

*Emerson
and the
Art of
the Diary*



*Lawrence
Rosenwald*

EMERSON
and the Art of the Diary

This page intentionally left blank

EMERSON
and the Art of the Diary



Lawrence Rosenwald

New York Oxford
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1988

Oxford University Press

Oxford New York Toronto
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi
Petaling Jaya Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town
Melbourne Auckland

and associated companies in
Berlin Ibadan

Copyright © 1988 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Rosenwald, Lawrence Alan, 1948—
Emerson and the art of the diary / Lawrence Rosenwald.
p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-19-505333-8

1. Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 1803-1882—Diaries.
2. Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 1803-1882—Style.
3. Authors, American—19th century—Diaries—History and criticism.
4. Autobiography.
 1. Title.

PS1631.R67 1988 818'.303—dc19 [B] 87-23074 CIP

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

FOR CYNTHIA

This page intentionally left blank

Is there any other work for the poet but a good journal?

Thoreau, *Journal X*: 115

Why rake up old MSS to find therein a man's soul? You do not look for conversation in a corpse.

Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks V*: 337

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

No doubt I've forgotten valuable help I've received, and I apologize to any neglected benefactors. But I remember many with pleasure. My thanks, for gracious and scrupulous readings of all or part of this, to Quentin Anderson, Sharon Cameron, Phyllis Cole, Julie Cumming, Arthur Gold, Maurice Gonnaud, Tim Peltason, David Pillmer, Monica Raymond, Gail Reimer, Bob Stein, and the members of the Wellesley College Colloquium on the History of Ideas. The editors of *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (JMN) have by their superb edition made this work possible. A briefer version of the first chapter appeared in *Raritan Review*; both it and the present version have benefited from the expert editing of Richard Poirier. Joel Myerson provided authoritative bibliographical help. Wellesley College funded a year's leave. Special thanks to Margery Sabin, who read the whole manuscript, helped me get rid of its pedantic clarifications, and showed me by her more literary criticisms what sort of a book I wanted to write and what sort I didn't, and how to make that clearer to my readers. Finally, my deepest thanks to Sacvan Bercovitch, friend and teacher, who more than any other scholar gave me the courage to pursue what in bleaker moments seemed an obsessive and peripheral interest.

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

In November of 1984, Harold Bloom published in the *New York Review of Books* an article about Emerson called "Mr. America." The title promises, and the article performs, a canonization; the canonization marks a moment in our history. We have freed ourselves from the sage of Concord, the bland and simplistic optimist; in his place we have found our contemporary, a precursor and spiritual colleague of Nietzsche, a living writer of great power and interest, the man Bloom describes as the "inescapable theorist of virtually all subsequent American writing."¹ This is all to the good, and Bloom in this article and elsewhere² has demonstrated by the quality of his attention to Emerson just how much we have to gain from such a conception. But while deliberately driving nails into the coffin of one false Emerson, Bloom offhandedly tidies the bust of another; he does away with Emerson the fuzzy thinker but retains Emerson the failed artist, writing that "[Emerson's] true genre was no more the lecture than it had been the sermon . . . and certainly not the essay, though that is his only formal achievement, besides a double handful of strong poems."³ This reflects the most tenacious of all our beliefs about Emer-

1. "Mr. America," *New York Review of Books* 21: 18, November 22, 1984, 19.

2. "The Freshness of Transformation: or Emerson on Influence," *ATQ* 21: 45-56 (also in David Levin, ed., *Emerson: Prophecy, Metamorphosis, and Influence* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1975], pp. 129-48, and *A Map of Misreading* [New York: Oxford University Press], pp. 160-92); and "Emerson: The Self-Reliance of American Romanticism," in *Figures of Capable Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1976), pp. 46-64.

3. Bloom, "Mr. America," p. 20.