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# STUDY ON RALPH WALDO EMERSON'S PROSE IDEALS RESEARCH

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## INTRODUCTION

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82), an American writer, poet, and popular philosopher, began his professional life as a Unitarian pastor in Boston. However, he went on to become a well-known lecturer and the author of such writings as "Self-Reliance," "History," "The Over-Soul," and "Fate." Emerson created a process metaphysics, a mood epistemology, and a "existentialist" self-improvement ethics by drawing on German and English Romanticism, Neoplatonism, Kantianism, and Hinduism. He had an impact on generations of Americans, including his friend Henry David Thoreau, John Dewey, and Friedrich Nietzsche in Europe, who took up topics like power, fate, the uses of poetry and history, and the criticism of Christianity.

## EMERSON, RALPH WALDO (1803–82)

Essayist, journal keeper, lyceum lecturer, and creator of the American transcendentalist school of thought—a peculiar fusion of romanticism and transcendental idealism—was Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson is grouped among nineteenth-century American Renaissance authors like

Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allen Poe, Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman as well as other writers with ties to Concord, Massachusetts, where he was raised, such Henry David Thoreau. Emerson's influence has historically had a significant impact because of how his 1837 speech "The American Scholar" published what Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. termed "America's Intellectual Declaration of Independence." Emerson's work became the benchmark by which authors like Thoreau, Melville, and Hawthorne were judged, and for better or worse, Emersonian transcendentalism became a defining category that other writers were perceived as sympathising with or reacting against (Matthiessen 1941).

Emerson, who was a prominent public intellectual in the USA and never went without readers among his own countrymen, can be usefully compared to nineteenth-century European thinkers and viewed as a member of a larger group of philosophers who were debating the issues surrounding emerging modernity. Emerson's thought goes beyond his own cultural context; rather than "confining" him to "the American terrain," he "belongs to that highbrow cast of North Atlantic cultural critics who set the agenda and the terms for understanding the modern world" and should be read along with his European philosophical counterparts, such as Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, and Friedrich Nietzsche (West 1989: 11).

Born in Boston in 1803 to Ruth Haskell and Reverend William Emerson, a Unitarian clergyman, Ralph Waldo Emerson has gone by the name Waldo ever since he was in college. Emerson began his career as a Unitarian pastor as well, but he left the church shortly after when he grew to doubt organised religion in general as well as particular rituals like communion and public prayer. He developed a secular profession teaching in lyceums rather than preaching in churches, promoting and enacting his transcendentalism theory and practise to aid people in moving away from conformity and dogmatism and toward more self-reliance and self-trust.

Emerson relocated to Concord, Massachusetts, where he married Lydia Jackson, afterwards known as Lydian, after losing his first wife, Ellen Tucker, to TB. Concord's early years were a time of intense intellectual activity. Emerson started outlining his philosophy in Nature in 1836, the same year he founded the Transcendental Club, a group of like-minded thinkers that would go on to edit the journal The Dial. Emerson and Henry David Thoreau began their enduring and complicated friendship in 1837, the same year he delivered his renowned lecture "The American Scholar." He delivered his contentious "Divinity School Address" at Harvard College in 1838. The two volumes, Articles: First Series and Essays: Second Series, which include the well-known essays "Self-


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Reliance" and "Experience," were published by him in 1841 and 1844, respectively. The "small canon" of Emerson's writings, which includes the works from these years, has traditionally drawn the most attention from academics. However, Emerson continued to write, producing Representative Men in 1850 and The Conduct of Life in 1860. Throughout his life, Emerson also kept a journal, which many people believe to be the majority of his writing. He also gave a series of antislavery speeches between 1844 and 1855 and became more involved in the abolitionist movement publicly. Scholars are now more aware of the overlaps and conflicts between his transcendentalism, his theory and practise of self-reliance, and his views on slavery.

## EMERSON'S TRANSCENDENTALISM

Taking transcendental idealism seriously as a constitutive aspect of Emerson's ideas while acknowledging how it is enacted through his manner of writing as well as through his struggles would help us grasp how transcendentalism plays into Emerson's thought in the best possible way. Emerson's transcendentalism can best be understood by looking at the way he looks. We can understand how essential it was to his own constitutional make-up, his ways of being, perceiving, and thinking when we examine the movement of his eye as it plays out on the words on the page and when we examine the kinds of visual practises that his texts portray. Through the visual activity of "focal distance," which Emerson engages in to mould a particular form of self and citizen, transcendentalism continues to be a crucial component of comprehending Emerson (Mariotti 2009).

Emerson defines idealism as "a manner of looking at things," a transcending mode of perception in which we focus beyond immediate specific material things toward more distant universal horizons, in which we stop being "nearsighted" and instead direct our gaze toward the realm of universal ideals where there is more harmony, balance, and compensation. While Emerson believes that the genuine reality may be discovered in the world of ideals and in consciousness, he portrays the world of the senses and the material world that surrounds us in the immediate foreground of our existence as an appearance, as a shallow, perplexing, and imbalanced realm. Emerson's writings exhibit a propensity to disparage particular items as "disagreeable appearances," "disagreeable particulars," and "trivial particulars" that we should swiftly look beyond because of this hierarchical attitude toward material particulars and universal ideals. He compiles examples of the types of things the idealist should focus his gaze beyond throughout his


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writings, including sensible masses, society, government, poverty, labour, sleep, fear, fortune, tragedy, moaning wives, hard-eyed husbands, pigs, spiders, snakes, pests, mad-houses, prisons, enemies, and the list could go on.

## MAJOR THEMES IN EMERSON'S PHILOSOPHY

### Education

Emerson argues that the scholar is educated by nature, books, and action in "The American Scholar," which he presented as the Phi Beta Kappa Address in 1837. Since it is always there, nature is the first in both time and importance of the three. The ancient precept "Know thyself" and the contemporary precept "Study nature" finally come together to form one maxim. Nature's diversity hides underlying rules that are also laws of the human mind (CW1: 55). The second part of a scholar's education, books, give us access to historical influence. The "sacredness which belongs to the act of creation...to the record" is transferred in a lot of what is passed off as education as plain book worship. The right relationship to reading is not that of a "bookworm" or "bibliomaniac," but rather that of a "creative" reader who uses reading as a catalyst to develop "his own sight of principles" (CW1: 58). When properly used, books "inspire...the active soul" (CW1: 56). Great books are merely records of such inspiration, and Emerson claims that the only reason they have any value is because they have the ability to evoke or capture such states of the soul. In "The Poet," Emerson writes that the "goal" he discovers in nature is "the development of new individuals. or the passing of the soul into higher forms," rather than a massive library (CW3:14).

### Emerson on Slavery and Race

When Chief Justice William Cushing told the jury in the case of former slave Quock Walker that "the idea of slavery" was "inconsistent" with the Massachusetts Constitution's provision that "all men are born free and equal," Massachusetts abolished slavery in that year (Gougeon, 71). When Emerson, at age 23, travelled to the south for his health in the winter of 1827, he first came into contact with slavery. In his journal, he noted the following scene from his time in Tallahassee, Florida:

It's been a fortnight since I went to a Bible Society meeting. The Marshal of the district, who serves as the institution's treasurer, made the somewhat regrettable decision to schedule a special meeting of the Society and a slave auction for the same day and location, with the former taking place in the Government House and the latter in the nearby yard. Therefore, one ear received the joyful


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news of tremendous joy while the other heard "Going gents, Going!" And nearly without changing our stance, we might help transport the Bible to Africa or make a bid for "four children without the mother who had been taken therefrom" (JMN3: 117).

To reveal what black slavery has been, language must be scoured, and the secrets of slaughterhouses and notorious pits must be searched. These men are our benefactors because they produce maize, wine, coffee, tobacco, cotton, sugar, rum, brandy, and other goods for the civilised world while also being kind and happy individuals themselves. When I read about how they got there and are maintained there, my heart breaks. Their brothers had forgotten about their case and had stopped caring.

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

William and Ruth Emerson welcomed Ralph Waldo Emerson into the world on May 25, 1803, in Boston. Emerson's father passed away in 1811, leaving his mother with few resources to raise the family. One of Emerson's siblings had a mental disability, while three of his siblings passed away before they turned thirty. The only other Emerson kid to have a successful career was his older brother William, who went on to practise law in New York City. In Emerson's early years, the family was so poor that he and his brother Edward had to share an overcoat one winter.

Ruth had assistance from her sister-in-law Mary Moody Emerson, who encouraged her young nephew to love school and helped him enrol in the prestigious Boston Latin School at age nine and Harvard University at age fourteen thanks to her influence. At Harvard, Emerson was at best a passing student who was selected as the class poet only after seven other students turned down the invitation. He established a club for public speaking, studied rhetoric, and took home the Boylston oratory prize. Following graduating, he initially worked as a teacher before deciding in 1826 to become a preacher. He first encountered Ellen Tucker, his true love, while preaching in New Hampshire. Emerson was given a significant post at the Second Church of Boston when they got married and made their home in Massachusetts. Emerson's life was permanently changed by Ellen's TB death in 1831.

He quit his position as minister after having his religious conviction completely tested and travelled throughout Europe, visiting Paris and the Italian museums. In England, he met Thomas Carlyle, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He then started a thirty-eight-year intellectual conversation with Carlyle. Emerson's creative phase started when he returned to


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America in 1833 and received an inheritance from his deceased wife. He started giving public lectures on a range of subjects, including natural history, biography, literature, and ethics, once he was released from the demands of the ministry. Public lectures gave him a consistent source of income for the remainder of his career and gradually helped him establish himself as one of America's foremost intellectuals.

## OPTIMIST AND REALIST

One of the most significant American authors of the nineteenth century was Ralph Waldo Emerson. His writings, including his essays, lectures, and poetry, had a tremendous impact on the intellectual and cultural traditions that continue to be essential to our comprehension of American society. From Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson to Robert Frost and William Carlos Williams, he was the source of a poetic tradition. He foresaw a way of thought known as pragmaticism, which has influenced American philosophers including William James, John Dewey, and Richard Rorty. He was a key participant in the transcendentalist movement, a group of writers, thinkers, and social reformers whose ideas helped change American culture between 1830 and 1860, a time of great industrial development and westward expansion. Theodore Parker, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, and Henry David Thoreau are just a few of the modern authors who were both influenced and offended by Emerson's ideas and actions. New generations of writers, thinkers, artists, and businesspeople are continually motivated by his self-reliance attitude, his upbeat optimism in the advancement of American civilisation, and his stress on each person's brilliance. His pieces in particular give readers the chance to practise deliberate self-reflection inspired by his own thoughtful interaction with nature. Emerson believed that entering nature meant removing oneself from the normative attitudes and beliefs of society and finding one's own unique identity separate from all other people. He stated in Nature, "In the woods, we return to reason and faith." "There I believe that nothing can happen to me in life that nature cannot fix," said the speaker. Those who read Emerson's articles might have a similar experience. Emerson's essays frequently turn readers back on themselves, reminding us that it is not in his writings but in ourselves that we will find the purpose and motivation that defines our lives. His essays are frequently written in an elliptical style and punctuated with epigrammatic statements like "That is always best which gives me to myself" and "Insist on yourself; never imitate."


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## EMERSON'S IDEALS

Emerson emphasises our separation from one another and our independence; nonetheless, the benefits of self-reliance are public and communal. The researcher discovers that his most personal and intimate ideas end up being "the most accepted, most public, and universally true" (CW1: 63).

## LITERATUREREVIEW

Numerous academics have commented on the topics of public and private loss that Emerson dealt with and on which my thesis is centred. When I read Emerson with these critics, we have spirited discussions about Emerson's grieving process, his responses to societal issues like slavery, and his philosophical evolution over the course of his career. Two key books I examined in order to understand Emerson's loss are Cameron's "Representing Grief: Emerson's "Experience"" and Mary Chapman's "The Economics of Loss: Emerson's "Threnody"". Even though my conclusions do not exactly match those of these critics, their work specifically analyses Emerson's works on death and so offers insightful, useful information. These and other essays look at Emerson's difficulties adjusting, wondering about his dissociation and wondering why the death of his kid was so much more upsetting than the previous deaths he had experienced. Misery's Mathematics: Mourning, Compensating, and Reality in Antebellum by Peter Balaam American literature responds to Emerson's profound.

**Cynthia A. Cavanaugh 2002.** Emerson uses the Aeolian harp as a symbol of a musical conduit that carries the spirit of the Over-Soul through nature's breeze to the soul of an individual in an effort to persuade his audience that the unity and harmony in the Over-Soul, or "great soul," can be experienced by all people, not just through the message of the poet, but also through other sources in nature. Emerson uses the Aeolian harp as a metaphor for beauty, understanding, and heavenly harmony as he becomes older. The poems on the Aeolian harp illustrate Emerson's view of beauty in his later years. In his poetry and journal entries as well as in the documented memories of his friends and family, Emerson shows a deep love for the Aeolian harp.

**Himal Giri 2020.** The study investigates and evaluates the influence of Vedic thought on Ralph Waldo Emerson's literary works, paying particular attention to Brahma, the Bhagavad Gita, and the rules of Karma. The project demonstrates a comparison of Emerson's writings with Vedic thought. As a result, readings and criticisms of his works help to provide the context for the


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assertion. The essay also explains how Eastern philosophy has influenced western authors, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson. The richness of this article is enhanced by the fusion of eastern philosophy with western perception. The understanding of American transcendentalism will be helpful to the readers.

**Yves Gardes 2021.** With a focus on Brahma, the Bhagavad Gita, and the laws of Karma, the research explores and assesses the contribution of Vedic thinking to Ralph Waldo Emerson's literary works. The research shows how Vedic ideas and Emerson's writings might be compared. As a result, readings and critiques of his works aid in setting the claim's context. The essay also discusses how western writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson have been affected by eastern thought. The blending of eastern philosophy and western vision adds to the article's richness. The readers will benefit from knowing about American transcendentalism.

## COMPILATION OF BELIEFS LISTS RALPH WALDO EMERSON'S

Although death is unavoidable and constant, its significance changes significantly over time. Particularly in the nineteenth century, mourning rituals and burial traditions, which were handled by family and close friends, came to characterise American death culture as an art form. Death and funerals are handled differently today, but from a twenty-first-century viewpoint, grief still feels personal. Understanding this difference in approach is crucial to understanding how Ralph Waldo Emerson mourned for his son and viewed death. Death demonstrated "certainty and universality" in antebellum America, a divided country based on race and socioeconomic class, as it was a process no one could avoid and everyone was surrounded by dying friends and family. Poetry, religious literature, correspondence, and numerous other texts that serve to remind readers of death's imminence all contain representations of death's unavoidable presence. Without undertakers, the bereaved would directly interact with their deceased family members to quite literally "undertake" the process of preparing the body, setting up a viewing, and burial the remains. "Little in the shape of an institutional shield stood between the lay person and the dirty details of disease and dying," when people died for one reason or another. Due to societal expectations and obligations to be close to the departed from family, people were unable to separate themselves from death.


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## PROTESTANTSANDDEATH

The Puritans who arrived in New England early and the Unitarians who were the dominant religious movement in Boston at the time of Emerson's service there had a significant impact on Emerson's upbringing in a predominantly Protestant milieu. Emerson was undoubtedly knowledgeable with the various New England Protestant groups. Emerson was not the only member of those groups that was inspired by Puritan thought, which established guidelines for religion and how to handle death. In his introduction to American Unitarianism 1805–1865, Conrad Edick Wright draws attention to this relationship, saying that "even the most steadfast Transcendentalist rebels could not escape essential components of the Puritan theological inheritance." Even while their views on human depravity and the triune nature of God were different, the Unitarian faith Emerson originally belonged to borrowed heavily from Trinitarian Christianity. A brief examination of Christianity, notably Puritanism and the early 1800s's popularization of its understanding of death, provides some context for Emerson's views on mortality.

Whether or not one was saved—that is, delivered from sin and the punishment of eternal torment in hell—by the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—was one of the main concerns of American Puritans and the Protestant churches they gave rise to. With this main concept established, it is possible to start looking at how the Puritans viewed death. Puritans could never truly know if they were saved or not, according to David E. Stannard in The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change. They believed that the "best evidence of certainty was to be uncertain" of their salvation15; in other words, they believed that being sure of your salvation was a sign of taking God's favour for granted. Puritans held beliefs in heaven and hell that "Saints were to be rewarded in the afterlife and the sinful punished," similar but not identical to other Protestant religions. Jesus stated that "all the nations will be gathered in His presence, and He will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" at the time of the final judgement, which is directly reflective of this conception of heaven and hell. Jesus reveals that people who are admitted into God's Kingdom for all eternity are called sheep and will be praised for their righteousness and service. Conversely, "everlasting punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life," is what will happen to the "goats," or those who were not righteous in God's view. This issue, whether good deeds affect salvation or not, and, with the Puritans, how to determine who is actually saved, are frequently debated by theologians.


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## UNITARIANSANDDEATH

Emerson began his career as a Unitarian pastor, but he left the pulpit after his wife's deadly TB episode, which added to his displeasure with Unitarian rituals like administering communion. Even so, there are strong Unitarian elements in Emerson's Transcendental philosophy, his response to Ellen's passing, and even in her own preparation for it. Wright discusses the interaction of Unitarianism and Transcendentalism in the 1830s and states that, "Mainstream Unitarians correctly understood Transcendentalism to pose a strong challenge to the special place of scriptural revelation within their theology,"25 but that, aside from this, the two ideologies were not in fundamental disagreement. Emerson used Unitarian principles as a starting point and filtered them through his worldview, choosing which parts to modify for his philosophical goals.

Emerson was particularly interested in the shame that frequently afflicted religious people. The dying sometimes pondered if they had done enough good deeds in their lives, and guilt would often follow people to their graves.

Emerson advocated optimism and confidence in a life well lived, rejecting the burdens of self-reproach. Emerson was consumed with figuring out what to believe and what to do with his convictions, as opposed to certain Protestants who may have been fixated on being sorted with the sheep rather than the goats. Our ancestors lived in the world and went to their graves plagued by the fear of sin and the terror of the Day of Judgment. Emerson spoke on these shifts in Transcendentalism from Unitarianism and Puritanism regarding the end of life. We are gladly free of those frights, and now our suffering comes from our complete indecision and confusion about what to do, as well as from our mistrust of the necessity that we have all come to believe in.

## EASTERNRELIGIONS ANDDEATH

Emerson and Thoreau devoted a column to sharing various Eastern works with readers who might not have otherwise been exposed to Hinduism, Confucianism, and Buddhism in The Dial, the illustrious literary journal of Transcendentalism. The influence is still there in Emerson's writing and the Transcendentalist philosophy, notwithstanding Sarina Isenberg's criticism that this column is prejudiced by "Western ideas of the Orient." It is plausible to anticipate traces of and allusions to Eastern faiths in Emerson's work and lectures based on that column, his notebooks, and his vast collection, which contained Eastern texts. Emerson's knowledge of Eastern faiths contrasted and


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enhanced the Christian culture that was all around him.

In his introduction to Emerson and Hinduism, philosopher Russell B. Goodman writes: "Emerson was a philosophical original, and he revolutionized everything he touched." Emerson, like other intellectuals, sought out unconventional ideas to question traditional wisdom, which eventually led him to create his own interpretations intermingled with experience and additional research. His eclectic attitude, which was derived by reading authors other than traditional Western authors, was based on the idea that every reader is capable of producing something new when they read. However, he firmly asserts the Hindu influences he finds in Emerson's work, such as overarching themes of unity, the almost directly echoed rejection of learning more from books than from practice, and the heavy emphasis on experiential learning. Goodman prefaces his article with the clarification that he does not think Emerson developed Transcendentalism out of Hinduism.

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON'S CONFRONTATION

Ralph Waldo Emerson's worldview, which was upbeat and independent, had an impact on how he approached politics, religion, and society. His early career was characterised by his decision to leave the Unitarian church and seize the chance to use transcendentalism to create a new culture. He gave a significant lecture on "The Transcendentalist" in 1841, defining a Transcendentalist as someone who "believes in miracles, in the continual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and strength; believes in inspiration, and in ecstasy." 48 Emerson's thought emphasised individualism and the need of resisting the urge to blend in with the crowd or become mired in futility. The abrupt death of five-year-old Waldo from scarlet fever in 1842, however, cast doubt on the unwavering optimism Emerson had embraced in earlier writings and speeches like "Circles," "Nature," and "The American Scholar." Emerson, who at this time had gained notoriety, was compelled to reveal the depth of his grief over Waldo's passing in contrast to his well praised outlook on optimism. Despite mortality's constant presence, it had not affected him as severely before Waldo's passing. Emerson lost his father just before he turned eight, but he wasn't very affected by it because his father was usually harsh and absent. Although the death of his first wife, Ellen, who predeceased him after less than two years of marriage, devastated the young Unitarian pastor and led him to abandon his faith, it did not affect him as much as the death of Waldo, who occurred several years later.


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## LETTERSAND JOURNALS

Emerson informed his loved ones in a string of letters the following evening that his son Waldo had passed away from scarlet fever. I can say nothing to you, Emerson wrote in a letter to his aunt Mary Moody Emerson. The first of many instances of Emerson's incapacity to adequately convey or comprehend the intensity of his feelings may be seen in these six words. When the great speaker and author is at a loss for words, "his silence speaks despite himself, and readers sense his loss in the mind-numbing first hours after Waldo's death." "Shall I ever dare to love any thing again?" Emerson said in a letter to Margaret Fuller that he also sent that morning.

Early on, Emerson felt the loss to be so incapacitating that he gave up hope; why would he be able to love again when the loss had torn everything apart? The discovery that someone outside of himself, even his offspring, affected him so profoundly tested the unbreakable constitution Emerson so cherished in himself and others. He had just published his first collection of writings outlining the benefits of individualism and thriving on one's own.

Lidian also discussed Emerson's "ongoing despair" in a letter she wrote after the defeat. Her husband, she said, "does not see how the child's absence is to be greater to us than his presence would have been. Lidian observed how her husband, in his characteristic attempt to make sense of and learn from the occasion of their son's passing, was unable to balance the scale in order to see why Waldo's passing would have been fate's favoured opportunity for their growth. Emerson would have definitely preferred that the young boy had grown up and had the opportunity to take use of the excellent education he could have given in terms of thinking for oneself and discovering the world from one's own farm or fireside. Waldo's condition prevented him from even reaching school age, let alone giving him the chance to age. The father also missed the opportunity to teach his bright-eyed son and impart some of his own wisdom due to that theft. When a family loses a kid, "they may feel the loss was too sudden, which may hinder their

acknowledging the loss Emerson was in awe as he attempted to reconcile the meaning that the natural world might have given to his son's untimely demise. Five years old was undoubtedly too young to pass away, upending Emerson's orderly and didactic worldview.

## EXPERIENCE

In one of his most well-known pieces, Emerson laments that because sadness "never introduces [him] to reality," it has failed to give him a profound, piercing emotion. To discover the truths that


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loss has to teach, he would "even pay the heavy price of sons and lovers." Emerson had a tendency to see the meaning in everything, but despite losing many people dear to him, such as his wife and son, he had never been able to sense the "sharp peaks and edges of truth." Emerson was hoping to find comfort in discovering anything new about himself, about the natural world, or about humanity, but was instead faced with nothingness.

Emerson's statement that "with the loss of my son, now more than two years ago, I seem to have lost a splendid estate, - no more" is frequently disputed and the subject of speculation is not a submission, as some academics contend. In "Representing Grief: Emerson's 'Experience,'" Sharon Cameron argues that rather than acknowledging Emerson's discontent with this situation, his remarks are "insistent denials of feeling." Although it is conceivable that Emerson's grief is more intense than his words initially suggest, reading Emerson as a man who aspires to feel deeply only highlights his inability to do so.

Emerson's comment, "I cannot pull it close to me," conveys irritation at the point where Cameron claims Emerson appears to be moving forward and that his sorrow is a "absolute adequacy."

## SLAVERY AND POETICS: EMERSON AND DOUGLASS'S DEVELOPMENT AS ABOLITIONISTS

Ralph Waldo Emerson was a vocal opponent of the practise of chattel slavery in 1861 at the outset of the American Civil War. He spoke out against the ills of human bondage and wrote against it. By the commencement of the Civil War, his words and message were crystal clear, but they had not always been. Emerson, one of the pioneers of transcendentalism, is well known for supporting optimism, his faith in progress, and the need of independence in personal and societal advancement. However, his early thought was influenced in part by the tragedy of slavery in the United States. Emerson was obliged to address slavery's roots and its continued existence in contradiction to his beliefs throughout the course of four decades and a career that included speaking and writing on both sides of the Atlantic.

He also needed to connect his theory with the reality of young America in order to confront the declining moral climate in his nation. At the same time, Frederick Douglass, one of the most well-known African-Americans of the nineteenth century, was breaking free from servitude, travelling with abolitionists to tell his narrative, and eventually demanding the chance to express his own views on abolition, equality, and women's rights. Both Emerson and Douglass started and ended


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their abolitionist journeys in radically different locations, but after encountering the world's tragic reality from both philosophical and physical perspectives, they came to the conclusion that a war might be morally inevitable for a country engulfed in slavery.

## EMERSON'SJOURNEY, SPEECHIN 1837

Nearly four decades passed between the time when Emerson held the belief that slavery mirrored the natural order of things114 and the time that he became a fervent abolitionist; these four decades can be divided into two categories: non-address and a formulated position. In 1837, Emerson gave his first public talk on the subject of slavery; yet, from 1837 and 1844, he was mostly reserved on the subject, as seen by his silence in essays and on his speaking tours. Emerson's discourse in 1837 reveals his focus on "the principle of free speech, which was then threatened by a nearly universal repression of abolition oratory, rather than the great moral and social issue of slavery," as Len Gougeon identifies. This threat to free speech was brought about by the nearly universal repression of abolition oratory. Critics like Gougeon and Shari Goldberg take issue with the fact that here Emerson defends the opportunity for abolitionists to organise and speak against an issue rather than directly condemning slavery. This is a fact that critics take issue with, particularly given the heated political climate in which Emerson lived. During the middle of the 1830s, Boston and the areas immediately surrounding the city were centres of political activity. In the year 1837, Emerson announced that he would no longer interact with the general people by giving a speech that Gougeon describes as "tepid and intellectual to a fault." The speech was unsuccessful in winning over abolitionists. He had previously criticised annoying abolitionists and reasoned that people would eventually come around to his point of view. That was not the case.

## CONCLUSION

Although Emerson passed away in 1882, his ideas continue to influence people all the way into the twenty-first century. Students of literature and philosophy continue to find him to be a resource that is both rich and sophisticated, despite the fact that his works provide thought-provoking food for thought on posters and birthday cards. Emerson was someone I admired when I started working on this project, even if I didn't agree with all of his ideals. I admired his self-reliance, his relentless pursuit of being a better person, and his belief that people should always question the existing quo. His profound views on society were also something I found admirable. As I analysed his responses


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to Waldo's life and death, I acquired sympathy for him. I was able to put myself in his shoes by envisioning the happiness he felt at the birth and development of his son, as well as the sadness he felt at the passing of his young son. Given that only a small number of academics have explored Emerson's beliefs about bereavement, I found the psychological aspects of his lengthy literature to be very interesting.

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