Professor Plochmann will not be the philosopher who popularizes Richard McKeon for professional philosophers and certainly not for the general academic public. Yet because Plochmann presents the overview of the development of McKeon's powerful anti-relativistic pluralism his book belongs in the library of every scholar and of every university where the teachers and students of Richard McKeon's philosophy work.

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Emerson on the Scholar, Merton M. Sealts Jr., University of Missouri Press, 1992 iv+326 pp. $39.95

Merton M. Sealts Jr. is Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Some might see this as an "old man's" book. It is, to be sure, more the fruit of "ripe" scholarship than a volume prematurely published in some frenetic grasping after tenure. It is more a "labor of love" than a "cry for recognition." His "scholarship" may seem rather "old-fashioned" to some. He is not a Marxist, a structuralist or a "post-modernist." He is simply an honest scholar trying to understand Emerson. This is a book for those who love Emerson, though probably not for beginners. It is a sort of biography of Emerson, though one focused on Emerson's thoughts on "the Scholar." Professor Sealts can make even tired topics seem fresh and alive. He is much concerned with how the published Emerson is related to Emerson's unpublished works. However, philosophers will not find much philosophical thought (or sophistication) in this book. This is more a contribution to "literary scholarship" than to philosophy. Some philosophers, of course, see Emerson as merely a "seer," "prophet" or "preacher," but no philosopher. It does seem to me that there is in truth much philosophical thought in Emerson (at least to those who rely on "Reason" and not just the "Understanding"). But there is not much "philosophy" in this book. One can not call this a "brilliant" book, but for those interested in Emerson, it is an illuminating one. After reading this book, one does feel that one's understanding of Emerson has been significantly enlarged (and deepened), though it would be difficult to state precisely how. There is no simple thesis to this book; its strength lies rather in the details, in the sensitive "reading" of Emerson on many issues. We see how Emerson's notion of the "Scholar" developed, and how it was tested by such issues as Slavery and the Civil War. But all this may sound rather "thin." This book must be read; it can not be "summarized" in brief. All those interested in Emerson should find something of interest here. Yet this book is not likely to "revolutionize" your understanding of Emerson. (It does not try to argue that Emerson was really a "male Lesbian," or a "unconstructed Trotskyite.") This is a very good book, though perhaps not a truly great book.

This is also a beautifully produced book (though the quotation marks seem somewhat inadequate). There are some minor
errors. On p. 14, Professor Sealts speaks of "Boston's Second Church, Unitarian," which is not technically correct. On p. 71, the first Greek word lacks a rough breathing. But these are rather minor quibbles. This is a rather good book.

University of Minnesota

Dallas L. Ouren


The author, Associate Professor of History at the Claremont Graduate School, has given us an informative and well-written study of the internal conflict in the lives of three writers, a conflict between their "natural superiority" and the "leveling effects" of the democracy within which they found themselves. Each of the three outstanding individuals realized that if he was to fulfill his duty -- since "noblesse oblige" -- to critique his society, he must maintain a certain "distance" (even if this meant, as it did for James and Santayana, living abroad). In this they were following, more or less, the lead of the young (at 27) Alexis de Tocqueville, the subject of the first chapter, who came to the young American republic (in 1831) to see the future of his own society, and who remains "a polestar for American self-study (1)."

Henry Adams (1838-1918), great-grandson of our second president, and grandson of our sixth president, ranks (alongside Emerson) "as our most remarkable all-round man of letters (34)." His Democracy, along with The Education of Henry Adams, indicates how democratic culture makes it difficult to sustain one's superiority by putting special limitations on intelligent and expressive people. Adams refused to be bound by these limitations, even when he was ambitious to serve his country (as a sort of national critic modeled after Tocqueville). Adams was imbued with the New English notion of high culture and how it can contribute (as the steward of the people's best interests) to the body politic from outside the sway of popular democracy through serious political journalism. Like his great-grandfather, he saw the New England character as the source of American democracy, and thought that democracy in the nineteenth century could be rescued only by that same character (now softened from its original Puritan Calvinist rage). Despite all his efforts Adams, in the end, felt alienated from the democracy that he felt had alienated him.

The solution of Henry James (1843-1916) he felt alienation was expatriation (finally to England). "Surely, this confirms the Tocquevillian prediction of the democratic principle driving the [natural] aristocratic out (15)." His The Ambassadors is the best American novel about American characters analyzing the characteristics of America. In retrospect it can be called a