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Joel Pace

‘Lifted to Genius’?  
Wordsworth in Emerson’s  
Nurture and *Nature*

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Joel Pace

## ‘Lifted to genius’? Wordsworth in Emerson’s nurture and *Nature*

One so persistently occupied with Wordsworth’s productions could scarcely have said less about his striking pantheistic attitude. The few sentences that deal with Wordsworth’s treatment of nature are not complimentary—are not what would seem to many of us sympathetic. [...] The evidence makes against the likelihood of any very profound influence of the Wordsworthian view of nature upon the Emersonian view which has, in 1836, already taken explicit shape.<sup>1</sup>

In 1926, John Brookes Moore published his very influential essay ‘Emerson on Wordsworth’, in which his argument steers away from the idea that there is any solid evidence for Wordsworth’s playing a shaping role in Emerson’s views of Nature. This thought was perpetuated for decades. In 1957, however, Stephen Whicher pointed out quite confidently that ‘Emerson’s achievement can be described with little adaptation, in the words which Coleridge used to describe Wordsworth’s purpose in the *Lyrical Ballads*.’<sup>2</sup> Four years later, Perry Miller’s essay ‘International Romanticism’ clearly delineated the American line of authors as an extension of their Romantic predecessors.<sup>3</sup> Yet even Miller declared that Emerson in the 1820s was repelled by Wordsworth and did not convert until 1838 or so (392). It was not until Harold Bloom’s thoughts were published that scholars were given terms to express Emerson’s quest to find his own

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1. John Brookes Moore, ‘Emerson on Wordsworth’, *PMLA*, 41 (1926), 185.

2. *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), xiii.

3. Perry Miller ‘International Romanticism’, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, Owen Thomas, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966), 390–400; the article was originally printed in *The New England Quarterly*, XXIV (June, 1961), 147–59.