makes a text of this nature far less valuable than this academic book should be, which is all
the more astonishing in the age of technology and the quality of Fordham University Press.
The second weakness is the lack of sensitivity to the use of inclusive language. While
Potter may have been of an earlier generation, there has been enough research to moveeditors and publishers to improve upon language and to make Potter’s contribution more
timeless. Nonetheless, this work is a must for any Peircean library and the casual and the
serious scholar.

Cobb County Schools

George W. Stickel

Seining New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Science. Laura
Dassow Walls. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995. xii plus
300 pp. $42.00, $22.95 pb.

This excellent book looks at Thoreau’s philosophical and literary development
against his scientific readings. Walls’ detailed study of the late writings, some forgotten or
just published, forces a reinterpretation of material once dismissed as inferior. Major
themes are his dialectic between intentional vision and “sauntering” with the eye, a
relational epistemology of contact, the world as composed of patterns created by multiple
material agents, the knower as one among these agents in interaction with them, and
multiple views substituting for a God’s eye view. Walls seeks to overcome our scientific-
literary split. Influenced by Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour, she is not just a post-
modernist. It is not language all the way down. There is interaction with the world.

Thoreau’s context includes Emerson, Coleridge, Locke, Goethe, Carlyle, Lyell and
especially Humboldt. Her point is that we have accepted the dichotomy between
“Baconian” science and romanticism and tried to fit Thoreau into the scheme. Walls
traces Thoreau’s journey from “rational holism” to “empirical holism.” Not an isolated
hermit, Thoreau participated in this misunderstood alternative scientific tradition. Facts
do not fit into, but generate the whole. Order is not the law of the same, but rather the
product of multiple interactions. Mind and nature create each other. Science involves
imagination. Since the parts combine to generate the whole, inconvenient parts cannot be
discarded as accidents. Since nature is generated by the interaction of random differences,
there is emergence but no teleology and facts are made by the interaction of mind and
nature, a rejection of dualism. Emerson’s single law disintegrated into Thoreau’s
multifariousness. Instead of universal truth there are viewpoints. Walls is excellent on
Thoreau’s twin strategies of intentionality and spontaneity. The 19th century origin of
these ideas, which anticipate ecology and James, challenges our periodization into modern
and postmodern.

“Rational holism” had set a gulf between mind and nature, creating alienation from
nature in the romanticists. This results in the standard interpretation of Thoreau,
McIntosh’s influential Thoreau as Romantic Naturalist, which sees a dialectic of

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alienation and nostalgia. Thoreau’s growing absorption into detailed measurements is then seen as a fall from Reason into Understanding. But Walls sees Thoreau instead developing a different approach to nature. Thoreau finds that we need to forget what we know and see things anew. He was looking for creative interaction with the natural, an intimacy that did not destroy reciprocity. Rather than detached observation, he wanted to be the scribe of nature. Nature is not passive in the knowing process. This challenges a science which abets commodification of things.

As an empirical holist, his task was to join literature, philosophy and science into a whole emerging from particulars. This is less shocking when we realize facts (facta) are made and that literature is not the same as fiction. Critics, like Matthiessen, debate Thoreau’s success in balancing fact and meaning. (Walls treats several critics in notes.) The literature/science split widened and criticism backed Thoreau into this split. Thoreau did cooperative natural history even as Agassiz demoted it to amateur status.

He finally studied the dispersion of seeds. What if matter organized itself without a divine or human mind? The world’s end changed into continual succession. Seeds are transported through several networks, dispersing the center across multiple lines of connection. This was a genuine but neglected contribution to science and anticipated postmodernism. In his time insistence on naturalistic explanation was revolutionary. Darwin’s Origin, read within a week of publication, give him context and focus. Yet Thoreau’s was not a competitive deterministic world alienated from humanism.

Thoreau’s project in the important address to the Middlesex Agricultural Society was to interface literature and science, just when they were unraveling. He used literary techniques to create what Steve Woolgar calls “feedbacking” and “inversion” which deny the transparency of the author and the object speaking for itself. The publisher deleted what he took as literary asides, thus stabilizing it as a scientific piece. “Wild Apples” traces his growing respect for the wild in which growth and decay are mixed.

Cosmos emerges and re-emerge from self-organizing chaos. Eden includes the Fall. Yet nature is redemptive. We can learn from him because what he experienced, we feel as a culture.

Jerome A. Stone

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Heaven’s Champion: William James’s Philosophy of Religion. Ellen Kappy Suckiel.
Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996. xvi plus 184 pp. $28.95

Ellen Suckiel's goal in this insightful volume is to "integrate James's numerous writings on the topic of religion, and to show how his religious views rely upon the broader principles of pragmatism" (pp. xi-xii). This project, however, must be taken with a grain of salt, for she argues again and again that James does different things in different texts. In the Varieties, for example, his aim is to marry science and religion, but in "The