Dieter Schulz, *Emerson and Thoreau, or Steps Beyond Ourselves: Studies in Transcendentalism* (Heidelberg: Mattes, 2012), 308 pp.

In 2013, the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society bestowed its highest honor—the "Lifetime Achievement Award"—on Dieter Schulz and thus recognized him as one of a very small group of scholars whose work has fundamentally shaped our understanding of Emerson and the Transcendentalists. Schulz, who now finds himself in the company of such luminaries of Transcendentalist scholarship as Kenneth Walter Cameron, Robert Richardson, Barbara Packer, Stanley Cavell, and Lawrence Buell, is the first scholar from outside the United States to receive the award. The Emerson Society's decision is all the more remarkable considering that Schulz's writings on Emerson and Thoreau have so far not been widely available internationally. His monograph *Amerikanischer Transzendentalismus: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller* (1997), while considered a benchmark introduction in German-speaking countries, has not been translated into English, and even the majority of his numerous essays on the Transcendentalists have been published in venues that are most often dismally ignored outside of German academe. To make things more complicated, some of them were written in German without having been translated into English. While experts have long been in the know (as the choice by the Emerson Society's award committee attests), the publication of *Emerson and Thoreau, or Steps Beyond Ourselves: Studies in Transcendentalism* finally fills the urgent need of collecting the key essays of Schulz's oeuvre on Transcendentalism in a nicely edited English-language paperback edition.

*Emerson and Thoreau, or Steps Beyond Ourselves* collects eleven of Schulz's essays on Emerson and Thoreau written between the mid-1990s and 2010, two of which are published here for the first time. They are framed by two articles on Puritan precursors to Transcendentalism (Roger Williams and John Cotton) and two articles on twentieth-century followers (William Carlos Williams, and Martin Walser, whom Schulz presents as deeply indebted to Whitman). Schulz's take on the Transcendentalists in these essays further develops ideas from his 1997 book, and, indeed, his critical project here is thematically continuous with his earliest publications from the early 1970s. Throughout this decade-spanning intellectual endeavor, Schulz has developed a mature, distinct voice, which comes to full fruition in these essays: he abstains from the attempt to score points with claims that are original at all cost and instead articulates positions that combine clarity—even a proclivity for the commonsensical—with at times unexpected insights gained from connections drawn to the Western philosophical tradition, including most centrally the Presocratics Saint Augustine, George Berkeley, and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

While his early work was dedicated to the quest motif in American fiction (his article on Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* as quest romance, published in *American Literature* in 1971, remains a classic), his monograph *Amerikanischer Transzendentalismus* reconceptualized the quest's mobility as 'walking' and opposed it to Emerson's and Thoreau's complementary figures of the house and the act of world-building.[1] Finally, in the present essays Schulz pays renewed attention to the wanderer and conceives of Transcendentalism as a "large-scale effort to revitalize the metaphor of the way" (4). Captured in this phrase are two interrelated projects. First, Schulz's essays can justly be regarded as contributions to the field of metaphorology, though characteristically he has little patience for its technicalities and restricts himself to drawing on the bottom line of recent interdisciplinary findings on the centrality of "metaphors derived from sensory experience" (2) for even the most abstract concepts. The Transcendentalists, he suggests, have been privy to this insight all along and have thus relied "on stimulating tropes rather than conceptual thought" (76). Second, Schulz's fascination with the "metaphor of the way" arises from its conceptual knotting together of the image of the open road, the activity of walking, and the scientific method. It is here that Schulz's indebtedness to Gadamer's hermeneutics is most pronounced. Like Gadamer, Schulz upholds the Presocratic notion of method (which, as he points out with an acuteness to etymology, "is a compound consisting of the noun *hodos*

[1] "Edgar Huntly as Quest Romance," American Literature 43 (1971): 323–35; *Amerikanischer Transzendentalismus: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997).

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– *way*, and the preposition *meta-* – *along with, after*") over against the objectivist ideal of Francis Bacon's scientific method: "In different ways, […] Thoreau, Emerson, and Gadamer […] recapture the original meaning of the word" (133). While for Bacon, Descartes, and their nineteenth-century followers, method assumes "an autonomous intellect confronting an object that we can know in a verifiable way only in so far as we distance ourselves from it," the Presocratic notion "envisages a *methodos* that enables us to share the path of things" and thus "takes for granted the unity of mind and being" (134).

From this hermeneutical starting point, Schulz develops a number of intriguing observations. He connects the necessary interestedness of knowledge—the experiential component in the capturing of the object—to the topos of the 'Book of Nature' and thus puts Emerson and Thoreau in deep conversation with a tradition that ranges from medieval theological theories of God's two books (the Bible and nature) to Neoplatonism and George Berkeley. Berkeley, Schulz points out, became, in part via Coleridge, a source of inspiration for Transcendentalists (and even for modernists, as he argues in his essay on William Carlos Williams) because Berkeley compellingly combined Locke's belief in the arbitrariness of human language with a conviction in the motivatedness of a natural language, "which, as God's language, is universal and absolutely dependable" (207). Humans, in other words, may be symbolic animals; this, however, does not set them apart from the rest of creation but rather emplaces them in its midst. And once human language becomes reconnected to its natural source, the unity of mind and being will be reestablished.

While this interpretation has the obvious benefit of accounting for Emerson's hopes for the recovery of an Adamic language (especially prominent in *Nature*), in which words and things are reattached to each other, it also lets Schulz clarify the fact that Thoreau's frequent proclamations of the language of nature are in no way meant as an analogy but, dead-seriously, as the postulation of an "*ur*-language," (184) the recuperation of which he made his writerly task by means of a poetics centered on etymology and punning (cf. 184–87). Thoreau scholars and ecocritics will be particularly interested in the ramifications of Schulz's analysis. While environmental critics have long debated whether Thoreau's writings are best described as anthropocentric or biocentric (the debate between Leo Marx and Lawrence Buell on this point has become part of the field's narrative identity), Schulz insists that Thoreau combines and alters both positions: "On the one hand, Thoreau's approach appears biocentric inasmuch as his object lies in a 'wildness' beyond the reach of civilization. On the other hand, he shares an anthropocentric concern with nature as something that is of greatest interest to us" (209). In Schulz's reading, the unity of mind and being, while growing out of traditions steeped in mysticism, can be regarded as a radically modern intervention into the split between the sciences and humanities as analyzed by C.P. Snow. As Schulz remarks repeatedly (unfortunately without ever fleshing out his point), "another look at Thoreau's excursions has considerable potential for overcoming the two-cultures dichotomy" (223).

The ideas outlined so far recur so frequently in *Emerson and Thoreau, or Steps Beyond Ourselves* that at times they begin to feel redundant, especially when reading the book cover to cover. On the other hand, these reiterations have the advantage, exactly as Schulz hopes in his preface, of conferring cohesiveness on essays of an obviously miscellaneous origin. Moreover, Schulz—a consummate prose stylist throughout—largely avoids the identical repetition of phrases even when he draws again and again on the pillars of his intellectual framework. One final such pillar needs to be considered here, not least for its contentious qualities. For Schulz, Emerson and Thoreau, as well as the Puritans and modernists who surround them in his book, all belong to a distinctly American tradition; even more, he insists that for the most part they thought of their work in those very terms. While recent influential readers, say Buell or Wai-Chee Dimock, have rejected the imputation of such a nationalist project to the Transcendentalists, Schulz maintains that Crèvecoeur's question "What is an American?" reverberates "nowhere with greater urgency than in Emerson's 'Experience'" (90), and that the heroes of Emerson's *Representative Men*, from Plato to Goethe, "remind us of Emerson's own ambition to […] provide a stimulus for the renewal of American culture" because they offered "glimpses of reconciliation and wholeness" (73). If there is a certain stubbornness in his conviction that these writers were preoccupied with America even when they

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were engaged in creating a canon of cosmopolitan minds (as Emerson was in *Representative Men*), the reason, I suspect, lies in his own investment in America. It should be noted, of course, that any scholarly engagement with America is marked by an investment in the object of study of one sort or another. For Schulz, American writing—and ultimately, America itself—is characterized by the provisional, the improvised, and the hopeful emphasis on new beginnings rather than endings (this may make him sound like a Pragmatist, which he is not; in his reading, the Transcendentalists' improvisational style grows out of their deep trust in metaphysical unity). These qualities are precisely the outlook he ascribes to his favorite authors, hence their seemingly predominant concern with America.

The collection's final article on Martin Walser's *Amerikareise* most fully brings to light Schulz's affective involvement with America. Schulz turns to Walser—and effectively makes him the mouthpiece of his own creed—in part because Walser stands apart from most other German intellectuals (as epitomized by Adorno), who could not overcome their anti-Americanism even after years of living there, and in part because Walser adopts the future-mindedness Schulz analyzes in his preferred writers. In Schulz's reading, Walser is a follower of Whitman in his conviction that the United States, despite its dismal condition in the present, "will sooner or later astonish the world by a spiritual and cultural renewal matching its political and economic strength" (265). Schulz is right, of course, if he means to say that the idea of renewal still functions as one of America's most potent myths. But he does not stop there. Whitman and Walser appeal to him precisely for their commitment to the idea of the "open road" (268), the philosophical articulation of which is Schulz's great project throughout these essays. The "open road," Schulz explains, describes "an experiment whose outcome is uncertain. This is the truth underlying the stereotypical references of the 'American Way'" (268). But why should the truth of the openness of experiments, widely applicable as it is, be in any way tied to America? Schulz's answer betrays a bedrock of faith in his lifelong object of study that grounds his impressive: the optimistic openness that runs through American writing, Schulz insists by echoing Walser, is no less than America's "dynamic center, the idea that energizes its people" (268).

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