret of culture, to interest the man more in his public, than in his private quality” (Emerson, 1983, p. 1029). In “Worship” (which, again, Emerson in “Power” asked that we consult), he assures us that we can retreat to our private selves with confidence that our thoughts shall be public:

*The builder of heaven has not so ill constructed his creature as that the religion, that is, the public nature, should fall out: the public and the private element . . . adhere to every soul. . . . God builds his temple in the heart on the ruins of churches and religions [i.e., sectarianism]. (p. 1056)*

And so, in short, by following Emerson’s reasoning not just in one sentence from “Power” but in that essay as a whole and then in the two other essays to which Emerson explicitly directs us, we learn that our growth—and implicitly our reading in pursuit of growth—does not lead to an “intellectual free-for-all” (Boatright & Faust, 2013, p. 5) because, frankly, we each have a soul (“God[’s] . . . temple” [Emerson, 1983, p. 1056]) that, once free of sectarianism, keeps us focused on “the public nature” (p. 1056): that is, on transcendental equality. It remains to consider the two reading lessons this more reverent Emerson offers us.

### **Repair to the Lamps and Rake the Language**

An initial way to characterize Boatright and Faust’s misrepresentation of Emerson is to say they overemphasize the “centrifugence” in Emerson’s writing and neglect the “centripetence”: that is, they emphasize how Emerson describes forces driving us away from the center but ignore how he also describes forces pulling us back. These two terms occur fairly often in Emerson’s writings; usually he uses them to indicate the importance of balance, as with the seesaw metaphor from “Uses of Great Men” and cited by Boatright

and Faust (2013, p. 3). But to focus on just the push *or* the pull, or even the push *and* the pull, in Emerson’s depictions of various natural and social phenomena is to miss the bigger point he is almost always making. That point is that all of these natural and social laws—laws like that of centrifugence and centripetence—are echoes of a more fundamental moral law in the universe, as he wrote in the 1867 “Progress of Culture.”

*The laws above are sisters of the laws below. Shall we study the mathematics of the sphere, and not its causal essence also? Nature is a fable whose moral blazes through it. There is no use in Copernicus if the robust periodicity of the solar system does not show its equal perfection in the mental sphere, the periodicity, the compensatory errors, the grand reactions. I shall never believe that centrifugence and centripetence balance, unless mind heats and meliorates, as well as the surface and soil of the globe. (Emerson, 1903–1904, Volume 8, p. 223)*

“There is no use” for this natural principle, Emerson contends, unless we recall the “equal perfection in the mental sphere”; he will “never believe” in natural balance unless our “mind” balances as well. Emerson had an indomitable faith that within each of us is an unseen moral power that is the “sister” of the seen natural power; this is why he repeatedly insisted that by “self-reliance” he meant “God-reliance” (Malachuk, 2011, pp. 284–285). This leads to the first of the two reading lessons with which this response will conclude.

That first lesson could be called “repairing to the lamps,” as suggested by the passage from “The American Scholar” cited above: that is, when we “can read God directly” there’s no need for books, but when we cannot we must “repair to the lamps . . . to guide our steps to the East again” (Emerson, 1983, p. 58). Repairing to the lamps means reading to confirm the moral law. That Emerson was convinced that truly literate people are able to grasp the moral law through reading is implied, for example, in his journal response to the passage of that “filthy enactment,” the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. What most astounded Emerson, he confessed to himself, is that this law was “made in the 19th Century, by people who could read and write” (Emerson, 1995, p. xxxviii). The architects of the Fugitive Slave Law were in Emerson’s view functionally illiterate, for they were blind to the moral law that true readers will always grasp when they read. We see this same conviction when Emerson later meditated on the righteousness of John Brown’s December 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry to initiate the end of the moral evil of slavery. In his January 1860 eulogy to Brown, Emerson observed that “every thing that is *said* [emphasis added] of him leaves people a little dissatisfied; but as soon as they *read* [emphasis added] his own speeches and letters they are heartily contented” (p. 121, my emphasis). Brown, in Emerson’s view, had hold of the moral law: He understood transcendental equality. Once people stopped talking about Brown and started reading his writings, they, too, grasped that law.

Looking beyond the isolated sentences Boatright and Faust (2013) provide to the larger arguments of which they are a part, we find this first lesson repeated again and again. For example, Boatright and Faust cite Emerson’s point in “Spiritual Laws” (1841)

that “the ancestor to every action is a thought” (p. 3) as proof of that Emerson understood reading to be “an active enterprise where ideas coagulate, repel, and bifurcate” (p. 3). This is not accurate. For Emerson in “Spiritual Laws,” behind actions are thoughts, as Boatright and Faust contend, but those thoughts, in Emerson’s argument, do not repel and bifurcate but instead stem from one thought: that there is a moral law, or “God.” Emerson ends “Spiritual Laws” with this example, its gentle humor about Irish domestic workers dated but its lesson clear:

*Let a man believe in God, and not in names and places and persons. Let the great soul incarnated in some woman’s form, poor and sad and single, in some Dolly or Joan, go out to service and sweep chambers and scour floors, and its effulgent daybeams cannot be muffled or hid, but to sweep and scour will instantly appear supreme and beautiful actions, the top and radiance of human life, and all people will get mops and brooms; until, lo! suddenly the great soul has enshrined itself in some other form and done some other deed, and that is now the flower and head of all living nature. (Emerson, 1983, p. 323)*

Reading or witnessing the various deeds of various self-reliant (i.e., God-reliant) people, “we know the authentic effects of the true fire through every one of its million disguises” (p. 323). Similarly, Boatright and Faust (2013) suggest that when Emerson writes in “The Sovereignty of Ethics” (1878) that “we are learning not to fear truth” (p. 8) he means that we must “challenge it [and] prevent the circulation of unchecked knowledge and serve as agents for change and progress” (p. 8). Again, Emerson is recommending we “not . . . fear truth” (p. 8) in the sense of accepting that truth, not challenging it. Later in the same essay, Emerson specifically praises the

*man who has accustomed himself to look at all his circumstances as very mutable, to carry his possessions, his relations to persons, and even his opinions, in his hand, and in all these to pierce to the principle and moral law, and everywhere to find that,—has put himself out of the reach of all skepticism. (Emerson 1903–1904, Volume 10, p. 213–214)*

Skeptics fear the truth of the moral law, and Emerson here counsels the opposite.

Perhaps the best place to learn Emerson’s first reading lesson, however, is in his antislavery writings, the key to Emerson’s philosophy of democracy. Reading about slavery, Emerson consistently concluded that the moral law of transcendental equality forbids slavery. As Emerson wrote in this 1841 “Lecture on the Times,” “If I treat all men as gods, how to me can there be such a thing as a slave?” (Emerson, 1983, p. 164). By the 1850s, Emerson was describing white American blindness to this moral law as “skepticism” or “atheism” or a “metaphysical debility” (as cited in Malachuk, 2011, p. 280). “Truth exists,” Emerson declared in one impassioned 1855 address, “though all men should deny it” (Emerson, 1995, p. 102). The appeal of John Brown to Emerson was Brown’s ability to “read” this moral law, unlike those judges who in reading only the human laws upheld the constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Law. These judges were functionally illiterate, in

Emerson’s view, for they saw only the forms and not the reality—the moral law—behind the forms: As he put it in an 1859 address, “[John Brown] saw how deceptive the forms are [but] the judges rely on the forms, and do not, like John Brown use their eyes to see the fact behind the forms” (p. 119).

The other way Emerson determined slavery to be wrong exemplifies his second reading lesson, with which I will conclude. As described by Gougeon (1995) in his “Historical Background” to *Emerson’s Antislavery Writings*, in preparing for his first full address on slavery, an 1844 celebration of the 1833 emancipation of the slaves in the British West Indies, Emerson read dozens of books and pamphlets, and his “extensive study of these sources had a profound effect on his understanding of slavery” (p. xxviii). In his 1844 “Address,” Emerson seems determine that we know this, too. He dramatically recounts how through reading he himself ultimately learned slavery was wrong.

*The history of mankind interests us only as it exhibits a steady gain of truth and right, in the incessant conflict which it records between the material and the moral nature. From the earliest monuments it appears that one race was victim and served the other races. [Emerson then shows this with evidence from Egyptian temples and Herodotus until the present.] Language must be raked, the secrets of slaughter-houses and infamous holes that cannot front the day, must be ransacked, to tell what negro slavery has been. . . . I am heart-sick when I read how they came there, and how they are kept there. Their case was left out of the mind and out of the heart of their brothers. (Emerson, 1995, pp. 8–9)*

“Language must be raked” in order that we can see the facts about the wrongs of slavery and equality of these enslaved people, our “brothers.” Raking the language for these facts, we can then trust that our moral sensibility will make us “heart-sick” and inspire us to end slavery, which Emerson did for the next two decades until Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863.

## Conclusion

While American schools will of course need to do much more, Boatright and Faust’s (2013) recommendation of Emerson as a model reader to students is most welcome. Boatright and Faust are absolutely right that Emerson would heartily object to “teaching reading so as to position young people as obedient consumers” (p. 8), and, to the extent that their essay represents Emerson this way, it is to be applauded. But, as shown above, Boatright and Faust go too far when they suggest Emerson teaches us all to become “critical makers of meaning” (p. 8). That is the position of pragmatists, and we already have lots of these kinds of readers—for example, James, Dewey, Rorty—who can serve as role models for students. Emerson was a transcendentalist, and his great message was that moral “truth exists, though all men should deny it” (Emerson, 1995, p. 102). Such moral truths, in Emerson’s philosophy, are not made but found, and the two ways that readers will find these truths are by reading intuitively—wherein our souls “repair to the lamps” (Emerson, 1983, p. 58)—and by raking the language for

the facts that awaken our moral sensibilities. Rather than continue to invent an Emerson who may flatter our contemporary philosophical sensibility, let's ponder and promote what Emerson actually advocates; his transcendental reading lessons may be just the ones that we require.

## References

- Boatright, M. D., & Faust, M. A. (2013). Emerson, reading, and democracy: Reading as engaged democratic citizenship. *Democracy & Education*, 21(1). Retrieved from <http://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol21/iss1/6>
- Cavell, S. (1990). *Conditions handsome and unhandsome: The constitution of Emersonian perfectionism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Dewey, J. (1903). Emerson—The philosopher of democracy. *Journal of Ethics*, 13(4), 405–413.
- Emerson, R. W. (1903–1904). *The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Emerson, R. W. (1995). *Emerson's antislavery writings*. L. Gougeon & J. Myerson (Eds.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Emerson, R. W. (1983). *Essays and lectures*. J. Porte (Ed.). New York, NY: Library of America.
- Gougeon, L. (1995). Historical introduction. In L. Gougeon & J. Myerson (Eds.), *Emerson's antislavery writings* (pp. xi–lvi). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Jacobson, D. (1993). *Emerson's pragmatic vision: The dance of the eye*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Levine, A. M. (2011). Skeptical triangle? A comparison of the political thought of Emerson, Nietzsche, and Montaigne. In A. M. Levine & D. S. Malachuk (Eds.), *A political companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson* (pp. 223–264). Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Malachuk, D. S. (2011). Emerson's politics, retranscendentalized. In A. M. Levine & D. S. Malachuk (Eds.), *A political companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson* (pp. 65–304). Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Nietzsche, F. (1999). On truth and lying in a non-moral sense. In R. Geuss & R. Speirs (Eds.), *The birth of tragedy and other writings* (pp. 141–153). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1873)
- Richardson, R. D., Jr. (1995). *Emerson: The mind on fire*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Winters, Y. (1947). The experimental school in American poetry. In Y. Winters, *In defense of reason* (pp. 30–74). Denver, CO: Alan Swallow.