

# SALEM PRESS

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## **Salem Press Announces a New Addition to the *Critical Insights* Series *Critical Insights: Ralph Waldo Emerson***

The principal goal of *Critical Insights: Ralph Waldo Emerson* is to introduce a perennial figure in studies of American literature, philosophy, and religion to a new generation of readers and to encourage further interest and inquiry. As in the cases of other highly influential nineteenth-century American figures such as Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, much of Emerson's writing is obscured in the shadow of the persona that precedes it. And like Douglass and Lincoln, Emerson can be a towering and intimidating figure for first-time readers. Yet, as all contributors to this volume might attest, Emerson is still a vibrant force within literary studies.

Emerson has not vanished from the realms of American and global thought. Many of the famous orator and writer's ideas still circulate within intellectual discussions today within a variety of academic disciplines. His ideas comprise what might be described as a common bedrock of American experience, and they remain inextricable from American identity today. This volume aims to celebrate that reality by discussing Emerson's contributions during his lifetime through the present day.

A collection of four critical contexts essays are intended to view the author

- 1) From a historical vantage point
- 2) In terms of its critical reception
- 3) Using a specific critical lens
- 4) And by comparing and contrasting it with another important work.

*Critical Insights: Ralph Waldo Emerson* opens with an introductory section consisting of two essays. In the first, "Critique and Celebration: Emerson and Social Reform," Jericho Williams discusses two of Emerson's lesser-known essays: "New England Reformers" and "Farming." Williams argues that these two essays offer differing perspectives on what Emerson offers contemporary readers. "New England Reformers" is cautionary and imparts Emerson's sense that true social reform must begin from within individuals. Calling attention to one of the weaknesses of social movements, Emerson points to the potential consequences of blind acceptance or commitment without the necessary and preliminary change within individuals. Williams suggests that this point resonates today, when social change is also complicated by neoliberalism, those seeking profit and power from fostering social change, the speed in which information is transmitted, and the competition for human attention. While "Farming" does not necessarily offer a viable solution for twenty-first-century problems, the actions of an ideal

farmer that Emerson celebrates—looking closely, thinking, acting, assessing, remembering, rebuilding, and regenerating—constitute a blueprint for the active individual mind that can still be empowering despite a more modern set of challenges. LuElla D’Amico’s short biography of Emerson focuses on the major changes and developments in Emerson’s life that enabled him to become such a profound thinker and inspiration for others. D’Amico details how Emerson participated not just as a writer, but also as an orator and speaker throughout his lifetime, inspiring countless Americans and encouraging independent thinking—perhaps his greatest legacy.

Following these four Critical Context essays is the **Critical Readings** section of this book, which contains the following essays:

- Emerson’s Polarity of Loneliness and Friendship, Susan L. Dunston
- Moral Sentiment and the Salvation of Spirituality in Emerson’s “Divinity School Address” (1838), Trevor B. Williams
- Emerson’s Transcendental Antislavery Writings, Len Gougeon
- Emerson and the Central Virtue of Reform: A Subjunctive Investigation into the Early Influence on Him of William Lloyd Garrison, Albert von Frank
- “My thunderbolt has eyes to see”: The Civil War, Nationalism, and Manifest Destiny in Emerson and Timrod, Benjamin Crawford
- The Multiplicity of Merlin: Emerson’s Merlin Poems, Dalicia K. Raymond
- Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Nature Poetry, Charles W. Rowe
- Master-Enchanter: Emerson’s Extraordinary Influence on John Burroughs, Stephen M. Mercier
- Writing Dawn and Day in the Work of Mary Oliver and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Jeff Westover

Each essay in *Critical Insights: Ralph Waldo Emerson* includes a list of **Works Cited** and detailed endnotes. In the final section, **Resources**, easy-to-follow lists are provided to help guide the reader through important dates and moments in the author’s life, beginning with a **Chronology of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Life**. This is followed by a list of **Works by Ralph Waldo Emerson** and a **Bibliography**. Finally, this section closes with an **About the Editor** section, **Contributors**, and a detailed **Index**.

The *Critical Insights* Series distills the best of both classic and current literary criticism of the world’s most studied literature. Edited and written by some of academia’s most distinguished literary scholars, *Critical Insights: Ralph Waldo Emerson* provides authoritative, in-depth scholarship that students and researchers will rely on for years. This volume is destined to become a valuable purchase for all.

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