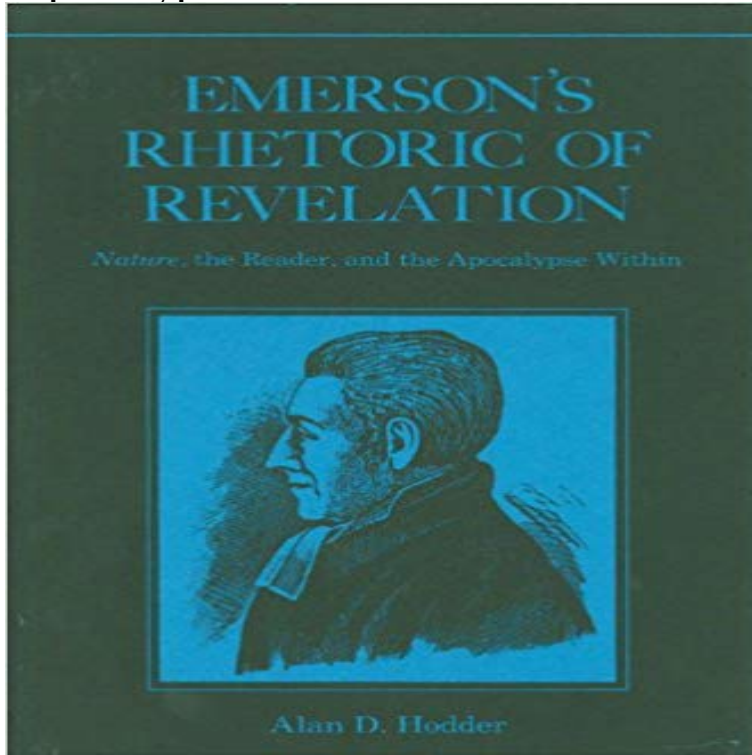


Emersons Rhetoric of Revelation: Nature, the Reader, and the Apocalypse Within



Throughout the history of American literature, Emersons *Nature*, his little book of 1836, has remained something of an anomaly. Is it a naturalists monograph or a metaphysicians scheme? In this provocative study of the development and discourse of Emersons first book, Alan Hodder supersedes the characterizations of previous scholars, as well as *Natures* own feints and calculated misrepresentations, in showing that its closest affiliations are actually with the Christian Bible, and in particular the Book of Revelation. Tracing the development of *Nature* from Emersons earliest letters, journals, and sermons, this book documents the persisting apocalypticism in Emersons thought and, in contrast to the received view of Emerson as a radical religious innovator, shows how in regard to questions of religious piety he remained a quite conservative religious thinker. Survival of the distinctive themes and imagery of apocalyptic vision in Emersons essays and later writing suggests that its crucial movement was for him the double one of the destruction of the world and the creation of the new heaven and earth. *Nature*, Hodder argues, is the showpiece of this vision and presents for the first time the formula for Emersons revelation that the essays of the next decade will continue to develop. Though conceived increasingly as Emersons paradigm for poetic creation and the practical basis for his emerging doctrine of Self-reliance, this apocalyptic formula has its origins in an apocalyptic sensibility and a traditional form of piety modeled after Christs kenosis and conditioned for him by Mary Moody Emerson, his Calvinist forebears, and the Quaker Friends. Leading his own readers through an exploration of *Natures* biblical designs and revisions, close analyses of its rhetorical strategies and multivalency, and a consideration of the impact of these upon Emersons reader, Hodder evokes a fresh reading of this

elusive classic and demonstrates how it repeats and revises the revelations of Saint John through an internalization of its vision.

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