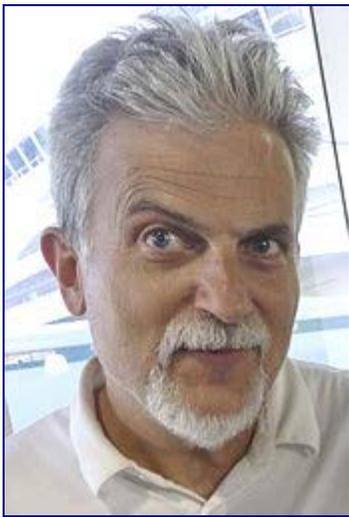


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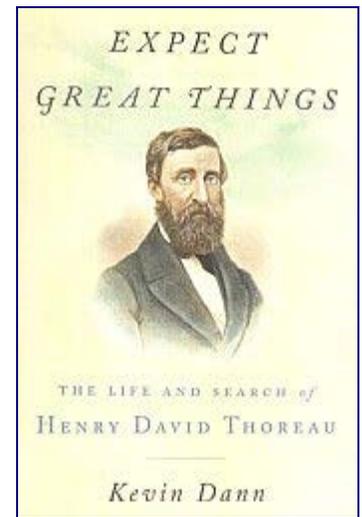


A READER'S JOURNAL

Expect Great Things The Life and Search of Henry David Thoreau by Kevin T. Dann

ARJ2 Chapter: Reading for Enjoyment
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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2017

By the time I reached Chapter 2 of this book, I felt like I was reading Thoreau's Journals again, feeling the same sweet, contemplative mood as I



accompanied Henry on his daily walks through the woods for 14 years. Looking at the cover artwork, featuring an artist's sketch of an old daguerreotype, it seems I'm looking into Kevin Dann's blue eyes. I followed Henry's walks through his native Concord, to Cape Cod, to Mt. Ktaadn in Maine, et al, reading about them about 150 years in the future. I followed Kevin's walk from Montreal past Lake Champlain to Brooklyn in real-time. How appropriate for one walker to document the life of another prominent walker. Henry documented the flora and fauna he encountered on his walks; Kevin documented the people and historical places on his walk. Pick up this book and join Kevin as he walks in Henry's footsteps and reports back to us on his progress through life. We know what Henry wrote; now we can begin to understand why he wrote.

When I had completed my review of Thoreau's Journal, [Volume 1](#), I received this note some fifteen years ago from the author of *Expect Great Things*:

Bobby in his Thoreau [review](#) — review is too small a term for the sort of engagement that he brings to this and all the books — has captured something essential about Thoreau, his deep humaneness. The pulse of quote and commentary seems much like a walk Thoreau might take — steady, measured, punctuated, brisk, rhythmic.

Kevin Dann, Author of [Lewis Creek, Lost and Found](#), and currently working on a biography of Thoreau, Vermont, Jan. 6, 2002.

This is the biography of Thoreau that Kevin was working on as far back as 2002 and likely longer. It has been worth the wait for me. I have read and reviewed most of the books that Kevin(1) has written and have been anxious to get my hands on this one. I placed an advance order for my hardback copy with amazon.com and it arrived on January 4, 2017, a day later than Google showed as the official publication date of the book.

Having walked through the woods with Henry for 14 years as I read his Journals, I came to know him very well, so I was not surprised to discover on page 2 of this book that he was born on July 12, making him a Cancerian like myself. I spent my childhood years studying the Moon and Mars through early science fiction books, but this one trip which Henry took on many nights never occurred to me. He would often lie awake at night and, when his mother asked him why, he replied, "Mother, I have been looking through the stars to see if I might see God behind them." (Page 3)

Henry's Uncle Charles was a vagabond who stumbled upon a graphite deposit in New Hampshire and began mining it. When it proved to be the best graphite source for pencils in the country, his uncle went into the pencil-making business, which Henry's father joined and became the sole owner. Henry got involved in the manufacturing process and improved it enough that by the 1840s, the John Thoreau & Co. pencils were competing against the more established Munroe pencils.

Kevin Dann, a professor himself, recognized how important the judgments of non-academic folks could be about the natural world.

[page 13] Cow-milking farm women and curious boys could be trusted to be as empirically minded as civil engineers and professors of natural philosophy. Free of abstract and elaborate theoretical constructions, the untutored folk of America in fact sometimes saw things clearer than professors.

Columbus was Thoreau's choice when assigned to write an essay in a class at Harvard on discoverers. He chose the untutored explorer over the academic discoverers such as Herschel and Newton.

[page 14] What delighted young Henry Thoreau most about Columbus was his persistence in the face of overwhelming skepticism and derision; it already seemed that the seventeen-year-old Thoreau was speaking about himself.

Living in a time without movies, Thoreau loved story and storytellers: Story inspired him as a writer and observer of the natural world around him. What fascination astronomers found in the stars, he found in the ground he walked upon, both as mystery and as story.

[page 17] Thoreau's own appetite for story carried within it the seed of his vocation, both as writer and naturalist. He believed that all humans craved story because they forever craved the new. "The earth we tread upon is as curious as the stars we gaze upon," he declared, quoting for support one of his own — and America's — favorite storytellers, Washington Irving: "To the thinking mind, the whole world is enveloped in mystery, and everything is full of type and portent."

My four children grew up in a world of Saturday morning cartoons designed for children. My three daughters watched the first child cartoon that starred a girl; she worked at a motor raceway and drove race cars as best I can recall. I remember only her name because of an event which occurred when we were driving to breakfast somewhere and I overheard one the girls saying, "I hope we get home in time to watch 'Penelope Pissed Off'". I asked my wife who she was and was told that the girl's name was actually Penelope Pitstop.

What did children in Thoreau's time have equivalent to my kids' cartoons? They had cheap chapbooks which were sold like peddlers today sell ice cream bars from their carts. Children would likely beg some change from their mother to buy a new chapbook of stories to read.

Thoreau knew the power of an unanswered question, how an innocent nursery rhyme can sometimes reside in a child's mind for decades before it blooms into an important understanding of the world. Simple chapbooks, comic books, and kiddie cartoons can have an important effect on a child's growth as they mature.

[page 16] Thoreau theorized that each child accidentally comes upon something that unveils a new truth to him, noting that if this new object of discovery has been pleasurable, the child becomes a hunter of novelty. Pursuing the "strange" or "remarkable" becomes a lifelong pastime, the "principle of our principles," so that the innocent Mother Goose rhymes of youth give way to adult curiosity about the mysteries of nature and history.

The concept of the "holy fool" reminds me of the Sufi fool, Nasruddin, who always emerged from scrapes victorious and unharmed. When Nasruddin arrived at a stable where he had been invited to go horseback riding, he was offered a donkey to ride on. He immediately jumped on the donkey backwards, and the fellows on their high horses laughed at him, saying, "Perhaps you are not accustomed to the riding habits of gentlemen!" To which Nasruddin replied, "Perhaps you think I did not notice that you had pawned off on me a 'front-to-back donkey!'".

[page 16] Thoreau loved particularly the Mother Goose tale of the three wise men of Gotham, who "went to sea in a bowl." The Gotham "wise men" were actually holy fools whose lack of wisdom got them into deep waters among their fellow men, but who always emerged unharmed and uncannily blessed.

It is too soon to tell, but the new US President may be exactly such a 'holy fool' as appeared in so many chapbooks. One character everyone knows is Tom Thumb who first appeared in a chapbook and went on to become a fixture in the Barnum Circus.

[page 17] These little pamphlets held wonderful worlds within, where characters often not unlike the peddler adventured among ghosts, goblins, mermaids, and elves. Stories religious, diabolical, supernatural, superstitious, romantic, humorous, legendary, historical, biographical, and even criminal filled the flimsy tomes in which American children first met Jack Horner, Jack the Giant Killer, Robinson Crusoe, Reynard the Fox, Robin Hood, and Doctor Faustus. In the chapbook world, dream and omen loomed large, so children also met celebrated prophets like Mother Shipton and Robert Nixon of Cheshire. The heroes were usually children or young adults: Fortunatus, the young man who finds a purse that cannot be emptied and a hat that carries him anywhere he wishes to be; Guy, the Earl of Warwick, who overcomes sixteen assassins, slays boars and dragons, and then goes on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land; even Saint George the dragon slayer was a young man in the chapbook tales. Before Barnum made a household word of a stage midget by the same name, Tom Thumb was a chapbook adventurer whose history of "Marvellous Acts of Manhood Full of Wonder and Merriment" were known to all American boys and girls. Chapbook humor was raw and bawdy, and the chief beauty of the tales was that of all fairy tale and fable — everything appeared to happen by chance, and so nothing seemed anything less than absolutely fated.

In my childhood, [Big Little Books](#), full of raw adventure, mystery, and humor, were sold for 10 cents and were filled with modern versions of chapbook stories, *Popeye*, *Charlie Chan*, *Dick Tracy*, *Red Ryder*, *Smokey Stover*, etal. These thick, 4X4 inches in size, books seemed to disappear around the time comic books became popular, presenting kids with Superman and Batman appearing for the first time with their modern adventures, two modern incarnations of chapbook heroes: The first a Fortunatus with super-human strength that carries him anywhere he wants to be and the second an Earl of Warwick disguised as a Bat who overcomes criminals and assailants with his bare hands and a utility belt. Our intrepid explorer of history, Dr. Dann, has unearthed the background of much of our modern storytelling genres.

I was amazed to read on page 18 that Ralph Waldo Emerson belonged to a literary club called the Knights of the Square Table at Harvard. [I](#) would assume that if these august collegians were to hold up a glass to toast "Holmes" it would be to Oliver Wendell Holmes, the poet, physician, and essayist who was in the audience when Emerson gave his famous essay, "The American Scholar." (Page 33)

In his poem entitled [Man](#), George Herbert gracefully portrays the correspondence between the microcosm of the human being and the macrocosm of the Cosmos in which we find ourselves. Herbert explains that the very herbs which can bring us back to health, the average person walks upon and smashes without notice. These are servants which wait upon our notice of them to help us.

More servants wait on Man

**Than he'll take notice of: in every path
He treads down that which doth befriend him,
When sickness makes him pale and wan.**

In our gardens the vegetables do the same: they respond to the stimulants our body gives off and modify their genes to provide to us the proteins that our body needs to return to a robust health. I explain this in detail in my Essay, [The Plant As Doctor](#), and various other sources are referenced there. The humble *weeds*, that Herbert refers to, respond to our presence as vegetables do in our garden. They can be the prescribing physician, the drug company, and the dispensing druggist who provides our body exactly what it needs. How is this possible, *except that* the plants around us today were once *part of our body* as we evolved into human beings? This is what is meant by microcosm and macrocosm. As such, plants are able to recognize the lack that make us ill, and then change their genes to produce new proteins designed to fill this lack and bring us back to health. If this seems like magic to you, perhaps you live in a reality so materialistic that the reality of being truly human escapes you. It certainly did not escape George Herbert(2). You are trampling down humanity like the *Man* in Herbert's poem trampled down the plants on his path.

Animals in the wild rarely get sick because they consume the plants around them, or consume other animals who consume these plants. Lacking the freedom of a human being, animals have naturally-balanced processes with no need for correction. Humans, however, can imbalance themselves, and the plants, who are not capable of imbalancing themselves(3), receive the stimulants from an imbalanced human (in the form of toxins) and modify their genes to produce proteins which, when consumed, will restore balance in the human by undoing the toxins. The stimulants can be received from a man treading on a path where plants are growing, such as Herbert writes about. Today the vegetables in a garden can receive stimulants (toxins) from a gardener who plows the ground, sows the seed, removes the weeds, breathes on the growing plant, drops sweat near the plant, or rubs oils from his hands against the plant. If you are a gardener who grows and eats your own fruit and vegetables, you will likely have noticed that they taste better than store-bought produce. The improved taste is your body's way of letting you know these home-grown plants are good for your health, that their custom-designed proteins are going to work undoing the toxins in your body.

Dann introduces the Herbert poem, "Man", in this next passage:

[page 24] Having long outgrown his infatuation with the fairy world, still the *genii loci* haunt the edges of Emerson's thought: "The greatest delight which the fields and woods administer is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me and I to them." A paragraph later he alludes to the "frolic of the nymphs," and then quotes George Herbert's statement that "More servants wait on man/Than he'll take notice of." Wholly forward-looking in its radical reliance on Nature, not God, as the arbiter of truth, the essay's embrace of participatory consciousness yet allied it with more traditional cosmologies. The essay's argument is itself largely a modern restatement of the ancient esoteric doctrine of correspondences, and its prophetic conclusion, "Prospects," returns to a language of hidden mystery: "In a cabinet of natural history, we become sensible of a certain occult recognition and sympathy in regard to the most unwieldy and eccentric form of beast, fish, and insect." Emerson, whose intensive reading in seventeenth-century English poetry preceded Thoreau's parallel reading program by just one year, included Herbert's "Man" as a prelude to his essay's Orphic apotheosis. Thoreau loved the poem as much as Emerson did, copying it out in full in his notebook.

Like Emerson and Thoreau, once I heard of Herbert's 1633 poem, "Man", I wanted to read it, so I immediately Googled the poem so I could read all of it. Here was a man, Herbert, still holding onto some spiritual vision of the natural world who was able to understand that the commonest of plants, the ones trod underfoot by passersby, could cure their ills if they but knew to pick them up and eat them. Since

these paths were walked upon often in those days of limited means of travel, the plants would have adjusted their genes to produce health-giving proteins to these oblivious local travelers.

In Rudolf Steiner's works I studied the microcosm of Man in the macrocosm of the Cosmos around us. In the evolution of Man and the Cosmos, Man in the earliest stages of evolution went through the plant stage of being. This allows plants to know the deep insides of Man today, leading to what Dann calls "a cosmic hospitality" between Man and Nature, between the human being and the plant kingdom.

[page 24] Herbert's poem presented the highest expression of the doctrine of correspondences, the ancient assertion that man was microcosm, embodying the macrocosm — not just the Earth but the planets and stars as well. Herbert's poem affirmed a cosmic hospitality that both Emerson and Thoreau knew personally.

This next passage comes from Emerson's *Nature*, included in my 1950 Modern Library Edition of *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. He never identifies the "poet who sang" this to him, but we can suspect it was his own Muse or *daimon* which did so.

[page 39, 40 of *Writings*] I shall therefore conclude this essay with some traditions of man and nature, which a certain poet sang to me; and which, as they have always been in the world, and perhaps reappear to every bard, may be both history and prophecy.

'The foundations of man are not in matter, but in spirit. But the element of spirit is eternity. To it, therefore, the longest series of events, the oldest chronologies are young and recent. In the cycle of the universal man, from whom the known individuals proceed, centuries are points, and all history is but the epoch of one degradation.

'We distrust and deny inwardly our sympathy with nature. We own and disown our relation to it, by turns. We are like Nebuchadnezzar, dethroned, bereft of reason, and eating grass like an ox. But who can set limits to the remedial force of spirit?

'A man is a god in ruin. When men are innocent, life shall be longer, and shall pass into the immortal as gently as we awake from dreams. Now, the world would be insane and rabid, if these disorganizations should last for hundreds of years. It is kept in check by death and infancy. Infancy is the perpetual Messiah, which comes into the arms of fallen men, and pleads with them to return to paradise.

'Man is the dwarf of himself. Once he was permeated and dissolved by spirit. He filled nature with his overflowing currents. Out from him sprang the sun and moon; from man the sun, from woman the moon. The laws of his mind, the periods of his actions externized themselves into day and night, into the year and the seasons. But, having made for himself this huge shell, his waters retired; he no longer fills the veins and veinlets; he is shrunk to a drop. He sees that the structure still fits him, but fits him colossally. Say, rather, once it fitted him, now it corresponds to him from far and on high. He adores timidly his own work. Now is man the follower of the sun, and woman the follower of the moon. Yet sometimes he starts in his slumber, and wonders at himself and his house, and muses strangely at the resemblance betwixt him and it. He perceives that if his law is still paramount, if still he have elemental power, if his word is sterling yet in nature, it is not conscious power, it is not inferior but superior to his will. It is instinct.' Thus my Orphic poet sang.

How can we understand Emerson's paragraph above beginning, "A man is a god in ruin . . ." ? We are fallen from the spiritual world into a material body. If we were innocent and pure, we would live much longer and enter consciously into the spiritual world. But, in our present state of impure materiality, if individual humans were to live for centuries, they would destroy each other maniacally. We are saved from that sad end by dying short of a century, and returning as a baby in a new life. When we receive an infant into our lives, or merely take one into our arms, the babe reveals to us the paradise of the spiritual world from which it has just entered into life and reminds us of our own destiny.

Emerson's next paragraph reminds us that we humans have evolved along with the Cosmos which surrounds us — we were all one in the earliest stage of evolution. In dreams we catch glimpses of the resemblance between the Cosmos (our house) and ourselves (the drop).

Here is how the magnificent passage by Emerson in *Nature* was summarized in this book. Dann gives us a gentle nudge and bids us to crack open our eyes a bit to see the spiritual realities in which we humans live, move, and have our being.

[page 25] Emerson acknowledged that the reciprocal hospitality between man and nature was broken, not by virtue of human degradation of wild nature, but because modern man mistook himself for a material, rather than spiritual, creation. "A man is a god in ruin. . . . Man is the dwarf of himself. Once he was permeated and dissolved by spirit. He filled nature with his overflowing currents. . . . But . . . he is shrunk to a drop." As remedy for this disenchantment, Emerson's *Nature* offered the vague outlines of a transcendental — and what was to become a transcendentalist — research program. Men could not be naturalists until they redeemed their soul and spirit natures, and birthed from themselves higher faculties. When that moment arrived, facts, not fables, would feed man.

Thoreau got a copy of *Nature* and had just finished reading it when Emerson's sister-in-law who was boarding in the Thoreau home, brought him to visit Emerson. Thus began the interweaving tapestry of their two lives. They had only come close to meeting several times before. Thoreau had found him earlier in *Nature*, and now would meet him in the flesh.

[page 25] Over the mantel in Emerson's study hung New Bedford artist William Wall's painting of *The Three Fates*, a copy of a painting that Emerson had seen in the Pitti Palace in Florence on his life-changing pilgrimage in 1833. Within the year, the spinning sisters Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos would weave together Emerson's and Thoreau's destinies more tightly than they could imagine.

Emerson ended his famous *American Scholar* lecture with these words which Thoreau could have taken as his marching orders, "We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds." (Page 34) We don't know if Thoreau was at this speech just outside the Harvard main gate on the day after his Harvard graduation, but he lived his life as if he had taken those words to heart. This is a simple example of the interweaving of the two men's lives. Another example: they shared a rebellious streak. Emerson gave a lecture to the senior class of the Harvard Divinity School on July 15, 1838 and the clergy were so incensed by his words that it was 30 years before Emerson was invited to speak at Harvard again. (See page 65 of *Writings*) Dann tells us that Thoreau in his second week as a school teacher was reprimanded for not using the cane to enforce discipline. "Thoreau went back into the classroom, selected six students at random, and struck them with the cane. He then resigned." (Page 35)

Dann also points out two salient episodes of rebirth in Thoreau's life. In his first publication, an obituary he wrote for the *Yeoman's Gazette*, he changed the order of his first and middle names and recast himself as Henry David Thoreau, which names stuck. The second rebirth came when Emerson met his new acquaintance on October 22, 1837 on the street and asked him, "What are you doing now? Do you keep a journal?" Within days, Thoreau was collecting scraps of his writing to place in his Journal which he kept writing into until 1861(4). Here is an excerpt from my review of the [first volume](#) of his Journal:

On October 27, he wrote a complete story about his finding an arrowhead. Many people find arrowheads, but few have ever found one the way Thoreau did — as the culmination of an imaginative story about Indians.

[page 7] "There on the Nawshawtuct," said I, "was their lodge, the rendezvous of the tribe, and yonder, on Clamshell Hill, their feasting ground. . . . Here," I exclaimed, "stood Tahatawan; and there is Tahatawan's

arrowhead."

We instantly proceeded to sit down on the spot I had pointed to, and I, to carry out the joke, to lay bare an ordinary stone which my whim had selected, when lo! the first I laid my hands on, the grubbing stone that was to be, proved a most perfect arrowhead, as sharp as if just from the hands of the Indian fabricator!!!"

Thoreau wandered inside his own magic circle, his hometown of Concord, Massachusetts, and was often aided by unseen helpers similar to those who aided Fortunatus in the popular chapbooks of his adventures. Thoreau was reading Goethe at the time he found the arrowhead.

[page 39] Goethe's conception of the poet was one to which Thoreau clearly aspired — one who found unity in diversity, whose mind took in all sensations, and who "In his own magic circle wanders." The magician's circle circumscribed a microcosmos where he became master of the elemental beings of nature, with whose help he could make things appear and disappear. Concord would become the magic circle into which this nascent master of the elementals would soon draw his own — and America's — destiny.

Emerson wanted a poetry for a new generation, not a rehash of past generations. He wrote in his Introduction to *Nature*, "The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should we not have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?" These words had a powerful impact on me when I read them after I bought my Modern Library copy of Emerson's *Writings* as a freshman in college. It was only a short time later that I bought a copy of [Samuel Hoffenstein](#)'s humorous and satirical poems which I found to be full of insight while making fun of tradition. Here's my favorite poem of his, which I quickly memorized and have carried with me since:

**Little by little we subtract
Faith and Fallacy from Fact,
The Illusory from the True,
And starve upon the Residue.**

This quatrain triggered my search to find a way to add a nutritive essence to what traditions of thought have removed from our now vacuous reality. My own poetry seeks to be a poetry of insight in the manner suggested by Emerson, a poetry which waters and nurtures the residue back into a living reality. Sometimes the best nurturing comes from a good laugh, and a biting satire can offer that to a true philosopher who takes no tradition seriously. Thoreau would agree.

[page 71, 72] The sly satirist Thoreau hides in plain sight as he says, "But the divinest poem, or the life of a great man, is the severest satire; as impersonal as nature herself, and like the sighs of her winds in the woods, which convey ever a slight reproof to the hearer. The greater the genius, the keener the edge of the satire."

Emerson learned about the out-of-doors from Thoreau, grafting apple trees, walking, and boating. Emerson writes of a magical night where the magician's wand was a paddle.

[page 74, 75] In June, out with Emerson for a crepuscular paddle on the Concord, Thoreau shared with his friend his especial dwelling — the night: "Then the good river-god has taken the form of my valiant Henry Thoreau here & introduced me to the riches of his shadowy starlit, moonlit stream, a lovely new world lying as close & yet as unknown to this vulgar trite one of streets and shops as death to life, or poetry to prose. Through one field only we went to the boat and then left all time, all science, all history, behind us, and entered into Nature with one stroke of a paddle.

The riches he shared with Emerson was an everyday experience to Thoreau, so one can find no notice of it

in Thoreau's journal, and yet Emerson experiences an ecstasy that he had rarely experienced before.

[page 75] Emerson always craved the sort of *ekstasis* he had experienced as a young man crossing that "bare common" when he felt himself become transparent, and on the moonlit river with his friend, Emerson felt caught up in "A holiday, a *villegiatura*, a royal revel, the proudest, most magnificent, most heart-rejoicing festival that valor and beauty, power and poetry ever decked and enjoyed — it is here, it is this." Thoreau's journal records no similar ecstasy, but what for Emerson were episodic encounters were for Thoreau nearly quotidian.

Thoreau could see fairies in his youth and regaled the children of Concord with fairy stories, becoming a living Pan to them. Chaucer, whose works were read by Thoreau, explains how fairies were "illusions" subtracted from fact by the church so that but few men like Thoreau could see them.

[page 93] Reading Chaucer this year, Thoreau had transcribed the opening stanza of "The Wife of Bath's Tale," which tells of how in King Arthur's time, "all this wide land was full filled of faerie," how "many hundred years ago" the elf-queen and her "jolly company" would dance on green meads. "But now no man can see the elves, you know," the narrator had lamented, due to the "limiters and other holy friars," whose activities had driven them away. Chaucer was satirizing the sort of Christianity that rather than respect and honor the fairies, had banished them from their old haunts. For as long as the fairies had been "going away," vanishing from human sight, there had always been individual seers who could catch glimpses of them and report on their activity. Thoreau was — at least up until his twenty-eighth year — such a seer.

Remember the rebellious lecture Emerson gave to the Divinity School which made him *persona non grata* at Harvard for 30 years? In his talk he called for a hero, a new Teacher, to come, not knowing that would be Thoreau, nor that he would provide the land near Walden Pond where Thoreau would come to give his greatest teachings in his small book *Walden*, teachings which would echo down the generations, inspiring non-violence in Gandhi, King, et al, and attracting millions of readers.

[page 98] Just days after Thoreau's twenty-first birthday, Emerson had concluded his Divinity School address with a plea for the American hero yet to come: "I look for the new Teacher that shall follow so far those shining laws that he shall see them come full circle; shall see their rounding complete grace; shall see the world to be a mirror of the soul; shall see the identity of the law of gravitation with purity of heart; and shall show that the Ought, that Duty, is one thing with Science, with Beauty, and with Joy." At that moment Emerson, almost exactly twice seven years Thoreau's senior, hardly could know that he would eventually provide the land upon which the anticipated new teacher would harmonize Duty, Science, Beauty, and Joy.

Anyone reading this book will want to know about how Thoreau selected the spot for his tiny cabin alongside Walden Pond. A month after moving into the cabin he remembered his first visit to the pond at age five:

[page 105] "That woodland vision for a long time made the drapery of my dreams. That sweet solitude my spirit seemed so early to require that I might have room to entertain my thronging guests, and that speaking silence that my ears might distinguish the significant sounds. Some how or other it at once gave the preference to this recess among the pines . . . as if it had found its proper nursery."

Dann calls Thoreau's modest cabin his temple, evoking the cathedral-like effect its Walden Pond milieu had on its owner and sole inhabitant.

[page 105, 106] Unadorned by a single graven image, cluttered with no relics or statuary,

fronted by no massive portal, and bearing no towering steeple or spire, Thoreau's Walden temple yet presented more beauty than the eye might imagine, and had a thousand entrances of the most splendid form. Divinity leaped from every niche and transept of the Walden woods, while a cathedral choir was ever singing ethereal hymns.

Dann writes on page 116 that Emerson eschewed Swedenborg's philosophy of pure evil, preferring the comforting philosophy that "evil is good in the making". This resonates well with Rudolf Steiner's view that "evil is a good out of its time", e.g., Lucifer's so-called *evil* deed which precipitated humanity's Fall into materialism, but which deed turned into a good when the deed of Christ arrived to allow humanity to rise again to spiritual realities. Look at the early evils of Irish emigration to the USA which resulted in generations of Irish cops defending our people. Each new wave of emigration seems like an evil because the good it will bring will only arrive later.

On page 119 Dann quotes Thoreau as saying, "I know of no rule which holds so true as that we are always paid for our suspicion by finding what we suspect." This parallels my rule, EAT-O-TWIST, which avers that "Everything Always Turns - Out - The Way It Is Supposed To" (5). Change the *suppose* to *suspect* and they are equivalent.

When I read on page 120 about Thoreau wondering about the "vanished neighbors at Walden Pond" who left only a shut up road as a sign of their presence, I was reminded of the years I spend at Union Carbide and Waterford 3 in St. Charles Parish, Louisiana. For three years in Taft and fourteen years in Waterford, Louisiana, I was daily walking over the sites of the first German settlers of the 1720s. This was in my twenties and forties when thoughts of previous settlers had never settled into my busy mind. Only later did I discover those vanished settlers when I read this book, [Germans of Louisiana](#). Their early settlements were wiped out by the spring flooding of the then un-leveed Mississippi River, which caused them to move to higher ground.

It is a service to the history of science that Dann explains the move from the use of hypnotism (mesmerism) for surgery to the use of ether. He points out that it was a move from a spiritualized agent to a chemical agent. Ether killed people due to overdoses, but it did avoid the appearance of clairvoyance episodes that accompanied hypnotism, so its use proceeded into the twentieth century when it was replaced by other forms of chemical anesthesia.

[page 130] On October 19, 1846, the day before the arrival of the news of Neptune's discovery, a Boston doctor named William Morton rejected his patient's request for mesmeric anesthesia, which had become the safest and most effective form of anesthetic, and instead applied ethyl ether before removing the patient's tumor. The success of this operation dealt the death blow to mesmerism as a therapeutic agent, since its full extinguishing of consciousness without provoking somnambulant lucidity meant that dentists and physicians would not have to confront the philosophical question of mesmeric anesthesia's puzzling side effect — clairvoyance.

Why is this history unknown today to the majority of people? Doctors are as capable as any despot of disguising unpleasant historical facts, rewriting history, to hide things they would feel uncomfortable about explaining to their patients.

[Page 130, 131] In banishing the phenomena of mesmerism from open investigation, nineteenth-century American scientists closed their eyes, sleepwalking in the face of the animating power of nature. The exclusion of the history of mesmerism from contemporary history of science attests to the triumph of mechanistic and materialistic theories of nature.

This pyrrhic triumph of materialistic science eliminated all knowledge of understanding ancient myths as records of clairvoyant abilities of early humans. "When knowledge ends, discussion begins" is a major insight I found in Rudolf Steiner's writings. When knowledge of the real basis of myths was lost, the

academic discussion and study of what they called *mythology* began.

[page 131] At Walden, Thoreau was mythologizing Nature and Self at the very moment when modern materialist science made it all but impossible to appreciate the deep truths of ancient myth. The advent of academic interest in mythology came just as the understanding of myth as the record of ancient clairvoyance of spiritual realities disappeared.

Thoreau was a punster, Dann says, he hid his Truth, never doubting it, but often doubling, adding light in juxtaposition to darkness, a darkness that we are forced to cast our own light upon, either while we are reading *Walden* or while we are sleeping and our own spirit is walking through *Walden*.

[page 135] That is the beauty of a pun: it deceives and enlightens at once. It is a gift offered also with no guarantee of acceptance or even recognition on the part of the hearer.

My dad kept a copy of *Parts Pup* in his bedside drawer, a monthly magazine of jokes which he got from the Auto Parts dealer across the street. One regular column was about the writer's "Shirt Sharpener," and, as a ten-year-old, I had no idea what that meant. I thought of a pencil sharper, but how could you get a shirt into a pencil sharpener? It took many years before I realized that man was talking about his wife who kept his shirts looking sharp! It was my first exposure to a pun, and the one person I knew who could tell me what it meant, my dad, was the one person I couldn't ask! I held that phrase as an unanswered question for a decade or so before I happened to revisit it in my memory and solved the hidden part of the pun. This pun was an unanswered question. It was like the "strong and beautiful bug" in Thoreau's parable which appeared out of an old table after someone placed a hot tea pot on the spot inside the tabletop where it had gestated for decades! (Page 139) Thoreau, when he received the 500 or so unsold copies of an early print run of *Walden*, must have thought of his fine book as just such a strong and beautiful organism in gestation.

Thoreau called a secret agreement an "East quarter bargain".

[page 157] For Thoreau, an "East quarter bargain" was one he made with the wild places around him:

How near to good is what is wild. There is the marrow of nature — there her divine liquors — that is the wine I love. A man's health requires as many acres of meadow as his farm does loads of muck. They are indispensable both to men & corn. They are the only strong meats — We pine & starve and lose spirit on the thin gruel of society. A town is saved not by any righteous men in it but by the woods & swamps that surround it.

Thoreau was an early advocate of burning of forest lands as a means of creating new growth of plants and even trees whose seeds had to be charred to sprout a new tree. Planned burning is a common practice in forest management today, but it was a radical thought that Thoreau offered the world in his day.

[page 168, 169] Because it would be another decade before Thoreau himself would discover that the forest type growing in the location was itself the product of millennia of fire, he couldn't congratulate himself as an agent of ecological restoration, but he did claim that forest fires were advantageous to both nature and man. He noted that by destroying underbrush they favored the "larger and sturdier trees," which in turn made walking in recently burned woods much easier. The berry crop that arrived in two or three years after a burn was a boon to both birds and people. Thoreau speculated — with good reason — that New England's "noblest natural parks" were a consequence of "this accident."

In the middle of a long, rambling description of Thoreau's activities, Dann includes a reference to a real-

time interruption while Thoreau was writing in his Journal (V2). My interest was piqued because Henry rarely wrote of something that was happening in the present moment of his life. Here is the cat interruption in Henry's own hand:

[page 98, [Thoreau Journal, V2](#)] Somebody shut the cat's tail in the door just now, and she made such a caterwaul as has driven two whole worlds out of my thoughts. I saw unspeakable things in the sky and looming in the horizon of my mind, and now they are all reduced to a cat's tail. Vast films of thought floated through my brain, like clouds pregnant with rain enough to fertilized and restore a world, and now they are all dissipated.

I recall another real-time interrupt while he was walking. He commented, "Some bird flies over, making a noise like the barking of a puppy. It is yet so dark that I have dropped my pencil and cannot find it." (Page 484, [Thoreau Journal, V2](#)) We can only guess that he had a second pencil at hand to record this occasion. The immediacy of the note indicates that Thoreau was writing these notes while they were happening, somehow managing it in the dark. Thoreau ruminated while he walked and apparently wrote down some of his ruminations while walking. He seemed to contrast his meandering way of educating himself to academic education when he wrote in 1850 (Page 83, [Thoreau Journal, V2](#)), "What does education often do? It makes a straight-cut ditch of a free, meandering brook." And directly below that line, he added, "You must walk like a camel, which is said to be the only beast which ruminates when it walks." Well, we might note that Thoreau was a thoughtful beast like the camel. Since one can do a lot of ruminating on a walk between Montreal and Brooklyn as Dann did, we must add his name to the honor roll of walking ruminators.

When Thoreau went into ecstatic states, Dann says that he entered more deeply into his body and the earth instead of leaving them, that he was able to get into them because he able to experience them without having to understand them beforehand. I have known "I know that!" people who say those words whenever they hear about something new. These are people who cannot, like Thoreau did so beautifully, hold an "unanswered question." Unable to hold questions such as "What might I be missing about this situation?", they fail to learn much about the world they live in and simply whitewash over the beautiful artwork of the world around them. Here is a passage where Henry shows that he appreciates the power of an unanswered question.

[page 183] This moment of ecstatic participation was fleeting but unforgettable. Eleven weeks later he spoke of this episode again, repeating almost verbatim the words he wrote in November but expanding the "I" to "we," turning his singular experience into a general epistemological law: "We shall see but little if we require to understand what we see."

In the passage below Dann conjures up a vision of winter snows in Concord which is vivid and sweet, like the natural sweet cider produced by the freezing and re-freezing of crab apples. For me only 40 miles or so south of Concord, my town of Foxborough had a State Forest full of paths which I daily went through on my trail bike during my lunch break, loving the solitude, the greenery, the flowing streams, the water falls, and even the rough ground of the long abandoned granite quarry on its south end. But nothing was more fun for me than wintery days with new snow on the ground. What I loved was the trails that the partridge, the rabbits, and other fauna left behind as footprints in the snow. No trace of these animals ever appeared to me in the green months, so I braved these slippery paths in winter to gaze on the natural artworks that the forest denizens traced in the snow. Never did I see a human footprint in the snowy paths.

[page 184] Winter's snows shut up Concord's cows, so cowherds — and "cowards" — vanished from remote pastures and hills, but Thoreau kept up his daily walks, appreciative of the extra solitude brought on by winter. Winter's bareness afforded all manner of revelation unavailable in the green months; shrubs and trees inconspicuous at other seasons now leaped out in full silhouette; frozen ponds could be traversed easily,

and Thoreau discovered new plants like sweet gale and panicked andromeda on islands previously unexplored; sour, inedible crabbed apples after repeated freezing and thawing were full of sweet cider; wind patterns could be studied from the humping and hollowing of snow, and the winter deposition of sand and stones from cut banks was revealed to leave lines of demarcation as pronounced as the pine pollen which ringed Walden Pond in summer. New walks could be traced out, like the path following the line of bare ground or snow just between the high water mark and the present water line of wet meadows.

It was winter which gave birth to much of Thoreau's poetry, little of which appeared in his Journal, so I appreciate Dann's sharing of these from Thoreau's *Collected Essays and Poems*, particularly his sharing of Thoreau's "tropes of triumph" and the passage, "there is truth in a small degeneracy."

[page 185] Winter's highlighting of essentials was conducive to poetry. In February 1851 Thoreau wrote four poems reflecting on the meaning of his own life and of life for all who were given the gift of it. Comparing his life to "a stately warrior horse," Thoreau asks when the horseman's "rambling head and neck" will meld with "that firm and brawny beast." He overcomes his hesitancy about his destiny, declaring "my unresting steed holds on its way," and then the steed becomes a ship with "expanded sail, and an eagle with unwearied wings," all tropes of triumph. Another poem allows that while moon, brook, and meteors move "without impediment, . . . No charitable laws alas cut me / An easy orbit round the sun," his current never "rounds into a lake," nor does his life "drop freely but a rod. . . as Meteors do." A third poem gives thanks for this very fact, that by aiming at "the splendid heights above," he inevitably must fall along the way. Out of this richly textured life he lifts the image of an "unanxious hen" bragging of a new laid egg — "Now let the day decline / They'll lay another by tomorrow's sun." The last poem — "Manhood" — though taking as its subject other men, is pure Thoreau. Beginning "I love to see the man . . . as yet uninjured by worldly taint" and continuing "But better still I love . . ." him who "proudly bears his small degen'racy." Thoreau at thirty-three had seen enough of life to know that its nobility lay in the fight against mere fatedness, that "man's eminence" sprang from his undying resolve to make his own fate. The brave man was finally he who, though struck down repeatedly, never lost sight of his high goal.

From reading Thoreau's Journals, I became aware that the verbs "want" could mean "lack," "wonder" could mean "amazed by", and "improve" could mean "make the best use of" — each of these are archaic or unfamiliar usages, but one needs to understand them this way when they appear in Thoreau's writings. Here's one example from page 186, as Dann writes, "The voice of his genius spoke a familiar dialect: 'Improve your time,' it hinted one July morning as he awoke." We today could easily imagine that he understood being told to "make the present time of the world better" but that would be a mistake, as I understand it. Thoreau was being encouraged to "make the best use of his own time." So, instead of trudging the ruts of travel, Thoreau instead enjoyed an adventure under a magnificent blue sky such as was never recorded in history. Here is an example of "wonder" used to mean *am amazed*, "It is a certain faeryland where we live . . . I wonder that I ever get five miles on my way, the walk is so crowded with events and phenomena."

On the first intercity telegraphic message, Samuel Morse sent this quote from the Bible, "What hath God wrought?" The telegraph was the nineteenth century equivalent of launching the Internet in terms of the rapidity of human communication it unleashed upon the world. When the first telegraph line came into operation through Concord, Thoreau heard the wind singing in its wires and sat down to receive a celestial message from the new invention.

[page 198] Quoted from Thoreau Journal v2: I instantly sat down on a stone at the foot of the telegraph pole, and attended to the communication. It merely said: "Bear in mind,

Child, and never for an instant forget, that there are higher planes, infinitely higher planes, of life than this thou art traveling on. Know that the goal is distant, and is upward, and is worthy of all your life's efforts to attain to." And then it ceased, and though I sat some minutes longer, I heard nothing more.

The ethereal sound of the wind blowing through the wires and humming of the telegraph pole inspired Thoreau to call this new invention, the "telegraph harp", a musical instrument soon to be strung from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans, bringing its music to all who walked along the railroad tracks and telegraph lines. Many wondered about the origin of the music, but to Henry it seemed clear, as Dann writes: "The telegraph harp seemed to give Thoreau a way to hear the music of the spheres directly." (Page 206)

Thoreau wrote about rules, "Any fool can make a rule and every fool will mind it." (Written in his Journal, February 3, 1860.) Maybe, but if the rule is useful, even the wise will mind it.

[page 215, 216] He even discovered a rule of thumb about the ideal distance between perception and conception. "I succeed best when I recur to my experience not too late, but within a day or two; when there is some distance, but enough of freshness." This rule of thumb is actually a universal law, a function of the rhythm of the etheric body. It takes three days for experiences — observations, images, ideas — to become imprinted into our body of etheric formative forces, and thus permanently into our memory, and more important, even when we have lost our own individual memories of them, into the cosmos, where they are stored even after our death. After three days, the more intensively and faithfully an individual attends to some thought, the more deeply it becomes inscribed into the universe.

One challenge as a writer is to correct one's early drafts of a text. I've found that three days is an ideal time between writing something and going over it thoroughly. This is a process that I call "playing with sentences". Here's how it works. My first draft goes to my Copy-Editor and she finds the missing "a" "an" "of" which I elided while typing quickly, plus she marks passages she has trouble with. Once she pointed to a sentence and said, "No hairdresser could understand that sentence." I resisted but had to agree that one should write at the level of an eight grade education to reach readers in a comfortable way. I usually proof and correct her edits almost immediately. But during this first editing phase this is *my* writing and *I do not really want to change anything*. Not until three days have passed. That's when the real work of editing happens for me. After this 72-hour break, I come back and read my own piece *as if it were written by someone else*. It is then I can see obvious mistakes and can question the text harshly. "What did this dimwit mean by this?" "What an awkward way of saying that!" "Ooh, here's a place where I can add something that he should have said about the subject!" These are the kinds of mental comments which come to me when I undertake the proofing after three days. It is a playful time for me — Why? Because all my life I've read pieces with typos, mistakes, badly worded tripe, etc, and because they appeared in a magazine, newspaper, or book, I was unable to fix them. The wonderful aspect of writing on the Internet is that I can edit my own writing any time I find a way of improving it. The most important improvement typically comes after the magical "three days", the time after which my own writing has become imprinted in my etheric body forces, the time when I can play with sentences to make the best of them. I can imagine that I'll have fun with this paragraph in about three days!

Thoreau built his "woodshed" alongside Walden Pond at age 28 and I built a garden shed in my back yard at age 28. We both used modest materials and built the structures of our own design and own hands. This coincidence had escaped my notice till Kevin Dann wrote this next passage:

[page 225] On this day after his thirty-fifth solar return, Thoreau [wrote]: "The youth gets together his materials to build a bridge to the moon, or perchance a palace or temple on the earth, and at length the middle-aged man concludes to build a wood-shed with them." Having impeccably built his temple at age twenty-eight, it seems hard to believe that Thoreau now looked back on it and declared his Walden cabin a woodshed.

It is not hard for me to believe that because I, as a boy, avidly read science fiction, gathering materials in my mind to build a bridge to the moon, and I would at age 28 gather actual materials from hurricane debris to build my own temple, a modest garden shed about the size of a wood-shed.

Thoreau wrote about the earth accepting and mothering the abandoned eggs of the turtle, and Dann comments:

[page 243] This was no Darwinian history, telling of nature red in tooth and claw, but a sympathetic biology founded on the recognition of the "universal world turtle," that same great mother spoken of in Native American mythology, who not only supported the globe with her stout back, but also with her nurturing warmth could penetrate the cools sands to quicken the life-giving yolks below.

This reminds me of a story I heard about William James who was accosted by a society matron after a lecture when he talked about the Earth spinning in space. She said, "Professor James, surely you know that the Earth sits on the back of an elephant." James asked, "If that's so, my dear lady, what does the elephant stand upon?" "Why, on the back of a giant turtle, of course!" "I see, and what, pray tell, does the turtle stand upon?" "Oh, Professor James! Everyone knows *it's turtle all the way down!*"

On Thoreau's visit to Cape Cod he learned that light along its shore could be misleading.

[page 250] Even light, the transcendental symbol of divine truth, proves untrustworthy when reflected off the sand and sea of Cape Cod. The Highland lighthouse keeper tells about a "looming" of the sun he once witnessed, which caused him to extinguish the lighthouse lamps fifteen minutes before the actual sun had risen.

I recall my visit to the Highland lighthouse on a frigid January day, and note it was most beautiful lighthouse that I had seen anywhere in the world, before and since. This lighthouse appears at the bottom of my early reviews' [webpages](#). It stands above the motto, "Books are lighthouses erected in the sea of time."

One other lighthouse we visited was at the top of an island on the east edge of the Abacos, where the beach falls away to 2 miles deep in a hundred yards. The inhabitants of the island lived off the wrecks and their town was called Hopetown because they lived in the perpetual *hope* of another shipwreck to fill their coffers. What they did not hope for, nor want, was a lighthouse! Apparently there were Cape Cod residents in Thoreau's time who had a similar means of surviving.



[page 253] The only Cape Cod inhabitant Thoreau portrays as possessing the landscape

is the wrecker, who gets his living by grabbing as quickly as possible that which others own but which the sea has violently wrested from them. Amoral and nakedly opportunistic, the salvager is the shrunken spirit of New World discovery, reduced to the petty entrepreneurial capitalism of bandit beachcombing.

This is a wonderful description of the beachcombers, but I take issue with characterizing this activity as *capitalism*, which is nothing if not the exchange of goods in such a way as both parties benefit. I cannot perceive a shred of benefit from this kind of blatant thievery to those poor souls who might have survived a shipwreck only to find no sign of their own property remaining on the beach.

Thoreau had a knack for finding plants that no one else knew existed in the area around Concord. He was great at holding an unanswered question, for example, about the scarlet oak. He explains how he finds such things.

[page 237] The scarlet oak must, in a sense, be in your eye when you go forth. We cannot see anything until we are possessed with the idea of it, and then we can hardly see anything else. In my botanical rambles I find that first the idea, or image, or a plant occupies my thoughts, though it may at first seem very foreign to this locality, and for some weeks or months I go thinking of it and expecting it unconsciously, and at length I surely see it, and it is henceforth an actual neighbor of mine. This is the history of my finding a score or more of rare plants which I could name.

In every book I read I look for the eponymous quote, the passage in which the book's title is revealed, and here is where I found it. Thoreau had just been surveying and found flowers he had never seen before in the area.

[page 258, *italics added*] Owing that "a botanist's experience is full of coincidences," in that thinking about a flower never seen nearly always meant you would find it nearby someday, he turned his botanical experience into a general law of life: "In the long run, we find what we expect." We shall be fortunate then if we *expect great things*."

Unfortunately, most people act as if they expect bad things to happen to them, and the universal rule still applies, namely, whatever you suppose is going to happen will likely happen to you. I gave this the form of a rule with an easy to say acronym, EAT-O-TWIST, which stands for Everything Always Turns - Out - The Way It's Supposed To. When you find yourself supposing something bad might happen, you can quickly say the three-syllable phrase, *eat-oh-twist*, to remind you to change your own supposing. If you learn to apply this in your own thinking, you will drop every negative concept and replace it with a positive. For example, instead thinking this is going to be bad weather, you'll think we'll get some good weather where we live. If you study hypnosis, you learn that creating vivid images puts people into trance states. The word *not* cannot remove the negative image you create in your mind, for example, when you say, "This is *not* going to be a bad day for me." By the time you've thought that, some bad image will have been created in the form of an expectation. Saying, "This is going to be a good day" will create a better expectation. If you truly learn the power of expectation, you will agree with Thoreau that it is best to *expect great things*. Did Thoreau stop expecting great things for his book *Walden* when he was storing in a closet 500 unsold copies returned to him by his publisher? Given his statements above, we can predict that he expected great things to come from *Walden*, and that expectation led to great things, in its enormous popularity throughout the world and the salubrious effects it has had on so many lives.

[page 301] Magazine editors — "afraid to print a whole sentence, a round sentence, a free-spoken sentence" — came in for Thoreau's especial vituperation. The particular editor Thoreau was thinking of was James Russell Lowell; the free-spoken sentence was one Thoreau had penned in his "Chesuncook" piece for Lowell's *Atlantic Monthly*. At the end of a meditation on the white pine tree and the necessity of saving it as a piece not only of wilderness, but also of the wilderness of the human soul, Thoreau wrote, "It is as

immortal as I am, and perchance will go to as high a heaven, there to tower above me still." Lowell cut this sentence without Thoreau's permission; the incident had occurred over four months before, and Thoreau was still livid. Lyceums and institutes were no better. His own experiences as a lecturer had taught him that "they want all of a man but his truth and independence and manhood."

Magazine editors are likely similar today, but they live in a world in which "a whole sentence, a rounded sentence" is becoming rare with the advent of social media, especially Twitter with its artificial limit of 144 characters in a single tweet. No whole trees anymore; only wood chips to kindle a fire! When Thoreau writes, "The deep places in the river are not so obvious as the shallow ones and can only be found by carefully probing it" (page 306), it reminds me that nicely rounded sentences which probe to the depth of a person cannot be written in 144 characters.

One of the advantages of age is to learn to trust one's own opinion on matters about which so-called experts expound contrary views. I've found the quickest way to deal with a tradesman who will not use the components I require in a repair is take my business elsewhere or do it myself. When I repair things I strive to use better materials than used in the original object. The alternative is to spend my time bemoaning the poor workmanship of a repaired object.

[page 308] On this same day, he reminisced about the success of boyhood huckleberrying excursions, and a few days later, he told a story about going to buy a pair of shoes and asking for the shoemaker to replace the wooden pegs at the toes with iron ones. When the cobbler offered zinc pegs instead, along with considerable advice on the subject of shoes, Thoreau held fast: "I have learned to respect my own opinion in this matter," he stated matter-of-factly. Year after year, Thoreau had only become more and more like himself, refusing to compromise, independent of thought and action, even in the humble matter of shoes.

Thoreau was speaking about National Parks as an idea at a time when none existed in this young country. Did his words inspire Theodore Roosevelt and others who undertook to protect and preserve portions of our country in their native and natural state? Henry knew of cow-commons but he extended the idea to *men*-commons and pioneered the way for what has become our state and national parks, *ministerial lots* administered by the local and federal government.

[Page 308, 309] As Thoreau had come more deeply into relationship with Concord's forests, he showed himself every bit the uncompromising two-fisted knight in his battle with those who saw forests as commodities. Tramping in Botrychium Swamp among larches turning golden, he dreamed that:

Each town should have a park, or rather a primitive forest, of five hundred or a thousand acres, where a stick should never be cut for fuel, a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation. We hear of cow-commons and ministerial lots, but we want *men*-commons and lay lots, inalienable forever. Let us keep the New World new, preserve all the advantages of living in the country. There is meadow and pasture and wood-lot for the towns poor. Why not a forest and huckleberry field for the town's rich? All Walden Wood might have been preserved for our park forever, with Walden in its midst, and the Easterbrooks Country, an unoccupied area of some four square miles, might have been our huckleberry-field. If any owners of these tracts are about to leave the world without natural heirs who need or deserve to be specially remembered, they will do wisely to abandon their possession to all, and not will them to some individual who perhaps has enough already. As some give to Harvard College or another institution, why might not another give a forest or huckleberry-field to Concord? A town is an institution which deserves to be remembered. We boast of our system of education, but why stop at schoolmasters and schoolhouses? We are all schoolmasters and our schoolhouse is the universe.

Someone asked, "How many seeds are in an apple?" A wise man answered, "That is easy to count, but who can count the number of apples in a seed?" The seeds Thoreau planted were powerful and are still producing strong tall trees.

Earlier I mentioned my trail biking in the snow of the Foxborough State Park each day, and how much I enjoyed observing the myriad of animal tracks in the new-fallen snow. Perhaps at some level these tracks were planting a seed in my soul about my own tracks in life.

[page 317] The new year 1860 brought abundant snow to Concord, and Thoreau on his walks enjoyed deciphering the impressions left by birds and mammals in their foraging. Finding that the snow showed him woodpeckers working, a flock of goldfinches feeding, a bevy of quail walking long the roadside, all after the fact, he exclaimed, "How much the snow reveals!"

Certainly Thoreau knew how one *tracks oneself* through life.

[page 316, 317] A man receives only what he is ready to receive, whether physically or intellectually or morally, as animals conceive at certain seasons their kind only. We hear and apprehend only what we already half know. If there is something which does not concern me, which is out of my line, which by experience or by genius my attention is not drawn to, however novel and remarkable it may be, if it is spoken, we hear it not, if it is written, we read it not, or if we read it, it does not detain us. Every man thus tracks himself through life, in all his hearing and reading and observation and traveling. His observations make a chain.

The phenomenon or fact that can not in any wise be linked with the rest which he has observed, he does not observe.

Thoreau loved wild apples and bemoaned their waning due to the Temperance laws which curtailed the production of apple cider among other alcoholic liquors. He warned his audience in a lecture that "soon they would be compelled to look for their apples in a bin," adding a quote from (Joel 1:12): "The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy withered away from the sons of men." Having just returned from the Supermarket where I bought a couple of apples out of a bin (the new apple barrel), these words rang true.

The word "inform" is part of so many modern words, that it is easy to overlook its original meaning which was "to form inside oneself" and by doing that, to come to understand something out in the world somewhere. I learned this from W. K. Chesterton's [Father Brown](#) stories. In this next passage, the procedure Thoreau uses to determine the origin of the tracks he found in the snow was identical to how Father Brown solved the mystery of the missing silverware.

[page 322] On his way home one night after tracking otter along the banks of the Assabet, seeing someone a dozen rods off — covered but for his hands and face, which he could not see at that distance — Thoreau recognized the man immediately by his walk. "We have a very intimate knowledge of one another; we see through thick and thin; spirit meets spirit." The next day, coming upon a distinctive footprint in the snow, he guessed it was the trapper George Melvin's, because it was accompanied by a hound's track. He experimented with his gait to get it to match the form of the track, and found himself walking just like Melvin, who later confirmed that the track had been his. "It is not merely by taking time and by a conscious effort that [man] betrays himself," Thoreau concluded. "A man is revealed, and a man is concealed, in a myriad unexpected ways."

There was one more eponymous quote on page 329 where Thoreau wrote (*italics added*), "What is the use

of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on? . . . Grade the ground first. If a man believes and *expects great things* of himself, it makes no odds where you put him, or what you show him, . . . he will be surrounded by grandeur"

Did Thoreau have a sense of humor? Yes, but admittedly a wry one such as in this story where he is confronted by farmers whose property he must cross for his surveying job. When one of them asked Thoreau if he were lost, not having seen him before on this land, Thoreau mused, "If the truth be known, and had it not been for betraying my secret, I might with more propriety have inquired, 'Are *you* not lost, as I have never seen *you* before?'" Who really owns the property but the one who walks it the most often?

Here we can read about Henry's last entry in his Journal.

[page 340, 341] He then turned to describing the storm of the previous evening and the long striations that the winds had left in the gravel along the railroad causeway. He gave the exact dimensions of the minute tracks: From behind each pebble projected a ridge an eighth of an inch high and an inch long. The very last line in this his very last journal entry reads: "All this is perfectly distinct to an observant eye and yet could easily pass unnoticed by most. Thus each wind is self-registering." With his last steps in life, Thoreau surely was leaving tracks that could be made by no other man.

Henry grew weak and asked Edmund Hosmer to stay the night with him.

[page 342] The next morning, Sophia read to her brother the "Thursday" section of "A Week" and, anticipating the "Friday" section's description of the exhilarating return journey home, he murmured, "Now comes good sailing." At nine o'clock on the morning of May 6, Henry Thoreau set sail.

Once more, as I did on Dec. 14, 2009 when I finished reading Volume 14 of his Journal, I am sad as I say Goodbye and Bon Voyage to my fellow traveler whose journey on the Earth ended some eighty years before mine began. I have read your long journals, your *Walden*, and have saved for later your other books, so that your memory, Henry, will never stay very far out of my consciousness and my soul.

~^~

----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 1.

My reviews of: [Bright Colors, Falsely Seen](#), [Lewis Creek Lost and Found](#), and [A Short Story of American Destiny](#).

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

Footnote 2.

It certainly escapes many moderns today. If you Google the phrase in brackets [george herbert's poem "Man"], you'll find references like this: *Please explain "Man," a poem by George Herbert 1633.*

[Return to text directly before Footnote 2.](#)

Footnote 3.

Rightly understood, there are no plant diseases, only bad soil that causes plants to appear wilted,

yellowing, molded, and dying. Restore the soil to health and the plant will revive.

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**Footnote 4.**

To see a list of the 14 volumes of his Journals and read my reviews of them, check this link:

<http://www.doyletics.com/arj/tjr01rvw.shtml>.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 4.](#)

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Footnote 5.

From my Matherne's Rule #10 which you can read about here:

<http://www.doyletics.com/mrules.shtml#mrn10>. The maps of Taft and Waterford can be found in the book by Ellen C. Merrill.

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