Record: 1

Title: Loving bondage: Emerson's ideal relationships.

Authors: Newfield, Christopher J.

Source: ATQ. Sep91, Vol. 5 Issue 3, p183. 11p.

Document Type: Literary Criticism

Subject Terms: *AUTHORS -- Political & social views

People: EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, 1803-1882 -- Political & social views

Abstract: Examines the political views of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Conservatism and need for a manly self-empowerment; Views on women; Advantage of heterosexual relations.

Full Text Word Count: 5650

ISSN: 1078-3377

Accession Number: 9605233894

Database: Academic Search Complete

LOVING BONDAGE: EMERSON'S IDEAL RELATIONSHIPS

Though Emerson loathed practical politics, he is thought to have loathed tyranny even more, and his work has long appeared to offer his readers a wide variety of grounds for opposing standing authority. His writing has inspired both personal and collective radicalisms and is invoked by gnostic deifiers of the self like Harold Bloom as well as by libertarian socialists like Cornel West. Nonetheless, a smaller but persistent number of Emerson's readers have found his legacy to be far more ambiguous than this and, on a number of crucial issues, to side with constituted authority. Recently, David Leverenz has challenged the tradition that sees Emerson as a kind of radical liberal and has encouraged us to see him as a frequent enemy of the personal and/or social liberation with which his name is often identified:

The usual thing to say about Emerson's politics is that while he sometimes seems elitist, he actually has a radically egalitarian vision of what people can be. I propose the reverse. Emerson calls for a new cultural elite.... Emerson's claims for the potential convertibility of every man to intellectual power veil a politics that divides people into a new elite and the mob. (51-52)

Leverenz's Emerson says to the average citizen not "obey thyself," in his famous phrase, but obey your designated betters.

To overstate Leverenz's claim in different terms, this would make Emerson a benevolent authoritarian who would place the masses under the wing of those enlightened enough to be trusted with democracy and capital. Emerson would not have to look far for an American model of "elitist" rejection of popular sovereignty, for it is part of the political work of the Constitution and has played an important role in American political theory both before and after James Madison's important attack on majority rule in Federalist 10.

Why would Emerson the liberator side with conservatives who distrust public government and demand

a "republic" run by elites who "refine and enlarge the public views" (Madison)? Among the possible explanations for his conservatism, Leverenz focuses on Emerson's need for a masculinity that defined itself through superiority to women. "Emerson's ideal of manly self-empowering reduces womanhood to spiritual nurturance while erasing female subjectivity" (44). His kinder and gentler patriarchalism, Leverenz continues, may have been softer than the old, but it continued to entail women's selfless servitude. "'Self-Reliance' takes for granted the presence of faceless mothering in the mind," Leverenz suggests (44). Women work so that men can think, but men are not willing to acknowledge their dependence by paying them for it. Emerson's acceptance of gender domination serves as an exemplar--and perhaps one source--of his reverence for various forms of inequality.

In general, I side with Leverenz and the tradition of Emersonians who find his legacy to be conservative rather than radical. Nonetheless, though I think that Emerson's philosophical radicalism usually produces social conservatism, I do not think that this conservatism takes the form of any kind of straightforward elitist domination. In Leverenz's reading, masculinity consists of manliness and more manliness: Emerson rejects manhood based in a "public rivalry for dominance" only to replace it with one based on an "inward experience of spontaneous metamorphosis" (44). Emerson's claim to transcend rivalry rather than to thrive on it maintains his steadfast loyalty to traditional gender relations that liberal, even transcendentalist, individualism did little to change. Reading Emerson as a male supremacist has two major disadvantages: it gives only a partial account of Emerson's relation to femininity, and it misses a subtler, more powerful mode of misogyny and social control.

In the first case, Emerson's partisans can partially balance his condescending and uncomprehending remarks about women with others which are far more generous and sympathetic. They could appeal to the complexity and diversity of his opinions, not to say his occasional incoherence and habitual equivocation, and conclude that for a man of his time he held large views. Emerson was indeed capable of taking profeminist stands, particularly in his private writing. There is, for example, his outrage at his peers' complacent response to Margaret Fuller's death by shipwreck. This tragedy, he fumes, revealed how most persons assume that "after the education has gone far, such is the expensiveness of America, that, the best use to put a fine woman to, is, to drown her to save her board."[1] Moving Emerson beyond sympathy for women, Eric Cheyfitz and Erik Ingvar Thurin, among others, have detailed his lifelong belief that the "complete" man must also be part woman.[2] Seeing Emerson as a consistent oppressor of women's desires and appropriator of their labor falsifies his complex (though still patriarchal) ambivalence about gender.

The second disadvantage of linking Emerson to explicit masculine authoritarianism is that it ignores how his power over women actually works--precisely through this ambivalence rather than through visible command. This is to be expected of an at least procedurally democratic culture, where power often works more effectively through persuasion than force, by winning consent rather than applying coercion. At least since the late 1970s when Ann Douglas alerted us to the role of ministers in "feminizing" American culture, commentators on the antebellum period have been invited to appreciate the tremendous cultural authority of men who opposed overt masculine tyranny. These moderate men favored sentiment over doctrine in their churches, wrote hygiene manuals showing weak boys how to be respectable men, stressed the importance of maternal influence in the home, ran moral reform societies in daily concert with middle-class women, and filled professions where they ruled through knowledge

and idealism rather than through force. Although manhood and virility remained ideals for these men, most of their work and experience suggested that the genders could not easily he regarded as opposites. Without being in the least bit feminist, they mastered the feminine by miming or seducing it rather than by commanding it with the "chastening rod" (Maria Cummins' phrase).

This is to say that the more effective mule authority in this period should in general be regarded as hegemonic rather than tyrannical. Tyranny works through force while hegemony manufactures consent, so that the subject of power believes that she or he is acting voluntarily (see Bercovitch's application of Gramsci and Foucault). In Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter, for example, Hester Prynne is far less vulnerable to Wilson or Bellingham than she is to Dimmesdale, the feminized man par excellence.[3] "Tyrannical" masculinity has less power over a nominally autonomous, self-directed citizenry than does "hegemonic" masculinity, who comes as the loving brother or friend. Middle-class liberalism is often incompetent at recognizing coercion in veiled or friendly forms. Liberalism resists rule by Ahab and Bellingham but accepts Ishmael and Dimmesdale; it rejects the determined Goldwater hut not the amiable Reagan; it is up in arms about street crime but not about the Federal Reserve; it objects to new taxes hut not to a regressive tax system--these examples of self-retrictive consent are all too easy to compile. If Emersonian liberalism oppresses women, it will not he through abuse but through effection, an affection that remains coercive nonetheless. The good father shudders at the image of Simon Legree. The whips and chains have long been put away, to be replaced by the bonds of love and virtue.

This contrast between tyrannical and hegemonic power is by now part of our common understanding of domestic ideology and can he restated for my present purpose. Emerson might have tried to defend his manhood through straightforward gender discrimination and asserted the superiority of men over women in any esteemed cultural, domestic, or social practice. But he actually defends it through discrimination's apparent opposite--neutrality. Rather than denying the subject autonomous will, he encourages it to know itself. Neutral hegemony works by inventing a way for a control system to work through the subject's self-determination. It is management through self-management. This self-management provides an autonomy which is limited only by procedures that apply equally to everyone. The only restrictions on liberty that this system admits to imposing are those which do not discriminate against anyone more than anyone else and which can be seen as fair and consensual. Hegemonic law is as much a law as discriminatory statutes might be, hut rather than operating through positive and particularized fiat, hegemonic law expresses-principles that appear to he neutral and general, not to say universal.

Emerson operates in a culture which is already strongly controlled by the refined coercion of domesticated, even male-"feminized" authority. It would be wrong to think that power is any less oppressive for being hegemonic. That Emerson and other white middle-class thinkers reject explicitly authoritarian forms of control does not mean that their milder rule amounts to a "liberal democratic" alternative to authoritarian masculinity. Instead, he may simply be modernizing and teamworking with ongoing forms of coerced inequality. To argue that Emerson favors a conservative status quo on gender issues rather than a gradualist liberalism, we would need to understand just how law-abiding love and friendship can be made to be. Clarifying Emerson's use of masculine power means showing not how he used male power (as either rivalry or detachment from rivalry) to dominate women, but how he used women to replace the issue of male power with the force of the law.

Emerson divides his relationships along Bender lines, and much of the time he has different names for them: "Friendship" for his connections with other men, "love" for those with women. A great deal of contemporary thinking about the passions regarded these as two distinct types of feeling. Whitman used phrenological terms in separating the "amative" feeling for women from the "adhesive" bond with men and saw these as different psychological and political structures. In his first series of essays (1841), Emerson divides love and friendship into consecutive chapters, and one difference in these feelings becomes consistent. In "Friendship," male-male relations do not transcend rivalry but rest on a vexed conjunction of rivalry and detachment. "Love," however, insistently imagines a union that overcomes rivalry and even the individual identities of the participants.

Male friendship was particularly important to Emerson, and his ideals of harmonious union may owe a great deal to the homoerotic attachments that persisted throughout his life. Although I will not elaborate the extent of Emerson's homosocial connections so much as take them for granted, it is worth mentioning that one experienced reader of Emerson's sexuality concludes that Emerson "concentrated in his adult years on developing friendly relations with young men who, in the words of the Symposium, 'had just begun to show some intelligence'" (Thurin 98). He often expressed his "elective affinities" for men with a romantic ardor, as when he notes, apparently alluding to his correspondence with John Sterling, "... that he feels 'as warmly' when his friend is praised 'as the lover when he hears applause of his engaged maiden'" (Thurin 171). Whatever their biographical intensity, my focus here is on the power relations that predominate in these same-sex rapports, as in the following "Friendship":

I hear what you say of the admirable pans and tried temper of the party you praise, but I see well that for all his purple cloaks I shall not like him, unless he is at last a poor Greek like me. I cannot deny it, O friend, that the vast shadow of the Phenomenal includes thee also in its pied and painted immensity,--thee, also, compared with whom all else is shadow. Thou an not Being, as Truth is, as Justice is,--thou an not my soul, hut a picture and effigy of that. Thou hast come to me lately, and [unreadable] friends as the tree puts forth leaves, and presently, by the germination of new buds, extrudes the old leaf? The law of nature is alternation for evermore. Each electrical state superinduces the opposite. The soul environs itself with friends, that it may enter into a grander self-acquaintance-or solitude; and it goes alone for a season, that it may exalt its conversation or society (Emerson 344).[4]

The passage begins with a concern that the friend may be too high and powerful for Emerson's speaker. This sense of inferiority receives an immediate (over)compensation as the friend is reduced to the speaker's reflection. This causes some justified alarm in the friend who has reached for his hat, as he is then reduced to a leaf on the tree that is the speaker. This radical subordination--if not outright elimination--of the friend is then naturalized as the law of polarity which rules throughout nature. The speaker's final state is not that of relation with another but an exalted solitude. In Emerson's description here, friendship provides rigorous domination and finally, rejection.[5]

The same essay offers another passage which suggests that the triumph of oneself over the male friend is not the main story:

Should not the society of my friend be to me peotic, pure, universal, and great as nature itself?... That great defying eye, that scornful beauty of [the friend's! mien and action, do not pique yourself on

reducing, but rather fortify and enhance. Worship his superiorities; wish him not less by a thought, hut hoard and tell them all. Guard him as thy counterpart.... What is so great as friendship, let us carry with what grandeur of spirit we can. Let us be silent,--so we may hear the whisper of the gods.

(Emerson 351)

Friendship may end with the speaker's domination of the friend, but its beginning depends on the friend's domination of him. The speaker loves so long as he is overwhelmed and compelled to worship. His true "counterpart" is his superior. He loves in submission as though his friend were a god. Worship leads to a silent acceptance of the divine elements that master the speaker through the friend's "manly furtherance." The speaker rather than being led back to his soul's exalted solitude as in the previous passage, is led to an audience with the gods. He does not dominate the friend but submits to him.

One common feature of these otherwise contrasting passages is that neither imagines male friendship leading to the equality of a band of brothers. Emerson might have managed such a description were he a fraternal democrat struggling to articulate egalitarian cooperation as an alternative to his competitive culture. Instead, he almost never sustains a description of relations between equal men without these relations becoming those of domination or submission. He does not so much replace rivalry with detachment as he makes detachment a form of rivalry. Emerson is indeed "elitist" in being unable, even in his visions of encompassing holiness, to conceive of fulfilling and cooperative bonds. Male friendship for Emerson is not an alternative to the master/slave struggles of entrepreneurial capitalism; male friendship is the master/slave struggle and draws its spiritual beauty from its continual movement away from egalitarian solidarity.

Emerson locates lordship and bondage at the center of male homosociality, and it stays there even as he imagines the friends' final unity. He closes "Friendship" by saying,

True love transcends the unworthy object, and dwells and broods on the eternal, and when the poor interposed mask crumbles, it is not sad, but feels rid of so much earth, and feels its independency the surer. Yet these things may hardly be said without a sort of treachery to the relation. The essence of friendship is entireness, a total magnanimity and trust. It must not surmise or provide for infirmity. It treats its object as a god, that it may deify both. (354)

Emerson imagines an "entireness" that ostensibly transcends rivalry while generating real "trust" and independence. The two friends become part of a united whole. But this transcendental marriage retains the competition implicit in the vigilance against "infirmity"; they "both" remain at the end, still in possession of separate identities. The speaker's spirit of friendship "treats its object as a god" and "worships [its] superiorities." "Trust" here does not arise from reciprocity, equality, or joint agency, but from a common worship. Male love is consummated when the "gods of the empyrean" intervene, but even the gods locate true friendship not in fraternity but in submission transcendentalized.[6] Master/slave relations are not in Emerson's description the unfortunate product of marketplace politics, but are the essence of redemption through love.

Emerson's male love has powerfully conservative consequences, though these do not appear as the will to power that is relatively easy to criticize. This love celebrates sameness;[7] it validates competition as central not just to economic efficiecy but to love itself; and it teaches submission rather than autonomy--

teaches submission to "neutral" laws and to those that such laws make superior. This love veils male submission in the loving jostling that ensues when kindred men sense potential brethren. By combining competition and submission, it suggests that freedom depends on maintaining hierarchy. Equality, reciprocity, autonomy never ensue, and the final triumph of male love in "Friendship" is obedience to and union with a greater power.

When Emerson writes about women in "Love," rivalry has all but vanished in the transcendent union toward which the lovers continually move. The beloved woman is not so interesting to Emerson for herself as for her facilitation of a spiritual movement beyond the physical world and into the realm of unchanging beauty. First the "lover comes to a warmer love of [the] nobilities'" of the beloved:

Then he passes from loving them in one to loving them in all, and so is the one beautiful soul only the door through which he enters to the society of all true and pure souls. In the particular society of his mate, he attains a clearer sight of any spot, any taint, which her beauty has contracted from this world.... And, beholding in many souls the traits of the divine beauty, and separating in each soul that which is divine from the taint which it has contracted in the world, the lover ascends to the highest beauty, to the love and knowledge of the Divinity, by steps on this ladder of created souls. (334)

In friendship, the male friend retains his power and otherness at the moment of spiritualization. The two friends remain as two, alone together; if the friend dissolves into "solid and sweet wisdom" for the speaker, then he is simply left alone. But in love, the (female) lover is the vehicle of an ascension that rapidly leaves her behind; their one-on-one relationship vanishes for the man's tie to "all true and beautiful souls." The relationship is a devotional practice for the man where he learns to find faults and to avoid them on the road to "blend[ing] with God" (337); the bride, through her moral beauty rather than agency or identity, gives way to God. The temporal male-female relation is replaced by the husband's link to a society of souls. The earthly woman is replaced by the divine one; "Thus are we put in training for a love which knows not sex, nor person, nor partiality" (337). The female lover is handmaiden to the man's spiritual destiny, leading him to the company of beautiful souls and then departing without a trace. "When the [mere] affections rule and absorb the man," he is dependent on an individual female person. But in true love, as in murder, the lady vanishes.

The hazards for women of being idealized by men are well-known, and Emerson is heir to them. The genteel misogyny of his evaporating passion does not need elaboration here.[8] Such moments are in full accord with the suspicions of critics like Leverenz who rightly find male domination in antebellum middle-class masculine idealism. I would also argue that Emerson's Platonizing is not merely the fever of youth, as Stanly Cavell and others have it, but reemerges whenever Emerson is faced with a concrete threat to his position. But as I have noted above, the form and objective of such sovereignty is important. Emerson is defending himself less against a threat to male domination than against exposure of his advocacy of male submission.

This becomes clearer in considering the kind of woman that Emerson fears. The woman he loves is all soul and is finally indistinguishable from all souls. The woman he hates insists on her visibility, and in his writing she can often be found wearing loud clothes and cheap makeup. He dislikes what he calls the "vulgar pretty woman" (JMN IV.73), while he praises the "rare women that charm us" by giving society

neither color nor any other visible presence but its "form, its tone" (JMN IV.299). This suggests that the "harlot's" immorality arises from having a body whose distinct visibility suggests that she is more than the translucent emission of the Lord. This autonomous presence marks her possession of an identity of her own.

Emerson spells this out in a journal passage from September of 1838:

Forget as fast as you can that you exist, if you would be beautiful & beloved. You do not tell me, young maiden, in words that you wish to be admired[,] that not to be lovely but to be courted, not to be mistress of yourself but to be mistress of me, is your desire. But I hear it, an ugly harlot sound in the recesses of your song, in the niceties of your speech, in the lusciousness (forgive the horrible word) of your manners. Can you not possibly think of any thing that you really & heartily want & can say so, & go the straight way in the face of God & men to effect, if it were only to raise a cucumber, or own a cat, or make a scratch cradle? Be it what it will, do that, chase your friend all over town; read, mark, eat, the book that interests you; anything, no matter what, that interests you, that do, with a single aim, & forget yourself in it, & straightway you are a piece of nature & do share the loveliness & venerableness of nature. Therefore are tears for anotber[,] therefore is lively repartee, a good story, a fit action lovely & enlivening because in them the soul goes out of self & gives sign of relation to universal nature. (JMN VII.77)

Emerson claims that the good woman acts as though she does not exist, while the harlot insists that she does. He demands a form of orthodox female submission in words much like those his wife Lidian uses to describe her sense of her duties within their own marriage: "God help me to have no aim in the future but do do his will in seeking the happiness of others-forgetting my own" (to Emerson, April 1836; qtd. in Rose 170). The harlot clearly renounces such wifely submission. Emerson's response is a stock horror at the prospect of a woman's autonomy. The harlot, he says, is the woman who wishes "to be mistress of me" and use her autonomy to rob me of mine.

The simplest explanation for Emerson's attitude would be a conventional sexism: he likes his men strong and his women weak. He really does revere self-reliance, this argument would go, but in men and not in women. But in fact he can often be found advocating worship for men and agency for women. This passage is a good example, a large portion of which consists of Emerson endorsing female activity. Similarly, Emerson feels an unsettled admiration for his phallic mother, Aunt Mary Moody Emerson, because, like the towering Daniel Webster, she "had an eye that went through & through you like a needle." Emerson accepts her own self definition: "'She was endowed,' she said, 'with the fatal gift of penetration'" (JMN IV.53).[9] When he venerates a woman's humble piety, he sometimes does so to establish a model for his own male self. He notes of a liberal Quaker woman of New Bedford, Miss Mary Rotch, that she had discovered her inward spiritual life only when "she learned to have no choice, to acquiesce without understanding the reason.... Can you believe, Waldo Emerson, that you may relieve yourself of this perpetual perplexity of choosing? by putting your ear close to the soul, learn always the true way" (JMN IV.263, 264). Waldo Emerson does not see self-reliant free choice as good for men but bad in women; he sees it as good or bad depending on what kind of self-reliance it is.

Emerson's distinction between decent and vulgar women clarifies thc difference between good and bad

self-reliance. The good kind, associated with the "preserved maiden," may act independently of neighboring men, but this power must come from self-negation: a "fit action" occurs when "the soul goes out of self & gives sign of relation to universal nature." The harlot, to the contrary, does not "forget as fast as [she] can that [she] exist[s]." This is her only error here. After all, she does not tell Emerson that she wishes to be admired and so on. Her sin is the sin of presence--of simply having "song," "speech," and "manners," to which Emerson attributes "recesses," "niceties," and "lusciousness" which he cannot name. More accurately, her sin is to act from this presence, to act out of herself, to have [unreadable] and manners which derive from her and not from "universal".

The harlot is Emerson's emhleni for a self-reliant woman. Female self-reliance is not wrong because women are not supposed to be strong; to repeat, Emerson often likes female strength and male "weakness" or submission. The flaw of harlot self-reliance is that it is a self-reliance which Emerson cannot readily link to suhmission to natural law. He can find this link in his Aunt Mary, whose strength derived from a powerful piety, and in his wife, and in the figures of "the holiest nuns" who lend "form" and "tone" to society--who transmit constitutive laws. The harlot remains other to his sense of natural law and asserts her difference from him in a way that friends and lovers never do. Harlot self-reliancc is simply self-reliance in its common meaning of making one's own identity and rules, but this is almost never the meaning Emerson intends. The harlot confronts Emerson with his own official doctrine, now severed from the subservience to divine law that was all that made the potential revolutions of self-reliance acceptably lawful to him in the first place. The self-reliant woman does not submit to a higher power, does not admit the superiority of these powers, and assumes her equal right to make her own rules. The harlot's threat is not the threat of enslaving the male will to her charms, but of her own freedom from the "universal" law.

The problem posed by the harlot, then, is that she reminds Emerson of his popularized notion of self-reliance as "the infinitude of the private man." She confronts a man who seeks power in obedience with power as revolt or at least self-direction. She is Emerson's own entrepreneurial individualist, but one cut loose from its tether to the "universal mind." Emerson must not simply criticize the free woman, but must criticize what she represent--freedom itself, freedom from preconstituted law. Free women lose here: in Emerson's writing women are almost always obliged lo forget themselves if they are to he trusted to do anything. But it would be wrong to think that free men win. Emerson does not contrast the fallen women's freedom with the freedoms safely enjoyed by a man. The passage attempts to bring women and men closer together in a common imperative to submit to the universal mind. For Emerson, it is not a crime for a woman to be free as long as she is free in the properly lawful sense. The criminalization of the genuinely autonomous woman is the criminalization of autonomy itself. This is not to say that such freedom is possible or desirable or that women in Emerson have nearly as much of it as men, but it is to say that Emerson does not allow such freedom in the first place.

Emerson's feelings about self-reliance do not get resolved in his theories of love and friendship. Instead, these theories offer two different ways of managing the difficult feat of sponsoring a form of self-reliance that is a competitive while simultaneously (and less obviously) bowing to authority.

Emerson's descriptions of male homosocial relations embed submission in ongoing competitive struggles. The friend is both revered and mastered, and the act of mastery never eliminates the friend's

superiority. The friend's superiority stems from an autonomy which the speaker then demonstrates to be in fact subordinate to divine principle. When both friends are men the friend's autonomy always threatens to return, and indeed the friend's superiority depends on the continuing "principle" of autonomy that the speaker cannot quite vanquish. In male friendship, the sublation of the friend does not eliminate the rivalry based on the friend's separate superiority. Power relations remain active and disruptive. Hierarchy exists and is never replaced by equal, fraternal bonds. But because the friend remains partially independent of the law, revolt and reversal remain possibilities.

For Emerson, the advantage of heterosexual relations lies in their power to turn submission to unity while eliminating rebellion far more completely than was possible with men. While relations with men can never entirely purge self-reliance from god-reliance, the two qualities are for Emerson separable into two kinds of women. Taking up the commonplace Victorian casting of women into Madonnas and whores, Emerson can divide self-created and submissive women into polarized moral categories. Self-reliance can be cast out as the quality of the harlot, while submission can be revered as the trait of "preserved maids." He can revere submission as the moral law while scapegoating autonomy as the law of depravity. With the specter of autonomy vanquished, so vanishes the difference or otherness represented by an independent woman. Absent her potential rebellion against the universal law, which would suggest that the law is incomplete or internally contradictory, and the law can seem entirely identical to the male self. All that is left in male heterosexuality is a common union with "universal nature" that does not in the least threaten male identity. Emerson's homosociality retains conflicts within the law that his heterosexuality denies.

Among the number of implications of Emerson's use of submission, I'd like to stress one in particular. Emerson does not reject antinomian self-reliance in favor of the "mutual stimulus" that the transcendentalists were continually imagining as the condition of reformed society (Margaret Fuller's phrase, quoted in Rose 174). He rejects libertarian freedom and egalitarian interdependence alike. He distrusts individual and collective self-determination, preferring determination to reside with preestablished authority. Even as he translates self-reliance as the love of a superior, he repudiates all social, public, or communal alternatives to self-reliance. This precludes revolt and reform alike. Since "true" self-reliance comes from obedience to the highest law, private and public attempts to make laws for oneself or a community will feel like crude violations of a preexisting and more natural scheme. The Emersonian law, in other words, is above all the law of submitting to higher law, a law which is almost always the law of oneness. A principal effect of this submissive individualism is that the antebellum women who suffered the regulation of moderate, caring men could look neither to liberty nor reciprocal agency for an alternative, but only to loving authority.

University of California
Santa Barbara, California

Notes

[1] Journals 13:139. Further references to these volumes will be abbreviated JMN in the text.

[2] See especially Thurin's chapter on "Androgynous Completeness." Thurin is useful throughout on Emerson's perennial ambivalence about masculinity and agency. See also Cheyfitz's chapter "The Decline of the Father."

[3] For this argument, see my "The Politics of Male Suffering."

[4] "Friendship," Essay and Lectures 344. All quotations from Emerson's essays are from this edition and will be found in the text.

[5] A paradigmatic instance of this elimination of the friend is the close of Nature's chapter on "Discipline": "whist his character...is converted in the mind into solid and sweet wisdom,--it is a sign to us that his office closing..." (31).

[6] Although Emerson does not specify the male gender in this paragraph, the essay never includes women in the first place.

[7] A partial qualification: Emerson does not declare that "Frienship requires that rare mean betwixt likeness and unlikeness, that piques each with the presence of power and of consent in the other party....The only joy I have in his being mine, is that the not mine is mine" (350).

[8] Rose uses the work of Nancy Cott, Ann Douglas, and other historians to illuminate the restrictive idealization of femininity among transcendentalist reformers; see especially 191-194, on Fourierism. Studies of domestic ideology have enjoyed a renaissance in the decade since Rose's book was published.

[9] Emerson remarked on Webster's "great cinderous eyes," eyes which Thurin thinks inspired a rhapsodic journal passage about being beheld by a man with "great serious eyes," which "were a great river like the Ohio of the Danube which was always pouring a torrent of strong, sad light on some men, and tinging [sic] them with the quality of his soul" (Thurin 179).

Works Cited

Cheyfitz, Eric. The Trans-parent: Sexual Politics in the Language of Emerson. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Essays and Lectures. New York: Library of America, 1993.

-----. Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks vols. 1-15. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959-1985.

Leverenz, David. Manhood and the American Renaissance: Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Naisbitt, John and Patricia Aburdene. Reinventing the Corporation: Transforming Your Job and Your Company for the New Information Society. New York: Warner Books, 1985.

Newfield, Christopher. "The Politics of Male Suffering: Masochism and Hegemony in The American Renaissance." differences 1.3 (Winter 1989): 55-87.

Rose, Anne C. Transdencentalism as a Social Movement, 1830-1850. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

Thurin, Erik Ingvar. Emerson as Priest of Pan: A Study in the Metaphysics of Sex: Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1981.

~~~~~~~~

By Christopher J. Newfield

~~~~~~~~