

SOCRATES OF ATHENS



470 BCE

According to the 3d-century-CE historian of philosophy Diogenes Laertius, there was an entry in Apollodorus's chronology recording that the famous [Socrates](#) had been born in Athens in the 4th year of the 77th Olympiad, on the 6th day of the month of Thargelion, which was the day on which the city was purified. This was about the period of the revolt of Naxos against Athens. The newborn was the son of the sculptor Sophroniscus and the midwife Phaenarete and therefore a citizen of Athens of the deme Alopece.

428 BCE

May 21: [Plato](#) was born, presumably in the vicinity of Athens, and was given the name Aristokles of Athens. His wealthy father, Ariston, was believed to have descended from Codrus, one of the ancient kings of Athens, and his mother, Perictione, was distantly related to the 6th-century BCE lawgiver [Solon of Athens](#). Plato became a wrestler and seems in that way to have picked up his nickname, "Platon," meaning "Broad-Shouldered." The family was very conservative in its politics: his uncles Charmides and Critias, who appear as characters in his dialogues, took part in the coup of The Thirty. Adiemantus and Glaucon, who appear in the *REPUBLIC*, were Plato's brothers. His half-brother Antiphon (after his father's early death, his mother had remarried, to an associate of Pericles named Pyrilampes) appears in the *PARMENIDES*. His sister Potone would have a son, Speusippus, who would succeed him as leader of his Academy. According to Aristotle's *METAPHYSICS*, Plato was initially a follower of the Heraclitean philosopher Cratylus. Diogenes Laertius informs us that the given story was that [Socrates](#) of Athens in a dream "saw a swan on his knees, which all at once put forth plumage, and flew away after uttering a loud sweet note." Another version of this dream has the swan as flying towards him. "And the next day Plato was introduced as a pupil, and thereupon he recognized in him the swan of his dreams." Here is Plato's mentor, virtualized first in antique petrification and then in modern pixilation:



(It was during the year 428 BCE that, in Israel, the Samaritans were building their temple on Mount Gerizim.)

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399 BCE

The concept of “soul” or “incorporeal life-force” entered mainstream Hellenic thought. The development is attributed to the school of an Athenian philosopher named Aristokles, who was called [Plato](#), or “broad,” after the shoulders that he had developed as a wrestler in his youth.



[Plato](#) was not present at his master [Socrates](#) of Athens’s execution/suicide after condemnation in a public assembly, by the drinking of a potion of hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), pleading that at the time he was ill (if his non-eyewitness description of this death is accurate, it is the only time that ingesting such a potion has not caused nausea, contortions, and extreme retching before the onset of the described numbness). Afterward, according to Hermodorus, Plato fled to Megara with other associates of Socrates, where they became guests of an associate of Socrates named Euclid (this of course isn’t the Euclid who was a geometer in Alexandria). We lose track of Plato for about a dozen years, until he reaches the age of 40. Some allege that he went to [Egypt](#) and to Cyrene to visit the mathematician Theodorus. Some claim he went to Persia and Babylonia and got himself initiated into the Chaldean Mysteries. Some claim he got as far as India. (He did eventually make his way to Sicily to visit the Pythagoreans Philolaus and Eurytus, making friends with Archytas, a ruler.)

PLANTS

Famous Last Words:



"What school is more profitably instructive than the death-bed of the righteous, impressing the understanding with a convincing evidence, that they have not followed cunningly devised fables, but solid substantial truth."

— A COLLECTION OF MEMORIALS CONCERNING DIVERS DECEASED MINISTERS, Philadelphia, 1787



"The death bed scenes & observations even of the best & wisest afford but a sorry picture of our humanity. Some men endeavor to live a constrained life — to subject their whole lives to their will as he who said he might give a sign if he were conscious after his head was cut off — but he gave no sign Dwell as near as possible to the channel in which your life flows."

—Thoreau's JOURNAL, March 12, 1853

399 BCE	Socrates	drinking the hemlock	<i>"Crito, I owe a cock to Æsclepius."</i>
27 CE	Jesus	being crucified	<i>"It is finished."</i> [John 19:30]
1415	John Huss	being burned at the stake	<i>"O, holy simplicity!"</i>
May 30, 1431	Joan of Arc	being burned at the stake	<i>"Hold the cross high so I may see it through the flames."</i>
May 4, 1534	Father John Houghton	as he was being disemboweled	<i>"And what wilt thou do with my heart, O Christ?"</i>
July 6, 1535	Sir Thomas More	being beheaded	<i>"The King's good servant, but God's First."</i>
1536	Anne Boleyn	being beheaded	<i>"Oh God, have pity on my soul."</i>
February 18, 1546	Martin Luther	found on his chamber table	<i>"We are beggers: this is true."</i>
July 16, 1546	Anne Askew	being burned at the stake	<i>"There he misseth, and speaketh without the book"</i>
<i>... other famous last words ...</i>			

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323 BCE

June 13: [Alexander the Great](#) of Macedon died mysteriously at age 32 in Babylon.

559 Cyrus the first king of Persia.
 538 The kingdom of Babylon finished; that city being taken by Cyrus, who in 536, issues an edict for the return of the Jews.
 534 The first tragedy was acted at Athens, on a waggon, by Thespis.
 526 Learning is greatly encouraged at Athens, and a public library first founded.
 515 The second Temple at Jerusalem is finished under Darius.
 509 Tarquin the seventh and last king of the Romans is expelled, and Rome is governed by two consuls, and other republican magistrates, till the battle of Pharsalia, being a space of 461 years.
 504 Sardis taken and burnt by the Athenians, which gave occasion to the Persian invasion of Greece.
 486 Æschylus, the Greek poet, first gains the prize of tragedy.
 481 Xerxes the Great, king of Persia, begins his expedition against Greece.
 458 Ezra is sent from Babylon to Jerusalem, with the captive Jews, and the vessels of gold and silver, &c. being seventy weeks of years, or 490 years before the crucifixion of our Saviour.
 454 The Romans send to Athens for Solon's laws.
 451 The Decemvirs created at Rome, and the laws of the twelve tables compiled and ratified.
 430 The history of the Old Testament finishes about this time.
 Malachi the last of the prophets.
 400 Socrates the founder of moral philosophy among the Greeks, believes the immortality of the soul, and a state of rewards and punishments, for which, and other sublime doctrines, he is put to death by the Athenians, who soon after repent, and erect to his memory a statue of brass.
 331 Alexander the Great, king of Macedon, conquers Darius king of Persia, and other nations of Asia. 323, Dies at Babylon, and his empire is divided by his generals into four kingdoms.
 285 Dionysius of Alexandria, began his astronomical æra, on Monday, June 26, being the first who found the exact solar year to consist of 365 days, 5 hours, and 49 minutes.
 284 Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, employs seventy-two interpreters to translate the Old Testament into the Greek language, which is called the Septuagint.

On his death becoming known throughout Greece, the Assembly of Athens declared war against his successor Antipon and attempted to free the southern Greek city states from Macedonian rule. The return of some of Alexander's veterans from Asia would enable Antipater to prevail over them. [Aristotle](#) was again perceived as anti-Athenian, pro-Macedonian. A charge of "impiety" (disbelief in the established gods) was leveled against him, the same charge that had been used against [Socrates](#) in 399 BCE, and he is said to have declared that he would not let the Athenians "sin twice against philosophy." He abandoned Athens to voluntary exile in the city of Chalcis, accompanied by his companion Herpyllis, probably his slave, the woman who was likely the

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mother of his son Nicomachus and with whom he had lived after the death of his wife.



During this year [Diogenes of Sinope](#), the cynic who lived in a tub in Athens, also died. Some say he died on the same day as Alexander.

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The master of the world was 33 and the master of himself 90. (At one point, asked about the evil of death, he had responded sensibly by asking as a counter-question — in what sense might something be said to be harmful to us, if in its very presence we are necessarily oblivious to it?)



1732

December 19: [Benjamin Franklin](#), AKA “Richard Saunders,” AKA “Poor Richard,” began publication of POOR RICHARD’S [ALMANACK](#). This continued the [Rural Wit](#) tradition of New England, with annual publication to the year 1757. Continuing for twenty-five years to contain these supposedly anonymous witty, worldly-wise sayings, the almanac would play a considerable part in bringing together and molding a white American character out of what had been at that time merely a collection of diverse immigrant European types. At about this time, presuming all of morality to consist of mere selfish prudence (a move most typical of this man, characterizable by his marginal jotting of 1741 “*Nothing so likely to make a man's fortune as virtue*”), Franklin undertook a characteristically simplistic plan for “self-improvement”:

Ben Franklin’s “Autobiography”

In this piece it was my design to explain and enforce this doctrine, that vicious actions are not hurtful because they are forbidden, but forbidden because they are hurtful, the nature of man alone considered; that it was, therefore, every one's interest to be virtuous who wish'd to be happy even in this world; and I should, from this circumstance (there being always in the world a number of rich merchants, nobility, states, and princes, who have need of honest instruments for the management of their affairs, and such being so rare), have endeavored to convince young persons that no qualities were so likely to make a poor man's fortune as those of probity and integrity.

Indeed Franklin determined in this to imitate the humility not only of Jesus but also of [Socrates](#):

Ben Franklin’s “Autobiography”

My list of virtues contain'd at first but twelve; but a Quaker friend having kindly informed me that I was generally thought proud; that my pride show'd itself frequently in conversation; that I was not content with being in the right when discussing any point, but was overbearing, and rather insolent, of which he convinc'd me by mentioning several instances; I determined endeavouring to cure myself, if I could, of this vice or folly among the rest, and I added Humility to my list) giving an extensive meaning to the word.



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Of course, in Franklin's book there was no great difference to be noted between humility and the appearance of humility, since either could produce the desired rewards, true humility being only slightly more bothersome to produce than its ersatz. How utterly different this mere prudence is from any real morality!

PROTOTRACTATUS (1921) 6.422

Die Ethik ist transzendental.

Ethics is transcendental.

TRACTATUS LOGICO-PHILOSOPHICUS, 6.421

*Es ist klar, daß sich die Ethik
nicht aussprechen läßt.*

It is clear that ethics
cannot be put into words.

Die Ethik ist transzendental.

Ethics is transcendental.

(Ethik und Ästhetik sind Eins.)

(Ethics and aesthetics are
one and the same.)

— Ludwig Wittgenstein

TRANSCENDENTALISM

The most pertinent of the recycled worldly-wise proverbs Franklin had put in the mouth of Saunders would be re-collected in 1758 as "The Way to Wealth," in which the literary persona would be a "Father Abraham" — an elderly person who was induced, in order to kill some time for some people who were waiting for the commencement of a public auction, to make a speech.

WALDEN: I am not sure that I ever heard the sound of cock-crowing from my clearing, and I thought that it might be worth the while to keep a cockerel for his music merely, as a singing bird. The note of this once wild Indian pheasant is certainly the most remarkable of any bird's, and if they could be naturalized without being domesticated, it would soon become the most famous sound in our woods, surpassing the clangor of the goose and the hooting of the owl; and then imagine the cackling of the hens to fill the pauses when their lords' clarions rested! No wonder that man added this bird to his tame stock, -to say nothing of the eggs and drumsticks. To walk in a winter morning in a wood where these birds abounded, their native woods, and hear the wild cockerels crow on the trees, clear and shrill for miles over the resounding earth, drowning the feebler notes of other birds, -think of it! It would put nations on the alert. Who would not be early to rise, and rise earlier and earlier every successive day of his life, till he became unspeakably healthy, wealthy, and wise? This foreign bird's note is celebrated by the poets of all countries along with the notes of their native songsters. All climates agree with brave Chanticleer. He is more indigenous even than the natives. His health is ever good, his lungs are sound, his spirits never flag.

PEOPLE OF WALDEN

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

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1787

In France, Jacques-Louis David painted “The Death of Socrates”:

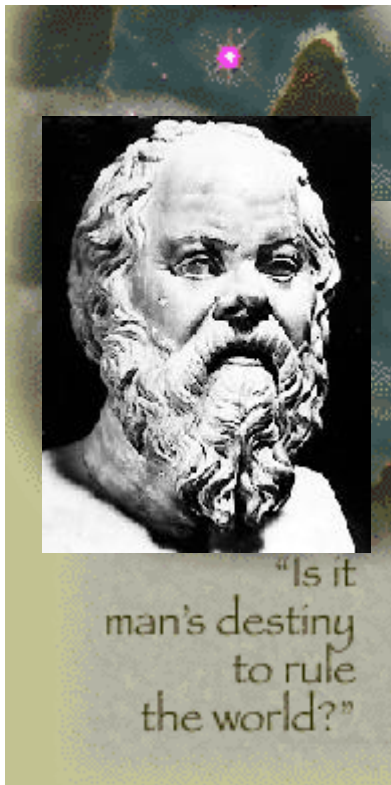


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1833



Schleiermacher’s ON THE WORTH OF [SOCRATES](#) AS A PHILOSOPHER was translated.





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August 28, Wednesday: [Waldo Emerson](#) had met, while in [Rome](#), the Gustave d'Eichthal who had sent Saint-Simonian materials to [Thomas Carlyle](#), and this scion of a Jewish banking family had given to the American tourist a letter of introduction to the sympathetic Scottish author. On this August day, therefore, Emerson showed up on the doorstep of the farmhouse at Craigenputtock — this is how Emerson would describe, later, how the visit had gone down, in his ENGLISH TRAITS:

From Edinburgh I went to the Highlands. On my return, I came from Glasgow to Dumfries, and being intent on delivering a letter which I had brought from Rome, inquired for Craigenputtock. It was a farm in Nithsdale, in the parish of Dunscore, sixteen miles distant. No public coach passed near it, so I took a private carriage from the inn. I found the house amid desolate heathery hills, where the lonely scholar nourished his mighty heart. Carlyle was a man from his youth, an author who did not need to hide from his readers, and as absolute a man of the world, unknown and exiled on that hill-farm, as if holding on his own terms what is best in London. He was tall and gaunt, with a cliff-like brow, self-possessed, and holding his extraordinary powers of conversation in easy command; clinging to his northern accent with evident relish; full of lively anecdote, and with a streaming humor, which floated every thing he looked upon. His talk playfully exalting the familiar objects, put the companion at once into an acquaintance with his Lars and Lemurs, and it was very pleasant to learn what was predestined to be a pretty mythology. Few were the objects and lonely the man, "not a person to speak to within sixteen miles except the minister of Dunscore;" so that books inevitably made his topics. **[continued on following screen]**



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He had names of his own for all the matters familiar to his discourse. "Blackwood's" was the "sand magazine;" "Fraser's" nearer approach to possibility of life was the "mud magazine;" a piece of road near by that marked some failed enterprise was the "grave of the last sixpence." When too much praise of any genius annoyed him, he professed hugely to admire the talent shown by his pig. He had spent much time and contrivance in confining the poor beast to one enclosure in his pen, but pig, by great strokes of judgment, had found out how to let a board down, and had foiled him. For all that, he still thought man the most plastic little fellow in the planet, and he liked Nero's death, "*Qualis artifex pereo!*" better than most history. He worships a man that will manifest any truth to him. At one time he had inquired and read a good deal about America. Landor's principle was mere rebellion, and **that** he feared was the American principle. The best thing he knew of that country was, that in it a man can have meat for his labor. He had read in Stewart's book, that when he inquired in a New York hotel for the Boots, he had been shown across the street and had found Mungo in his own house dining on roast turkey.

We talked of books. [Plato](#) he does not read, and he disparaged [Socrates](#); and, when pressed, persisted in making Mirabeau a hero. [Gibbon](#) he called the splendid bridge from the old world to the new. His own reading had been multifarious. Tristram Shandy was one of his first books after ROBINSON CRUSOE, and Robertson's America an early favorite. Rousseau's CONFESSIONS had discovered to him that he was not a dunce; and it was now ten years since he had learned German, by the advice of a man who told him he would find in that language what he wanted.

He took despairing or satirical views of literature at this moment; recounted the incredible sums paid in one year by the great booksellers for puffing. Hence it comes that no newspaper is trusted now, no books are bought, and the booksellers are on the eve of bankruptcy.

He still returned to English pauperism, the crowded country, the selfish abdication by public men of all that public persons should perform. "Government should direct poor men what to do. Poor Irish folk come wandering over these moors. My dame makes it a rule to give to every son of Adam bread to eat, and supplies his wants to the next house. But here are thousands of acres which might give them all meat, and nobody to bid these poor Irish go to the moor and till it. They burned the stacks, and so found a way to force the rich people to attend to them."

We went out to walk over long hills, and looked at Criffel, then without his cap, and down into Wordsworth's country. There we sat down, and talked of the immortality of the soul. It was not Carlyle's fault that we talked on that topic, for he had the natural disinclination of every nimble spirit to bruise itself against walls, and did not like to place himself where no step can be taken. But he was honest and true, and cognizant of the subtle links that bind ages together, and saw how every event affects all the future. "Christ died on the tree: that built Dunscore kirk yonder: that brought you and me together. Time has only a relative existence."

He was already turning his eyes towards London with a scholar's appreciation. London is the heart of the world, he said, wonderful only from the mass of human beings. He liked the huge machine. Each keeps its own round. The baker's boy brings muffins to the window at a fixed hour every day, and that is all the Londoner knows or wishes to know on the subject. But it turned out good men. He named certain individuals, especially one man of letters, his friend, the best mind he knew, whom London had well served.

1834

→ [Waldo Emerson](#)'s brother [Charles Chauncy Emerson](#) lectured at the newly founded Concord Lyceum on the



life and the death of [Socrates](#). (He would repeat this lecture in the Salem Lyceum during the Winter 1835-1836

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lecture season.)



Before Lecture

After Lecture

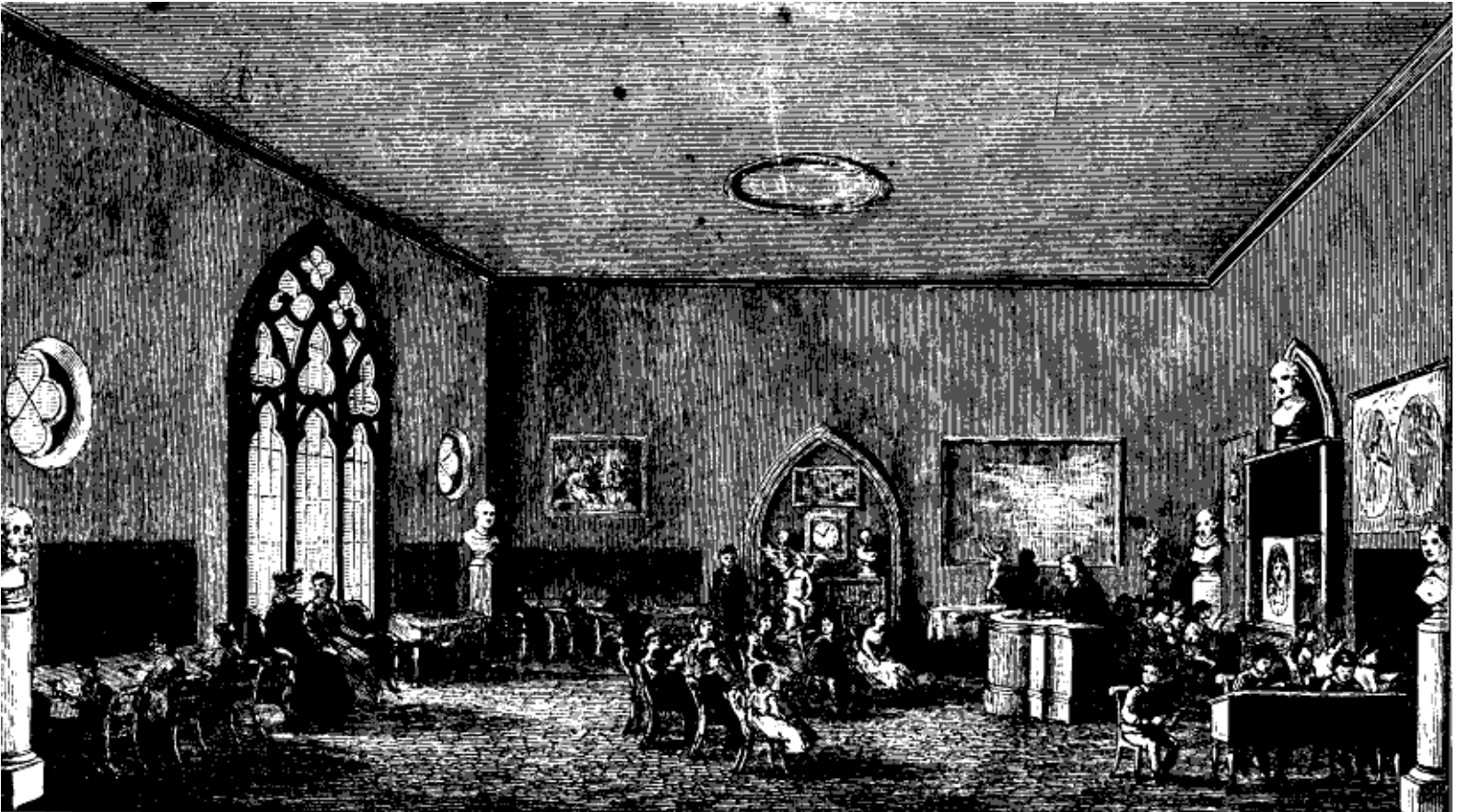
Were [John Shepard Keyes](#), who was trying to decide between Hanover and Cambridge, and [David Henry Thoreau](#), who had become a freshman in Cambridge, in the audience?

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September 22, Monday: At 10AM, the School of Human Culture opened its doors for business in the Masonic Temple on Tremont Street directly across from the Tremont House and the Boston Common. The school occupied two rooms on the fourth floor, the top floor, at a rent of \$300.⁰⁰ per year. The furnishings, for which [Bronson Alcott](#) went further into debt, included not only a larger-than-life “bass-relievo” of [Jesus](#) Christ over a bookcase behind the schoolmaster’s enormous desk, and busts of Plato, [William Shakespeare](#), [Socrates](#), and [Sir Walter Scott](#) in the four corners of the classroom, but also a portrait of the Reverend [William Ellery Channing](#) (father of one of the pupils) and two geranium plants. Alcott had heard [Waldo Emerson](#) preach in 1828, and now Emerson was doing him the honor of visiting his school.



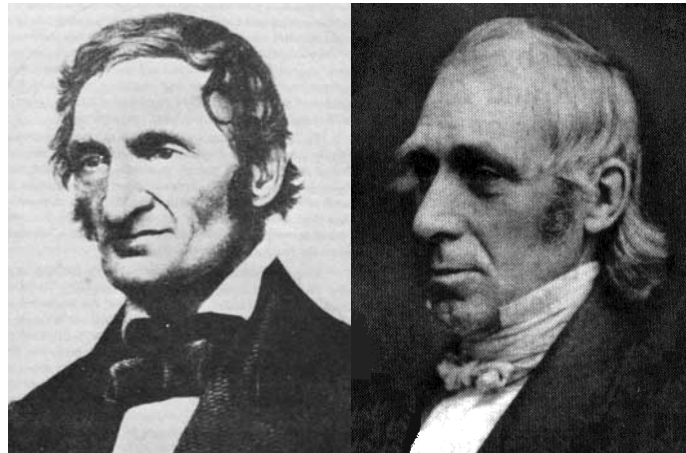
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[Elizabeth Palmer Peabody](#) became Bronson Alcott's assistant at this Temple School, and began boarding with the Alcott family. There were, initially, 30 pupils.

The students used desks having individual shelves and a hinged blackboard that could swing forward or back. Evidently, this desk had been developed by Bronson's cousin, [Dr. William Andrus Alcott](#).





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WINTER 1835/1836



Lecture Season: The 7th course of lectures offered by the Salem Lyceum consisted of:



The Salem Lyceum — 7th Season

James Flint of Salem

Poem, Change

Sylvester Graham

Capabilities of the human frame in respect to the duration of life

W.B.O. Peabody

Hebrew Commonwealth

Samuel M. Worcester of Salem

James Otis and Patrick Henry

B.B. Thatcher

Boston Tea Party

O.W.B. Peabody

British Poetry during the latter part of the last century

Leonard Withington

Dangers of Republicanism

George Putnam

Water

Jeremiah Smith

Washington

John Appleton

Sir Humphrey Davy

William H. Simmons

Education

[Charles Chauncy Emerson](#)

[Socrates](#)

Abel L. Peirson of Salem

St. Peter's Cathedral

George S. Hillard

Living too fast

Jonathan F. Worcester of Salem

China

A.M. Quimby

Electricity

Ralph Waldo Emerson of Concord

Martin Luther

William Silsbee of Salem

Study of the Beautiful

B.B. Thatcher

Philosophy of Self-Education

Henry R. Cleveland

[Pompeii](#)

Charles G. Page of Salem

Heat

Charles T. Brooks of Salem

Character



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1837



February: [Bronson Alcott](#) self-published the 2nd volume of CONVERSATIONS ON THE GOSPELS IN MR. ALCOTT'S SCHOOL, transcribed by [Margaret Fuller](#) (Boston: Russell, Shattuck and Company, 198 pages).¹ Reviews and sermons called the volumes indecent, obscene, and absurd. Suddenly there were angry crowds outside Boston's Masonic Hall protesting that, inside, Headmaster Alcott was accepting children as spiritual authorities, that he was not assigning to Jesus Christ a special place as uniquely the Son of God — and that clearly he had been informing some of the children of some of the physical details of the process of birth. For instance, little Josiah Quincy was recorded as commenting that babies came about through “naughtiness.” The school lost many of its pupils. [Waldo Emerson](#) contributed handsomely to Alcott's printing bill.

The day after the attacks on [Alcott](#) began, [Emerson](#) appeared at the office of one of the chief offenders with a letter of complaint in his hand. He was turned away. The anti-transcendentalists had been lying in wait for this sort of ugliness to appear, and they were not to be denied their prey. Not only had this man dared to give sex education to their innocent schoolchildren, he had raised in their susceptible minds suspicions as to the divinity of Christ. What more could you expect of an atheist than that he would be a pervert as well? Were the Christ merely a wise human being, he would be merely a cunning Jew. No! Godly Bostonians could never be

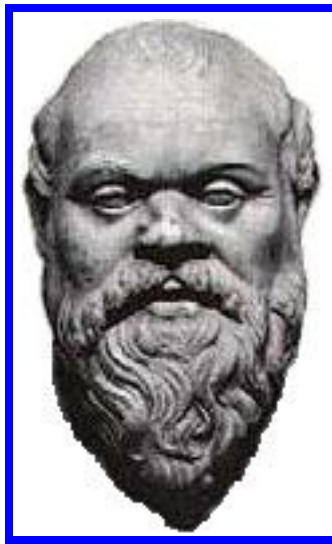
1. I wonder what was the relationship between [Henry Thoreau](#)'s continual glosses on “lest ye become again as a little child” and [Alcott](#)'s 25-page manifesto of 1836, DOCTRINE AND DISPOSITION OF HUMAN CULTURE.

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reconciled to such a blasphemy. The school book was “one-third absurd, one-third blasphemous, and one-third obscene.”

The roster of [Alcott](#)'s paying students dropped to ten, the school was forced to relocate from its suite on the top floor of the Masonic Lodge, into a windowless box room in its basement renting at \$250.⁰⁰ per year, and Alcott's creditors zeroed in on him. He owed about \$6,000.⁰⁰, which, any way you look at it, is more than half a million in our contemporary money. Everything had to be sold, the Alcott family retaining only the bust of [Socrates](#)² when they moved from their home near Boston Common into a little house on Cottage Place in the South End.



2. [The Alcott family](#) achieved very little reduction of their debt by selling the school equipment, but it had to be done. It is possible that the Alcott family retained this bust of Socrates, which later traveled with them in their wagon from Concord to Fruitlands, simply because no-one was willing to give them a few pennies for it, in the same way that when I received a box of clothing in my lawyer's office, after I was divorced in California in 1974, at the bottom of the box were my well-worn hiking boots, brushed off, and tied into a grommet of these old boots there remained a garage sale price tag marked 50¢.

1843

June 1 (Pentecost Thursday): [Joseph Smith, Jr.](#) “got married with” Elvira Anie Cowles.

Go East, 46-year-old black woman, go East: Isabella³ experienced a command to “go east” and testify, adopted the monicker Sojourner Truth, and departed New-York with but an hour’s notice, with two York shillings in her pocket, carrying her worldly belongings in a pillowcase, to move on foot through Long Island and Connecticut, testifying to whatever audiences she was able to attract. –It is the life of a wandering evangelist, is mine. In the course of attending Millerite meetings to testify, she would accommodate to a number of the apocalyptic tenets of that group.



3. Isabella Bomefree van Wagenen, “Bomefree” being the name of her first husband which by virtue of enslavement she had been denied, and “van Wagenen” being the name of the white family which she assumed and used for a number of years. (“Wagener” was a consistent misspelling perpetrated by the printer of the first version of her NARRATIVE in 1850.)

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As [Louisa May Alcott](#) has reported in later life, on this same day quite another journey was taking place:

On the first day of June, 1843, a large wagon, drawn by a small horse and containing a motley load, went lumbering over certain New England hills, with the pleasing accompaniments of wind, rain and hail. A serene man with a serene child upon his knee was driving, or rather being driven, for the small horse had it all his own way. Behind a small boy, embracing a bust of Socrates, was an energetic looking woman, with a benevolent brow, satirical mouth and eyes full of hope and courage. A baby reposed upon her lap, a mirror leaned against her knee, a basket of provisions danced about her feet, and she struggled with a large, unruly umbrella, with which she tried to cover every one but herself. Twilight began to fall, and the rain came down in a despondent drizzle, but the calm man gazed as tranquilly into the fog as if he beheld a radiant bow of promise spanning the gray sky.

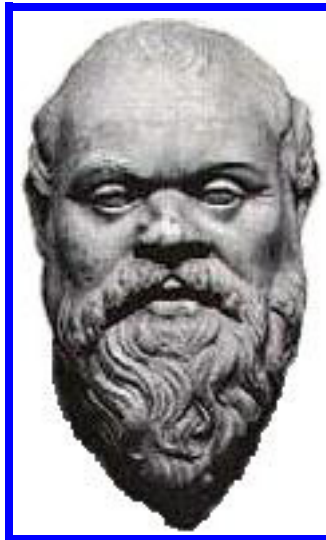
The Consociate Family of Bronson Alcott was on its way from Concord to “Fruitlands” on Prospect Hill in Harvard, Massachusetts, in the district then known politely as “Still River North” and impolitely as “Hog Street,” with its prospect of Wachusett and Mount Monadnock and its prospect of “ideals without feet or



hands” (an apt phrase said to have been created by [Waldo Emerson](#),⁴ who himself, if anyone ever metaphorically lacked them, metaphorically lacked feet and hands and other essential body parts), ideals such as “a family in harmony with the primitive instincts of man.” In her fictional account of the journey, Louisa May Alcott invented an additional child and placed it on her father’s knee, obviously where she would have wanted to be, and made it a “serene” child, what she never was but longed to be. The bust of [Socrates](#) actually rode between the father Bronson, who was holding the reins, and Charles Lane, on the wagon’s bench. There was no room in this wagon for William Lane or for Anna Alcott, who for all 14 miles of the journey had to

4. But we may note that in Bronson Alcott’s journal for Week 45 in November 1837, Alcott had himself termed himself “an Idea without hands.”

walk alongside it.



At this point the [Association of Industry and Education](#) had 113 members, a large proportion of whom were children:

Membership

April 1842	41
May 1842	65
End of 1842	83
June 1843	113
Winter 1844	120
Spring 1845	120

Having had enough after less than two months of attempting to teach almost entirely without teaching supplies and without adequate classroom space, Sophia Foord threatened to resign as teacher at the Association. (Promises would be made that would keep her teaching while efforts were made to convert a barn into classrooms, but the problem eventually would be resolved by the need of the community to use its children as a cheap source of incessant factory labor. After Miss Foord left [Northampton](#), she became tutor to the children of the Chase family (Elizabeth Buffum Chase) of Valley Falls, [Rhode Island](#); “she taught botany; she walked with the children over the fields ... and made her pupils observe the geographical features of the pond and its banks, and carefully taught them to estimate distances by sight.”)

Railroad service to [Concord](#) began. Preliminary earthmoving crews, and then crossties and rails crews, had reached Concord at the rate of 33 feet per day, filling in Walden Pond’s south-west arm to give it its present

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shape. 1,000 Irishmen were earning \$0.⁵⁰ or \$0.⁶⁰ for bonebreaking 16-hour days of labor. [Waldo Emerson](#) was elated because he much preferred riding in the railroad coach to riding in the stage coach which offered a “ludicrous pathetic tragical picture” (his comment from April 15, 1834; I don’t know whether he meant that he felt that he presented a ludicrous pathetic tragical appearance while riding on the stage coach or that the view from the stage coach window presented him with a ludicrous pathetic tragical perspective). He found, however, that when a philosopher rides the railroad “Ideal Philosophy takes place at once” as “men & trees & barns whiz by you as fast as the leaves of a dictionary” and this helps in grasping the real impermanence of matter: “hitherto esteemed symbols of stability do absolutely dance by you” and we experience “the sensations of a swallow who skims by trees & bushes with about the same speed” (June 10, 1834). By this time, with the railroad actually in Concord, Emerson had decided that “Machinery & [Transcendentalism](#) agree well.”⁵



“[The railroad will] only encourage the common people to move about needlessly.”

— [Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington](#)



1851

August 22, Friday: [Prince Albert](#) had invited the Royal Yacht Squadron at Cowes to stage an international yacht race around the Isle of Wight. In response, Commodore John Cox Stevens of the New-York Yacht Club had had an enlarged version of the local pilot boats constructed, naming this yacht the *America*. In English waters on this day, therefore, the 1st America’s Cup race took place. The *America* beat 14 English yachts around the island, coming to anchor ahead of them by more than half an hour.



August 22, Friday: I found last winter that it was expected that I would give some account of Canada because I had **visited** it and because many of them had & so felt interested in the subject—visited it as the bullet visits the wall at which it is fired & from which it rebounds as quickly & flattened (somewhat damaged

5. EMERSON’S JOURNALS AND MISCELLANEOUS NOTEBOOKS 4: 277, 4:296, 8:397.



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perchance)— Yes a certain man contracted to take 1500 live Yankees through Canada—at a certain rate & within a certain time— It did not matter to him what the commodity was— If only it were delivered to him according to agreement at the right place & time—and rightly ticketed—so much in bulk—wet or dry on deck or in the hold—at the option of the carrier how to stow the cargo & not always right side up— In the mean while it was understood that the freight was not to be willfully & intentionally debarred from seeing the country if it had eyes— It was understood that there would be a country to be seen on either side—though that was a secret advantage which the contractors seemed not to be aware of—

I fear that I have not got much to say not having seen much—for the very rapidity of the motion had a tendency to keep my eye lids closed— What I got by going to Canada was a cold and not till I get a fever shall I appreciate it.

It is the fault of some excellent writers—De Quincy’s first impressions on seeing London suggest it to me—that they express themselves with too great fullness & detail. They give the most faithful natural & living account of their sensations mental & physical—but they lack moderation and sententiousness—they do not affect us by an ineffectual earnestness and a reserve of meaning—like a stutterer—they say all they mean. Their sentences are not concentrated and nutty. Sentences which suggest far more than they say, which have an atmosphere about them—which do not merely report an old but make a new impression— Sentences which suggest as many things and are as durable as a Roman Aqueduct To frame these that is the **art** of writing. Sentences which are expensive towards which so many volumes—so much life went—which lie like boulders on the page—up & down or across. Not mere repetition but creation. Which a man might sell his grounds & castle to build. If De Quincy had suggested each of his pages in a sentence & passed on it would have been far more excellent writing.— His style is no where kinked and knotted up into something hard & significant which you could swallow like a diamond without digesting.⁶

6. In April-May 1841, [Henry David Thoreau](#) had been reading in an English translation, André Dacier’s THE LIFE OF [PYTHAGORAS](#): WITH HIS SYMBOLS AND GOLDEN VERSES. TOGETHER WITH THE LIFE OF [HIEROCLES](#) AND HIS COMMENTARIES UPON THE VERSES. COLLECTED OUT OF THE CHOICEFT MANUSCRIPTS, AND TRANSLATED INTO FRENCH, WITH ANNOTATIONS. BY M. DACIER. NOW DONE INTO ENGLISH. THE GOLDEN VERSES TRANSLATED FROM THE GREEK BY N[ICHOLAS] ROWE, ESQ. (London: Printed for *Jacob Tonfon*, within *Grays-Inn Gate* next *Grays-Inn Lane*. 1707), a book in Bronson Alcott’s library, when he came across a comment about the discourse of [Socrates](#) of Athens. Thoreau copied “Hierocles said — ‘That the discourses of Socrates resembled cubes, because they remained firm wherever they might fall.’” into his literary notebook of the period. If it was the Dacier volume of 1707 from which he derived this sentiment, then Thoreau altered a reference to gaming dies into a reference to geometric shapes.

1863

In this year the scholar Wang T'ao came to live in [Hong Kong](#) (he would assist the [Reverend James Legge](#) in many translations from the [Chinese](#) into English).



At the end of the journal entries for this year, [Waldo Emerson](#) listed his recent readings in Oriental materials: “Confucius, Book of Poetry, *apud* J. Legge,⁷ D’Herbelot, Bibliothèque Orientale; Saadi; Hafiz; Von Hammer Purgstall.” While reading in the James Legge translation, he had jotted into his journal an impression that in reading [Confucius](#) he was “reading a better [Pascal](#),” and had declared that this ancient had “anticipated the speech of [Socrates](#), and the Do as be done by, of [Jesus](#).”

EMERSON AND CHINA

7. It seems clear that the source that Emerson consulted in this year for the Chinese “Book of Poetry, *apud* J. Legge,” could not have been any one of the three editions that the Reverend Legge published in book form, for these would not be published until 1871, 1876, and 1879. Emerson must, therefore, have been referring to some earlier effort along this line as published in some local journal such as the [North American Review](#).

1992

This year marked the *reductio ad absurdum* of the influence study, with the publication of George J. Stack's *NIETZSCHE AND EMERSON: AN ELECTIVE AFFINITY*.⁸ Professor Stack seemed not to be able to grasp the difference between mere reiterated assertion and demonstration:



Nietzsche rarely travelled without his Emerson. And Emerson's *ESSAYS* were quite literally treasured by him: the works of Emerson, in German translation, were the most frequently read books in his library. Over a twenty-six year period allusions to, or references to, Emerson cropped up in Nietzsche's notes or letters. His affinity with this man he knew only through his translated writings was so strong that he often referred to him as if he were a personal friend. In his published and unpublished writings Nietzsche made over a hundred direct or indirect references to Emerson. He often paraphrased him, adopted his tone or imagery, and appropriated his phrases.



Stack of course offered no evidence whatever for the accuracy of his bald assertion that "Nietzsche rarely travelled without his Emerson." This stands as a mere assertion made by a person given to such assertions. He likewise offers no evidence whatever for the accuracy of his assertion that "the works of Emerson, in German translation, were the most frequently read books in his library." This stands also as a mere assertion made by a person given to such assertions. The instances which Stack cites, of the over a hundred points at which in his published and unpublished writings, Friedrich Nietzsche made direct or indirect references to [Waldo Emerson](#), paraphrased him, adopted his tone or imagery, and appropriated his phrases, have left me rather out in the cold. For instance, one of these instances amounts to the following: Napoleon said: "Friendship is but a name," then Emerson said: "Friends such as we desire are dreams and fables," then Nietzsche quoted a bitter remark of "the sage," to wit, "Friends, there are no friends," and George J. Stack concludes from the foregoing that it constitutes "yet another" demonstration that Nietzsche was influenced by

8. George J. Stack. *NIETZSCHE AND EMERSON: AN ELECTIVE AFFINITY*. Athens OH: Ohio UP, 1992

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Emerson!



I will proceed to instance some of this material which I found to be particularly worthy of being here instanced. For instance, for a one-liner, how about:




Emerson served as Socrates to Nietzsche's Plato.


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(The materials I am citing on the following screens appear in the sequence which I have preserved here.)


The following it would seem to me is an excellent example of what one might be tempted to characterize as “craziness.” Any scholar who finds himself noticing that it “appears” that there is a connection which could not possibly be the case ought to be able to put on his or her brakes at that moment, full lock, and pose to himself or herself the poser, “What is going wrong with my thinking here?” It seems clear that Professor Stack does not subject himself to such interrogations:

 Commentators on Nietzsche are pleased to cite the passages in his writings in which he speculates about the nature of dreams and the expression of the unconscious in them as miniature anticipations of Freud’s analysis of dreams. Emerson is never acknowledged as the teacher of the German philosopher in oneiric mysteries.... Although there is no evidence that Nietzsche had access to Emerson’s JOURNALS, there are instances in his writings in which it appears that he did. As early as 1840, Emerson speculates about the role of the unconscious in our own life.


What Professor Stack giveth with one hand he taketh away with the other:

 It is Nietzsche who synthesizes ideas that Emerson expresses without explicitly conjoining them.


Also:

 Many of Nietzsche’s heartfelt sentiments are, in actuality, paraphrases of, or unconscious echoes of, Emerson’s writings.... There are so many instances of this phenomenon –that is, Nietzsche adopting Emerson not only as teacher and model, but as *alter ego*–that to speak of intellectual “influence” here is a considerable understatement.

Also:

 To be sure, Emerson himself does not tie together all of the pieces of his scattered, insightful reflections on this question [of a viable interpretation of reality in terms of the most fundamental aspect of the human self] in such a neat, philosophical way. It was left to his unknown German “soul-brother” to gather together and synthesize the random and dispersed observations and *aperçus* of the American thinker and poet.

Also:

 In the course of his discussion of what he variously calls “force,” “vital force,” “energy,” or “spirit” in his essay, “Power,” Emerson introduces a number of observations that seem to have left their imprint on Nietzsche’s thought ... Nietzsche’s admiration for the energetic, vital, and uninhibited “blond beasts” of his imagination is obviously **derived** from Emerson’s writings.

Also:



Before one can duel with a philosophical problem, one must first recognize it, inherit it, have it impressed upon one, as a problem. Given Nietzsche's almost reverential attitude towards Emerson's Essays when he was young and his rereading of them over a twenty-six year period, and given his respect for the man and his thought, it would be natural if some of the primary issues in his philosophy centered around themes that were first posed by Emerson. As we've seen, and as we shall continue to see, there are very strong, clearly identifiable, conceptual-imaginative connections between Emerson and Nietzsche in regard to a number of philosophical ideas. The agreement between the two on the question of the meaning of, and role of, fate in existence is one of the strongest of these connections.

(Be warned that by "first" in the above, obviously, all that is meant is "before Nietzsche," as there is no attempt in the monograph in question to establish that such ideas actually originated with Emerson.)



The resemblances between key doctrines, theories, and conceptions in the philosophy of Nietzsche and the impressionistic theories and conceptions of Emerson are not carefully examined. What is at issue in the relation between Emerson and Nietzsche is not only a matter of shared turns of phrase, words, or tropes. Rather, it is a question of a deep, highly specific transmission of ideas from the one to the other, ideas that lie at the center of Nietzsche's constructive thought and are considered his original creations. Ironically, perhaps by looking backward to the original American template of these patterns of thought we may gain a better understanding of what Nietzsche meant.

Also:



Emerson's interpretation of man as subject to powerful fatalities cast a long shadow on Nietzsche's thought. It is present in the piece of juvenilia he wrote in 1862, "Fate and History," and it reappears in a passionate passage in *Twilight of the Idols* ("The Four Great Errors," §8). Although the language of this passage is far more intense and dramatic than that of Emerson, the ideas expressed in this work of 1888, as well as some of the words and phrases, are Emerson's. "No one," Nietzsche writes,

is accountable for existing at all, or for being constituted as he is, or for living in the circumstances and surroundings in which he lives. The fatality [*Fatalität*] of his nature cannot be disentangled from the fatality of all that has been and will be.... One is necessary, one is a piece of fate [*ein Stück Verhängnis*], one belongs to the whole, one **is** in the whole.

In "The Method of Nature" and especially in "Fate," Emerson characterized the individual as a "necessary" piece of a dynamic cosmic process, as subject to "circumstances" that are out of his or her control, as conditioned by a host of natural "fatalities." And the pithy phrase that is so closely identified with Nietzsche – "a piece of fate" – was derived from Emerson's essay, "Nominalist and Realist." Describing there how he reads authors for stimulation of his imagination, he remarks that he doesn't simply read a particular author (a Plato, say, or a Proclus). rather, it is "but a piece of nature and fate that I explore." In another place, he characterizes man as a "piece of causation."

Also:



It is curious how often the American literary critics have appealed to Nietzsche in order to illuminate aspects of Emerson's thought. For, in many instances, as we've seen and shall see, it is Emersonian insights and conceptions that are accentuated and intensified in the philosophy of Nietzsche.

Also:



In Stanley Hubbard's study of the influence of Emerson on Nietzsche [*NIETZSCHE UND EMERSON*, 1958] he goes out of his way to say that the latter was not an "Emersonian." But given the parallels between the thought of these similar radical thinkers, we may wonder if Hubbard fully understood what an Emersonian was.

Also, in regard to *THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA*:



The sayings of the "sage of Concord," paraphrased or slightly modified, appear often in this work. If one went from a careful reading of Emerson's essays (let's say a Nietzschean reading!) to *THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA*, one would repeatedly have the experience of *déjà-vu*.



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Also:⁹



[Nietzsche] adopted Zarathustra as his prophetic cultural hero on the basis of Emerson's description of this Persian "sage." In his worn copy of Emerson's *VERSUCHE* he wrote "Das ist es!" ("That is it!") in the margin next to the following passage in "Character" which creates a charismatic picture of "Zertusht." "We require that a man ... can proceed from them."

2012

Rick Anthony Furtak, Jonathan Ellsworth, and James D. Reid's THOREAU'S IMPORTANCE FOR PHILOSOPHY (Fordham UP). What follows is Jonathan Ellsworth's essay in this volume, "How Walden Works" — in which he discovers that [Socrates](#) is peeking out from behind a shrub in Walden Woods and winking at us.

[text to be added]

9. In fairness to Professor George J. Stack, I must acknowledge that he is correct in pointing out that the German rendition of Emerson's "Zertusht" in the following from "Character" was "Zarathustra" and that this particular passage has been annotated **by someone at some time** in the household edition available to Nietzsche:

The most credible pictures are those of majestic men who prevailed at their entrance, and convinced the senses; as happened to the eastern magian who was sent to test the merits of Zertusht or [Zoroaster](#). When the Yunani sage arrived at Balkh, the Persians tell us, Gushtasp appointed a day on which the Mobeds of every country should assemble, and a golden chair was placed for the Yunani sage. Then the beloved of Yezdam, the prophet Zertusht, advanced into the midst of the assembly. The Yunani sage, on seeing that chief, said, "This form and this gait cannot lie, and nothing but truth can proceed from them."

Whether the handwriting in question is Friedrich's or Elisabeth's is as far as I am concerned yet to be determined, just as whether the annotation in question was made before Nietzsche wrote on Zarathustra, or while Elisabeth was crafting stuff out of the insane one's old notes, is yet to be determined. It is, however, a plausible interpretation that Nietzsche had originally derived the name for his most significant persona during an early reading of Emerson. (I wouldn't trust Elisabeth any farther than I could throw an opera singer.) Some may wish to see in this an influence: I see in it at most nothing that could not just as easily have been derived from a dictionary or from a collection of popular children's stories. Emerson influenced Nietzsche to use a particular word — big freaking deal!



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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: May 18, 2013

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