

## ARTS &amp; LETTERS

after his first novel was published; Saul Bellow was shunned for 31 years. F. Scott Fitzgerald was never selected during his lifetime.

In recent years, the club's importance has diminished. Chain bookstores have spread throughout exurbs and rural areas, cutting into the club's major market. Publishers increasingly prefer more profitable bookstore sales to splitting their profits with a book club. Moreover, Teachout reports, serious bestselling novels, such as those of John P. Marquand (*The Late George Apley*), are no longer being written. Club judges have filled this void by selecting "fifth-rate throwaway tracts" by such novelists as John Irving and E. L. Doctorow.

Teachout thinks the BOMC has done its best to survive a period of American literary decline. "In its well-meaning, idealistic way," he maintains, the club brings "pretty good books to the prairies year after year."

### *Emerson the Showman*

"The Making of an American Prophet: Emerson, His Audiences, and the Rise of the Culture Industry in Nineteenth-Century America" by Mary Kupiec Cayton, in *The American Historical Review* (June 1987), American Historical Association, 914 Atwater, Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind. 47405.

For much of his career, American philosopher-essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) toiled in obscurity. Such early works as *Nature* (1836) were reviewed only by Emerson's fellow Unitarians in church tracts or by



*Emerson's success on the lecture circuit coincided with the publication of his most noted works. Among them: English Traits (1856); The Conduct of Life (1860); May-day, and Other Pieces (1867), a collection of poems, and Society and Solitude (1870).*

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Boston literary journals. Yet Emerson became so popular in later years that attending one of his lectures was quite fashionable. For example, the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* reported in 1867 that an Emerson lecture attracted "the most elegant assemblages we remember to have seen on any occasion in this city."

Why did Emerson's reputation soar? The answer, says Cayton, visiting assistant professor of interdisciplinary studies at Miami University of Ohio, lies both in Emerson's writing and in the changing nature of the American lyceum movement.

Lyceums became popular during the 1830s as an early form of adult education. By the 1850s, they had been superseded by "literary societies," which provided single young men with social alternatives to the tavern and the theater. Society members were always interested in developing self-reliance, largely as a way to increase their chances of success in the business world. Emerson's interest in the nature of correct conduct and individual achievement thus paralleled, on a more philosophical level, the interests of much of his audience.

Although Emerson lectured on a wide variety of subjects, audiences skipped his more abstruse discussions, preferring such practical topics as "Eloquence" and "The Conduct of Life." Emerson salted these lectures with "concrete and homely metaphors," but did not dilute his transcendentalist philosophy. His style kept audiences mystified. Emerson "don't say at all—he *hints* or *intimates* or walks around about what he *would* say but *don't* say," future president Rutherford B. Hayes wrote to a friend after attending an 1850 lecture.

Yet by the late 1850s, Emerson's success on the lecture circuit was assured. Audiences absorbed his work as "intellectual treats," Cayton notes, thinking Emerson an archetypal "embodiment of Man Thinking." Midwestern newspapers, representing young, self-conscious cities, increasingly supported Emerson's lectures as a way to show that their cities were as cultured as those on the Eastern Seaboard. By the time of his final lecture in 1871, critics ignored his speech and reviewed audience reaction. "The applause," the *Chicago Tribune* reported, "bespoke the culture of the audience."

"The people," Cayton concludes, liked Emerson "because he did their thinking for them."

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**OTHER NATIONS**


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***Pinochet's Chile***

"Going to Extremes" by Mark Falcoff, in *The New Republic* (Sept. 7, 1987), 1220 19th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Eight years ago, the only democracies in South America were Colombia and Venezuela. Since then, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and four other Latin nations have joined the list.

Why does Chile, a once-prosperous nation with a strong democratic