The Powerful Mind is the Healthy Mind:  
Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Representative Men* (1850) and the History of Mental Health

**INTRODUCTION**

Through his book of lectures, *Representative Men* (1850), Ralph Waldo Emerson created a technology that impressed upon America what it means to be great, the qualities of greatness, and whom we should look to as our heroes. In the nineteenth century, Emerson was seen as a champion of individualism and a prescient critic of the countervailing pressures of society. He lauded the free-thinker, he who questioned what others told him to believe. Building on and strengthening those ideas, *Representative Men* constructed a model of mental health and the perfect person that is focused around “power.” This conception went forth to inspire others and is even still influential today.

No other scholar to date has written about Emerson’s influence on the history of mental health. To be true, a lot has been written about Emerson’s impact on intellectual history and how his philosophies have become eminent fields of thought with which to base other philosophies. However, little has been written on how his works generally, or *Representative Men* specifically, influenced ideas about what makes a healthy person. This analysis will take previously unanalyzed manuscripts, as well as the scholarly works of others, in a new direction, seeing Emerson as not only a mode of thought, but as a landmark in the history of mental health.
In this analysis, I am concerned neither with the personal history of Emerson, nor with the broader history of psychology. Rather, this essay seeks to uncover how Representative Men affected the way his readers “saw” mental health and to place Emerson’s work in the greater narrative of the history of mental health. This essay intends to prove that Representative Men encouraged readers to see greatness and great health as a product of power, control, and action as well as to uncover the role of Representative Men in the “progressive model” of the history of mental health.

The argument proceeds in five steps: Part I of this essay will describe Emerson’s background to Representative Men: how Representative Men came to be as an idea, a series of lectures, and finally, a book. Part II will closely analyze two chapters of Representative Men (1850) as well as written annotations and markings on early editions of Representative Men from the Wellesley College Special Collections Library and the Harvard University Widener Library. This section will uncover how actual contemporary readers of Emerson focused their study. Part III will break down contemporary criticisms of Emerson’s work, understanding how the most eminent scholars and friends of Emerson understood and publicized Representative Men. Part IV of this essay will place Emerson’s work into contemporary religious, scientific and philosophical contexts and further analyze a phrenological work that was directly influenced by Representative Men. Finally, in Part V, I will place Emerson into the greater historical narrative of “Mental Health.” With a close analysis of phrenology as seen through How to Read Character (1874) by Samuel R. Wells and others works, I intend to prove that the nineteenth-century phase in the histories of psychiatry and neuroscience could be expanded to include what looks like merely a set of historical biographies, Representative Men, but is actually so much more.
I: BACKGROUND

*Representative Men* (1850) is a series of lectures/essays about men who Emerson considered to be “great.” The first of Emerson’s essays, “Uses of Great Men,” discusses the role played by "Great Men" in society, and the remaining six extol the virtues of particular men: Plato ("the Philosopher"), Emanuel Swedenborg ("the Mystic"), Michel de Montaigne ("the Skeptic"), William Shakespeare ("the Poet"), Napoleon Bonaparte ("the Man of the World"), and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe ("the Writer").

Despite the statuesque status the work has garnered today, for Emerson, *Representative Men* began as a very fluid concept. From his youth, Emerson was interested in the study and history of important men. In the early 1800s, biography writing was very popular,1 and it was in this style that Emerson’s first inklings on the topic began. In the late 1830s, Emerson delivered his “Lectures on Biography” which were the first of his to explore the idea of a singular “Great Man.”2 He covered men such as “Michelangelo, Martin Luther, John Milton, George Fox, and Edmund Burke.”3 Interestingly, none of these men would make it into his later book. In the early 1840s, Emerson began to closely research several of his later famed “Representative Men,” starting with Napoleon and Plato.4 In October of 1845, Emerson began plans for a Boston lecture series:

> seven lectures … beginning in the beginning of December on ‘Representative Men’ consisting with perhaps a preliminary discourse on Plato or the Philosopher/ Swedenborg or

---


3 Whicher, *Freedom and Fate*, xxv.

With that final phrase, Emerson denotes that his ideas were still fluid and changing.

Throughout the pages of his journal, “I shall modify my list” is perhaps a most grand understatement. From 1844 to his final draft publication in 1850, Emerson wrote, re-wrote, edited, ordered, reordered, omitted and added pieces to *Representative Men.* In one iteration, Joseph Fourier, a French mathematician, appeared in Emerson’s lineup. However, Fourier was not included in the final cut of the book (though he is made brief mention to in “Napoleon”). Emerson would write throughout his journal differing titles and descriptions of his *Representative Men,* including alternative topics such as “What is the use of great men?,” “On the misuse of men,” and even combining “Swedenborg & Fourier.” There is one page in his journal where Emerson writes and rewrites, editing the order of his speeches fifteen times in a row.

In 1845, Emerson’s opening lecture, “Uses of Great Men,” filled the Boston Lyceum Theatre. The lecture was heavily publicized by the club. In fact, Emerson had been entirely sponsored by the Boston Lyceum who rented the hall, advertised, and printed tickets for all seven of Emerson’s lectures to take place over seven consecutive weeks. Henry Longfellow (1807-1882), the famed American poet, attended Emerson’s anticipated lecture series with his scholarly friends.

According to Longfellow’s diary, even though there was room in the lecture hall for 1500 people

---

7 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xi-liv.
8 *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* 219-220.
9 *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* 224.
10 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xxxv.
and standing room for many more, Emerson’s crowd filled the entire room. At the lecture Longfellow heard from Emerson “many striking and brilliant passages, but not so much as usual of that ‘sweet rhetorick’ which usually flows from his lips; and many things to shock the sensitive ear and heart.” The next week, Longfellow “Heard Emerson’s second lecture, on Plato. A theatre full. It is curious to see such an audience,-- old men and young, bald heads and flowing transcendental locks, matrons and maidens, misanthropists and lovers, -- listening to the reveries of the poet-philosopher.”

Longfellow noted that many different types of people were in attendance, all listening to Emerson’s speech. However, because of Emerson’s local fame at this time in his career and the price of attendance for his speeches, these were probably all fairly wealthy, intellectual men and women of Boston. In his writings, Emerson professed a desire to educate the “humblest and most ignorant” in place of the “the most cultivated.” However, Emerson surely did not give his speech to any “lowly” people in this club, as Longfellow and his friends undoubtedly took place among the “cultivated” high society. It might also be assumed, through the title of Emerson’s work, that women were wholly excluded from Emerson’s endeavor, however through Longfellow’s diary we learn that women as well as men attended these lectures.

As he continued giving his speeches, Emerson was “much in demand at Lyceums in neighboring towns.” At some of his appearances, Emerson delivered only one or two lectures—usually “Plato” or “Napoleon.” By special request, Emerson delivered “Napoleon” twice (in two

---

11 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xxxviii.
12 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xxxviii.
13 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xxxviii.
14 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xxxviii.
16 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xxxix.
consecutive nights) to the fashionable Boston Mercantile Library Association.\textsuperscript{17} He often gave his speeches out of the traditional order listed in his book, sometimes he began with “Uses of Great Men” (the first essay in his book) and sometimes he ended with it.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1847, Emerson travelled to England with his “Representative Men” series and his typical lecture canon.\textsuperscript{19} In his usual way, Emerson made revisions to the order of his speeches. Curiously, in England, Emerson would give some of his “Representative Men” lectures mixed in with his other prepared speeches. In Glasgow, Paisley, and Perth, Emerson gave the speeches “Eloquence” “Domestic Life” and “Napoleon.”\textsuperscript{20} Curiously, the two favorites from the “Representative Men” series, “Napoleon” and “Shakespeare,” were often given alongside Emerson’s speech on “Domestic Life.”\textsuperscript{21}

In England (as it later would in America), Emerson’s “Swedenborg” speech was met with controversy. Christians denounced Emerson’s “obvious denial of pure malignity,” especially his passage on the ascent of a man’s spirit even in jail and in the brothel.\textsuperscript{22} For these reasons, Christian leaders made great efforts in Nottingham and Derby to prevent Emerson from speaking. Nevertheless, Emerson gave “Swedenborg” twice on this trip.\textsuperscript{23} Despite the controversy of “Swedenborg,” Emerson did not replace it for “Plato” or “Napoleon,” his more popular essays. For some reason, “Plato” was never read to any audience in Great Britain.\textsuperscript{24} Similarly, only once in his whole trip did Emerson speak on the “Uses of Great Men.”\textsuperscript{25} Wallace Williams, who writes the

\textsuperscript{17} Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xxxix.  
\textsuperscript{18} Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xxxix.  
\textsuperscript{19} Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xlv.  
\textsuperscript{20} Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xlv.  
\textsuperscript{21} Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xlvii.  
\textsuperscript{22} Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xlv.  
\textsuperscript{23} Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xlv.  
\textsuperscript{24} Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xlv.  
\textsuperscript{25} Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xlv.
historical introduction to Harvard’s *Collected Works of Emerson*, seems to think that Emerson was holding his “Plato” lecture for “special occasions.” Of course, that means Williams conceived of “Plato” as Emerson’s most important lecture. It is perfectly possible, however, that Emerson just did not feel that the speech was ready to deliver to esteemed audiences abroad. Emerson never explained the reason for his omission in writing.

On the whole, the critical balance was tipped in Emerson's favor in England, with many warm expressions of praise and admirations in newspapers and magazines. Throughout all his travels, the large size of the crowds that Emerson drew were noted. Emerson’s trip to England became a turning point in his popularity. His travels “deprovincialized him” and brought him current with the international intellectual tides of the mid nineteenth century. When Emerson returned from Europe, he brought with him a more “urbane” version of his lectures, no longer useful on the podium but now firmly destined for publication.

Despite the biographical content of *Representative Men*, Emerson did not consider his work “biography.” He figured he had finished that genre with his “Lectures on Biography” in 1835, and *Representative Men* was something of an entirely different character. Instead, he described *Representative Men* as a “contemporaneous work.” The point of his book was not to simply write about these “Great Men,” but to teach others how they could raise themselves alongside great figures-- making it a modern text, rather than a historical text. However, never quite content with his finished product, it took Emerson five years to complete revisions on the print version of *Representative Men*.

---

26 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xlvi.
27 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xlvi.
28 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xlvii.
29 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xlvii.
30 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” l.
31 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xxii.
32 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” liv.
On January 1, 1850, the first edition of Representative Men was published in Boston by the Phillips, Sampson and Company (110 Washington Street). They printed 3500 copies. There was also a contemporary “Chapman edition” printed and published in London on or about the same day as the Boston edition, created from a transcription that Emerson sent to his English friend, Mr. Chapman. According to the back of the front cover of the first edition of Representative Men, the book was “entered into the clerk’s office of the District Court of Massachusetts.” This served as its copyright.

II: REPRESENTATIVE MEN

Emerson designed his book as a technology to instruct models for future ages; an ideal that all men might follow. In his work, Emerson's asserts that leaders, and subsequently mentally healthy people, need to have certain qualities such as charm, persuasiveness, commanding personality, intuition, intelligence, courage, and aggressiveness which are of such a nature that they cannot be taught or learned in a formal sense. All others without these qualities (common people), will never be able to reach such a high status naturally. However, if common people follow the example of a “Great Man” they may become more like him and learn something about themselves along the way. Representative Men presupposes that perfection, and therefore perfect mental health, is something that is innate but that can be worked on. Because of this depiction, a reader might believe

---

33 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” lvii.
34 In my analysis, I had the privilege to investigate a first edition printing of Representative Men (1850) by Ralph Waldo Emerson in Wellesley’s Special Collections Library and several first and early editions of Representative Men (1849, 1850, 1897) in the Harvard College Widener Library. These physical annotated copies, in conversation with the text itself, will help uncover how Emerson’s work was read and understood by his users.
35 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xxiii.
that, in order to be mentally healthy, he or she need to have these specific characteristics of
greatness, or at least aspire to them. If readers did not have these characteristics or were not actively
working towards them, they could not achieve greatness, or good health. Thereby, through
*Representative Men*, Emerson expresses how “Great Men” show the “capacity” of all men.\(^{36}\) Emerson
also hoped that his work would inspire his readers with the ethic, merit, heroism, and superior
intellect of his chosen.\(^{37}\) By lauding the great thinker, the man who challenges the social and
intellectual fabric of his time, Emerson hoped that readers would follow the influence of these
pioneering “first men”\(^{38}\) and live their lives by a great example.

Most explicitly through his work, however, Emerson asserts that “Representative Men”
should be those who have power over other people. In fact, Emerson literally writes that being at
the pinnacle of power makes someone healthy: “That is the moment of adult health, the culmination
of power.”\(^{39}\) This is the most overt and clear connection that Emerson makes in his book to the
ideal qualities as well as what is “health.” In informing readers how they should act, Emerson’s book
makes often use of the word “power.” Strikingly, “power” is referred to 126 times throughout the
text with an average of 17.8 times per chapter. In only a single paragraph about Shakespeare,
“power” appears 5 times.\(^{40}\) “Napoleon,” Emerson’s most popular chapter, references “power” 31
distinct times. Having such a recurring and explicit theme has an undeniable message-- in order to
be healthy, you must exert power over other people.

---

\(^{37}\) Williams, “Historical Introduction,” xxiii-xxiv.
\(^{39}\) Ralph Waldo Emerson, “II: Plato,” *Representative Men* (1850): “There is a moment, in the history of every
nation, when, proceeding out of this brute youth, the perceptive powers reach their ripeness, and have not yet
become microscopic: so that man, at that instant, extends across the entire scale; and, with his feet still
planted on the immense forces of night, converses, by his eyes and brain, with solar and stellar creation. *That
is the moment of adult health, the culmination of power.*” [Emphasis mine].
\(^{40}\) Emerson, “V: Shakspeare,” *Representative Men* (1850), paragraph 2.
Emerson’s hoped his users might “see” a mentally healthy person as unique and powerful. In order to understand the way in which Emerson explicitly conveys these messages and what he meant by them, I will take the reader through two essays in *Representative Men*: “I: Uses of Great Men,” and “VI: Napoleon.”

In his first essay, “Uses of Great Men,” Emerson opens by appealing to the sentiments of his reader: “It is natural to believe in great men.” He explains the importance of this kind of man: “the world is upheld by the veracity of good men: they make the earth wholesome.” Additionally, everything great and good comes from these men—religion, philosophy, service, and more: “Every other thing draws off of the pioneering work of these ‘first men.’” Emerson reminds us that this man is unlike everybody else: “He is great who is what he is from nature, and who never reminds us of others.” The great man, to Emerson, is also attune to intellectualism: “a great man … inhabits a higher sphere of thought, into which other men rise with labor and difficulty.” In his work, Emerson does not contend that everyone is equal; he quickly separates humanity into “men” and their “superiors.”

Emerson follows that the great man does stirring deeds; he reveals knowledge and wisdom; he shows depths of emotion—and others resolve to emulate him. The great man accomplishes intellectual feats of memory, of abstract thought, of imaginative flights, and dull minds are brightened by his light. The true genius does not tyrannize; he liberates those who know him. The great man, too, is powerful in many different ways. He is powerful in his “influence,” but also

---

43 Emerson, “I: Uses of Great Men,” *Representative Men* (1850): “Thus we feed on genius, and refresh ourselves from too much conversation with our mates, and exult in the depth of nature in that direction in which he
powerful as in “rich,”44 “magical power,”45 “power of performance,”46 “power in love,”47 and “imaginative power.”48 To Emerson, power simply meant being the best, and it was possible to be the best in every form, including a curious “power of abstraction.”49

In order to bring the great man to relevance for the rest of us, Emerson makes comparisons. For Emerson, all humans are infinitely receptive in capacity; they need only the wise to rouse them, to clear their eyes and make them see, to feed and refresh them: “Great men are thus a collyrium to

leads us. What indemnification is one great man for populations of pigmies! Every mother wishes one son a genius, though all the rest should be mediocre. But a new danger appears in the excess of influence of the great man. His attractions warp us from our place.” [Emphasis mine].

44 Emerson, “I: Uses of Great Men,” Representative Men (1850): “But if there were any magnet that would point to the countries and houses where are the persons who are intrinsically rich and powerful, I would sell all, and buy it, and put myself on the road to-day.” [Emphasis mine].

45 Emerson, “I: Uses of Great Men,” Representative Men (1850): “Our common discourse respects two kinds of use of service from superior men. Direct giving is agreeable to the early belief of men; direct giving of material or metaphysical aid, as of health, eternal youth, fine senses, arts of healing, magical power, and prophecy.” [Emphasis mine].

46 Emerson, “I: Uses of Great Men,” Representative Men (1850): “If you affect to give me bread and fire, I perceive that I pay for it the full price, and at last it leaves me as it found me, neither better nor worse: but all mental and moral force is a positive good. It goes out from you whether you will or not, and profits me whom you never thought of. I cannot even hear of personal vigor of any kind, great power of performance, without fresh resolution.” [Emphasis mine].

47 Emerson, “I: Uses of Great Men,” Representative Men (1850): “There is a power in love to divine another’s destiny better than that other can, and by heroic encouragements, hold him to his task. What has friendship so signaled as its sublime attraction to whatever virtue is in us? We will never more think cheaply of ourselves, or of life. We are piqued to some purpose, and the industry of the diggers on the railroad will not again shame us.” [Emphasis mine].

48 Emerson, “I: Uses of Great Men,” Representative Men (1850): “The high functions of the intellect are so allied, that some imaginative power usually appears in all eminent minds, even in arithmeticians of the first class, but especially in meditative men of an intuitive habit of thought. This class serve us, so that they have the perception of identity and the perception of reaction. The eyes of Plato, Shakespeare, Swedenborg, Goethe, never shut on either of these laws. The perception of these laws is a kind of metre of the mind. Little minds are little, through failure to see them.” [Emphasis mine].

49 Emerson, “I: Uses of Great Men,” Representative Men (1850): “We go to the gymnasium and the swimming-school to see the power and beauty of the body; there is the like pleasure, and a higher benefit, from witnessing intellectual feats of all kinds; as, feats of memory, of mathematical combination, great power of abstraction, the transmutations of the imagination, even versatility, and concentration, as these acts expose the invisible organs and members of the mind, which respond, member for member, to the parts of the body.” [Emphasis mine].
clear our eyes from egotism, and enable us to see other people and their works.”\textsuperscript{50} This subsequent clarity is possible because the spirit of the world’s great thinkers “diffuses itself.”\textsuperscript{51} A diffusion of greatness and subsequent absorption is what Emerson hopes others glean from his book: that common men will have their eyes cleared and the diffused power of superior men will rouse them to action. Thus, the cumulative effect of great individuals is that they prepare the way for greater intellects: “great men exist that there may be greater men.”\textsuperscript{52}

After all his lauding, Emerson expresses that his readers are not far from that same greatness he describes: “We are entitled, also, to higher advantages.”\textsuperscript{53} He even tells us what we must change about ourselves to be representative: “We need not fear excessive influence. A more generous trust is permitted. Serve the great. Stick at no humiliation. Grudge no office thou canst render….”\textsuperscript{54} Emerson does not pretend it will be easy; Emerson’s readers will need to work to change themselves because greatness is not innate. However, if we follow and act like the great man, we, too, can become representative: “nature brings all this about in due time.”\textsuperscript{55}

In a similar way, Emerson uses his chapter on “Napoleon” to further express an emphasis on power, dominance, and control. In his very first sentence, Emerson mentions power: “Among the eminent persons of the nineteenth century, Bonaparte is far the best known, and the most powerful…”\textsuperscript{56} He goes on to explain that Napoleon was a champion for the everyday person. Elevating him to the status of a “prophet,” delivered to rescue his people. He writes that Napoleon expressed powers of a great man. Following the more unique types of power listed in his first

\textsuperscript{50} Emerson, “I: Uses of Great Men,” \textit{Representative Men} (1850).
\textsuperscript{52} Emerson, “I: Uses of Great Men,” \textit{Representative Men} (1850).
\textsuperscript{54} Emerson, “I: Uses of Great Men,” \textit{Representative Men} (1850).
\textsuperscript{56} Emerson, “VI: Napoleon,” \textit{Representative Men} (1850).
chapter, Napoleon contains “material power”\textsuperscript{57} in wealth, but also power in eloquence, intellect, and even fashion.\textsuperscript{58}

In “Uses of Great Men,” Emerson writes: “Other men are lenses through which we read our own minds,”\textsuperscript{59} indicating that he expects us not only to lead our lives by the example of great men, but to actually frame our lives by their example. Emerson explores this idea more fully in his chapter on Napoleon: “Napoleon’s truth of adaptation to the mind of the masses around him becomes not merely representative, but actually a monopolizer and usurper of other minds.”\textsuperscript{60} Like the land he conquered, Napoleon usurped the minds of his people. Despite the inherent negativity of the word “usurp,” Emerson employs it in relationship to his representative man—ultimately, it is not a negative or oppressive word to Emerson. It seems as though Napoleon’s controlling of minds is among the reasons why he is great, because it assumes his superior intellect: lesser minds simply cannot help but become absorbed by his exceptional, unique, more powerful mind.

Surprisingly, however, Emerson does not go into detail about Napoleon’s background in his essay. The chapter does not explain Napoleon’s life much at all or what he did to become great or representative. Like Emerson expressed, this work is not a biography. It lauds qualities and nothing else. In fact, Emerson does not even attribute Napoleon’s success to Napoleon: “Nature must have

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[57] Emerson, “VI: Napoleon,” \textit{Representative Men} (1850): “Paris, and London, and New York, the spirit of commerce, of money, and \textit{material power}, were also to have their \textit{prophet}; and Bonaparte was qualified and sent.” [Emphasis mine].
\item[58] Emerson, “VI: Napoleon,” \textit{Representative Men} (1850): “He finds him, like himself, by birth a citizen, who, by very intelligible merits, arrived at such a commanding position, that he could indulge all those tastes which the common man possesses, but is obliged to conceal and deny; good society, good books, fast traveling, dress, dinners, servants without number, personal weight, the execution of his ideas, the standing in the attitude of a benefactor to all persons about him, the refined enjoyments of pictures, statues, music, palaces, and conventional honors,—precisely what is agreeable to the heart of every man in the nineteenth century,—this powerful man possessed.”
\item[60] Emerson, “VI: Napoleon,” \textit{Representative Men} (1850).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
far the greatest share in every success, and so in his.” To Emerson, although Napoleon’s weapon was “the millions whom he directed,” his power came from nature. Through this portrayal, is it clear to readers that Napoleon was a representative man, a strong man, a bold man, a brave man, a man who “knew no impediment to his will.” Napoleon transcends the “qualities and powers of common men.”

Before we continue, it should be addressed in this analysis whether or not the meaning of “power” has changed since Emerson’s time. According to Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language in 1828, “Power” was defined firstly:

“1. In a philosophical sense, the faculty of doing or performing any thing; the faculty of moving or of producing a change in something; ability or strength. A man raises his hand by his own power or by power moves another body. The exertion of power proceeds from the will, and in strictness, no being destitute of will or intelligence, can exert power in man is active or speculative…”

The dictionary further describes power as “force” (2, 3, 7, 9), “influence” (10), “command” (11), “divinity” (14), “legal authority” (16), and even “violence, force; compulsion” (20). In this way, “power,” like the modern form of the word, can be explained and explored in many different contexts, from the vagueness of “doing” to that of exerting power upon others. In the same way, Emerson seeks to define power in many different ways. However, the forceful power touched upon in this dictionary is what I will be primarily arguing in my analysis. Emerson’s continued focus and praise of Napoleon’s powerful triumph against weakness and in military measures, and, too, the

---

61 Emerson, “VI: Napoleon,” Representative Men (1850).
focus of this type of power by his readership, cannot be mistaken for merely a “faculty doing or
performing any thing.”

The content of Emerson’s book, with its close association with power and control, probably
appealed to individuals who were seeking to make themselves representative. The intended users of
Representative Men were likely middle to upper-middle class or wealthy intellectuals. In 1850,
Emerson’s book sold for $1 a copy. According to the census in 1850, a day’s wage for an average
male skilled worker (mechanic) was around $1, making Emerson’s book worth around a day’s
wage. This price would have put Representative Men out of the price range for many average people,
or made it a type of luxury item. Though the book itself had no fancy illustrations or varied colored
print, the quality of the printing and paper was quite nice and made use of italics and prints of varied
sizes. In this way, I expect it was of high quality. The book is exclusively in English, though it was
probably meant for a learned audience who was familiar with the historical figures in Emerson’s
book. This is especially highlighted by the fact that, in his book, Emerson does not describe any
biographical content of his chosen figures such as dates, events, or important moments in their lives.

Emerson’s Representative Men, however, sometimes seems to appeal to a type of common or
average, middle-class person because of particular passages in Emerson’s text. In “Uses of Great
Men” Emerson writes: “I admire great men of all classes, those who stand for facts, and for
thoughts.” In his Napoleon section, he similarly writes:

---

65 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” lxxii.
66 United States. Census Office. 7th census, 1. Statistical view of the United States, embracing its territory,
population—white, free colored, and slave—moral and social condition, industry, property, and revenue: the detailed statistics of
cities, towns and counties; being a compendium of the seventh census, to which are added the results of every previous census,
beginning with 1790, in comparative tables, with explanatory and illustrative notes, based upon the schedules and other official
In our society, there is a standing antagonism between the conservative and the democratic classes; between those who have made their fortunes, and the young and the poor who have fortunes to make; between the interests of dead labor,—that is, the labor of hands long ago still in the grave, which labor is now entombed in money stocks, or in land and buildings owned by idle capitalists,—and the interests of living labor, which seeks to possess itself of land, and buildings, and money stocks… Paris, and London, and New York, the spirit of commerce, of money, and material power, were also to have their prophet; and Bonaparte was qualified and sent. 

In this way, Emerson is describing an “antagonism” between the upper-class and the common people. His representative man, Napoleon, appears as the champion of the common man. However, in his first section, Emerson subtly contradicts this assumption:

I applaud a sufficient man, an officer, equal to his office; captains, ministers, senators. I like a master standing firm on legs of iron, well-born, rich, handsome, eloquent, loaded with advantages, drawing all men by fascination into tributaries and supporters of his power. Sword and staff, or talents sword-like or staff-like, carry on the work of the world…

The men that appear in this quote would all be members of the upper-echelon and probably not a common person. In this way, it is probable that Emerson is really appealing to comfortably wealthy people who do not yet consider themselves “representative.” The book, then, probably appeals to the man on a quest to become as representative as possible, just like Longfellow and his friends.

Though his book appears to exist for more wealthy patrons, Emersons motives to create Representative Men were not exclusively financial. For each copy of his book, Emerson only made 20 cents on the dollar, while his publisher made the other 80 cents of profit. Hence, Emerson’s publisher might be particularly motivated by the money, but Emerson was probably more concerned with disseminating his information and spreading his influence. This also may be the reason why he

---

68 Emerson, “VI: Napoleon,” Representative Men (1850).
70 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” lxxii.
travelled far distances; Emerson wanted his readers to understand and believe in the autonomy of
the individual.\textsuperscript{71}

Contemporary and early annotations of \textit{Representative Men} further illuminate the focus on the
important themes of power and control in the previous discussion. In the following analysis, we will
be looking at four early editions of \textit{Representative Men} to see how they were used. Studying how these
few readers read \textit{Representative Men} is something that cannot be seen in a pure reproduction of the
book. Each of these markings are specific to these copies. In experiencing the technology itself, we
catch a glimpse of another time, where scholars took Emerson’s essays and closely analyzed them.

In each contemporary used copy, there is a pattern: “Uses of Great Men” is always the most
marked, the chapter that tells the reader how he can measure up to these mammoths of time, and
“Napoleon” is the next most heavily marked. Additionally, because many of the chapters are less
marked than others, it is possible that the chapters were read out of order, or without as careful
precision as some of the other chapters. Despite the inherent order and numbering of the chapters,
in which Emerson delineates a method in which to read the book, Emerson did not deliver his
speeches in that way. The shuffling and reordering of his lecture style may have granted a sort of
permission to choose specific essays to read and others to skip.

In Wellesley College’s first edition copy of \textit{Representative Men},\textsuperscript{72} the previous owners made
extensive markings throughout. This usage gives us insight into the ways in which these individual
users read and learned to “see” mental health with regards to \textit{Representative Men}. There are marks in

\textsuperscript{71} William E. Cain, “Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882),” \textit{American Literature, Volume I}, 2 edition (Boston: Pearson, 2013), 590.

\textsuperscript{72} Ralph Waldo Emerson, \textit{Representative Men: Seven Lectures} (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1850), Wellesley College, Special Collections Durant 814.36 T1.
both pencil and pen, which denotes use at different times and possibly by different people. While the users of the book put check-marks in the table of contents next to two of the figures, Plato and Swedenborg, in the text, the Shakespeare and Napoleon sections are the most marked (underlined) of all the chapters. This close reading of the text sees power and action as common themes, especially the repeated focus on power and the marking of specific quotes about the strong actions and abilities of great men. Interestingly, the most severely marked pages in this copy are in Emerson’s first chapter, “The Uses of Great Men”: the chapter where Emerson makes direct mention to what makes a “Representative Man.” Perhaps, through Emerson’s enumeration of specific qualities, the readers attempted to imitate his great men and live by their example. These further notable markings all appear in the Napoleon chapter of the text. The users underlined “directness of action” and “his superiority” (227), “his principal means are in himself” (228), and “he saw only the object, the obstacle must give way” (299) (figure 1, figure 2). Further, the users put a check next to “great men exist that there may be greater men,” and nearly every reference to “power” (many on 210 and 211) as they appear throughout the book (figure 2, figure 3).

In a late nineteenth-century Boston printing, now in the Harvard University Library, we see a very similar reading throughout when compared to that of the Wellesley reader. Among other markings, the user of this book underlines: “The world is upheld by the veracity of good men” (9), “Great geniuses have the shortest biographies” (45), “precision of natural agents” (218), and “natural and intellectual power” (219). These select markings appeared in the “Uses of Great Men”

---

73 It is possible that one or both of these readers were from the twentieth century. Even if that is the case, the use shows that the prevailing opinions and close readings that we will analyze in this section were still prevailing and prevalent as time went on.

74 Ralph Waldo Emerson, Representative Men: Seven Lectures (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1897), Harvard University, Widener Library Offsite Storage AL 1323.499.17.
and the “Napoleon” chapters. Further, these markings likely denote the reader’s interested in these particular phrases. Because this reader includes question marks in the margins around passages or phrases that confused him, I imagine that if he did not agree with something Emerson said, he would mark those sections with a question mark and not merely underline them. In this particular edition, there are no markings in the “Montaigne” or “Swedenborg” essays, and only one each in “Shakespeare” and “Goethe.” These sparing marks imply that each of the other essays were not noted with as careful precision as the “Uses of Great Men” or “Napoleon” were. Perhaps they were seen as less important, or perhaps they were simply not read at all.

The Harvard and Wellesley editions are not the only two copies whose annotations expose similar themes. Another two first editions in Harvard University Library, respectively from 1849 and 1850, also uncover close readings of power and control. The user of the 1849 book underlines: “other men are lenses through which we read our own minds” (11), “some imaginative power usually appears in all eminent minds” (23), “there needs but one wise man in a company and all are wise, so rapid is the contagion” (30), “serve the great” (34), “we are all equally served by receiving and by imparting” (36), “the power of the greatest men,—their spirit diffuses itself” (38), “no man ever more fully acknowledged the ineffable” about Plato (64), “his power ... does … consist … in the exercise of common sense on each emergency” about Napoleon (242). In “Uses of Great Men,” the user underlines and checks, “Great men are thus a collyrium to clear our eyes from egotism, and enable us to see other people and their works” (30) (figure 4). The two most heavily marked phrases

75 Ralph Waldo Emerson, Representative Men: Seven Lectures (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1849), Harvard University, Widener Library GEN AL 1323.494.
76 Ralph Waldo Emerson, Representative Men: Seven Lectures (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1850), Harvard University, Widener Library Offsite Storage AL 1323.495.6.
in this copy are “Other men are lenses through which we read our own minds” and great men “clear our eyes … and enable us to see.”

The user of the 1850 book, among other markings, underlines: “our life in this world is not of quite so easy interpretation as churches and school-books say” (172), “his principal means are in himself” (228), “he went to the edge of his possibility” (232), “Able men do not care in what kind a man is able, so only that he is able” (264), “the former great men call to us affectionately” (285).

While these markings are more spread out among the chapters (the chosen markings appear in “Montaigne” and “Napoleon”), the selections still highlight the same themes: power and action. Unsurprisingly, these last two readers focus on the greatness of men and what their qualities were in order to become representative. Perhaps this close reading of action, more so than the close reading of power that we saw in the other copies, makes following great men by their example even more explicit.

By beginning with “The Uses of Great Men,” Emerson urges his reader to follow the man who is powerful. The proof comes next, where users literally focus most specifically upon on “Napoleon” more so than any other chapter. They instantly went to the most powerful “great man” in Emerson’s book, he who had power applied to him 31 times. In this way, the actual procedure of using the book allowed one to focus in on what seemed most important, using Emerson’s conception of greatness and power as the basis of good mental health. It is in this same vein that Emerson writes all his “contemporary works,” not so that one might learn about Napoleon if he or she had not already heard of him, but, rather, to explain to common men what about these six figures make them representative. In this close analysis it is clear that the primary reason is power.

---

III: CRITICAL RESPONSE

To further the proof that readers were informed and moved by Emerson’s book, it is valuable to analyze the contemporary critical response. In reviews of Emerson’s book, some scholars were just as expressive as the annotations noted above were. Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), a Scottish philosopher, contemporary, and dear friend of Emerson’s, praised *Representative Men* as “abounding in instruction and materials for reflection to me.”78 Physician James John Garth Wilkinson (1812-1889) describes its high-flying effects: “It is for me full of vistas and views, a regular exhibition of the optics of the soul. You shew your men and things by new properties of light, hinting at all kinds of polarizations of these truths through which we see.”79 Similarly, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) called *Representative Men* “a little granite book you can lean on.”80 Which is of particular importance coming from a woman, who one might imagine would be cut off from this technology.

However, many contemporary reviewers had negative responses. One writer from *The North American Review*, acknowledges Emerson’s talent, but critiques him as a “pupil” and “mimic” of Carlyle.81 Another characteristic condensation represented by an English journal, *The Spectator* (January 12, 1850), says that Emerson’s book is a rather weak derivative of Carlyle’s 1841 work *On heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*.82 In his book, Carlyle reflects on his belief that heroes

---

78 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” lviii.
79 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” lviii.
82 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” lix.
shape history through their personal attributes and divine inspiration with detailed analysis of the influence of several men: Muhammad, Shakespeare, Luther, Rousseau, Pericles, Napoleon, and Wagner.

Another common criticism to Representative Men is religiously based and can be exemplified by a response from George Gould in 1850. Gould writes that Representative Men is “complete antagonism to the spirit and teachings of Christianity.”83 Others, such as James Blythe84 explicitly ask why Emerson leaves Jesus out of his work, criticizing Emerson for not including Christ in his list of Representative Men.85 However, these criticisms, too, were on Emerson’s mind in his writing process. According to Emerson: “When I wrote ‘Representative Men’ I felt that Jesus was the ‘Rep. Men’ whom I ought to sketch: but the task required great gifts,—steadfast insight & perfect temper; else, the consciousness of want of sympathy in the audience would make one petulant or sore, in spite of himself.”86

Even so, the response to Representative Men was friendly on the whole. In April 1850, The Christian Review, a Baptist quarterly, allowed that Emerson is a “man of unquestioned power, nay, of genius even.”87 Daniel March, a Yale conservative, reviewed the book in The New Englander in May 1850 under the title “Popular Lectures,” expressing that Emerson writes the perfect “conception of an ideal character.”88

---

84 Blythe’s pamphlet was priced at 1 cent, which makes Emerson’s $1 book (30 years its senior) seem extremely expensive in comparison. This cheap (by comparison) pamphlet obviously did not command the same type of authority as Emerson’s valuable book.
85 James W. Blythe, Representative Men (Greenwich: T.S.D. Floyd at the Reformer’s Library, 1871).
87 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” lx.
88 Williams, “Historical Introduction,” lxi.
IV: DIFFERENT READINGS OF REPRESENTATIVE MEN

Through this small sample, it is easy to tell that the critical response for Representative Men was varied. However, Google Books Analytics, suggests that Emerson’s work might have represented a watershed moment in literary history as well as in the greater history of mental health. According to Google, the phrase “Representative Men” did not turn up in the titles of any recorded books until 1850, the time of Emerson’s publication. This means that Emerson may have coined the term. Following the next 30 years, the usage of the phrase “Representative Men” in titles of books increased by over 250% internationally (figure 5).89 For example, titles that included “Representative Men” were used in contemporary works such as Representative Men of the South (1880), An Illustrated Chapter of Representative Men and Residences of Quincy (1888), and Eminent and Representative Men of Virginia (1893). This evidence suggests that Emerson started a “Representative Men” movement.

In the cases above and others, the circulation of Emerson’s work inspired contemporary authors to use his terminology to forward their own messages, including how to understand leadership and representative men in terms of mental health. An example of this evolution is Hugh M’Coll’s book, Phrenological Sketch of one of the Representative Men of the “Age” (1856) (Figure 6).90 This book was written about David Blair, an Irish-Australian politician, journalist, and encyclopedist active in Ireland, Scotland, England, and Australia. The book itself was published in Melbourne, Australia, showing the physical distance that Emerson’s phrasing had travelled in only 6 years.

89 Joel Porte, a noted Emerson historiographer, writes that Emerson’s publication of Representative Men at the beginning of 1850 was “overshadowed” by the Fugitive Slave Law which Emerson vehemently opposed. He spent much of his publication year voicing opposition to the act. In the meantime, he set his book of essays aside. It was through subsequent publications and the sharing of books that Emerson’s essays became more widely known. This delay might explain the spike in Google Books Analytics leading up to 1880. From Joel Porte, Representative Man: Ralph Waldo Emerson in His Time (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 217.
90 Hugh M’Coll, Phrenological Sketch of one of the Representative Men of the “Age” (Melbourne: H. M’Coll, 1856).
Framing his argument through the pseudo-scientific practice of phrenology, the study of the shape and size of the head to indicate character and ability, M'Coll’s book seeks to uncover how David Blair is not actually not a “Representative Man,” despite how others praise him. M’Coll describes his phrenological practice on his book’s title page: “taken from a first glance at his [Blair’s] head, as he delivered from the stage of the Theatre Royal, his wonderful oration on the state-aid question.” So, as Emerson describes what qualities make someone great, M’Coll is uncovering and explaining those qualities with a critical “physical” analysis:

Your head size is about average, but much extended at the base or the seat of the selfish propensities, and flattened at the coronal or moral region. This formation indicates an opposite, destructive and grasping spirit almost destitute of the enobling principles of justice, piety, hope, faith, and charity…. The posterior of your head is very defective compared with the base, therefore you are deficient in those qualities which constitute the loving and lovable friend and companion.91

M’Coll continues throughout his work, using Emerson’s conceptions of greatness and ideas of phrenology to highlight the qualities that Blair does not have. With these methods, M’Coll ultimately concludes that Blair is not representative.

Amazingly, we see M’Coll’s work in contact with two contemporary technologies of mental health-- phrenology and Representative Men. In this moment, a principle function in studying the history of mental health can be seen happening: the theory is changing, but the action remains the same. More explicitly, there are certain qualities that underlie greatness that Emerson enumerates and attributes to innate nature, and by applying these qualities to contemporary scientific understanding about mental health, M’Coll is using phrenology to frame and explain Emerson’s proposed qualities. In this way, Emerson impressed upon M’Coll what qualities a man needs to be

91 M’Coll, Phrenological Sketch, 4.
great, and the practice of phrenology impressed upon him ways in which to prove those qualities (or, rather, disprove them).

**V: REPRESENTATIVE MEN IN THE HISTORY OF MENTAL HEALTH**

In his time, Emerson was in dialogue with many fields of study: philosophy, science, and religion. While Emerson is not explicitly mentioned in the histories of exclusively scientific fields that focus on mental health such as psychology and psychiatry, the way Emerson is mentioned in his respected fields is actually very related to the language that is being employed in these other, more typically “mental health” centered disciplines. As I will indicate in this section, Emerson ran perpendicular to many contemporary ideas of science, religion, and philosophy, but his view of character as both innate and evolving links him to contemporary psychological theories and a trend in the longer-term history of mental health.

Emerson lived during the “golden age” of science, and he hoped to translate its dawning radiance into a beacon for the masses. Yet, Emerson has never been known as a "scientist." During his heyday the word barely existed, and to suggest today that his work was scientific strains belief.  

Science for Emerson was not a rarified method or a specialized field of study, but the highest form of mental action. For him, the true man of science and the American scholar were one and the same, and science was the dynamic heart of America. Emerson thought all actions of the mind were compatible with science: poetry, to him, was as much a scientific endeavor as math.

---

More uniquely but stemming from similar conceptions, Emerson was also building his own movement in philosophy at this time, which turned into a kind of religious ideology as well. Emerson believed in something he referred to as the “humanity of science.” In his “Humanity of Science” lecture/essay Emerson writes: “there is in nature a parallel unity, which corresponds to this unity in the mind.” This mode of thought later grew into the “universal mind,” the highest level of understanding, a philosophical, perfect, ideal mind. The common person can try to reach that state of higher consciousness but few are truly able to reach it, as it is inherently innate.

Following the ideas of the perfect natural mind, religiously, Emerson placed a rift between himself and conventional spirituality. In his 1858 essay “Powers of the Mind” Emerson writes: “to construct a philosophy is nothing more than to give the best attention to the operation of one’s own mind,” and too, in his famous last sentence of “Self-Reliance” Emerson writes “nothing is, at last, sacred but the integrity of your own mind.” For Emerson, everything is a consideration of the nature of the mind. He, too, writes in “Uses of Great Men”: “In the history of discovery, the ripe and latent truth seems to have fashioned a brain for itself. A magnet must be made man, in some Gilbert, or Swedenborg, or Oersted, before the general mind can come to entertain its powers.”

Here, a pattern emerges for Emerson in the hierarchy of the mind: nature was the embodiment of divine mind, the “greater mind.” In his day, Emerson’s highest, greatest mind, ran contrary to...

---

98 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Powers of the Mind* (1858).
99 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance* (1841).
the popular Calvinist emphasis on mankind’s innate sinfulness and which appealed to God as the highest figure, as opposed to one’s mind.\textsuperscript{104} Emerson’s love of the individual, faith in oneself, and regarding of one’s own mind as the highest form was practically seen as heresy to American religious conservatives of the 19th century.

Emerson can also, however, be compared to technologies in the greater history of mental health. For example, Sebastian Brant, in his book \textit{Ship of Fools} (1494), contends, through religiously focused allegories and satire, that it is mentally healthy to NOT act like the fools he describes. In contrast, through \textit{Representative Men}, Emerson represents wise men and enumerates the exact opposite, encouraging one to act like the men he describes. In opposite ways, these two texts confirm the same about Mental Health- it is something to work toward. In fact, the idea of self-improvement is a common thread throughout many technologies of mental health. Satire of the 15th century, religious autobiographies of the 16th century, confession manuals of the 18th century, phrenology of the 19th century, and therapeutic asylums of the 20th century all do similar things: they each contend to improve mental health, albeit in very different ways.

On the other hand, for our purposes, the most important technology that Emerson is in contact with is phrenology. Surprisingly, there are actually many similarities between the theory that underlies the pseudo-scientific practice of phrenology and Emerson’s \textit{Representative Men}, as we have begun to explore in the previous section through Hugh M’Coll’s book, \textit{Phrenological Sketch of one of the Representative Men of the “Age”} (1856). While Emerson was focused in no way upon the physicality of his men, he was centered on the great mind and how people can become more like “Great Men.”

\textsuperscript{104} Cain, “Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882),” 590.
a similar way, Samuel R. Wells’ book about practical phrenology, *How to Read Character* (1874), talks
about how one can improve despite what the shape of your head tells others about you.¹⁰⁵ Wells
believed you can change your “predispositions” through habit and actions, and in the same way,
Emerson believed that, while greatness is innate, you can learn to follow Great Men and act by their
traditions.

Wells also focuses, like Emerson, on “power.” He mentions “mental power,” the powerful
brain, and “powerful properties.”¹⁰⁶ Perhaps it is a function of the nineteenth century, but, in both
cases, power deeply underlies beliefs about what makes someone a mentally healthy person. This
may be because just before and just after the Civil War, and congruous with the time of slavery,
power is an extremely contentious topic. Whether you are the more capable country
(union/confederacy) or a slaveholder/abolitionist, if you have power you have control, and control
is preferable no matter what. This is also why some contemporary historians view *Representative Men*
as an abolitionist text, because it empowers the free-thinker and undermines the racist, conforming,
oppressive institution of slavery.¹⁰⁷

In other phrenology books, we can even see how Emerson’s most representative men are
also used as aspirations. In Joseph Simms’ phrenology book from 1869, someone with a small head
might read, “You can never be a Napoleon.”¹⁰⁸ Similarly, in another phrase that comes from a

¹⁰⁸ Joseph Simms, *Physiognomical and physiological chart of [blank] as given by [blank] / by J. Simms ; comprising full and plain descriptions of all the discovered faculties, a new classification of temperments, and directions for the cultivation and restraint of all the physical and mental organs. ; This chart gives all necessary information relative to pursuits in life, matrimonial alliances, how to regain and preserve health, etc* (New York: 1869), 21.
phrenology advertisement: “Men’s greatest knowledge is himself to know.”¹⁰⁹ Unsurprisingly, this quote reads as though Emerson wrote it himself. Unlike phrenology, however, which implies that certain professions like an attorney, banker, judge, lawyer, or phrenologist are better than other professions,¹¹⁰ Emerson writes that a person of any profession can be great: what is important is their greatness. It is through being true to your own vocation that allows you to achieve the status of greatness, no matter what you do.

Emerson’s Representative Men and the practice of phrenology are worlds apart in terms of practice, but in theory, they bear a striking resemblance. It is possible that phrenology became a method with which to support what Emerson enumerated and others contended-- there are certain traits that make people great, and phrenology gave users a way of seeing that from the outside. So, when we mention phrenological analysis as a nineteenth-century tool for assessing and improving mental health, we should also be thinking of Representative Men, which is also trying to get us to improve our healthiest mind.

CONCLUSION

Scholars of the history of mental health have never before placed Emerson into their timeline. Many scholars such as Foucault describe a linear history from isolation to medicalization,¹¹¹ whereas others see religion and secularization moving forward either independently or successively. In contrast, Emerson believed in a “marrying of Nature and

¹⁰⁹ E. Potter, Pleasing and instructive. Science, amusement, and music! : Grand dioramic views of astronomy, phrenology, history, &c. : Mr. E. Potter, by this means announces to the inhabitants of this place and vicinity, that he will give one of his pleasing & popular entertainments! On [blank] evening, [blank] in the [blank] (New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, steam printers, 78 State Street, New Haven, 1854?), 4.
¹¹⁰ Wells, How to Read Character, 139.
Mind,” he felt drawn to the religionist and the scientist alike. Emerson sees religion and secularism as existing together. However, the timeline of the history of mental health that we should be looking most closely at is the “progressive model” as supplied by the history of neuroscience and expressed through Andrew Wickens’ *A History of the Brain* (2015). According to this model, the history of mental health began with ignorance of the inner workings of the mind and progressed toward an ever-more-physical and localized understanding of the mind as a function of the human brain and nervous system.

We have proven through this analysis that, if one is curious about the full context of the history of mental health as seen through the progressive model, Emerson should have a place in the narrative. *Representative Men* helped readers see mental health in a new way, health in terms of innate nature and specific qualities of greatness: power, action, and control. As we witnessed in Wells’ work and *Phrenological Sketch of one of the Representative Men of the “Age,”* phrenology cannot exist independently of *Representative Men.* Since phrenology has a place in the progressive model, if one wants to explore the context of this history in its fullest capacity, Emerson must be recognized for the parts of his theory that are intrinsic to phrenology, such as the qualities of greatness, power, an emphasis on “nature,” and “the great mind.”

Phrenology builds from and understands itself through *Representative Men.* *Representative Men* cleared the phrenologists’ eyes and “ma[d]e them see.” So too, today, by using Emerson’s book, readers can see and understand their own minds through a new “lens.” Thus, while Emerson is in

---

conversation with many disparate technologies of mental health, phrenology exposes to us that the history of madness and neuroscience should be cognizant of Emerson to glean the big picture of their studies. In this way, the nineteenth-century phase of exclusively “hard” sciences in the history of mental health should be edited and expanded to include Emerson’s contribution to the field—Representative Men.
Figures

Figures 1-3: Markings from Wellesley College’s version of *Representative Men*. These markings show repeated notes to “power,” as well as marks on “directness of action,” “his superiority,” and “his principle means are in himself.”

Figure 1:

heat or haste of his own. “My hand of iron,” he said, “was not at the extremity of my arm; it was immediately connected with my head.” He respected the power of nature and fortune, and ascribed to it his superiority, instead of valuing himself, like inferior men, on his opinionativeness, and waging war with nature. His favorite rhetoric lay in allusion to his star; and he pleased himself, as well as the people, when he styled himself the “Child of Destiny.” “They charge me,” he said, “with the commission of great crimes: men of my stamp do not commit crimes. Nothing has been more simple than my elevation: ’tis in vain to ascribe it to intrigue or crime: it was owing to the peculiarity of the times, and to my reputation of having fought well against the enemies of my country. I have always marched with the opinion of great masses, and with events. Of what use, then, would crimes be to me?” Again he said, speaking of his son, “My son can not replace me; I could not replace myself. I am the creature of circumstances.”

He had a directness of action never before combined with so much comprehension. He is a realist, terrific to all talkers, and confused truth-obscuring persons. He sees where the matter hinges, throws himself on the precise point of resistance, and slight all other considerations.
He is strong in the right manner, namely, by insight. He never blundered into victory, but won his battles in his head, before he won them on the field. His principal means are in himself. He asks counsel of no other. In 1796, he writes to the Directory; “I have conducted the campaign without consulting any one. I should have done no good, if I had been under the necessity of conforming to the notions of another person. I have gained some advantages over superior forces, and when totally destitute of every thing, because, in the persuasion that your confidence was reposed in me, my actions were as prompt as my thoughts.”

History is full, down to this day, of the imbecility of kings and governors. They are a class of persons much to be pitied, for they know not what they should do. The weavers strike for bread; and the king and his ministers, not knowing what to do, meet them with bayonets. But Napoleon understood his business. Here was a man who, in each moment and emergency, knew what to do next. It is an immense comfort and refreshment to the spirits, not only of kings, but of citizens. Few men have any next; they live from hand to mouth, at the end of their
Figure 3:

...
This is he that should marshal us the way we were going. There is no end to his aid. With-out Plato, we should almost lose our faith in the possibility of a reasonable book. We seem to want but one, but we want one. We love to associate with heroic persons, since our receptivity is unlimited; and, with the great, our thoughts and manners easily become great. We are all wise in capacity, though so few in energy. There needs but one wise man in a company, and all are wise, so rapid is the contagion.

Great men are thus a collyrium to clear our eyes from egotism, and enable us to see other people and their works. But there are vices and follies incident to whole populations and ages. Men resemble their contemporaries, even more than their progenitors. It is observed in old couples, or in persons who have been housemates for a course of years, that they grow alike; and, if they should live long enough, we should not be able to know them apart. Nature abhors these complaisances, which threaten to melt the world into a lump, and hastens to break up such maud-lin agglutinations. The like assimilation goes on between men of one town, of one sect, of one political party; and the ideas of the time are in the air, and infect all who breathe it. Viewed from any high point, this city of New York,
Figure 5: Google Books Analytics shows that “Representative Men” increases in the titles of books by 250% between 1850 and 1884.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{117} Google does not list the exact number of titles (per year) in this increase.
Phrenological Sketch

OF ONE OF THE

REPRESENTATIVE MEN

OF THE

"AGE."

TAKEN FROM A FIRST GLANCE AT HIS HEAD, AS HE DELIVERED FROM THE STAGE OF THE THEATRE ROYAL, HIS WONDERFUL ORATION ON THE STATE-AID QUESTION.

"He'll Aiblins Tak' a Thocht and Mend."

—BURNS.

MELBOURNE:
PUBLISHED BY HUGH M'COLL, AND SOLD BY THE BOOKSELLERS.
PRICE SIXPENCE.
1856.
**Bibliography**

**PRIMARY SOURCES**


Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Powers of the Mind*, 1858.


“Mr. Emerson’s Lectures’ on Representative Men” The Manchester Guardian (1828-1900) (Nov 17, 1847): 6.

“Mr. Emerson’s Lectures’ on Representative Men” The Manchester Guardian (1828-1900) (Nov 10, 1847): 2.

Potter, E. Pleasing and instructive. Science, amusement, and music! : Grand dioramic views of astronomy, phrenology, history, &c. : Mr. E. Potter, by this means announces to the inhabitants of this place and vicinity, that he will give one of his pleasing & popular entertainments! On [blank] evening, [blank] in the [blank]. New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, steam printers, 78 State Street, New Haven, 1854?.


Simms, Joseph. Physiognomical and physiological chart of [blank] as given by [blank] / by J. Simms ; comprising full and plain descriptions of all the discovered faculties, a new classification of temperments, and directions for the cultivation and restraint of all the physical and mental organs. ; This chart gives all necessary information relative to pursuits in life, matrimonial alliances, how to regain and preserve health, etc. New York: 1869.

United States. Census Office. 7th census, 1. Statistical view of the United States, embracing its territory, population--white, free colored, and slave--moral and social condition, industry, property, and revenue: the detailed statistics of cities, towns and counties; being a compendium of the seventh census, to which are added the results of every previous census, beginning with 1790, in comparative tables, with explanatory and illustrative notes, based upon the schedules and other official sources of information. Washington: B. Tucker, Senate printer, 1854.


SECONDARY SOURCES.

Allen, Gay Wilson, “A New Look at Emerson and Science,” Literature and ideas in America : essays in
memory of Harry Hayden Clark, 1975.


“Representative Men” on Google Books Analytics
https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=%22+Representative+Men+%22&year_start=1800&year_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=4&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2C%20Representative%20Men%20%22%20Representative%20Men%20%22%3B%2Cc0


