

Barry Tharaud (Ed.)

Ralph Waldo Emerson:

Bicentenary Appraisals

Bernd Engler, Michael Hochgeschwender,
Udo Sautter, Oliver Scheiding (Hg.)

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In Memoriam

Joel Porte, 13 November 1933–1 June 2006

Gustaaf Van Cromphout, 22 November 1938–1 September 2005

I write this dedication in response to the sad loss of two fine Emerson scholars. Since the original publication of these essays in *Nineteenth-Century Prose* in celebration of the Emerson bicentenary, contributors Joel Porte of Cornell University and Gustaaf Van Cromphout of Northern Illinois University have died.

Out of great respect to these two scholars, this volume is dedicated to their memory. By virtue of their presence in this volume, we celebrate both their scholarly excellence and their crucial contributions in the vineyard of Emerson scholarship. They were fine scholars and, more important, fine human beings.

Barry Tharaud
Istanbul
December 2006





Acknowledgments

The re-publication of this collection of essays in celebration of the 2003 Emerson bicentenary was initiated by Dr. Jan Stievermann, an Americanist and Emerson specialist at the University of Tübingen who in late 2004 contacted me to obtain a copy of the original Emerson Bicentenary Essays that had appeared in a special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, Vol. 33, Nos. 1/2 (Spring/Fall 2003). When I told him that the collection had sold out immediately upon publication, he suggested that I publish the collection as a book with one of several German publishers of scholarly works, and shortly afterward he put me in touch with Professor Bernd Engler, one of the editors of the series MOSAIC (Studies and Texts of American Culture and History), published by Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier. Moreover, Dr. Stievermann continued to give encouragement and moral support, at times acting as a liaison with the publishers, who efficiently reformatted the original 500-page collection down to its slightly-more-compact present size.

Later, after Dr. Otto from Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier suggested that I write a preface for the re-publication of the collection as a book, I felt that I had little to add to my already lengthy Introduction and therefore asked Lawrence Buell if he would situate the collection within the context of “the Emerson industry” – a term that he coined nearly twenty-five years ago – and he kindly agreed to honor the volume with his Preface. The result is a volume that has the added value of Professor Buell’s Preface and also is more carefully edited – I did the final editing of the previous publication during a five-week period in which I wrote the lengthy Introduction, finished teaching my classes at San Diego State University, graded final exams, and packed up my family for an indeterminate overseas stay that continues to this day. This time around, I had more time for a final editing – a task that actually became enjoyable because of the high quality of the essays. In addition to a number of minor improvements, I rearranged the order of the essays to reflect the conceptual organization of the Introduction.

The original volume could not have been produced in its final stages in such a short time without the fine group of contributors, who produced such excellent

essays in such a steady workman-like manner and with such good spirit. In the process, I experienced none of the unpleasantness and drudgery that is too often the lot of editors. Throughout the process of the original publication as a special journal issue, and now again in the process of its re-publication as a book, I have been fortunate to experience academic scholarship and collegiality at its best.

Barry Tharaud
Editor and Publisher, "Nineteenth-Century Prose"
Professor of English, Doğuş University, İstanbul





Foreword:
Forward! Toward a Third Century
of Emerson Studies

Lawrence Buell

The widespread commemorations of the bicentennial of the American poet-critic and public philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson's birth (2003) shows that scholarly interest in Emerson gives no sign of slowing down any time soon, even if outside the academy his most famous disciple, Henry David Thoreau, seems permanently enshrined as the more popular figure. The recent book-length reassessments by individual Emersonians seem to have been as great in number and even broader in scope than the spate of books a quarter century ago marking the centenary of Emerson's death: for example, Stanley Cavell's *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford UP), Peter S. Field's *R.W. Emerson: The Making of a Democratic Intellectual* (Rowman and Littlefield), David Justin Hodge's *On Emerson* (Thomson/Wadsworth), Kenneth Sacks' *Understanding Emerson: "The American Scholar" and His Struggle for Self-Reliance* (Princeton UP), Laura Dassow Walls' *Emerson's Life in Science: The Culture of Truth* (Cornell UP), and my *Emerson* (Belknap Press of Harvard UP).

Arguably even more impressive than this (incomplete!) list, however, is the extent and proliferation of venues of high-profile bicentennial conferences and critical collections: from the *Emerson Bicentennial Essays* sponsored by the Massachusetts Historical Society near Emerson's own home base, to the French and Italian symposia, *Ralph Waldo Emerson dans ses textes* and *Emerson at 200: Proceedings of the International Bicentennial Conference*. The present book, originally a special Spring/Fall 2003 issue of *Nineteenth-Century Prose* that sold out quickly, may well emerge as the most diverse and durable of these gatherings. This I declare not mainly for the sake of promotionalism, though that's of course

precisely what forewords like this are supposed to do, because I'm sure the collection will speak for itself in this respect. Rather I speak from a spirit of comingled admiration and ruefulness. I wish in retrospect that I had been able to benefit from a number of these essays when I was finishing my own concurrent book on Emerson.

It's still too early to pronounce judgment with any confidence on how the spate of bicentennial reexaminations will affect the future course of Emerson studies. I suspect that it will be harder to extract anything like a dominant trajectory, such as the "plotline" of "detranscendentalization" that I inferred from the work of the early 1980s in that old review article Editor Barry Tharaud here cites. Having evidently guessed right once, I'm reluctant to prophesy again, especially since Emerson studies at present don't strike me as so informed by a definable template or templates as it was in the late 1970s, owing to the influence of the oddly dissonant but nonetheless synergistic charisma of Stephen Whicher and Harold Bloom. But I do want to try at least to suggest what I take to be some likely trend-lines on the basis of the present book considered against the background of the other twenty-first-century Emerson projects so far in view.

First and foremost, the recent Emerson studies demonstrate that the focus on the "social" or "political" dimensions of his thought, based on a thorough re-reading of his work in which the "later" Emerson counts for much more than it did during the third quarter of the twentieth century, is indeed here to stay for some time to come. And furthermore that these dimensions are going to be developed by a combination of concentrated sifting of familiar texts (*e.g.* Michael), comparative analysis (Hodge), retrieval of neglected Emerson texts (Robinson), and recuperation of neglected aspects of Emerson's legacy (Gougeon). Second, that the ideological character of Emerson's thought, writing, and status as public figure will be variously diagnosed, *e.g.* that readings of Emerson as complicit with American expansionism, which strongly marked the so-called new historicist and new Americanist movements of the 1980s and 1990s respectively, will be reinvented in order to stay vital (Cheyfitz) and will compete with other, sometimes quite discrepant assessments (J. Tharaud, Gougeon, Porte, etc.) Third, that Emerson's claims to philosophic interest are in the process of being taken much more seriously than ever – and variously as well (Hodge, Albrecht, Stack). Fourth and related, that the same holds for the relation between Emerson's writing and the history of scientific thought (Wilson, Walls). Fifth, and related to each of the last putative trend-lines, that Emerson will cease to be considered so exclusively in relation to national literary, intellectual, and cultural

history as he has tended to be since the birth of the American literature and American studies movements in the 1920s and 1930s: that the multiple lines of connection and influence linking him to European and also Asian thought and writing will continue to be charted (Hodge, Hodder, Stack). And finally, that biographical and critical and theoretical work along more familiarly established lines will continue to be done but continue to unearth freshly surprising results (Morris, Richardson, Van Cromphout).

Here then are at least six reasons to welcome the book publication of this important new gathering of studies. I'm willing to bet that its readers will find many more.

Harvard University





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Introduction: Emerson Bicentenary Essays

Barry Tharaud

Those shores you found, I say you have led The States there – have led Me there. I say that none has ever done, or ever can do, a greater deed for The States, than your deed. Others may line out the lines, build cities, work mines, break up farms; it is yours to have been the original true Captain who put to sea, intuitive, positive, rendering the first report, to be told less by any report, and more by the mariners of a thousand bays, in each tack of their arriving and departing, many years after you.

Receive, dear Master, these statements and assurances through me, for all the young men, and for an earnest that we know none before you, but the best following you; and that we demand to take your name into our keeping, and that we understand what you have indicated, and find the same indicated in ourselves, and that we will stick to it and enlarge upon it through These States.

Walt Whitman, “Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson”
Leaves of Grass [1856 edition]

Just over twenty years ago Emersonians celebrated the centennial of Emerson’s death, and a couple of years after that, Lawrence Buell summed up the state of “the Emerson industry” and commented on the “increasing volume and diversification” of Emerson scholarship – to the extent that “From now on almost nobody except the person doing the *American Literary Scholarship* chapter will come close to reading all that is published on Emerson in a given year....”¹ Since then, production has hardly abated as we now arrive at the bicentennial of Emerson’s birth, which we celebrate with a collection of essays that reflect the continuing expansion of Emerson scholarship. Although a good deal of this scholarship, as Buell predicted, has become “more precise, more subtle, more deeply if less broadly informed than ever before”² as it falls increasingly into the hands of specialists, the contour of Emerson’s thought conti-

nues to expand as it is viewed from different perspectives, so that in the present volume we see Emerson not only as a transcendentalist who utilizes German idealistic thought and language theory, as detailed below in Gustaaf Van Cromphout's magisterial "Emerson and the Aesthetic Philosophy of Language," but we also see David Justin Hodge draw rays of relation between Emerson and John Stuart Mill, while James Albrecht explores facets of Emerson from the perspective of William James' pragmatism, and George Stack reviews affinities between Emerson and Kant, as well as various existentialist thinkers. Someone once described all of philosophy as a footnote to Plato, and in a similar manner a good deal of American and even some European philosophy is beginning to look like a footnote to Emerson. Moreover, as the fifteen essays that follow this Introduction make clear, even with the new editions of Emerson material over the last forty years, as well as new scholarship on Emerson in a variety of contexts, the 'Emerson industry' is still undergoing debate and adjustment, so that a final institutionalization of Emerson's life and thought at times seems as elusive as ever. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris have elsewhere referred to "Emerson's perpetually inexhaustible presence" that is "multifaceted and unresolved,"³ and the collection of essays assembled here does little to contravene the notion that Emerson's thought is protean in both content and expression.

Because Emerson is a complex and multifaceted thinker, he has both engaged and eluded his own audiences as well as writers and intellectuals extending to our own time at the bicentenary of his birth. Emerson often serves as a kind of literary Rorschach: traditionally, critics cut him down to their own size and pattern, and in the process portray a partial, limiting view of the man who wished above all to inspire individuals to be more "spherical" and to expand *beyond* limits – "transgress" is the word both Emerson and Thoreau occasionally use⁴ – set by their society and themselves. To naïve, simplistic souls, Emerson may seem naïve and simplistic; to egotists, he may seem egotistical – and there is no shortage of egotistical interpretations of Emerson in American popular culture of the last century; and to more subtle minds there is no limit to the depth and complexity that can be found when one plumbs the depths of Emerson's mind as expressed in his essays, lectures, journals, and poetry: Emerson "has already anticipated any degree of sophistication that might be brought to him."⁵ The collection of essays assembled for this Special Issue of *Nineteenth-Century Prose* gives some idea of the explosion of activity that has occurred in the Emerson industry in the last few decades and that shows no sign of abatement at the present time.