Introductory note
The selected essays which comprise this special volume of *Anglo Saxonica* aim to follow up on the rich ideas that emerged from the international conference *Naturally Emerson: Creative Writing, Self-Reliance, and Cultural Agency* organized by ULICES (University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies) Research Group 3 on American Studies, “Interfacing Cultures and Identities”, which was held at the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon from April 16 to 18, 2015. They result from the call for papers sent out afterwards not just to the participants in the conference itself, but also to other interested academics, many of whom manifested their interest in contributing to the volume in the weeks that followed its dissemination. Inspired by the *leitmotif* “What role is left for the artist, the scholar, the self-reliant individual?” the conference aimed to seek out possible ways of responding to the call of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) — the “voice oracular” of American letters — to heed our inner voices, as we search for readings and inscriptions of our human nature in sustainable interaction with the environment at the start of this new millennium. It will be immediately apparent from the essays which follow that the topics addressed by our contributors range far into interdisciplinary thought, delving into different areas of literature, philosophy, ecocriticism, and creative writing. They are proof that Emerson’s critique of convention in his own time, whether literary, religious or social, is an enduring legacy for the engaged citizen and the troubled artist and/or scholar alike, continuing to provide ample ground for reflection and discussion in our day and age.

In “Doing what comes naturally: the domestication of bug and humbug at Melville’s table”, Rute Beirante draws for us possible lines of interpretation between Herman Melville’s humorous short story “The Apple-Tree Table; Or, Original Spiritual Manifestations” and Emerson’s
essay “Nature”. She argues that Melville’s narrative is imbued with Emersonian philosophical principles, expressing, though paradoxically, both a rejection and an acceptance of Emerson’s ideas and thoughts.

Jeffrey Child’s essay “On the Abandonment of American Poetry: from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Mark Strand” offers a compelling analysis of the poetry of Mark Strand in light of Emerson’s understandings of the self, identity, and language. Child’s special focus on the issue of inheritance (or “cultural belatedness”) suggests that Strand negotiates an Emersonian conception of the poet through his own works. The essay deepens our current scholarly understanding of Emerson, Strand, and American poetry more generally. Moreover, it highlights the artist’s relationship to his cultural inheritance.

Fernanda Luísa Fenejas’s text “‘To what end is nature’ — Rachel Carson’s *Under the Sea-Wind* and Environmental Literature” presents a convincing case for understanding Carson’s narrative as integral to the environmental literary tradition. Through an analysis of the ways in which the book fits within various existing definitions of “environmental literature”, the essay highlights the importance of Carson’s work in terms of environmentalism and environmental aesthetics. This exploration of *Under the Sea-Wind*, with its literary as well as scientific elements, enriches our understanding of both the book and Carson’s work within an Emersonian tradition.

Mary Fowke’s “Emerson in the Star Garden: Writing and the Sensuous World” is an insightful paper based on personal experience. The association of Emerson with *Jardim da Estrela*, in Lisbon, is an original idea in this non-fiction piece, where the author examines the notions of “slow time” and “timelessness” and how these concepts may provide higher levels of mental well-being for all human beings. The essay is an incursion into the process of autobiographical creative writing through memory.

David Greenham’s “Emerson’s ‘Apposite Metaphors’ and the Grounds of Creativity” offers a lucid close reading of Emerson’s understanding of the poet in relation to metaphor and nature. Exploring Emerson’s “purposive engagement” with the metaphoric and symbolic language, the author argues that, for Emerson, metaphor constituted a “liberating principle for original expression”. The essay is an important
contribution to our understanding of Emerson, his work, and his place in Transatlantic literature.

“Traces of Ralph Waldo Emerson in the Poetic Work of A. R. Ammons” by Josef Jařab makes a case for reading Ammons in an Emersonian light, particularly with regard to both authors’ understandings of the role of the poet’s voice. Tracing a literary lineage from Emerson to Ammons, the essay deepens our understanding of Emerson’s presence in modern American poetry while it sheds new light on Emerson’s works themselves. Jařab’s text, which includes an important discussion on the American Sublime, highlights the fact that these two authors shared many similarities and concerns.

Pedro Madeira’s “A Revolution of All Things”: Nature and Eureka or Poe’s Transcendental Hoax” offers a shrewd analysis of Poe’s prose poem Eureka in light of scientific understandings, Romanticism, and Emerson’s particular notions of poetry, the poet, and encounters with matter. The author argues that Poe’s poem is a critique of Transcendentalism/Transcendentalists, Emerson included, and as such should be read for its irony and sub-textual references to the movement.

In “‘Travelling is a fool’s paradise’: What We Talk about When We Talk about Emerson’s Views on Travelling”, Isabel Oliveira Martins uses careful close readings and attention to text to argue that a superficial analysis of Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” could lead the inadvertent reader to the wrong conclusion on the subject of travelling, as expressed in the above-mentioned essay. By relying on a variety of texts, the author points out the contradictions in Emerson’s phrase, maintaining that the latter’s views on travelling may actually provide the means whereby the significance of the (re)construction of the “Self” may be affirmed.

In his clearly articulated paper “Two Houses White”, Paul J. Medeiros calls on readers to reconcile environmentalist thought with Emerson’s ideas. Its different sections guide the reader neatly through the central argument of the paper, namely the fact that Emerson’s thought has been somewhat misconstrued by many environmentalists and ecologists, who have taken at face value many of the ideas expressed in essays such as “Nature” and “Self-Reliance”. The author convincingly argues that Emerson’s self-reliant individual is primarily concerned with intellectual self-reliance, not physical (fortitude), suggesting that environmentalists and
ecologists should consider Emerson’s notion of justice and human dignity if they want to use him as a source of inspiration for their activism.

Lawrence Rhu’s “‘Where do we find ourselves?’: Emerson, Percy, and Ford as Unlikely Soulmates” discusses the ways in which the work of the novelists Walker Percy and Richard Ford suggests, tangentially for the most part, Emersonian language and ideas, including Transcendentalist thought. As Rhu proceeds to make his point clear that it is possible to find “spiritual affinities” between Walker and Percy, “unlikely soulmates” though they may seem, it turns out that their work help us deepen our understanding of Emerson as well.

Reinaldo Silva’s “Recycling Emerson’s Legacy: The Depictions of the Ethnic Garden in Portuguese-American Writings” is a well-argued and informed discussion of the notion of garden in Portuguese-American literature in relation to Emerson’s “Nature”. The author centers his discussion on contemporary Luso-American authors like Katherine Vaz and Frank Gaspar as he attempts to highlight the importance of the garden for Portuguese communities in North America by drawing upon contemporary scholarship on ecocriticism.

In “Subtle distinctions”: Emerson’s “Gifts” and Sentimental Rhetoric of Gift-Giving”, Alexandra Urakova offers a fascinating and important discussion of Emerson’s essay, “Gifts”, contextualizing it within sentimental nineteenth-century etiquette manuals. Through a process of close-reading, she argues that Emerson’s essay both draws upon and challenges popular sentimental discourse surrounding gift-giving, suggesting that he develops in the above-mentioned essay his own original theory for exchanging gifts. The essay is an important contribution to the nineteenth-century discourse of gift-giving.

As editors of this collection of essays it is our hope that we may have succeeded in reassessing and updating critically, in modest terms, no doubt, Emerson’s literary legacy for future generations of students and scholars alike, in line with his proposition that “the question of the times resolved itself into a practical question of the conduct of life. How shall I live?”

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