



# Emerson on the Scholar

*Merton M. Sealts*

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## **Emerson on the Scholar** Merton M. Sealts

In this study of Ralph Waldo Emerson's conception of the scholar, Merton Sealts sheds new light on Emerson's attainment of his influential position in 19th-century literary history. Sealts goes beyond Henry Nash Smith's statement, "The scholar is the hero of Emerson's unwritten prelude" - the protagonist of his spiritual autobiography - by systematically examining the development and testing of the scholar as Emerson's idealized self-image. Part 1 shows how Emerson came to think of the ideal scholar as the "intellectual man", "the Thinker", and finally as "Man thinking". His image of what the true scholar should be remained essentially unchanged, but his idea of how the scholar should respond to public issues gradually altered during his later years as the crisis over slavery increasingly divided America. Part 2 examines Emerson's reaction to both personal and public crises as the country moved toward the Civil war and beyond and as he himself became more and more active in the antislavery movement. The book concludes with an appraisal of the Emersonian scholar in his role as a widely respected teacher of self-reliance and self-fulfillment. Following the course of Emerson's intellectual life in terms of his chosen angle of vision as a scholar, "Emerson on the Scholar" leads to a new understanding and appreciation of Emerson and his thought in relation to American life, then and now.

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