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LEGACIES OF RESISTANCE

Emerson, Buddhism, and Richard Wright's Pragmatist Poetics

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Emerson's affinity with Buddhism has been a subject of much controversy, and his adaptation of the doctrine translated as Buddhist "indifference" can easily be construed as stifling resistance to social injustice. I will revisit this topic, showing how Emerson figures prominently in discussions of Buddhism by the British haiku scholar R. H. Blyth, in order to develop a context for analyzing modes of resistance in Richard Wright's late haiku-inspired poetry. In 1959, when Wright was exiled and seriously ill in Paris, he studied Blyth's works while composing 4000 poems he would draw from a year later to produce "This Other World: Projections in the Haiku Manner," a manuscript that remained in the Rare Book Collection of Yale's Beinecke Library until its publication in 1998, thirty-eight years after Wright's death (Fabre, *Unfinished* 1993: 510; Ogburn 1998: 57). A central question raised in discussions of these poems is whether or not Wright turns away from the social and political concerns evident in his earlier writings. I hope to show that their significance and force as protest poetry are stronger when read in light of a twentieth-century Emersonian pragmatist tradition elaborated by scholars such as Cornel West, James Albrecht, and Douglas Anderson, a tradition characterized by East-West intercultural exchange that includes John Dewey and Wright's close friend, Ralph Ellison. Contextualized and enriched by this

tradition, the poem Wright selected out of the 4000 to open his collection, "I am nobody," can be read in numerous ways, including as a pragmatic affirmation of Emerson's individualistic ethic of self-expressive action. I will conclude by discussing how Wright's pragmatist poetics and creative engagement with Buddhism in the work of T. S. Eliot shed light on Emerson's vastly neglected contribution to the development of Eliot's modernism in *The Waste Land*.

Emerson's first encounters with Asian cultures happened during his youth. His namesake uncle, Ralph Haskins, was active in trade with East Asia, and returned from a voyage to China shortly after Emerson was born (Haskins 1881: 8–9). Kenneth Cameron describes how Emerson's father, the Reverend William Emerson, was the founding editor of the *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, which in a July 1805 issue featured "possibly the first Sanskrit translation in the United States" (Cameron 2007: 14). Emerson was a student at Harvard College during a time when there was a great deal of interest in Indic traditions, and much of what he read about Hinduism in periodicals as an undergraduate provided a rich stimulus for his future studies in Buddhism (Cameron 2007: 18–20, 26, 24; Goodman 1990: 625). As Robert Richardson puts it, "Despite the scarcity of major texts and sympathetic accounts in languages he could read, Emerson came quickly to value the importance and appeal of Buddhism" (Richardson 1995: 393).

Although Emerson's first explicit mention of Buddhism occurs in an 1841 letter to Margaret Fuller, he first learned about East Asian Buddhism as early as 1831. In a letter written on May 24th to his brother William, Emerson says that he has been reading the first seven or eight lectures in the first volume of Victor Cousin's *Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie*, which was published in Paris in 1829 (Emerson, *Letters* 1: 322). Emerson's reading of Cousin came at a moment of transition and crisis, a time when he was raising fundamental questions about his faith and vocation, culminating in "The Lord's Supper" and his resignation from the pulpit at the Second Church of Boston on September 9th, 1832 (Buell 2003: 21; Richardson 1995: 139; Urbas, *Metaphysics* 2016: 77–85). He left for Italy in December, arriving in Paris in mid-June, 1833, where he visited the Louvre and the Jardin des Plantes, and attended

lectures at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France. In his book, Cousin calls attention to the importance of Buddhism in the history of philosophy; elaborates the historical and doctrinal connections between Hinduism and Buddhism; and, perhaps most significantly, refers to new work by the important nineteenth-century scholar, Eugene Burnouf, that was published in the March 1825 issue of the *Journal asiatique* by the Société Asiatique de Paris (Cousin 1829: 178n.1). In 1826, Burnouf published *Essay sur le pali*, the first grammar for one of the sacred languages of Buddhism, giving access to the language of the oldest Buddhist canon. In 1832, just a year before Emerson's visit, Burnouf was elected to the Collège de France, inaugurating the study of Buddhism in Europe. One of the first major texts of Buddhism Burnouf chose to translate was the *Lotus Sutra*, or the *Lotus of the Good Law* and, in 1844, Burnouf published *Introduction à l'histoire de Buddhisme Indien*, which set the course for the academic study of Buddhism for the next century.

Thus we know that Emerson happened to be in Paris when European Buddhist studies was first emerging in the early 1830s and, as Raymond Schwab has shown, the city was the hub of oriental scholarship (Schwab 1984: 111, 46). Ralph Rusk reports that among the Emerson papers there is a copy of the outline of lectures at the Sorbonne for the second semester, 1833, which lists courses by professors such as Cousin, and a copy of a program from the Collège de France that lists Burnouf "on the Sanskrit language and literature" (Emerson, *Letters* 3: 387n.90; Rudy 2001: 220–21n.1). Emerson became increasingly interested in Buddhism during the 1830s and 1840s, unlike the vast majority of Americans, who knew very little about Buddhism until the 1860s and 1870s, when Buddhism became a vogue (Jackson 1981: 56, 141). We know that he read and reread a translation of an Indian book on Buddha, because it appeared on the lists noted in his journals for 1836, 1838, and 1840—an experience which, according to Frederic Carpenter, "clearly affected Emerson's writing" (Carpenter 1930: 108). We also can be sure that Emerson was aware of Burnouf's 1839 translation from Sanskrit into French of manuscripts of the *Lotus Sutra*, because selections from Burnouf's translation were included in two articles in *La Revue Indépendante* in 1843—"Fragments des Prédications

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de Buddha" and "Considérations sur l'Origine du Bouddhisme"—and in his journal that year, Emerson had translated a passage from the latter of these articles into English. Emerson was editor for *The Dial* at that time, and included a selection from Burnouf's French translation that was subsequently translated into English, either by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody or by Emerson himself, for publication as "The Preaching of Buddha" in the January 1844 issue (Van Anglen 2012: 3–5). This publication of a selection from the *Lotus Sutra* in *The Dial*, which was prefixed with an extract from Burnouf's article, effectively opened what Thomas Tweed has called "the American conversation about Buddhism" (Tweed 1992: xix).

Emerson's doctrine of correspondence has been discussed in connection with the influence of Emanuel Swedenborg and Coleridge, but more should be said about the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination, which teaches that all things arise in dependence on other things (Bosco et al. 2009: 101–102). Carpenter has noted Emerson's expressed aversion to the "over-rational quality which he felt to underlie [Buddhism]" as evidenced by this journal entry from 1845: "*Buddha, or he who knows*. Intellect puts an interval: if we converse with low things,—the interval saves us. But if we converse with high things, with heroic actions, with heroic persons, with virtues, the interval becomes a gulf, and we cannot enter into the highest good." (Carpenter 1930: 146, 148; Emerson, *Journals* 9: 2) But this passage immediately precedes another entry that shows a similar aversion to Plato, even though Plato was central to the formation of Emerson's thought. Indeed, the intellectual quality underlying the Buddhist perspective may have been an enabling source of its appeal for Emerson at this time. Emerson's experience in the Jardin des Plantes, related in his journal for 1833, instructs us not just to take Emerson's interests in science more seriously, but to consider how his awareness of Buddhism, through Cousin and Burnouf, prepared him for his naturalist revelation, when he writes, "Not a form so grotesque, so savage, nor so beautiful but is an expression of some property inherent in the observer,—an occult relation between the very scorpions and man. I feel the centipede in me—cayman, carp, eagle, & fox. I am moved by strange sympathies, I say continually, 'I will be a naturalist'" (Emerson, *Journals* 4: 199–200). In *Nature*, as in the Jardin des Plantes, Emerson is drawn

to the organic, dynamic, all-encompassing unity in nature's web of relation and analogy, the profound interrelationship among the overwhelming diversity of natural facts arranged into a perfectly ordered, unified system that shows the "radical correspondence between visible things and human thoughts" (Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* 1983: 10–11, 22).

There are many other suggestive references to Buddhism in Emerson's journals, but the clearest evidence we have that Emerson himself regarded Buddhism as relevant to his thought occurs in "The Transcendentalist," an 1842 lecture read at the Masonic Temple in Boston. Here, in his first public reference to Buddhism, Emerson explicitly identifies Buddhism with Transcendentalism. "The Transcendentalist adopts the whole connection of spiritual doctrine," he writes. "Buddhism is an expression of it. The Buddhist…in his conviction that every good deed can by no possibility escape its reward, is a Transcendentalist." (Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* 1983: 22) In this lecture, as in his essay "Compensation," which appeared a year earlier, Emerson conceives of a universe where beneficial effects are derived from virtuous actions and harmful effects from evil actions, a theory that, according to Arthur Versluis and others, was shaped by the doctrine of karma shared by Buddhism and Hinduism (Versluis 1993: 58; Christy 1932: 98–105; Jackson 1981: 54).

There is, moreover, a growing consensus among scholars with regard to resonances with the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness or the nonego in one of the most memorable passages from Emerson's *Nature* where he becomes a transparent eye-ball: "In the woods, we return to reason and faith […]. Standing on the bare ground […] all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" (Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* 1983: 10; Richardson 1995: 393; Rudy 2001: 50; Hakutani 2017: 45–47). Sharon Cameron has argued that in Emerson "the personal is most marked at the moment of its obliteration," and this recurring dialectic, Emerson's "making and *un*making of personality," should be regarded in light of his interest in Buddhism (Cameron 2007: viii, 93–94). Indeed, Emerson's perceived affinities with Buddhism may have been one reason, as Alan Hodder has remarked, that his writings influenced Japanese intellectual circles during the Meiji era, when "Compensation" was the very first of his essays to be translated into Japanese by Nakamura Masano in 1888. Hodder states that "By the 1890s, Emerson's

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writings began to exert a strong influence on Japanese culture more widely, and before long, quotations from Emerson found their way into Japanese newspapers, magazines, and even common usage as well" (Hodder 2015: 401). Emerson's 1872 speech at a Harvard banquet held in Boston for the Iwakura mission, a group of diplomats and technical advisors sent by the Meiji government to study Western institutions, may have helped to establish his popularity in Japan (Gewertz 2004). D. T. Suzuki, an influential interpreter of Zen Buddhism, published his "Essay on Emerson" in 1896, and in later years recalled the "deep impressions" made upon him while he was reading Emerson in college (Suzuki 1959: 343–344; Goto 2007: 74–82).

Richard Wright very likely would have come across Suzuki's commentary on Emerson while he composed his projections in the haiku manner in 1959, because at the time he was also perusing *The Complete Works of D. T. Suzuki: Manual of Zen Buddhism* and Suzuki's second series of *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. Wright owned three volumes of collected essays by Emerson, and his deep and lasting appreciation for Emerson's place in the American tradition was expressed in his comments in an unpublished essay on "Personalism" written in the mid- to late-1930s, and on the dust jacket of Henrietta Buckmaster's history of the Underground Railroad, published by Harper in 1941. "Emerson speculated and sang of the spiritual and moral perfection of the individual under what he hoped would be a truly democratic civilization," Wright claimed. "We Americans have lost something, have forgotten something, that we will never be ourselves again until we have recaptured and made our own the fire that once burned in the hearts of [...] Douglass, [...] Emerson, [...] and others." (Fabre, *Books* 1990: 19, 47; Davis et al. 1982: 167)

Learning about haiku and Buddhism from R. H. Blyth, Wright would have become even more intensely aware of Emerson, for the simple reason that Blyth quotes extensively from Emerson to illustrate fundamental tenets of Zen Buddhism. There are seventeen quotations drawn from Emerson's poetry and prose in Blyth's four volumes, and nine in the first volume alone, a volume we know Wright studied with great care. For example, in his discussion of "Zen, the State of Mind for Haiku," in a section

titled “Selflessness,” Blyth quotes from Emerson’s “Bacchus”—“And the poor grass shall plot and plan/What it will do when it is man”—to illustrate the Buddhist doctrine of the nonego where, he writes, “it is the insentient things whose own Buddha nature stirs within them.” Wright would also have been struck by Blyth’s quotation of a line from “Self-Reliance,” “God will not have his work made manifest by cowards,” to explore courage as a manifestation of Zen:

Though not one of the virtues especially emphasized by the moralist, it nevertheless includes all the other twelve characteristics mentioned above, selflessness, loneliness, grateful acceptance, wordlessness, non-intellectuality, contradictoriness, humour, freedom, non-morality, materiality, and love. All these elements are in some way present when an act of courage is performed. It may be difficult, however, to see how courage is an essential, even the most essential part of a poet. (Blyth 1949: 165, 261–62; Emerson, *Collected Poems* 1994: 96; Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* 1983: 260).

The majority of the illustrative passages in Blyth’s discussion of Zen and haiku in the first volume are drawn from Emerson’s “Woodnotes I.” For example, in order to explain “Materiality” as a manifestation of Zen and the “practicality of haiku,” Blyth quotes from the first section of “Woodnotes I,” to show how Emerson “gives us a list of things that a poet, and preeminently a haiku poet, prizes most” (Blyth 1949: 304):

[...] shadows, colors, clouds,
Grass-buds and caterpillars’ shrouds,
Boughs on which the wild bees settle,
Tints that spot the violet’s petal [.]
(*Emerson, Collected Poems 1994: 35–36*)

At the end of the volume, Blyth uses his own line breaks and omits the conjunction “And” opening a line in the third section of Emerson’s poem (*Collected Poems* 1994: 37) as a model of what he describes as “haiku in English poetry” (Blyth 1949: 241–242):

Up the tall mast
Runs
The woodpecker.

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Another quotation from the third section of the poem occurs where Blyth elucidates the "extreme simplicity" of Zen, and the resulting reticence of haiku poetry where "the volubility of the Japanese language has been completely overcome." "Such a simplicity," he continues, "implies an extraordinary acuteness, such as we find, for example, in the following: […] 'Go where he will, the wise man is at home.'" Finally, the memorable and compelling identification of love with courage "as one thing" in Zen and haiku is illustrated in Emerson's concluding lines:

> When the forest shall mislead me,
> When the night and morning lie,
> When sea and land refuse to feed me,
> 'Twill be time enough to die:
> Then will yet my mother yield
> A pillow in her greenest field,
> Nor the June flowers scorn to cover
> The clay of their departed lover.
> (Blyth 1949: 252, 267–68; Emerson, *Collected Poems* 1994: 39)

In scholarly debates concerning Wright's haiku-inspired poetry, the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness has been construed as stifling resistance to social injustice: a central question critics raise is whether or not Wright turns away from the social and political concerns evident in his earlier works (Fabre, "Poetry" 1982: 271; Tener 1982: 273–74; Brignano 1970: 16). Consider, for example, the opening poem from Wright's collection, which arguably alludes to the passage in *Nature* where Emerson writes "I am nothing":

> I am nobody:
> A red sinking autumn sun
> Took my name away. (Wright, *Haiku* 1998: 1)

Some critics, such as Toru Kiuchi, have praised Wright for exhibiting the influence of Zen Buddhism (Kiuchi 2011: 34); it is plausible, as Sanehide Kodama has argued, that the poet-speaker's description of himself as "nobody" represents "selflessness," in Blyth's sense, because an angry black consciousness has, through the poem's willed loss of identity, been transcended and transmuted to peace of mind and acceptance (Kodama 2011: 127–128). Viewed in these terms, Wright's "I am nobody" liberates the poet-speaker from his-

tory, including his lifelong struggle against racism. However, "I am nobody" has also been construed as a powerful affirmation of subjectivity. Robert Tener has argued that Wright did not achieve mastery of haiku as a genre in this poem, in part because the poet-speaker is too intrusive, and fails to accept the loss of personal identity (Tener 1982: 283, 289); as Yoshinobu Hakutani observes, "the poet is strongly present, even by negation" (Hakutani 2017: 141). According to this interpretation, Wright's poem should be read as a protest poem depicting what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. memorably described some years later as "a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness'" in his celebrated "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" (King 1991: 283).

The significance and force of Wright's "I am nobody" as a poem of protest and resistance are considerably stronger when it is read in light of Emersonian pragmatism: another possible intertext is "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" by Emily Dickinson, whom Richard Poirier has identified as a pragmatist, whose lyric practice has been found to share characteristics of Japanese visual art and ceremonies underlying the aesthetics of haiku poetry, and whose poetry Wright reread in 1958 (Poirier 1992: 80; Takeda 2013: 26; Fabre, *Unfinished* 1993: 464, 614n.5). In *White Man, Listen*, published in 1953, Wright adamantly affirms both the "autonomy" of art and a "tough-souled pragmatism" that would nurture a meaningful life: "I am convinced that the humble, fragile dignity of man, buttressed by a tough-souled pragmatism, […] can sufficiently sustain and nourish human life, can endow it with ample and durable meaning […]. I believe that art has its own autonomy, a self-sufficiency that extends beyond […] the spheres of political or priestly power or sanction" (Wright, *White* 1957: 51–52). In his 1945 introduction to *Black Metropolis* by St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, Wright discusses the work of John Dewey, along with his fellow pragmatist William James (Wright, "Introduction" 1945: xxiii). His interest in Dewey's *Art as Experience* is especially noteworthy, insofar as Kenneth Yasuda has observed the applicability of Dewey's text to traditional haiku aesthetics (Yasuda 1957: 12), and at least one Dewey scholar, Jim Garrison, has examined Dewey's influence on twentieth-century Japanese Buddhist philosophy (Garrison et al. 2014: 4–5, 13).

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I will not attempt to definitively answer the question of whether Emerson should be regarded as a pragmatist or an originator of this tradition, citing instead numerous scholars, such as Cornel West, Richard Poirier, James Albrecht, and Douglas Anderson. Joseph Urbas has addressed this question in an illuminating close analysis of the line in "Experience" where Emerson writes that "The true romance which the world exists to realize will be the transformation of genius into practical power," concluding that Emerson's doctrine is "practical *because metaphysical*" insofar as the world "exists to realize right ideas aligned with its causal order." (Urbas, "How Close" 2017: 569) As Albrecht observes, "The notion that Emerson is a seminal figure or precursor for American pragmatism is no longer new or controversial" and the influence of pragmatist ideas and motifs in American literature during the first half of the twentieth century has been widely recognized by Frank Lentricchia, Paul Jay, Jonathan Levin, and others (Albrecht 2012: 18; Lentricchia 1994: 1–46; Jay 1997: 20–56; Levin 1999: 17–44). West, Anderson, and Albrecht have argued that Dewey, following Emerson, places emphasis on reconstructing the idea of truth with a focus on consequences, the conduct of life, and the betterment of human existence in society. All three affirm that Dewey adapts and expands Emerson's affirmation of individuality as self-reliance. "The grand breakthrough of Dewey," West writes, "is not only that he considers […] larger structures, systems, and institutions, but also that he puts them at the center of his pragmatic thought without surrendering his allegiance to Emersonian and Jamesian concerns with individuality and personality" (West 1989: 217).

It is very likely that Wright had both Emerson and Dewey in mind when he composed "I am nobody," because Dewey quotes Emerson's transparent eye-ball passage to illustrate the mystic aspect of "aesthetic surrender," advocating intercultural engagement with the arts of Asian and African civilizations in order to combat racism (Dewey 1934: 29, 344, 349–350). But an even more compelling intertext is *Invisible Man* by Wright's close friend Ralph Ellison, a novel which, as Albrecht has convincingly argued, should be included in the genealogy of Emersonian pragmatism. Refuting critics who interpret Ellison's parodic allusions as a "scathing rejection" of Emerson, Albrecht argues that *Invisible Man* expresses

Ellison's ambivalent indebtedness to and critique of Emerson's conception of self-reliance and "complex sense of the self's social implication and indebtedness" (Albrecht 2012: 19). I contend that Wright, in "I am nobody," deliberately alludes to Ellison's opening chapter in *Invisible Man*, where a single passage encapsulates a central insight about democratic individuality as it is reconceived by Emerson and the legacy of pragmatism elaborated by Dewey: "It took me a long time," says the Invisible Man, "and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself." (Ellison, *Invisible* 1995: 15) Despite their at times fraught relationship, Wright's late haiku recalls Ellison's celebration of Wright's "assertion of individuality" in his 1945 review of *Black Boy*, "Richard Wright's Blues" (Ellison, *Collected* 2003: 134). Affirming Emerson's individualistic ethic of self-expressive action, or self-culture, Wright and Ellison both show how individuality can only be known and developed against the resistance of a particular social environment; in doing so, they respond in a hopeful, life-affirming way to what would otherwise appear to be tragic limitations on the self.

I hope I have given some indication of how Emerson fostered the development of Wright's pragmatist poetics. I will conclude with a brief consideration of how Wright's pragmatist poetics and interest in Buddhism help us to acknowledge that Emerson's East-West interculturality laid a foundation for the flourishing of T. S. Eliot's modernism in *The Waste Land*, a work rarely discussed in connection with either Emerson or Wright. We know that part three of *Lawd Today!*, Wright's first novel, was begun in 1935, at a time when Wright was reading Eliot with a passion, and carried this memorable, haunting epigraph taken from Eliot's *The Waste Land*: "But at my back in a cold blast I hear/The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear." (Walker 1988; Eliot 2015: 62; Patterson, "Projections" 2021: 13) The epigraph explicitly alludes to one of the most enigmatic, studied passages in all of Eliot's poetry, part three of *The Waste Land*, "The Fire Sermon," which culminates in a juxtaposition of fragments from Augustine's *Confessions* and a Buddhist scripture that Eliot identifies in a footnote and had studied in the original Pali

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for Charles Lanman's course as a graduate student at Harvard. As I have argued elsewhere, the influence of *The Waste Land* extends to Wright's protest poems published during the 1930s, including "Between the World and Me," which appeared in the *Partisan Review* in the summer of 1935, and where Wright renders his speaker's awakening to shocked horror at a lynching (Patterson, "Projections" 2021: 17). Wright's 1945 journal, written shortly before he expatriated to Paris, reveals a renewed interest in Eliot's poetry, insofar as Wright quotes from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Portrait of a Lady," and *Ash-Wednesday*. Composing his projections in the haiku manner two decades after he first used the epigraph from Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Wright's interest in Buddhism, haiku poetry, and transpacific interculturality rendered Eliot's work more relevant than ever (Patterson, "Modern Poetry" 2021: 296–298). Wright's dialectical affirmation of subjectivity by negation in "I am nobody," inspired by Emerson and Buddhism, also recalls Eliot's formulation of poetic impersonality in his 1919 essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"—a concept that was, according to Sharon Cameron (Cameron 2007: 152, 166–167), Tatsuo Murata (Murata 1995: 18–23), Christian Kloeckner (Kloeckner 2012: 166–167, 171), and others, shaped by Eliot's study of Sanskrit and Pali texts and attraction to the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness.

Eliot's own academic course of study raises the strong possibility that he was intensely aware of Emerson's prior interest in Buddhism. In his graduate courses with Lanman, for example, where Eliot read works by the Sanskrit scholar and philologist, F. Max Müller, he would have learned that Müller dedicated his foundational study of comparative religion, *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, to Emerson. Moreover, while auditing lectures in another course, Philosophy 24a, "Schools of Religious and Philosophical Thought in Japan," taught by the Japanese comparative religion scholar Masaharu Anesaki, during the 1913–1914 academic year, Eliot received a class handout on the "parable of the plants" from the *Lotus Sutra* that was the same excerpt published by Emerson as "The Preaching of the Buddha" in *The Dial* (Patterson, "Eliot" 2018: 36–38; Crawford 2015: 176). Anesaki, who frequently drew comparisons between Unitarianism and Buddhism, and who was closely connected with the Unitarian community in Boston as well

as the Unitarian mission in Japan, would have known, and likely mentioned this to his class (Kearns 1987: 78).

Many critics have examined Eliot's allusion to Hinayana Buddhism in "The Fire Sermon," but no one to my knowledge has discussed the relevance of Emerson's 1844 Mahayana Buddhist selection for *The Dial*, even though its imagery and hermeneutical emphasis present strong, striking resonances with *The Waste Land*. In *The Waste Land*, as in the parable of the plants, thunder and water figure the difficulty, and necessity, of cultural mediation and interpretation in the transmission of Mahayana Buddhist teachings. The version rendered in *The Dial* describes a scene in which a great cloud, resounding with the noise of thunder, spreads water over the land and nourishes the different kinds of plants. The rain, we are told, represents the teachings of the Buddha, and the plants represent the diverse capacities of living beings who hear and are nourished by his teachings, each one according to their ability and need. The parable demonstrates how the Buddha employs skillful means and devices in order to adapt his teachings to the abilities of his hearers, a central doctrine of the Mahayana. Eliot's deliberate allusion to this East Asian Buddhist parable conjoins the quandary of interpretation vividly dramatized at the end of *The Waste Land* by the Hindu parable of the Thunder, and the Biblical trope of water as a metaphor of transmission in what Eliot called the "water-dripping song," endowing greater formal coherence to his poem as a whole.

We still have much to learn about Emerson, Buddhism, and their importance for the development of Wright's pragmatist poetics as well as Eliot's modernism. At the very least, I hope I have shown that, read carefully within the context of Emersonian legacies of resistance, Wright's work is a monumental achievement that has opened new cross-cultural vistas and will continue to inspire future generations.

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Abstract: Emerson's affinity with Buddhism has been the source of much controversy, and his adaptation of the doctrine translated as Buddhist "indifference" has been construed as stifling resistance to social injustice. I will revisit this topic, explaining why Emerson figures so prominently in discussions of Buddhism by the philosopher D. T. Suzuki and the British scholar R. H. Blyth, in order to develop a context for analyzing modes of resistance in Richard Wright's late haiku-inspired poetry. A central

question raised in critical debates is whether or not Wright turns away in these poems from the social and political concerns of his earlier works. I will show that their significance and force as protest poetry is considerably stronger when regarded in light of Wright's "tough-souled pragmatism" and an Emersonian pragmatist tradition elaborated by scholars such as Cornel West, James Albrecht, and Douglas Anderson, a tradition characterized by East-West intercultural exchange that includes John Dewey and Ralph Ellison. Contextualized and enriched by this tradition, the poem Wright selected out of the 4000 to open his collection, "I am nobody," can be read as alluding to Ellison's allusion to Emerson in *Invisible Man*, protesting what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would some years later memorably describe as "a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness'" in his celebrated "Letter from Birmingham City Jail." I will conclude with a brief consideration of how Wright's creative engagement with Buddhism in the work of T. S. Eliot illuminates Emerson's vastly neglected contribution to the development of high modernism.

Keywords: transpacific, pragmatism, haiku, Buddhism, Richard Wright, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Dewey, T. S. Eliot, modernism, African American literature

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