

Nature and the Self: From Emerson's Transcendental Manifesto to Oodgeroo Noonucal's Poetic Cosmology

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Abstract: The intersection of Ralph Waldo Emerson's Transcendentalist philosophy and Oodgeroo Noonuccal's Indigenous poetics, focusing on conceptions of nature and selfhood is the centre of this paper. While emerging from radically distinct historical, cultural, and epistemological contexts, both authors foreground the ethical and transformative potential of human engagement with the natural world. Emerson's essays "Nature" (1836) and "Self-Reliance" (1841) articulate a vision of individual autonomy, moral self-cultivation, and spiritual insight, positioning nature as symbolic of universal truths. Oodgeroo's poetry, particularly *We Are Going* (1964), situates selfhood relationally, embedding it within land, community, and historical memory, and often addressing ecological and cultural disruption. This article employs a comparative, qualitative methodology integrating hermeneutic close reading, ecocriticism, and postcolonial theory to analyse convergences and divergences in their representations of nature and selfhood. Key points of convergence include resistance to materialist reductionism, critique of institutional authority, and valorisations of experiential engagement with nature, while divergences emerge in conceptions of individual versus collective selfhood, historical consciousness, and political engagement. By reconciling these elements, the study demonstrates that Emerson's Universalist idealism and Oodgeroo's culturally specific poetics mutually illuminate the ethical stakes of human–nature relationships. The analysis underscores the need for pluralistic frameworks in literary and ecological scholarship, showing that moral and philosophical reflection on the self and environment must negotiate both abstract principles and historical realities. Ultimately, this study contributes to cross-cultural literary discourse by situating Indigenous poetics alongside canonical Transcendentalist thought, revealing the ethical and epistemological richness of their comparative reading.

Keywords: Transcendentalism, Indigenous Epistemology, Ecocriticism, Nature-Self Relationship, Emerson, Oodgeroo.

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INTRODUCTION

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Oodgeroo Noonuccal represent literary and philosophical paradigms that, while historically and culturally distinct, share a profound engagement with nature as

a locus of ethical and self-reflective inquiry. While Emerson's philosophical writing seeks to cultivate the autonomous self in relation to nature, Oodgeroo's poetry emphasises collective identity and historical responsibility, linking land and selfhood inextricably

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with community and ancestral memory. This study explores the synergies and tensions between these two literary visions by analysing their respective articulations of nature and self. Central to this analysis is the recognition that, despite apparent differences, both authors are invested in ethical reflection: Emerson through Universalist idealism and Oodgeroo through culturally grounded activism. Their works provide complementary perspectives on how humans understand themselves in relation to their environment, offering insights into the moral and philosophical stakes of human–nature relations. The study hypothesises that Emerson and Oodgeroo conceptualize nature as central to selfhood, yet articulate fundamentally different identities shaped by Western individualism and Indigenous relational cosmology. Emerson's essays, particularly "Nature" and "Self-Reliance," posit nature as symbolic and morally instructive, asserting that direct engagement with the natural world cultivates insight, courage, and ethical awareness (Emerson 23, 259). Oodgeroo's poetry, especially in *We Are Going*, positions nature as a living presence imbued with cultural, historical, and ethical significance, where environmental disruption mirrors social and political injustice (Noonuccal 32).

This paper is thematically structured to explore the interconnected concepts of nature, selfhood, spirituality, and identity across two distinct literary traditions. Rather than following a chronological or purely historical approach, the study organizes its analysis around shared themes such as human–nature relationships, individual versus collective identity, and spiritual belonging. This thematic framework allows for a focused comparison of Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendental philosophy and Oodgeroo Noonuccal's Indigenous poetic vision. By foregrounding themes over periodization, the paper highlights how similar concerns are articulated through different cultural, philosophical, and political perspectives. The scope of this study is limited to textual and theoretical analysis rather than historical exhaustiveness. Drawing on Transcendentalism, Ecocriticism, Indigenous epistemology, and postcolonial theory, the study examines how diverse cultural contexts influence concepts of identity and human–nature relationships. It does not attempt a comprehensive survey of either author's oeuvre, but concentrates on representative works to highlight contrasting ontological and ethical frameworks. By juxtaposing these texts, the study interrogates the intersections of philosophical idealism and Indigenous poetics, examining how shared commitments to moral engagement, nature, and selfhood are differently realised across contexts. The investigation proceeds through a synchronised literature review, followed by analyses of points of convergence and divergence, culminating in a

synthesis that reconciles abstraction and specificity, individual and collective selfhood, and universal ethical aspiration with historical responsibility. This approach demonstrates that the dialogue between Transcendentalist and Indigenous thought can illuminate broader questions of human and ecological ethics, offering insights for literary, philosophical, and environmental studies.

Theoretical Approach

This study adopts a multidisciplinary theoretical approach that brings together Transcendentalist philosophy, Ecocriticism, and Indigenous epistemology, framed within a postcolonial critique of selfhood and nature. By reading Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1836) alongside the poetry of Oodgeroo Noonuccal, the study examines how different cultural and philosophical traditions conceptualise the relationship between nature and the self, and how these conceptualisations are shaped by distinct historical, spiritual, and political contexts.

At its foundation, the paper engages with American Transcendentalism, particularly Emerson's assertion that nature functions as both a spiritual teacher and a mirror of the individual soul. Emerson's theory of the self is grounded in Romantic idealism and German philosophy, especially Kantian and post-Kantian notions of subjectivity. Nature, in this framework, is not merely external or material but symbolic and metaphysical: it enables the individual to transcend social constraints and access universal truths through intuition. This study draws on Transcendentalist theory to understand how Emerson constructs the self as autonomous, inward-looking, and capable of communion with the divine through solitary engagement with the natural world.

However, the paper does not treat Emerson's philosophy as ideologically neutral. Instead, it situates Transcendentalism within its nineteenth-century Euro-American intellectual milieu, acknowledging its implicit assumptions about individualism, universality, and mastery over meaning. This contextualisation allows for a critical examination of how Emerson's "transparent eyeball" metaphor, while radical in its rejection of materialism, still centres a human subject who observes, interprets, and symbolically absorbs nature. Thus, Transcendentalism is approached both as a liberatory philosophy and as a discourse shaped by Western metaphysics.

To extend and complicate this framework, the paper draws on ecocriticism, particularly its emphasis on the ethical and ontological relationship between humans and the non-human world. Ecocritical theory challenges anthropocentric models

of nature and interrogates literary representations that position the environment as passive, symbolic, or subordinate to human consciousness. This perspective is crucial for comparing Emerson's symbolic natural world with Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poetic cosmology, in which land is not an abstract spiritual medium but a living, ancestral presence. Ecocriticism thus provides the vocabulary to analyse differing environmental ethics embedded in the two bodies of work.

Central to the paper's theoretical approach is the integration of Indigenous epistemology, which fundamentally redefines both "nature" and "self." In Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poetry, identity is relational rather than individualistic, and the self is inseparable from land, community, and ancestral continuity. Indigenous knowledge systems reject the nature-culture binary that underpins much Western philosophy. Instead, they posit a cosmology in which land is animate, sacred, and constitutive of identity. The paper approaches Oodgeroo's work through this epistemological lens, recognising her poetry as an articulation of Indigenous worldview rather than merely a literary response to colonial oppression.

This theoretical stance is informed by postcolonial theory, which provides tools for understanding how colonial histories shape representations of land and identity. Postcolonial criticism highlights how Western philosophical traditions, often universalised, have historically marginalised Indigenous ways of knowing. By juxtaposing Emerson and Oodgeroo, the paper does not attempt to collapse their differences into a single humanistic vision of nature. Instead, it foregrounds asymmetry: Emerson writes from within a settler-colonial society that could afford to romanticise wilderness, whereas Oodgeroo writes from the position of an Indigenous subject whose relationship to land has been violently disrupted by colonisation. Postcolonial theory thus helps frame Oodgeroo's poetic cosmology as both a cultural affirmation and a political intervention.

Methodologically, the paper employs close textual analysis informed by these theoretical perspectives. Emerson's philosophical prose is examined for its metaphors of vision, transparency, and transcendence, while Oodgeroo's poetry is analysed for its use of ancestral voice, collective pronouns, and land-centered imagery. The theoretical approach emphasises comparison without equivalence: the goal is not to determine which vision of nature is superior, but to explore how different ontologies of self and environment emerge from distinct cultural traditions.

Basically, this theoretical framework allows the paper to argue that while Emerson and Oodgeroo both envision nature as central to human identity, they articulate profoundly different models of the self. Emerson's transcendental self seeks unity with nature through individual perception and spiritual ascent, whereas Oodgeroo's self is already embedded within a living ecological and ancestral network. By integrating Transcendentalist philosophy, ecocriticism, Indigenous epistemology, and postcolonial critique, the paper demonstrates how literary representations of nature reveal deeper cultural assumptions about what it means to be a self in the world.

Comparative Biographical Context: Emerson and Oodgeroo Noonuccal

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Oodgeroo Noonuccal occupy distinct positions within literary history, shaped by divergent cultural, philosophical, and political circumstances. A comparative biographical examination reveals how each author's lived experience informed their understanding of nature and the self, while also highlighting the asymmetries produced by colonial histories and differing epistemological traditions.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in 1803 in Boston, Massachusetts, into a family deeply rooted in New England's intellectual and religious life. Educated at Harvard College and later Harvard Divinity School, Emerson was trained within the Western philosophical and theological canon, drawing on classical philosophy, Christian Unitarianism, and European Romanticism. His resignation from the Unitarian ministry in 1832 marked a turning point, prompting his pursuit of an independent philosophical path grounded in intuition and personal experience (Emerson). Travels to Europe further influenced his thinking, particularly his encounters with Romantic writers such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Upon returning to the United States, Emerson settled in Concord, Massachusetts, where he emerged as the leading figure of American Transcendentalism. His essay *Nature* (1836) articulates a vision of the self as capable of spiritual transcendence through solitary communion with the natural world, reflecting both his intellectual privilege and his position within a settler society that could idealise wilderness as unoccupied and restorative.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal, born Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska in 1920 on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) in Queensland, Australia, was a member of the Noonuccal people. Her life unfolded under the conditions of colonial dispossession, racial discrimination, and the suppression of Indigenous

cultures. Unlike Emerson, Oodgeroo had limited access to formal education due to systemic inequalities, and her knowledge was shaped by oral tradition, community life, and lived experience. She worked in domestic service and later served in the Australian Women's Army Service during World War II, experiences that heightened her political consciousness. Oodgeroo became a prominent activist for Aboriginal rights, contributing significantly to campaigns for legal recognition and social justice, including the 1967 referendum that amended the Australian constitution.

The publication of *We Are Going* in 1964 marked a milestone as the first widely recognised poetry collection by an Aboriginal woman. Her work foregrounds land as ancestral, sacred, and inseparable from Indigenous identity, rejecting Western separations between nature and culture. In 1988, she adopted the name Oodgeroo Noonuccal, symbolically reclaiming her Indigenous identity and resisting colonial naming practices. Her poetry speaks in a collective voice, emphasising continuity, responsibility, and relational belonging rather than individual transcendence.

Comparatively, Emerson's biography reflects the freedoms and limitations of a Western, individualist intellectual tradition, while Oodgeroo's life embodies the struggles and resilience of Indigenous resistance under colonial rule. Their differing relationships to land and self are inseparable from these biographical contexts, demonstrating how literature emerges from historically situated experiences of power, place, and identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly engagement with Ralph Waldo Emerson's Transcendentalism has long emphasised his reconceptualisation of nature as a spiritual and epistemological force central to the formation of the self. A cross-cultural study of his manifesto with other scholarly perspectives is not new to scholarship. This paper, for example, was inspired by Djockoua Manyaka's *Manyaka Toko. Cross-Cultural Affinities: Emersonian Transcendentalism and Senghorian Négritude*, which reconciles Transcendental perspectives in the works of Emerson and Négritude perspectives of Leopold Sedar Senghor, to deeply outline the convergence and divergence in the works of these world-renowned scholars.

Generally, in "Nature" (1836), Emerson rejects empirical materialism in favour of an idealist philosophy in which the natural world becomes a symbolic language through which moral and metaphysical truths are apprehended (Emerson 20). Critics such as Lawrence Buell argue that Emerson's

work establishes a foundational paradigm for American environmental thought by framing nature as a site of ethical self-cultivation rather than mere resource or scenery (Buell 23). This perspective has positioned Emerson as a precursor to modern ecocriticism, though not without critique.

Central to Emerson scholarship is the tension between individualism and universality. In *Self-Reliance* (1841), Emerson's insistence that "nothing is at last sacred, but the integrity of your own mind" (Emerson 259) has been read as a radical affirmation of intellectual independence. Scholars, including Sacvan Bercovitch, contend that this emphasis reflects a broader American ideology of self-making that aligns personal freedom with national identity (Bercovitch 63). However, more recent criticism has interrogated the limitations of Emerson's universalism. Buell notes that Emerson's abstraction of nature often detaches it from historical and material realities, resulting in a vision that is spiritually expansive yet environmentally and socially underdetermined (Buell 34). Such critiques are particularly relevant when Emerson's philosophy is placed in dialogue with Indigenous literary traditions.

In contrast, critical responses to Oodgeroo Noonuccal's "We Are Going" (1964) consistently foreground the political urgency and cultural specificity of her poetry. As the first published collection of poetry by an Aboriginal Australian, "We Are Going" has been widely studied as both a literary milestone and an act of resistance. Adam Shoemaker emphasises that Oodgeroo's work marks a decisive shift in Australian literature by introducing Indigenous perspectives that challenge settler-colonial narratives of land and history (Shoemaker 89). Unlike Emerson's symbolic landscapes, Oodgeroo's representations of nature are inseparable from dispossession, memory, and communal identity.

Scholars have highlighted the accessibility and directness of Oodgeroo's poetic style, sometimes critiquing it as lacking formal complexity. Yet critics such as Anita Heiss argue that this stylistic clarity is a deliberate strategy, allowing Oodgeroo to speak across cultural boundaries while maintaining political force (Heiss 41). Poems such as "We Are Going" and "Municipal Gum" depict environmental degradation as a manifestation of colonial violence, transforming nature into a witness to historical injustice. In this respect, Oodgeroo's poetry aligns with what Graham Huggan describes as postcolonial ecocriticism, wherein ecological loss is understood as inseparable from cultural erasure (Huggan 87).

Comparative scholarship that places Emerson alongside Indigenous writers remains

relatively limited, yet emerging studies suggest the value of such dialogue. Val Plumwood's critique of Western dualisms, particularly the separation of human from nature and self from community, offers a theoretical bridge between Emersonian idealism and Indigenous relational ontology (Plumwood 43). While Emerson resists mechanistic materialism, his philosophy nonetheless privileges the solitary self as the primary site of meaning. Oodgeroo's work, by contrast, articulates a collective self-embedded in land, ancestry, and responsibility.

This synchronised reading reveals both convergence and divergence in the critical reception of the two authors. Both are praised for challenging dominant paradigms of their time, confronting religious and intellectual conformity, and Oodgeroo, resisting colonial silencing. Yet where Emerson is often celebrated for philosophical abstraction and universality, Oodgeroo is valued for historical specificity and ethical immediacy. Bringing these bodies of scholarship together underscores the need for comparative frameworks that do not collapse difference but instead use it to interrogate the cultural assumptions underlying concepts of nature and selfhood. Such an approach not only deepens Emerson studies but also affirms Indigenous poetics as central, rather than supplementary, to contemporary ecocritical discourse.

DISCUSSION

Despite the profound cultural, historical, and political differences separating Ralph Waldo Emerson and Oodgeroo Noonuccal, their works converge at several critical philosophical and ethical junctures. Most notably, both articulate a fundamental rejection of materialism, challenge dominant epistemological authorities, and assert the primacy of lived experience, particularly engagement with the natural world, as a source of moral truth. These convergences do not erase difference; rather, they illuminate shared impulses toward reimagining human relationships with nature, selfhood, and ethical responsibility.

Synchronising Ideological Commonalities

A primary point of convergence lies in their critique of materialist worldviews. Nature and the self are the heart of existence when Emerson says, "Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul" (4). Emerson's "Nature" explicitly opposes the reduction of the world to economic or utilitarian terms, arguing that nature's true value lies in its capacity to awaken spiritual insight. He contends that "the sensual man conforms thoughts to things; the poet conforms things to his thoughts" (Emerson 27), privileging imaginative and moral perception over material utility. Similarly, Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poetry

resists commodified understandings of land imposed by colonial capitalism. In "Municipal Gum," the tree is alienated and confined within an urban grid, emblematic of a worldview that strips nature of relational meaning (Noonuccal 32). Scholars such as Graham Huggan note that Indigenous environmental writing frequently exposes how material exploitation of land parallels cultural dispossession, a critique that aligns with Emerson's moral resistance to instrumental reason, albeit from a radically different positionality (Huggan 89).

Moreover, the authors both portray their distrust of institutional authority as a mediator of truth. Emerson's insistence that "nothing is at last sacred, but the integrity of your own mind" (Self-Reliance 259) constitutes a direct challenge to religious, social, and intellectual orthodoxies. Sacvan Bercovitch interprets this stance as an attempt to liberate moral authority from inherited institutions and relocate it within the individual conscience (Bercovitch 64). Oodgeroo similarly rejects imposed structures of authority, particularly colonial governance and epistemology. Her poetry consistently exposes the inadequacy of settler institutions to recognise Indigenous law, memory, and belonging. As Anita Heiss observes, Oodgeroo's work "reclaims narrative authority for Aboriginal people by speaking outside and against colonial validation" (Heiss 44). In both cases, truth emerges not from sanctioned systems but from experiential knowledge grounded in ethical perception.

Again, Emerson, like Oodgeroo, privileges experience over abstraction, though expressed through different modes. Emerson's philosophical values immediate encounter with nature as a means of self-renewal, asserting that "The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; 'who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, despite real sorrows'" (Nature 6). While Emerson's language tends toward abstraction, his emphasis on encounter rather than doctrine resonates with Indigenous epistemologies that prioritise lived relationship. Oodgeroo's poetry embodies this principle through concrete imagery and collective memory. In "We Have Come Home," the persona states, "We have come home, To the green foothills, To drink from the cup, Of warm and mellow birdsong". In "We Are Going," the repeated evocation of vanished animals and silenced laughter enacts what Adam Shoemaker describes as "experiential testimony rather than metaphorical lament" (Shoemaker 92). Both writers thus resist second-hand knowledge, asserting that understanding in general and nature in particular arises from direct

engagement with the world rather than inherited ideology.

Ethically, Emerson and Oodgeroo agree that nature functions as a moral agent rather than a passive backdrop. Emerson maintains that natural forms encode moral law, stating that "the moral law lies at the centre of nature and radiates to the circumference" (Nature 25). Although this view universalises morality, it nevertheless positions nature as ethically instructive. Oodgeroo similarly portrays land as morally charged, bearing witness to injustice and loss. Val Plumwood argues that Indigenous texts frequently attribute ethical agency to land itself, challenging Western separations between moral subject and natural object (Plumwood 47). While Emerson conceptualises this agency metaphysically and Oodgeroo historically, both reject the notion of nature as morally inert. In the same light, their didactic intents do not conceive literature as purely aesthetic but inspirational. In "Nature," Emerson states,

The poet, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the architect, seek each to concentrate this radiance of the world on one point, and each in his several work to satisfy the love of beauty which stimulates him to produce. Thus is Art a nature passed through the alembic of man. Thus, in art does Nature work through the will of a man filled with the beauty of her first works. (14)

Beyond this, Emerson's essays are explicitly instructional, urging readers toward intellectual independence and moral courage. Lawrence Buell notes that Emerson's prose functions as "ethical exhortation rather than detached reflection" (Buell 31). Oodgeroo's poetry is similarly pedagogical, though directed toward social justice and cultural survival. Her direct address and accessible diction are strategic, intended to educate both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. As Heiss argues, this didacticism should be read not as aesthetic limitation but as ethical commitment (Heiss 39). In both cases, literature is a tool for transformation.

Lastly, on the blending of their ideologies, both writers articulate a vision of renewal through reorientation to nature. Emerson envisions regeneration at the level of the individual soul, while Oodgeroo imagines cultural renewal through recognition of Indigenous relationships to land. Yet the underlying impulse—to restore balance by rethinking humanity's place within the natural world—is shared. Buell suggests that Emerson's legacy lies in initiating a tradition that later writers, including Indigenous authors, revise and ethically ground (Buell 45). From this perspective, Oodgeroo's work may be read not as an extension of

Transcendentalism but as a corrective convergence, one that retains its spiritual aspiration while anchoring it in history, community, and responsibility.

Basically, the convergence between Emerson and Oodgeroo Noonuccal lies not in philosophical sameness but in shared resistance: resistance to materialism, imposed authority, and alienated conceptions of nature. These convergences provide a productive comparative space in which Emerson's idealism can be ethically interrogated, and Oodgeroo's poetics recognised as central to contemporary redefinitions of nature and the self.

Exploring Ideological Disparities

While Ralph Waldo Emerson and Oodgeroo Noonuccal converge in their ethical valuation of nature and their resistance to dominant materialist paradigms, their works diverge sharply in their constructions of selfhood, their treatment of history, and their political implications. These divergences are not incidental but arise from fundamentally different epistemological traditions and historical positions. Examining these differences is essential to understanding both the limits of Emersonian Transcendentalism and the distinct intervention of Indigenous poetics.

The most significant divergence lies in the concept of the self. Emerson's Transcendentalism is grounded in an ideal of autonomous individualism, wherein the self is conceived as self-originating and inwardly sufficient. In *Self-Reliance*, Emerson asserts that "to believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius" (Emerson 261). This formulation universalises the individual perspective, positioning personal intuition as a reliable foundation for moral truth. Scholars such as Sacvan Bercovitch argue that this model reflects a distinctly American ideology in which personal freedom is elevated as a moral absolute (Bercovitch 67). By contrast, Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poetry articulates a relational and collective self, defined not by autonomy but by connection to land, ancestors, and community. In "We Are Going," identity is articulated through communal loss and continuity: "We are the old people, we are the past" (Noonuccal 15). The self here is inseparable from collective history and shared responsibility. Emerson's manifesto takes a universal perspective, a one-for-all rule, but to a colonised people, this cannot apply. Sarah Anyang precisely that, "The idea of universalism originating from the colonial discourse intended to spread European culture to the colonised world as the universal culture, thus annihilating colonial cultures" (172). The Western individuality concept deeply contrasts with the communal traditions of the subaltern.

Indigenous scholars emphasise that communal relational ontology resists Western liberal notions of individuality, which often obscures social obligation (Plumwood 52). This exposes a critical limitation in Emerson's philosophy: its assumption that selfhood can be abstracted from social and historical relations.

Again, the role of history and material conditions is deeply contrastive in the works of both writers. Emerson's engagement with nature is largely ahistorical. Although he writes during periods of social upheaval, his philosophical mode tends toward timeless abstraction. Nature, in "Nature", is described as "the present expositor of the divine mind" (Emerson 23), a formulation that detaches it from specific political or historical circumstances. Lawrence Buell observes that Emerson's landscapes are often "symbolic rather than situated," privileging spiritual meaning over environmental or social specificity (Buell 34). In Oodgeroo's "The Dispossessed," from the *We Are Going* collection, the persona cries out,

*The white man claimed your hunting grounds and you could not remain,
They made you work as menials for greedy private gain;*

Oodgeroo's poetry, in contrast, is insistently historical. Nature in her work bears the visible scars of colonisation, urbanisation, and ecological destruction. "Hunting ground" represents not only the value of catching prey on the land but also the cultural routine, the homely attachment, and the sacred nature of their land. "Greedy private gain" expresses the persona's disdain for excessive exploitation without taking into consideration the preservation of the earth. In "Municipal Gum," the displaced tree becomes a metaphor not of spiritual transcendence but of enforced alienation within a colonial cityscape (Noonuccal 32). Graham Huggan argues that postcolonial Indigenous writing "refuses the luxury of abstraction" because land is always already entangled with histories of violence and survival (Huggan 91). Similarly, Blossom Fondo expounds that,

"It is in recognition that both postcolonialism and Ecocriticism were born of a desire to question abusive systems of domination and seek solutions to these abuses that the category postcolonial Ecocriticism came to be established. This convergence of both fields seeks to elicit methods of theorization and conceptualization of the abuse of both nature and culture. (11)

In other words, there is an irrefutable link between the concepts of nature and culture, hence nature and history, and therefore nature and colonialism to anyone with a colonial experience.

This explains the conception of discourses on postcolonial Ecocriticism. Emerson, being on the colonial side, and Oodgeroo, the colonised, their perspectives of nature can never fully align. Where Emerson's nature offers escape from society, Oodgeroo's land demands confrontation with historical colonial injustice.

Moreover, in their political orientation, Emerson's philosophy, though radical in its challenge to conformity, remains largely indirect in its political engagement. In "Nature," he explains that, "All science has one aim, namely, to find a theory of nature. We have theories of races and of functions, but scarcely yet a remote approach to an idea of creation" (3). Clearly, Emerson's priority is not on human interaction but on the mysteries of nature. Even when he dwells on culture, his emphasis on self-culture assumes that social reform will follow from individual moral awakening. An awakening that "Nature" can enhance in man. As Buell notes, Emerson's politics are "implicit rather than programmatic," rooted in ethical persuasion rather than collective action (Buell 29). This stance reflects Emerson's position within a society that afforded him intellectual freedom and relative security. Oodgeroo's writing, by contrast, is explicitly political. Her poetry functions as protest literature, addressing land rights, cultural erasure, and systemic inequality. Adam Shoemaker emphasises that Oodgeroo's work cannot be separated from her activism, noting that her poems "operate simultaneously as cultural testimony and political demand" (Shoemaker 95). This divergence underscores how historical marginalization necessitates a more direct mode of resistance. Where Emerson can afford philosophical distance, Oodgeroo writes under conditions that require immediacy and urgency.

Their treatment of nature itself also diverges in important ways. Emerson's nature is primarily symbolic, a medium through which spiritual laws are discerned. His claim that "every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact" (Nature 20) exemplifies a semiotic approach that privileges meaning over materiality. Critics such as Plumwood argue that this symbolic elevation risks reinscribing human-centered perspectives, even when reverent (Plumwood 44). Oodgeroo's land, however, is not symbolic but ontological. It exists as a living presence with agency, memory, and moral force. This distinction aligns with Indigenous epistemologies that reject the metaphorisation of land as a form of epistemic violence (Heiss 46). The divergence here is not merely stylistic but ethical: Emerson interprets nature, whereas Oodgeroo speaks from within it.

Finally, on their intended audience and rhetorical strategy, Emerson writes primarily for an

educated readership capable of philosophical abstraction. His essays demand interpretive labour and inward reflection. Oodgeroo, however, deliberately employs accessible diction and direct address. While early critics dismissed this style as simplistic, contemporary scholars recognise it as a strategic choice aimed at cross-cultural communication and political efficacy (Heiss 40). The difference reflects divergent assumptions about literature's role: Emerson privileges intellectual provocation, while Oodgeroo prioritises social transformation. So generally, the divergences between Emerson and Oodgeroo Noonuccal illuminate the cultural and ethical boundaries of Transcendentalism when read alongside Indigenous poetics. Emerson's philosophy offers a powerful critique of conformity and materialism, yet remains constrained by abstraction, individualism, and historical distance. Oodgeroo's work exposes these limitations by grounding nature and selfhood in collective memory, political struggle, and lived relationship to land. Together, their differences underscore the necessity of plural philosophical frameworks in rethinking nature, identity, and responsibility in a global literary context.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the comparative analysis of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Oodgeroo Noonuccal reveals a dynamic interplay between philosophical alignment and contextual divergence, illustrating how shared ethical and literary impulses can manifest differently across cultural and historical circumstances. Both authors converge in their resistance to materialist reductionism, their critique of imposed authority, and their valuation of experiential engagement with nature as morally formative. Emerson's idealist landscapes and Oodgeroo's historically grounded environmental imagery each serve as sites through which selfhood and ethical awareness are cultivated, demonstrating a shared commitment to the transformative potential of human-nature relations. Both employ literature as a vehicle for moral instruction, signaling an overlapping concern with shaping consciousness, albeit through distinct aesthetic and philosophical registers. However, their divergences underscore how epistemology, social position, and historical circumstance shape literary practice. Emerson's abstraction and individualism reflect the intellectual and social freedoms of nineteenth-century New England, privileging inward reflection over collective or historical accountability. Oodgeroo's poetry, in contrast, is inseparable from communal identity, colonial history, and political activism, foregrounding relational selfhood and material responsibility to

land and people. These differences do not negate the convergence; rather, they enrich it by highlighting how universal ethical concerns, such as moral engagement with the natural world, must be adapted to specific cultural and historical realities. In synthesising these points, it becomes evident that Emerson and Oodgeroo occupy complementary comparative positions. Emerson's Transcendentalism provides a conceptual model of ethical imagination and self-cultivation, while Oodgeroo's Indigenous poetics demonstrate how such models can be reoriented to prioritise collective memory, social justice, and ecological accountability. Together, their works suggest that literature's ethical potential is both universal and context-dependent, requiring readers to negotiate abstraction and specificity, individual insight and communal responsibility, in the ongoing dialogue between philosophy and poetics.

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