The Visitor Who Never Comes: Emerson and Friendship

Wallace Coleman Green Jr.

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the American Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-xxw7-ck83

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Wallace C. Heen Jr.
Author

Approved, May 1993

Robert Scholnick, Director

Richard Lowry

Adam Potkay
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL SHEET</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. ANALYSIS OF EMERSON'S PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. ANALYSIS OF &quot;FRIENDSHIP&quot;</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOTES</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to express his appreciation to Professor Robert Scholnick for his thoughtful suggestions and patient guidance throughout this investigation. The author is also indebted to Professors Richard Lowry and Adam Potkay for their careful reading of the manuscript. Finally, the author wishes to express his sincere gratitude to Wallace and June Green for many years of financial and moral support.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to show that Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Friendship" (1841) delves into the heart of his philosophy of self-reliance and reveals much about his Transcendentalist view of human relations. Despite its seemingly austere tone, "Friendship" is an intensely personal work which grew out of Emerson's private relationships. A study of Emerson's journals and letters reveals that "Friendship" is, in part, the result of the period between 1836 and 1840, in which the previously reclusive Emerson became acquainted with a new and stimulating circle of friends: Margaret Fuller, Caroline Sturgis, Anna Barker and Samuel Gray Ward. In the midst of an epistolary debate about the nature of friendship, Fuller and Sturgis began to criticize Emerson for his refusal to engage in truly intimate forms of friendship; he responded to this emotional pressure by angrily withdrawing from the relationship. Emerson dramatically reveals his preference for idealized, intellectual relationships and his extreme fear of intimacy.

Through their repeated demands for intimacy, Fuller and Sturgis, in effect, asked Emerson to remove his armor of privacy; "Friendship" is his rhetorical attempt to explain his refusal. Employing his considerable rhetorical skills, Emerson takes weaknesses and endeavors to portray them as moral and spiritual virtues. "Friendship" thus reflects a tension between Emerson's desire for friendship and his need to protect his privacy.

Although he clearly admires the concept of friendship, Emerson recalls the beliefs expressed in "Self-Reliance" and repeatedly maintains that his primary concern is for the spiritual development of the individual self. In Emerson's view, the great problem of friendship is that "all association is a compromise, and, what is worst, the very flower...of each of the beautiful natures disappears as they approach each other." Fearing the inevitable intermingling of souls that results from a close friendship, Emerson asserts the superiority of solitary spiritual development. By concentrating on the self, Emerson believes that the individual will become spiritually "pronounced" and will, eventually, engage in friendship with a small fraternity of similarly developed souls.

Emerson was apparently satisfied with impersonal and intellectual relationships, but many of his friends considered his form of friendship to be painfully inadequate. While other Transcendentalists, such as Thoreau, were able to reconcile the conflicts of society and self, Emerson considered intimate relationships to be a threat to the sanctity of the individual self, a belief which he defended in his famous essay. For this reason, "Friendship" offers critical insights into the personality and philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson.
THE VISITOR WHO NEVER COMES:

EMERSON AND FRIENDSHIP
INTRODUCTION

Despite his reputation as an extreme individualist who chafed at the mere mention of society, Henry David Thoreau spends two chapters of *Walden*, "Visitors" and "Winter Visitors," declaring his appreciation of friendship and the spiritual value he perceives in companionship. Claiming to be "naturally no hermit," Thoreau states, "I think that I love society as much as most, and am ready enough to fasten myself like a bloodsucker for the time to any full-blooded man that comes in my way."¹

With this admitted love of human companionship, Thoreau confesses in *Walden* his disappointment with a certain un­named friend. In "Winter Visitors," he describes with obvious pleasure the visits of a "poet" (Ellery Channing) and a "philosopher" (Bronson Alcott), but there was one whose absence saddened him:

There was one other with whom I had "solid seasons," long to be remembered, at his house in the village, and who looked in upon me from time to time; but I had no more for society there.

There too, as every where, I sometimes expected the Visitor who never comes. The Vishnu Purana says, "The house-holder is to remain at eventide in his courtyard as long as it takes to milk a cow, or longer
if he pleases, to await the arrival of a guest." I often performed this duty of hospitality, waited long enough to milk a whole herd of cows, but did not see the man approaching from the town.²

The man whose absence so profoundly disappointed Thoreau was his friend and mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson.³ At the time Thoreau was at Walden Pond (1845-1847), Emerson and Thoreau still considered themselves to be close friends (the estrangement would not occur until 1853),⁴ and yet for whatever reason, Thoreau, looking back, complains about Emerson, who apparently made no effort to visit or share his life and thus strengthen and solidify their friendship. According to Thoreau biographer Robert Richardson, this reference to Emerson is the "saddest sentence of the book, because...the most important friendship of Thoreau's life is buried in that flat sentence with no further attempt at a public marker."⁵ The very fact that Thoreau makes no effort to express his feelings about "the Visitor" adequately conveys the intensity of his pain; the silence is most eloquent.

Friendship was a subject of great interest to Thoreau, as evidenced by the fact that he wrote an essay on the subject in 1848,⁶ which he later included in A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers. Thoreau's view of friendship is an interesting paradox. On the one hand, he seems to share Emerson's belief that friendship is a sacred relationship, in which two individuals come together in order to share their knowledge and enhance one another's spiritual
development. However, Thoreau differs from Emerson in the sense that he is realistic enough to accept the inevitable flaws of human relations, and he is willing to experience humble forms of friendship; unlike Emerson, Thoreau's relations do not always have to meet on the holiest ground.

Like his mentor Emerson, Thoreau had a definite tendency to view friendships from a Transcendental and spiritual point of view. According to Thoreau, "We do not wish for Friends to feed and clothe our bodies — neighbors are kind enough for that — but to do the like office to our spirits." The role of friendship is to improve the spiritual state of the participants. According to Thoreau, "it is the merit and preservation of Friendship, that it takes place on a level higher than the actual characters of the parties would seem to warrant." Through friendship, individuals are able to attain a higher level of spiritual development than they would have been able to achieve through solitary effort.

In order to develop his spiritual state, Thoreau demands that his friend be critical and correct his faults; he views friendship as a relationship in which one might grow in virtue and nobility. According to Thoreau, most social relations are inadequate because they do not require enough of the individuals involved: "In our daily intercourse with men, our nobler faculties are dormant and suffered to rust. None will pay us the compliment to expect nobleness from us." A true friendship, on the other hand, will demand the best of its participants. As Thoreau notes, "A Friend
is one who incessantly pays us the compliment of expecting from us all the virtues, and who can appreciate them in us."\(^{10}\) Speaking of his ideal companion, Thoreau states, "I require one who will make an equal demand on me with my own genius."\(^{11}\) Friends should expect and accept only the best of one another.

One should note, however, that Thoreau does not limit himself by demanding idealistic, spiritual friendships to the exclusion of all others. In spite of the lofty goals which he claims for friendship, Thoreau actually is quite humble in that he recognizes value in any individual whom he might call friend. Noting the folly of continually expecting an idealistic perfection from one's friends, Thoreau writes, "How often we find ourselves turning our backs on our actual Friends, that we may go and meet their ideal cousins. I would that I were worthy to be any man's Friend."\(^{12}\) Similarly, Thoreau notes, "Friendship is first, Friendship last. But it is equally impossible to forget our Friends, and to make them answer to our ideal."\(^{13}\) As this passage suggests, Thoreau seems to recognize that it is unreasonable constantly to expect perfection in even a relationship as sacred as friendship. Individuals have no right to expect their companions to "answer" an "ideal."

In a startlingly realistic and practical manner, Thoreau states that "Friendship is not so kind as is imagined."\(^{14}\) The reason for Thoreau's assertion is simple: "The constitutional differences which always exist...are obstacles to a perfect friendship."\(^{15}\) People are simply
different, and Thoreau shows that it is unrealistic to expect perfect unanimity, even among friends. In spite of the highest expectations and goals, no friendship is perfect; therefore, friends must make allowances for each other:

"We must accept or refuse one another as we are. I could tame a hyena more easily than my Friend." Because of the "constitutional differences" that separate people, Thoreau concludes that friendship may only be achieved by individuals who are mutually willing to strive and sacrifice in order to make the relationship a success.

Thoreau goes to great pains, however, to show that friendship is an important goal and is absolutely worth the effort. Speaking to a hypothetical friend, Thoreau states:

I know that the mountains which separate us are high, and covered with perpetual snow, but despair not.

Improve the serene winter weather to scale them. If need be, soften the rocks with vinegar. For here lie the verdant plains of Italy ready to receive you.

Nor shall I be slow on my side to penetrate to your Province.

In this passage, Thoreau shows the intensity of his love of friendship. The metaphorical journey of friendship is difficult and often involves considerable struggle and pain. Nevertheless, Thoreau contends that he is prepared to meet his friend halfway and thus contribute to the success of their relationship. When one considers the sacrifices Thoreau was prepared to endure for friendship, one may easily understand his disappointment with Emerson.
Even though Thoreau's actual behavior occasionally differed from the stance he took in his essay, he was willing, in theory, to climb mountains to meet his friend, whereas Emerson was apparently unwilling to take a simple walk to Walden pond.

Thoreau was clearly saddened by Emerson's cold and reserved form of friendship, and in this observation he was not alone. Ellery Channing considered Emerson to be "a terrible man to deal with...he cannot establish a personal relation to anyone." Similarly, Henry James, Sr. stated that Emerson "always kept one at such arm's-length, tasting him and sipping him and trying him, to make sure that he was worthy of his somewhat prim and bloodless friendship." Remarks like these abound; almost all of Emerson's friends complained in some way of his "bloodless" form of friendship.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's personal reserve and preference for solitude is so well documented that a study of Emerson's friendships almost seems oxymoronic. At the same time, I believe that a study of the specific personal and philosophical roots of Emerson's essay "Friendship" will reveal general conflicts in the Transcendentalist movement and in ante-bellum America. "Friendship" offers insights into Emerson's personality and expounds the foundations of his philosophy. In order properly to understand "Friendship," one must recognize that the essay grew out of an emotionally intense period in the summer of 1840. With this biographical information, one may clearly see that "Friendship" represents Emerson's effort philosophically to justify his life-long fear of intimacy.
CHAPTER I

ANALYSIS OF EMERSON'S PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

On May 29, 1840, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had spent the majority of his life in a thoughtful seclusion, a man who claimed to "study the art of solitude,"21 made an astounding statement in a letter to John Sterling: "I am a worshipper of friendship, and cannot find any other good equal to it."22 This comment represents the culmination of the most personally intimate period in Emerson's adult life. Between 1836 and 1840, he became acquainted with many of the individuals who would later form the nucleus of the Concord Transcendentalist movement, including Jones Very, Bronson Alcott and the young Henry David Thoreau. Although these men would become frequent visitors to the Emerson home and participate in many philosophical discussions while accompanying Emerson on his famous walks, their relationships appear to have been somewhat distant, primarily involving a shared interest in the principles of Transcendentalism.23 The only friend in this period who attempted to break through Emerson's shell of privacy and achieve intimacy was Margaret Fuller. Because of her efforts, this period of social activity became so emotionally intense it caused Emerson to reevaluate his concept of human relations and resulted in the
Fuller appeared on Emerson's doorstep in July of 1836. Having been told about the intellectual Reverend Emerson, Fuller "had determined to make Waldo Emerson her friend." In *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, Emerson would recall his initial distaste for the young woman: "Her extreme plainness, - a trick of incessently opening and shutting her eyelids, - nasal tone of her voice, - all repelled, and I said to myself, we shall never get far." But Fuller's goal of friendship was not to be denied, and through what Gay Wilson Allen describes as "flattery, drollery, shrewd judgements, and overpowering enthusiasm," she charmed the shy minister enough to merit an invitation for a three-week stay at the Emerson home in August 1836.

This budding friendship was possible because, despite Emerson's aversion to Fuller's mannerisms, the two individuals had similar backgrounds and intellectual accomplishments. After Fuller's second visit, Emerson described her as "a very accomplished & very intelligent person." As John Bard McNulty notes, Fuller "had read Ovid, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Moliere before reaching her teens; she recognized the importance of Carlyle, the greatness of Goethe, the vitality of Transcendentalism." Thus, she and Emerson shared many interests and never lacked for topics of discussion. Their intellectual connection lasted throughout their friendship and reached its most tangible form in their collaborative work as editors of *The Dial* (July 1840 - April 1844).
Fuller's greatest impact on Emerson's personal life, however, may well have been to introduce the reclusive scholar to her intellectual circle of friends. This new social activity was pleasantly surprising for the previously reclusive Emerson, who wrote to Elizabeth Hoar with obvious pleasure, "Have I not always been a hermit, and unable to approach my fellow man, & do the Social Divinities suddenly offer me a roomful of friends?." Of the many friends whom Fuller introduced to Emerson, three stand out: Caroline Sturgis (1836), Anna Barker (1839) and Samuel Gray Ward (1839).

As John Bard McNulty demonstrates in "Emerson's Friends and the Essay on Friendship" (1946), these four individuals played a primary role in the development of his essay on "Friendship." In the summer of 1840, this intellectual quintet engaged in an extensive, and intensely personal, epistolary debate about the proper nature of friendship. McNulty's study of the surviving letters and Emerson's journal clearly establishes the fact that the five friends were fascinated by this subject and engaged in extensive conversations about "the desire of sensitive persons to seek their sympathetic counterparts or affinities and to be understood in their full and creative individuality." As one might surmise, this debate occurred in the same time period in which Emerson conceived and wrote the essay "Friendship." Thus, as McNulty suggests, Fuller and her friends had such a profound effect on Emerson that "the hermit began to
contemplate with renewed interest the beauties and wonders of friendship.\(^{32}\)

McNulty is absolutely correct when he states that Emerson's "experience and intercourse with these friends, in all its freshness, has been transferred directly into the fabric of the essay."\(^{33}\) However, McNulty is content merely to show that a large portion of "Friendship" comes directly from the letters written to, and the journal entries written about, these four friends. He fails to explore the extent to which this specific period in Emerson's life reveals his lifelong attitudes toward friendship and the attitudes which he will philosophically defend in his essay on the subject. Through a study of Emerson's temperament and personal relationships one may properly understand the intellectual and rhetorical stances which Emerson takes in "Friendship."

Emerson's relationships with Fuller, Sturgis, Barker and Ward dramatically reveal his preference for idealized, intellectual relationships and his extreme fear of intimacy. In Samuel Ward and Anna Barker, Emerson found exactly the sort of individuals with whom he was comfortable. Emerson's journals and letters offer absolutely no indication of frustration or anger with either of these individuals. The very fact that he was so pleased with these friendships speaks volumes about Emerson's personality. For this reason, the relationships are worthy of analysis, because they represent exactly the sort of friendship for which he calls in his essay. Conversely, Emerson's relationship
with Sturgis and Fuller is significant to an understanding of the man and his philosophy because it highlights Emerson's personal fears and inadequacies. "Friendship" is, in large part, a defensive response to Fuller's demands for intimacy and thus represents Emerson's effort philosophically to rationalize his personal failures.

In Samuel Gray Ward, Emerson found his ideal friend, a "formidable" individual with whom he could maintain a mutually stimulating intellectual relationship. Ward, who was Emerson's junior by nine years, had a reputation as a "travelled and cultured lover of art." According to Gay Wilson Allen, "the two men were strongly attracted to each other, and when the younger offered his friendship, the older man eagerly responded." This friendship appealed to Emerson on an intellectual level because as Allen notes, "Emerson thought [Ward] the most polished, gifted, and knowledgeable authority on art he knew." Because Emerson believed himself to be deficient in his knowledge of art, he valued Ward's skills. Similarly, Ward was pleased with the relationship, because he had read Nature and wished to learn more about Emerson's Transcendental philosophy. In a letter to Ward dated July 18, 1840, Emerson acknowledges the fact that their relationship was mutually beneficial:

The reason why I am curious about you is that with tastes which I also have, you have tastes and powers and corresponding circumstances which I have not and perhaps cannot divine.
Along with the rest of Fuller's circle of friends, Emerson and Ward regularly discussed the concept of friendship. Writing to Ward about this subject on January 17, 1840, Emerson states, "This is to me the most attractive of all topics, and, I doubt not, whenever I get your full confession of faith, we shall be at one on the matter." But, as always, Emerson is hesitant and wishes to move slowly in the area of intimacy: "Because the subject is so high and sacred, we cannot walk straight up to it; we must saunter if we would find the secret." Emerson's half of the correspondence expresses his belief that true friendship need not be physically close and intimate, as long as both participants strive to meet on a spiritual level:

You and I, my friend, sit in different houses, speak all day to different persons, but the differences - make the most we can of them - are trivial; we are lapped at last in the same idea, we are hurried along in the same material system of stars, in the same immaterial system of influence, to the same untold ineffable goal. Let us exchange now and then a word or a look on the new phases of the Dream.

In addition to the fact that Ward intellectually stimulated and inspired him, Emerson clearly appreciated the fact that Ward offered a "manly resistance." This peculiar term, which also appears in "Friendship," refers to the fact that Ward, like Emerson himself, was a strong individualist who
refused to submit his own self in order to achieve intimacy with a friend. In the terminology Emerson would later use in "Friendship," this was "an alliance of two large formidable natures." 42

Because of their correspondence and mutual intellectual respect, Emerson even asked Ward to read and critique the rough draft of "Friendship," which he was developing in the summer of 1840. On 22 June of that year, Emerson wrote Ward: "Then I am just now finishing a chapter on Friendship...on which I would gladly provoke a commentary. I have written nothing with more pleasure, and the piece is already indebted to you and I wrote to swell my obligations." 43 According to Allen, "Emerson wanted Ward's opinion on his essay...for two reasons: literary criticism and the hope that his ideas on this subject would draw them together. Ward responded in a way that cemented their mutual regard." 44 This relationship is noteworthy primarily because Emerson enjoyed it so much. Clearly, the Ward friendship represents the sort of intellectual and ideal relationship which Emerson desired. Ward never made any demands on Emerson; the two men merely shared intellectual interests and developed a relationship which was perfectly suited to the temperament of Emerson.

In Anna Barker, Emerson found another individual who completely satisfied his idealistic conception of friendship. This wealthy New Orleans socialite, who was engaged to Sam Ward, so completely charmed Emerson that he frequently referred to her as "that very piece of human divinity"; as
in most things, Emerson tended to raise friendship to a spiritual level, and this is where he envisioned his relationship with Anna Barker, evidenced by the fact that he dubbed her the "holiest nun." This idealization clearly appears in a letter in which Emerson describes his reaction to the beautiful Barker:

The moment she fastens her eyes on you, her unique gentleness unbars all doors....It is almost incredible to me, when I spoke with her the other night - that I have never seen this child but three times, or four, is it? I should think I had lived with her in the houses of eternity.

Although this letter does suggest a physical attraction, Emerson's comment that he knew Anna in the "houses of eternity" raises important questions about Emerson's tendency to idealize and spiritualize friendship.

For Emerson, the perfect friendship could only be a spiritual form and could certainly never exist in the material world. In a revealing journal entry, Emerson states that "the friends that occupy my thoughts are not men but certain phantoms clothed in the form and face and apparel of men by whom they were suggested and to whom they bear a resemblance." Emerson admits that the only friends that interest him are "phantoms"; he prefers the idealistic image to the actual person that inspires the image. In Emerson's view, the material world cannot possibly live up to his idealized expectations. This preference for a spiritual form of friendship goes far to explaining Emerson's
lifelong solitude. Since he did not believe in the possibility of perfect friendship, he never actually sought it; instead, he preferred to idealize certain individuals, endowing them with great spiritual qualities and worshipping them from afar.

Anna Barker was one recipient of this distant admiration, and in this sense, she has a role in Emerson's life much like the one of Ellen Tucker, Emerson's first wife. According to Allen, Emerson's first marriage was "blissfully harmonious" and filled with love. But Emerson's relationship with Ellen, from their introduction to her death, lasted less than five years, and much of that time Ellen was bed-ridden because of her poor health. Indeed, as Allen notes, "some students of Emerson have wondered, considering Ellen's frequent invalidism, whether the marriage was ever consummated." In this situation, one may reasonably assume that, despite their obvious love, Emerson and Ellen lacked the intimacy that one would expect from a married couple. Yet throughout his life, Emerson fairly worshipped the memory of his first wife, much to the pain of his second wife, Lydian. According to Allen, Emerson "always said that, with the exception of his first wife, no living person could become the completely ideal friend." He adored Ellen as much, and probably more, after she was dead than when she was alive. In his relationship with Ellen, as in his friendship with Anna Barker, Emerson preferred the idealized image to the actual relationship and thus avoided any potential demands for intimacy.
Unfortunately for Emerson, however, other women were not content to sit on the pedestal he created for them. In a masterpiece of understatement, Gay Wilson Allen states that Emerson's relationship with Margaret Fuller and Caroline Sturgis was "more complicated." Based on letters and Emerson's journal, it becomes clear that Fuller and Sturgis harshly criticized Emerson for his reserved disposition and his refusal to engage in emotionally intimate forms of friendship. In a letter to Sturgis on August 16, 1840, Emerson writes, "[Margaret Fuller] taxed me on both your parts with a certain inhospitality of soul inasmuch as you were both willing to be my friends in the full & sacred sense & I remained apart, critical, & after many interviews still a stranger. I count & weigh, but do not love." Emerson conceded some truth in Fuller's accusations, but he still defended his form of friendship. As he tells Sturgis in the same letter, "I confess to the fact of cold & imperfect intercourse, but not to the impeachment of my will and not to the deficiency of my affection. If I count & weigh, I love also." As this letter indicates, the sort of friendship which Emerson enjoyed with Ward was not enough for Fuller and Sturgis; instead, they desired an emotional closeness that Emerson was either unwilling or unable to give.

As his letters to Fuller and Sturgis demonstrate, Emerson urged his women friends to accept his desire to remain emotionally distant. In his August 16 letter to Sturgis, Emerson writes:
You & I should only be friends on imperial terms. We are both too proud to be fond & too true to feign [. ] But I dare not engage my peace so far as to make you necessary to me as I can easily see any establishment of habitual intercourse would do, when the first news I may hear is that you have found in some heaven foreign to me your mate, & my beautiful castle is exploded to shivers.  

Confessing at least one of the reasons for his fear of intimacy, Emerson states that he dares not make her "necessary" to him because she may find a "mate" and leave him. He fears loss and rejection so deeply that he would prefer to keep their relationship at an emotionally safe distance; thus, he decides that they should only be friends on "imperial terms."

At this point, one should consider the probable psychological reasons for Emerson's rather extreme fear of loss and abandonment. Although he was only thirty-seven years old in 1840, Emerson was well acquainted with the pain of loss and death. He was only eight years old when his father, William Emerson, died in 1811. As a result of this personal tragedy, the Emerson family spent many years on the edge of poverty, depending largely on the charity of church and family and on the income Mrs. Emerson gained by taking in boarders. According to Allen, the death of Emerson's father combined with the death of his grandfather, John Haskins, in 1814 "to upset the boy's confidence in the permanence of his world."
Unfortunately for Emerson, similar losses would occur throughout his life. His first wife, Ellen Tucker, died in 1831, less than two years after their marriage. Similarly, his brothers Edward and Charles died in 1834 and 1836 respectively. The cumulative effect of this much sadness and death is not difficult to imagine. By the time he would discuss the possibilities of intimacy and friendship with Fuller and her circle in 1840, Emerson had personally known the pain of loss, and he was naturally hesitant to accept the emotional vulnerability that occurs in an intimate relationship.

Despite Fuller's and Sturgis's understandable complaints about Emerson's emotional distance, Emerson did make an effort, in his own fashion, to grow close to this group. In a letter to Fuller, he describes his efforts to overcome his natural "flinty way." He writes:

Can one be glad of an affection which he knows not how to return? I am....I say this not to you only, but to the four persons who seemed to offer me love at the same time....Yet I did not deceive myself with thinking that the old bars would suddenly fall. No, I knew that if I could cherish my dear romance, I must treat it gently, forbear it long, - worship, not use it, - and so at long last by piety I might be tempered & annealed to bear contact & conversation as well as mixed natures should."

Ralph Rusk identifies the "four persons" as Fuller, Sturgis,
Barker and Ward. Emerson did, therefore, suggest that with time and effort he may be able to tear down "the old bars" and achieve intimacy, but for whatever reason, Emerson's efforts were not enough to satisfy Fuller.

Although there is not enough evidence to say with certainty, Carl Strauch and Allen have suggested that the tension arose from the fact that Fuller desired an erotic element to the relationship. This sort of suggestion, however, is difficult to prove, and Fuller scholars generally dispute the controversial charge. For example, in her biography of Fuller, Paula Blanchard writes that to "suggest that Margaret was in love with Emerson is to risk perpetrating one of our twentieth-century vulgarities." According to Blanchard, an erotic connection between Emerson and Fuller was unlikely because "Margaret had learned to sublimate her sexual feelings early in life." On the other hand, Fuller clearly wanted more of Emerson than he was willing to give, and there is evidence to support Allen's charge that "Margaret Fuller was in love with [Emerson]." In his journal entry for September 26, 1840, Emerson writes a frustrated speech to an unnamed person; the editors of Emerson's journals state that this passage is written about "a recent declaration of love for Emerson by Margaret Fuller." Emerson writes:

You would have me love you. What shall I love? Your body? The suppositions disgusts you. What you have thought & said? Well, whilst you were thinking and saying them, but not now. I see no possibility of
loving any thing but what now is, & is becoming; your courage, your enterprise, your budding affection, your opening thought, your prayer, I can love, - but what else?

Two points in this letter stand out. First, Emerson and Fuller clearly had discussed the possibility of an intimate relationship, one which would move from "friendship" to love or in which love would constitute an essential dimension of the friendship. Even though the possibility of physical relations "disgusts" Fuller, she certainly appears to have wanted more than mere friendship. Secondly, Emerson's position in this discussion is consistent with his preference for intellectual, emotionally distant friendships. He states that he can only love the intellectual and spiritual aspects of her nature: "thoughts," "words," "courage," "enterprise" and "affection." In the defensive tone which also appears in "Friendship," Emerson essentially asks Fuller a simple question: "What do you want from me?" Emerson, of whom Bronson Alcott had said "His sympathies are all intellectual....He is an eye more than a heart, and intellect more than a soul," simply could not accommodate these demands for intimacy.

By 24 October, Emerson had clearly tired of Fuller's incessant and intrusive demands for intimacy, and he wrote a letter stating in no uncertain terms that he wanted their relationship to regain a respectful distance. In a angry and defensive tone, Emerson complains, "sometimes you appeal to sympathies I have not." Emerson demands a return to their
original relationship; he enjoys Fuller's intellectual abilities but is repelled by her demands for intimacy. He writes, "I was content & happy to meet on a human footing a woman of sense & sentiment with whom one could exchange reasonable words...That is to me a solid good." Here, again, Emerson states his basic desire to have an intellectual friendship free of any emotional commitment. Fuller has invaded Emerson's sphere of privacy, and he uses this letter to repel her once and for all: "Speak to me of every thing but myself & I will endeavor to make an intelligible reply."

In an unmistakably defensive tone, he tells Fuller that their discussion about the proper nature of friendship is over. He writes, "I ought never to have suffered you to lead me into any conversation or writing on our relation, a topic from which with all persons my Genius ever sternly warns me away." Notice that it is his "Genius" which forces him away not only from intimacy but even any discussion of their relationship. Emerson believes that Fuller's desire for emotional intimacy is somehow a threat to his intellect and his philosophy. He concludes the letter with his final warning to Fuller: "I see very dimly in writing on this topic. It will not prosper with me. Perhaps all my words are wrong. Do not expect it of me again for a very long time." This letter states the extent to which Fuller's emotional demands threatened and angered Emerson.

This period of social activity and its dramatic
conclusion is indicative of Emerson's lifelong difficulty with human relationships. His fear of intimacy was so intense and long-lasting that Emerson came to think of himself as "diffident, shy, proud of having settled it long ago in his mind that he & society must always be nothing to each other." Although Fuller was unable to pierce Emerson's armor of privacy, her demands and arguments helped to cause the Sage of Concord to write "Friendship," a philosophical study of the value of solitude and the nature of human relations.

In addition to reflecting Emerson's personal conflicts, "Friendship" reveals gender tensions in ante-bellum America. As recent feminist scholars such as Dorothy Berkson and Evelyn Greenberger have suggested, Emerson's essay reflects a particularly masculine view of human relations. Thus, Emerson's personal conflicts, which surfaced so dramatically in the summer of 1840, represent an extreme case that points to general gender problems in ante-bellum America.

According to his 24 October letter, Emerson believed that his conflict with Fuller was the result of some fundamental difference in their natures:

There is a difference in our constitution. We use a different rhetoric[.] It seems as if we had been born & bred in different nations. You say you understand me wholly. You cannot communicate yourself to me. I hear the words sometimes but remain a stranger to your state
Although he never specifically attributes the "difference" to gender, this belief is implicit in his tone. In this letter, Emerson suggests that he and Fuller have fundamentally different world views. They have conflicting expectations about the nature of friendship and are, ultimately, unable to communicate their desires. Although Emerson used this "difference" primarily as an excuse to limit their relationship, recent scholarship has drawn a portrait of ante-bellum America which suggests that men and women did indeed have conflicting views about the proper form of friendship.

The social historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has shown that the women of this time period were used to emotional closeness and expected that from a friendship; thus, Fuller's complaints about Emerson's unwillingness to accept intimacy are understandable for a woman raised in the early nineteenth century. Based on her extensive study of women's diaries, letters and other manuscript evidence, Smith-Rosenberg asserts that women of the early nineteenth century commonly formed "long-lived, intimate, loving friendships." Because of the segregation and "rigid gender-role differentiation" within American society in this period, women formed "supportive networks" that resulted in friendships of profound duration and emotional intensity. Although Smith-Rosenberg suggests that this pattern of intimate friendships among women diminished in the latter nineteenth-century, it was
certainly a factor in the emotional lives of women in the early to mid 1800's. According to Smith-Rosenberg's work, women naturally expected a friendship to involve mutual support, intimacy and emotional openness. As we have seen, this is exactly what Fuller wanted from Emerson. Because she did not respect conventional gender boundaries, she offered Emerson the sort of intimacy which women of the nineteenth-century commonly enjoyed, but he was either unable or unwilling to engage in this form of friendship.

From the perspective of psychologists and feminist scholars, however, Emerson's hesitancy to engage in intimate friendship becomes more understandable. For example, Dorothy Berkson's revisionist study of the Emerson-Fuller relationship draws from the psychological theories of Carol Gilligan. According to Gilligan, because masculinity is "defined" through separation from the mother, "male gender identity is threatened by intimacy.... Thus males tend to have difficulty with relationships." Furthermore, Gilligan asserts that men avoid intimacy, because they fear "entrapment or betrayal, being caught in a smothering relationship or humiliated by rejection and deceit." For proof that this fear was a factor in Emerson's life, one need only consider the letter to Sturgis, in which he states that he prefers not to become an intimate friend, lest she find another "mate" and destroy his world "to shivers." Based on his reaction to the emotional demands of Fuller and Sturgis in the summer of 1840, Emerson represents a classic example of the male fear
of intimacy which Gilligan describes in her study.

With this fact in mind, the essay "Friendship" assumes greater meaning because it represents Emerson's rhetorical effort to defend philosophically his personal failings and general male fears. Through their repeated demands for intimacy, Fuller and Sturgis have, metaphorically speaking, demanded that Emerson remove his armor of privacy; "Friendship" is his rhetorical attempt to explain his refusal. In essence, he offers a philosophical justification for his personal insecurities. Employing his considerable rhetorical skills, Emerson takes weaknesses and endeavors to portray them as moral and spiritual virtues. For instance, Emerson suggests that his distance and coldness actually represent a spiritual belief in the importance of self and solitude; thus, the doctrines of individualism and self-reliance become the foundations of his transcendentalist philosophy.
CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS OF "FRIENDSHIP"

In March of 1841, all of Emerson's hard work and emotional strain came to fruition when he published his first volume of essays. "Friendship" was the sixth essay in this collection which has often been praised for its "intricate interrelationship of parts." Through its reflection of the inner life of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Friendship" adds depth and meaning to other essays in the volume, such as "Self-Reliance," "Love" and "Circles." This tangible result of Emerson's relationships with Fuller, Sturgis, Barker and Ward represents a unique opportunity to study the manner in which Emerson's personal life affected his philosophy and his writing. The emotionally draining events of the summer of 1841 caused Emerson to reevaluate his personality and his philosophy, and the essay "Friendship" represents possibly our best opportunity to understand the conclusions to which Emerson came.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of "Friendship" is the genuine warmth which Emerson shows for his subject. He speaks glowingly of his friends and rejoices in the thought of social companionship. With an uncharacteristic exuberance, he states that "the whole human family is bathed with an element of love like a fine ether." According to Emerson, all forms
of friendship are worthy of praise: "From the highest degree of passionate love, to the lowest degree of good will, they make the sweetness of life." Friendship is so glorious that Emerson even suggests a divine aspect to the relationship:

I awoke this morning with a devout thanksgiving for my friends, the old and the new. Shall I not call God, the Beautiful, who daily showeth himself so to me in his gifts?

These are exactly the sort of words that one would expect from the man who called himself a "worshipper of friendship"; the tone is one of unmistakable love and joy.

Much of Emerson's enthusiasm, however, is quite poignant in the sense that it seems specifically directed at his actual friends; it appears that, in response to their many criticisms Emerson is asserting his love of friendship. When one considers the extent to which Emerson's friends complained about his "bloodless" personality, it is surprising to note the vehemence with which he praises friendship. As a matter of fact, he begins the essay with what appears to be a personal response to any who have doubted his love: "we have a great deal more kindness than is ever spoken." Defending himself, Emerson makes a point of saying that it is possible to admire and love friends without continually verbalizing the emotion:

How many we see in the street, or sit with in church, whom though silently, we warmly rejoice to be with. Read the language of these wandering
eye-beams. The heart knoweth.87

One may, according to Emerson, appreciate and love one's friends in a silent and distant manner. This form of friendship may not be readily apparent, but "the heart knoweth." To all who have doubted his love, Emerson signals an unspoken closeness.

Emerson begins the essay with a description of the positive, social characteristics of friendship. According to Emerson, affectionate relationships tend to improve the individual's personality and generally bring about "the sweetness of life." In an effort to express dramatically the personal benefits that a new friendship can produce, Emerson describes the positive effects which occur upon the entrance of an "commended stranger":

We talk better than we are wont. We have the nimblest fancy, a richer memory, and our dumb devil has taken leave for the time. For long hours we can continue a series of sincere, graceful, rich communications, drawn from the oldest, secretest experience, so that they who sit by, of our own kinsfolk and acquaintance, shall feel a lively surprise at our unusual powers.88

Friendship "exalts conversion" and enables the individual to display his "best" social skills. Imagination and charm increase significantly in pleasant, social situations. The individual behaves so gracefully that onlookers are shocked by the "unusual powers" that appear as a result of a new,
Creative and artistic impulses are, according to Emerson, some of the many positive effects of friendship. He states that "our intellectual and active powers increase with our affection." Interestingly, Emerson seems to concede that friendship may produce thought even more effectively than intellectual study. Emerson states that although "years of [scholarly] meditation" cannot supply "one good thought or happy expression," one need only "write a letter to a friend, - and, forthwith, troops of gentle thoughts invest themselves, on every hand, with chosen words." Through friendship, the individual experiences "new thoughts" and increased imaginative abilities, which often result in artistic inspiration: Speaking of friends, he states:

These are not stark and stiffened persons, but the new born poetry of God, - poetry without stop, - hymn, ode, and epic, poetry still flowing, and not yet caked in dead books with annotation and grammer, but Apollo and the Muses chanting still.

Friendship is a vital element and can serve as an active source of creativity and spiritual life. To Emerson, his friends are his Muses and are thus the source of his imagination.

According to Emerson, "there are two elements that go to the composition of friendship." Although both of these characteristics are "sovereign" and of equal importance, Emerson begins with "Truth," the quality which
allows for complete sincerity and intellectual honesty. With the element of truth, a friend becomes "a man so real and equal that I may drop even those most undermost garment of dissimulation, courtesy, and second thought...and may deal with him with the simplicity and wholeness with which one chemical atom meets another." In discussing this feature of friendship, Emerson shows the great value of a tender relationship. He states, "when a man becomes dear to me I have touched the goal of fortune." Friendship is a vital part of any individual's life, because it ultimately offers "aid and comfort through all the relations and passages of life and death." Through the elements of Truth and Tenderness, Emerson believes that Friends will develop a mutual sincerity and openness that will eventually result in the most intimate of spiritual unions.

In his extensive discussion of the value of Truth in friendship, Emerson makes some noteworthy assertions. Confessing to "an extreme tenderness" on the subject, Emerson goes so far as to suggest a transcendental quality in friendship. According to Emerson, through friendship one might find a kind of solution to the metaphysical problem of identity; in a friend, the individual may actually find a spiritual counterpart:

I who alone am, I who see nothing in nature whose existence I can affirm with equal evidence to my own, behold now the semblance of my being in all
its height, variety and curiosity, reiterated in a foreign form; so that a friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.97

Through friendship, Emerson suggests that the "Not Me" may actually become the "Me." This Transcendental connection is possible because, as Emerson has already noted, friendship is a divine relationship:

My friends have come to me unsought. The great God gave them to me. By oldest right, by the divine affinity of virtue with itself, I find them, or rather, not I, but the Deity in me and in them, both deride and cancel the thick walls of character, relation, age, sex and circumstance, at which he usually connives, and now makes many one.98

The divinity in each individual is able to recognize itself in others; thus, friendship is actually a spiritual way of uniting individuals. Emerson writes that the friend "who hears me, who understands me, becomes mine, - a possession for all time."99 This spiritual connection represents perfect unity and sincerity and is thus the final result of the element of Truth in friendship.

In the midst of this seemingly rapturous description of the joys of friendship, however, Emerson subtly expresses feelings of ambivalence. Admitting that "friendship, like the immortality of the soul, is too good to be believed,"100 Emerson overtly voices his concern that most socially oriented friendships are shallow, deceptive and of little
permanent spiritual value. Even in his initially euphoric scenario of the joys of a "commended stranger" one may detect a definite ambivalence in Emerson's tone. After describing the positive effects of friendship, Emerson states: "Pleasant are these jets of affection which relume a young world for me again." Mary Rucker suggests, in her essay "Emerson's 'Friendship' as Process," that this metaphor represents Emerson's first subtle suggestion of his ambivalent feelings about the possibilities of friendship: "His choice of the expression 'jets of affection' with its intimation of ebb and flow reflects his awareness of a lack of permanence in friendship and lends an emotional overtone that is not in harmony with the dominant tone of celebration." Furthermore, by placing this metaphor directly after his scenario of the "commended stranger," Emerson might be expressing his doubts about the permanent spiritual value of traditional friendships, which stress the social (i.e., artificial) aspects of human relations.

Despite Emerson's brightly optimistic assertions of his love of friendship, he does confess some doubts. Admitting that even "in the golden hour of friendship, we are surprised with shades of suspicion and unbelief," Emerson overtly voices his concern that most socially oriented friendships are shallow and deceptive. In Emerson's view, "we doubt that we bestow on our hero the virtues in which he shines, and afterwards worship the form to which we have ascribed this divine inhabitation." With this passage in mind,
one should note a troubling irony in Emerson's initial description of the "commended stranger":

Of a commended stranger, only the good report is told by others, only the good and new is heard by us. He stands for humanity. He is, what we wish. Having imagined and invested him, we ask how we should stand...with such a man.105

Mary Rucker notes that even though this passage appears to be optimistic about the role of friendship, "the assertion that 'only' the good report is heard, that the stranger is what 'we wish,' and that he is 'imagined' and 'invested' implies a fallacy in the relationship." 106 According to Emerson, we "invest" our friends with attributes and then worship that image, which results in a relationship that is superficial at best. Rucker believes that, in his scenario of the "commended stranger," Emerson "inadvertently reveals...his disappointment in human relationships. Thus, what begins as an illustration of positive qualities becomes an illustration of negative qualities." 107

Emerson's concern about the ultimate worth of traditional, socially oriented friendships becomes quite explicit in the seventh paragraph, in which he creates a metaphor of the human heart. Returning to the "jets of affection" imagery, he states that the "systole and diastole of the heart are not without their analogy in the ebb and flow of love." 108 Just as the heart contracts and expands in a rhythmic fashion, human relations tend to "ebb and flow." Finding great significance in this passage, Wynn Thomas suggests that in this analogy, Emerson confronts the fact that
his social affections appear and disappear "with the predictable regularity of a physiological process."\(^{109}\) Because friendships are often transitory and disappointing, Emerson concludes, in an extremely logical manner, that "the soul does not respect men as it respects itself," and "all persons underlie the same condition of an infinite remoteness."\(^{110}\) Before one can reasonably expect to engage in a lasting, spiritual friendship, one must recognize and celebrate the predominance of the soul.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that Emerson abandons traditional relationships in order to search for a more spiritual form of friendship. Because of his recurring disappointment with socially oriented friendships, Emerson appears to make a conscious decision to turn from these pleasures and consider a higher sort of relationship:

> The attractions of this subject are not to be resisted, and I leave, for the time, all account of subordinate social benefit, to speak of that select and sacred relation which is a kind of absolute, and which even leaves the language of love suspicious and common, so much is this purer, and nothing so much divine.\(^{111}\)

In this passage, Emerson leaves behind his fondness for social relations and states his higher goals. He seeks a relationship so "pure" and "sacred" that it surpasses love and becomes a universal "absolute," a union of "divine" nature. Clearly, this spiritual form of friendship will not be achieved in the traditional manner, so Emerson proceeds to discuss the way in which an individual might attain a divine
friendship.

Although Emerson still claims to admire the experience of friendship, he, nevertheless, shifts his focus and begins to insist vehemently on the primacy of the individual self. Speaking of a hypothetical comrade, Emerson states:

Let him not cease an instant to be himself. The only joy I have in his being mine, is that the not mine is mine. It turns the stomach, it blots the daylight; where I looked for a manly furtherance or at least a manly resistance, to find a mush of concession. Better be a nettle in the side of your friend than his echo. The condition which high friendship demands is ability to do without it.... There must be very two, before there can be very one.\(^{112}\)

This preference for distance and "manly resistance" sounds much like Emerson's friendship with Sam Ward, a relationship which never made any emotional demands on the participants. According to Emerson, the great problem of friendship is that "all association must be a compromise, and, what is worst, the very flower...of each of the beautiful natures disappears as they approach each other."\(^ {113}\)

As two individuals come together in friendship, the possibility exists that they will lose their individuality in the inevitable intermingling of souls. As Emerson states, "every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of a second person, hypocrisy begins."\(^ {114}\) Rather than participate in any form of dishonest associations, Emerson comments that
he would prefer to be "alone to the end of the world, rather than that my friend should overstep, by a word or a look, his real sympathy."\textsuperscript{115}

Even though he regrets losing the common, "household joy" of social relationships, Emerson argues that his efforts to preserve and develop the self will result in more than adequate compensation. As he states, "By persisting in your path, though you forfeit the little, you gain the great. You become pronounced."\textsuperscript{116} Through an uncompromising recognition of the primacy of the self, each individual is able to develop and study his own visions. Emerson does admit, however, in a touchingly human manner, that he feels great personal conflict about his decision to forsake simple, social pleasures:

It would indeed give me a certain household joy to quit this lofty seeking, this spiritual astronomy, or search of stars, and come down to warm sympathies with you; but then I know well I shall mourn always the vanishing of my mighty Gods.\textsuperscript{117}

This passage is an example of Emerson's rhetorical genius; instead of admitting that his unwillingness to commit to an intimate relationship is a personal flaw, he suggests that all relationships are trivial in comparison to his solitary spiritual quest of the "mighty gods." In Emerson's mind, all one really forfeits by seeking the self are the "false relations" of the world. Throughout his life, Emerson had little respect for the value of traditional social relations and generally considered society to be hopelessly artificial
and potentially damaging to the individual spirit. He once complained in his journal that "in an evening party you have no variety of persons, but only one person. For, say what you will, to whom you will, - they shall all render without heart, - a conversation of the lips. So is a soiree a heap of lies; false itself it makes falsehoods." Social relations may be pleasurable, in a worldly sense, but Emerson believes that they have little lasting value. By seeking the self, one may avoid the "leagues of friendship with cheap persons... rash and foolish alliances which no God attends." More importantly, the individual self has the room to grow and become "pronounced," which will eventually lead to the higher forms of companionship which Emerson hopes to discover.

Instead of the "modish and worldly alliances," which he perceives to be the unfortunate norm in modern society, Emerson desires a small fraternity of spiritually developed souls, with whom he can meet on a higher plane. Although he worries that such spiritual friends "are dreams and fables," Emerson states that "a sublime hope cheers ever the faithful heart, that elsewhere, in other regions of the universal power, souls are now acting, enduring, and daring, which can love us, which we can love." After the necessary period of solitary communion with the self, Emerson suggests that spiritually enlightened individuals will join in a realm of true fraternity: "when we are finished men, we shall grasp heroic hands in heroic hands." The individual who is "pronounced" will draw to himself "the first-born of the world, - those rare pilgrims whereof only
one or two wander in nature at once, and before whom the vulgar great, show as spectres and shadows merely.\textsuperscript{122}

Emerson encourages solitary spiritual development, because he only wishes to encounter his friends when they are "finished men." The perfection is necessary, because Emerson has an extremely limited role for the friend. He states that he does not want to chat with his friends about "news," "politics" and "neighborly conveniences"; Emerson asserts that he can find "cheaper companions" to share the superficial experiences of life. In a statement that seems to refer directly to his actual friends, Emerson asserts:

A new person is to me always a great event, and hinders me from sleep. I have had such fine fancies lately about two or three persons, as have given me delicious hours; but the joy ends in the day: it yields no fruit. Thought is not born of it; my action is very little modified.\textsuperscript{123}

This comment is the key to understanding the limited role to which Emerson assigns his friends. Emerson believes that the ideal friendship should be a distant relationship, in which the friends only meet on the highest spiritual levels in order to ennoble each other. He expects his friends to inspire him and positively affect his spiritual state. In keeping with his idealistic and spiritual view of human relations, Emerson only wants the best from his friend. He wishes to "worship" his friend's "superiorities" and "hoard" his noble thoughts. From his friend, whom he prefers to think of as a "spirit," Emerson primarily desires "a
message, a thought, a sincerity."

Friendship is, therefore, acceptable only if both participants are able firmly to retain their individual selves: "Let it be an alliance of two large, formidable natures, mutually beheld, mutually feared." We should give friends room and allow them to have their own thoughts. Believing that only the "magnanimous" are truly capable of friendship, Emerson describes his idea of the proper sort of friend:

Reverence is a great part of it. Treat your friend as a spectacle. Of course, if he be a man, he has merits that are not yours, and that you cannot honor, if you must needs hold him close to your person. Stand aside. Give those merits room. Let them mount and expand.

Each individual has unique merits, and according to Emerson, the true friend will never hinder another individual's spiritual development. Emerson sternly warns all friends to "leave this touching and clawing" and give each other room to grow: "Be not so much a friend that you can never know his peculiar energies, like fond mammas who shut up their boy in the house until he is almost grown a girl." Although this may seem to be a cold approach to friendship, Emerson asserts that daily social contact is trivial compared to the higher intercourse that is possible between two highly developed spirits. Speaking of his friend, he states, "to a great heart he will still be a stranger in a thousand particulars, that he may come near in the holiest
ground." Only children "regard a friend as property"; Emerson suggests that "we desecrate noble and beautiful souls by intruding on them," and prefers, instead, to wait for a truly spiritual connection, which is the "pure nectar of God."  

Because he recognizes the extreme unlikelihood of achieving this goal of fraternity among the "one or two" enlightened individuals, Emerson concludes that "friendship, like the immortality of the soul, is too good to be believed." With this doubt in mind, he praises the concept of what Wynn Thomas calls a "one-sided friendship." Emerson reasons that if the individual is sufficiently spiritually developed, the other party in a relationship is not really necessary. As Emerson states, "I do then with my friends as I do with my books. I would have them where I can find them, but I seldom use them. We must have society on our own terms, and admit or exclude it on the slightest cause." Through his acceptance of the "one-sided friendship," Emerson offers the final defense of his life of solitude and individualism. Attempting to show the spiritual heights that an individual may achieve by focusing on the self, Emerson states that "it has seemed to me lately more possible than I knew, to carry a friendship greatly, on one side, without due correspondence on the other." Apparently not troubled by the fact that the "receiver [of his friendship]is not capacious," Emerson points out that "it never troubles the sun that some of his rays fall wide and vain into ungrateful space." In this amazing
statement, Emerson attempts to describe the inestimable value of the individual self; because he sought solitude and studied his own "visions," Emerson believes that he is now able to shed spiritual light on his friends in much the same way that the sun shares its power with the "ungrateful" world. Even though conventional wisdom views "unrequited love" as a "disgrace," Emerson asserts that "true love transcends instantly the unworthy object, and dwells and broods on the eternal." From his transcendent position, Emerson believes that he can now "educate the crude and cold companion" and thus "soar and burn with the gods of the empyrean."

Actually, we should not be at all surprised that Emerson should come to this conclusion, because many of his friendships were quite one-sided. For example, in his relationships with both Thoreau and Fuller, Emerson was the acknowledged mentor and the other merely the pupil. He tended to look at these "friends" in quite possessive terms, often referring to Thoreau as "My Henry." Similarly, Emerson saw Margaret Fuller merely as a willing vessel which he could fill with his wisdom and spiritual insight. For proof of this tendency, one need only consider the fact that upon recording Fuller's death in his journal, Emerson writes, "In her I have lost my audience." Unable or unwilling to commit to an intimate personal relationship, Emerson claims the role of revered and isolated sage, a position which will allow him to engage in exactly the sort of distant, intellectual relationship he desired.
CONCLUSION

Although the psychological and philosophical reasons behind Emerson's preference for an "intimately impersonal" relationship are certainly understandable, the views expressed in "Friendship" do raise serious questions about Emerson's Transcendentalist view of human relations. Emerson may have been completely satisfied with an impersonal friendship, but as I have shown, many of his friends considered his form of friendship to be painfully inadequate. Thus, Emerson's life suggests that radical individualism and self-reliance, which are the foundations of his Transcendentalist philosophy, have the potential to result in great human pain.

As he honestly admits in "Friendship," Emerson's idealistic and spiritual view of friendships leads him to desire only the best of his friends. Conversely, he has little use for friends who fail to live up to his high standards. Emerson's essay "Circles" (1840) also shares this attitude; as Joyce Warren notes, the essay "portrays how the individual's constant quest to develop the self impels him to disregard other people." In this essay, which strongly echoes the views of "Friendship," Emerson writes:

The continued effort to raise himself above himself, to work a pitch above his last height,
betrays itself in a man's relations... A man's growth is seen in the successive choirs of his friends. For every friend whom he loses for a truth, he gains a better.... Every personal consideration that we allow costs us heavenly state. We sell the thrones of angels for a short and turbulent pleasure. How often must we learn this lesson? Men cease to interest us when we find their limitations. 138

This passage aptly expresses the problem of Emerson's idealistic philosophy of human relations. He views friends only as a means to "raise himself above himself," and when he discovers his friend's weaknesses or "limitations" the friend no longer interests him, which would presumably end the relationship. A friendship lost in the pursuit of truth is a necessary and acceptable sacrifice in the individual's quest for spiritual growth. Human relations, in Emerson's opinion, should remain distant and impersonal, because all "personal" considerations harm the individual's quest for the "heavenly state."

As Emerson's form of friendship indicates, the doctrine of self-reliance tends to lead the Transcendentalist to ignore human pain. In "Friendship," Emerson states that friendship "must not surmise or provide for infirmity." 139 Not only does Emerson want the best of his friend, he will not tolerate any form of weakness. A friend's "infirmity" does not lead to high thoughts, so Emerson wants no part of it. This somewhat cavalier attitude toward human suffering
clearly appears in the disapproval many Transcendentalists, including Emerson, felt about the concept of charity. Emerson's emphasis on self-reliance simply will not allow him to stoop to aid another's infirmity.

As I have shown, many of Emerson's friends criticized his "bloodless" form of friendship, but the most eloquent criticism of Emerson and his Transcendental view of human relations comes from none other than Lydian Emerson. As I have already pointed out, Lydian suffered throughout her marriage because of her husband's adoration of the spirit of his first wife, Ellen. Emerson seemed to prefer an idealized, spiritual relationship with Ellen to the actual one he shared with Lydian. In the 1840's Lydian Emerson expressed her pain by bitterly attacking her husband's cold philosophy:

Loathe and shun the sick. They are in bad taste, and may untune us for writing the poem floating through our mind....

Despise the unintellectual, and make them feel that you do by not noticing their remark and question lest they presume to intrude into your conversation....

It is mean and weak to seek for sympathy; it is mean and weak to give it....Never wish to be loved. Who are you to expect that? Besides, the great never value being loved....

If you scorn happiness...you have done your whole duty to your noble self-sustained,
impeccable, infallible Self.  

As Lydian Emerson brilliantly shows satire is often the most effective tool for exposing flaws. Although Emerson's form of Transcendentalism sounds like an appealing and robust philosophy, Lydian asserts that its effects on actual people are less impressive. Emerson's life and works suggest that the Transcendentalist does, indeed, "loathe" the weak and "despise the unintellectual," and he would certainly never offer or request sympathy. After all, as Lydian Emerson points out, in Emerson's mind a "great" soul would "never wish to be loved"; all that matters is the development of the individual self.

Lydian's complaint is particularly insightful in the sense that it exposes the fundamental conflict in the Transcendentalist view of human relations. As a belief system, Transcendentalism was built on the cornerstones of individualism and self-reliance. In his essay on "Self-Reliance," Emerson asserts that "the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude." Similarly, he writes that "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart, is true for all men, - that is genius." These comments are indicative of the general Transcendentalist belief that true genius occurs when the individual follows his or her own light to the exclusion of all others. Because the "other" represents a potential threat to the self-reliant individual, society becomes anathema to the Transcendentalist. According to Emerson,
Society is a joint-stock company in which the members agree for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. Thus, Emerson holds up self-reliance as the individual's bulwark against the pressures of a society that demands conformity. For Transcendentalists, self-reliance was an absolute necessity, because all truth lay within the individual. As Emerson notes in "The Oversoul," the solidarity and competeness of the self was an issue beyond question:

Let man then learn the revelation of all nature, and all thought to his heart; this, namely; that the Highest dwells with him; the sources of nature are in his own mind....But if he would know what the great God speaketh, he must "go into the closet and shut the door," as Jesus said....He must greatly listen to himself, withdrawing himself from all the accents of other men's devotion.

The individual is compete in himself; no other is needed. Quite the contrary, other people merely serve to confuse. According to Emerson, the self-reliant individual was fully capable of achieving spiritual enlightenment with no help from the "other." This was the goal toward which Transcendentalists aspired.
From this pattern of belief, however, an obvious question arises: How do people with such values ever achieve friendship and intimacy? Herein lies the value of "Friendship." Emerson's life and his essay both serve to highlight this basic tension in the Transcendentalist approach to human relations. As Emerson's personal and philosophical lives demonstrate, the conflict between self-reliant individualism and the mutual dependence and support of friendship becomes a basic issue which the Transcendentalist must resolve.

Emerson's experiences in the summer of 1840 demonstrate his belief that, to a certain extent, friendship poses a threat to the core beliefs of Transcendentalism (i.e., individualism and self-reliance). The issues of intimacy, vulnerability and mutual dependence, which are the very bases of friendship, obviously conflict with Emerson's self-reliant belief that "the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude." 146 The experience of friendship challenges Transcendentalism in several ways. For example, as Emerson implied in his essay, friendship may lead to a spiritual union of souls. When he writes that "the Diety... derides[s] and cancels[s] the thick walls of character... and now makes many one," Emerson is suggesting that some spiritual states may only be achieved through unity with others. This possibility would be troubling for the Transcendentalist, because it implies a need for the other. It suggests that the self is not wholly complete.
Similarly, Emerson's statement that a friend can produce more "gentle thoughts" and creative impulses than "years of meditation" conflicts with his belief that the individual need only look inward to hear "what the great God speaketh." Consequently, friendship confronts the Transcendentalist with the possibility that complete individualism is impractical and self-reliance is inadequate.

In both his essay and life, Emerson attempted to embrace friendship, but he failed because he was apparently unable to accommodate the tension between his conflicting desires. As he showed in his joyful embrace of Fuller's circle and in the resulting essay, he did recognize many benefits in friendship, and more importantly, he longed for intimacy. Emerson's journals and letters are replete with rhapsodies about the pleasures of friendship. This praise certainly is reflected in his essay on the subject, which begins with a virtual hymn to the glories of friendship. But with Emerson a trend begins to appear. Despite his initial enjoyment, he retreated from his friendships with Fuller, Sturgis, Thoreau and others. This tendency to withdraw from friendship is certainly reflected in his essay. Despite his praise at the outset of "Friendship," he eventually begins to focus on the self, to the exclusion of all others. For Emerson, the demands for individualism and self-reliance were too strong, and he could not accept the inherent conflict in his beliefs. In his essay and, to a lesser extent, in his life, he finally
retreats to an ideal place, in which he will exist above the pressures of his conflicting desires for intimacy and individualism.

At this point, one should note that, rather than being an insoluble problem for all Transcendentalists, the complete inability to reconcile self and society appears to have been unique to Emerson. As the many criticisms of Emerson's "bloodless" form of friendship suggest, other members of the Transcendentalist movement were able to accept the tension and accommodate their conflicting desires for friendship and self. In Emerson, however, the fears of loss, rejection and intimacy resulted in a personality that deliberately avoided human closeness. In his essay "Friendship," Emerson defends himself from the frequent charges of emotional coldness by arguing that he avoids "neighborly conveniences" because he prefers to meet his friends on a spiritual plane. This emphasis on the spirit was apparently enough to satisfy Emerson, but many of his friends in the Transcendentalist movement disagreed with Emerson's position that one must refrain from the "household joys" of social relationships in order to attain the higher forms of spirituality. Fuller and Sturgis, as I have shown, were deeply saddened by the "inhospitality of soul" that caused Emerson to remain "apart, critical, & after many interviews still a stranger." The emotionally intense debate of the summer of 1840 occurred because these two women attempted to convince Emerson that it was possible to engage in
intimate friendships and still maintain the sanctity of the individual self.

Similarly, Thoreau shows in *Walden* that he would have enjoyed some companionship and personal intimacy with Emerson. Many nights he waited in vain, hoping for a simple visit and chat with his friend. But this sort of contact was too trivial for Emerson, who asserts in "Friendship" that he has no time or desire to engage in "neighborly conveniences." Thoreau, on the other hand, found great spiritual value in the simple pleasures of friendship. Although he was certainly one of the great individualists in the Transcendentalist movement, Thoreau saw no insurmountable conflict in his desires for both friendship and self-reliance; quite the contrary, he thought that his periods of solitude and society complemented each other. In *Walden*, he states:

I had more visitors while I lived in the woods than at any other period in my life; I mean that I had some....But fewer came to see me upon trivial business. In this respect, my company was winnowed by my mere distance from town. I had withdrawn so far within the great ocean of solitude...that for the most part...only the finest sediment was deposited around me.\(^{148}\)

As Thoreau shows, his independence and self-reliance eliminated much of the trivial forms of social intercourse, the "false relations" which Emerson condemns in "Friendship." His secluded home and individualistic
approach to life resulted in only the "finest" visitors, and Thoreau celebrates their friendship, gladly acknowledging his belief in the spiritual value of companionship. According to Thoreau, the Transcendentalist need not live a life of spiritual solitude, fearing all intrusions upon the sanctity of the individual self. This is a realization that Emerson, Thoreau's mentor and friend, never made. Valuing the individual self above all else, the Sage of Concord refused to endure the inherent risks of an intimate friendship. Instead, Emerson proudly asserted his preference for spiritual relationships, kept his distance from all potential friends and set impossibly high goals for any friendship to achieve.

The student of Emerson is thus left with two conflicting pictures to consider. On the one hand lies the essay "Friendship." With his ingenious rhetoric, Emerson convincingly argues to his friends of 1840, as well as his readers today, that his form of friendship is not flawed and "bloodless" because he fears intimacy; rather, he is a strong individualist boldly seeking spiritual development and the higher forms of friendship which reside therein. On the other hand, one must consider the image of Henry Thoreau. As he movingly admits in Walden, many nights he spent enough time "to milk a whole herd of cows" while waiting for Emerson, his friend, to come by for a visit. This visitor never came, and Thoreau was continually disappointed by the man who called himself "a worshipper of friendship."
"NOTES"


2 Thoreau 424-425.


5 Richardson 299-300.


7 Thoreau 755.

8 Thoreau 759.

9 Thoreau 756.

10 Thoreau 756.

11 Thoreau 764.

12 Thoreau 755.

13 Thoreau 755.

14 Thoreau 761.

15 Thoreau 766-767.

16 Thoreau 767.

17 Thoreau 769.

18 Harding 300.


24 Allen 283.


26 Allen 283-284.

27 JMN, V, 188.


30 Rusk, II, 330.


32 McNulty 391.

33 McNulty 393.

34 McNulty 390.

35 Allen 351.

36 Allen 339.


38 Norton 19.

[Notes to pages 13 - 21]

40 Norton 41.
41 Norton 16.
43 Norton 21-22.
44 Allen 351.
45 Rusk, II, 327.
46 Rusk, II, 333.
47 JMN, III, 25.
48 Allen 147.
49 Allen 148.
50 Allen 306.
51 Allen 351.
52 Rusk, II, 325.
53 Rusk, II, 325.
54 Rusk, II, 324-325.
55 Allen 15 & 34.
56 Allen 28.
57 Rusk, II, 351.
58 Strauch 70.
59 Allen 352.
60 Blanchard 102.
61 Blanchard 102.
62 Allen 352.
63 JMN, VII, 400.
64 JMN, VII, 400.
[Notes to pages 21-29]

66 Rusk, II, 352.

67 Rusk, II, 352.

68 Rusk, II, 353.

69 Rusk, II, 352.

70 Rusk, II, 353.

71 Rusk, II, 351.

72 Dorothy Berkson, "'Born and Bred in Different Nation': Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson," Patrons and Proteges (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988).


74 Rusk, II, 353.


76 Smith-Rosenberg 1.

77 Smith-Rosenberg 9.


79 Gilligan 8.

80 Gilligan 42.

81 Allen XXIV.


83 Emerson Essays 159.

84 Emerson Essays 159-160.

85 Emerson Essays 161.

86 Emerson Essays 159.

87 Emerson Essays 159.
[Notes to pages 29 - 36]

88 Emerson Essays 160-161.
89 Emerson Essays 160.
90 Emerson Essays 160.
91 Emerson Essays 162.
92 Emerson Essays 168.
93 Emerson Essays 168.
94 Emerson Essays 170.
95 Emerson Essays 170.
96 Emerson Essays 171.
97 Emerson Essays 169-170.
98 Emerson Essays 162.
99 Emerson Essays 161.
100 Emerson Essays 163.
101 Emerson Essays 161.
102 Mary Rucker, "Emerson's 'Friendship' As Process" Emerson Society Quarterly 69 (1972), 237.
103 Emerson Essays 163.
104 Emerson Essays 163.
105 Emerson Essays 160.
106 Rucker 237.
107 Rucker 237.
108 Emerson Essays 163.
110 Emerson Essays 163.
111 Emerson Essays 167.
112 Emerson Essays 173.
113 Emerson Essays 166.
[Notes to pages 36 - 45]

114 Emerson Essays 168.
115 Emerson Essays 173.
116 Emerson Essays 177.
117 Emerson Essays 179.
118 JMN, VII, 132.
119 Emerson Essays 177.
120 Emerson Essays 177.
121 Emerson Essays 177.
122 Emerson Essays 177.
123 Emerson Essays 163.
124 Emerson Essays 174.
125 Emerson Essays 173.
126 Emerson Essays 174.
127 Emerson Essays 174.
128 Emerson Essays 174.
129 Emerson Essays 174.
130 Emerson Essays 163.
131 Thomas 57.
132 Emerson Essays 178.
133 Emerson Essays 179.
134 Emerson Essays 179.
135 Emerson Essays 180.
136 Emerson Essays 180.
138 Emerson Essays 254
139 Emerson Essays 180.
140 Emerson Essays 43.

Emerson Essays 44.

Emerson Essays 37.

Emerson Essays 41.

Emerson Essays 243.

Emerson Essays 44.

Rusk, II, 225.

Thoreau 340.

Rusk, II, 300.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VITA

Wallace Coleman Green, Jr.


While attending the College of William & Mary the author worked as night Administrator for the Rita Walsh Adult Skills Program. September 1992, he joined the faculty of Thomas Nelson Community College as an Adjunct English Instructor.