



## Emerson

By Lawrence Buell

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### Emerson By Lawrence Buell

"An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man," Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote--and in this book, the leading scholar of New England literary culture looks at the long shadow Emerson himself has cast, and at his role and significance as a truly American institution. On the occasion of Emerson's 200th birthday, Lawrence Buell revisits the life of the nation's first public intellectual and discovers how he became a "representative man."

Born into the age of inspired amateurism that emerged from the ruins of pre-revolutionary political, religious, and cultural institutions, Emerson took up the challenge of thinking about the role of the United States alone and in the world. With characteristic authority and grace, Buell conveys both the style and substance of Emerson's accomplishment--in his conception of America as the transplantation of Englishness into the new world, and in his prodigious work as writer, religious thinker, and philosopher. Here we see clearly the paradoxical key to his success, the fierce insistence on independence that acted so magnetically upon all around him. Steeped in Emerson's writings, and in the life and lore of the America of his day, Buell's book is as individual--and as compelling--as its subject. At a time when Americans and non-Americans alike are struggling to understand what this country is, and what it is about, *Emerson* gives us an answer in the figure of this representative American, an American for all, and for all times.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

This is a splendid book, an important one, and one that will have wide appeal. This will be an indispensable book on Emerson, putting the keys to that complex man and his work into the reader's hand. If you want to know why we are still reading and talking about Emerson, start here. (Robert Richardson, author of *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* and *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*.)

Lawrence Buell has made it his business to set forth exciting new lines of inquiry. He has done so once again: bringing Emerson up to date, moving him away from a nation-based paradigm, and firing him up as an entry point to a global, cross-lingual circuit. (Wai Chee Dimock, author of *Empire for Liberty*.)

This book is a literary-cultural event: the harvest of the past half-century of Emersonian revaluations and the harbinger, guide, and provocation for the next generations of Emerson scholars and critics. One cannot call a work on Emerson definitive, even provisionally, but I cannot imagine that any Americanist - or for that matter, anyone interested in America, specialist or non-specialist -- will be able to do without this book in the foreseeable future. (Sacvan Bercovitch, author of *The American Jeremiad*, and *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*.)

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I learned from and greatly enjoyed reading Lawrence Buell's *Emerson*. (Susan Sontag *Times Literary Supplement* 2003-12-05)

Lawrence Buell has written a comprehensive, penetrating and timely study, the distillation of a lifetime's scholarship, of this great thinker and writer, 'the poet of ordinary days,' as his disciple, John Dewey, beautifully called him. (John Banville *Irish Times* 2003-11-01)

In this book Buell distills a lifetime of study and teaching on Emerson. Its tone is easy and confident, friendly and inviting, and Buell's aim is to share his admiration for America's first public intellectual with a new generation of readers. (P. J. Ferlazzo *Choice* 2003-11-01)

In this book Lawrence Buell shows us why Emerson remains worth reading in our own time...What Buell

has to say here about Emerson is not only persuasive but also consistently interesting, surprisingly original...and, best of all, written in straightforward, lucid language...Buell's discussion of the relationship between Emerson and his prize pupil, Henry David Thoreau, is brilliant. (Daniel W. Howe *Common-Place* 2003-10-01)

About the Author

Lawrence Buell is Powell M. Cabot Research Professor of American Literature at Harvard University.

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