One of the hallmarks of our present cultural ethos is that analyses that focus on an author's conceptual fragmentation are more fashionable than earlier studies that instead emphasized unity and structure. Such a move for good or ill reflects a postmodern embrace of historicism and psychologism at the expense of the antediluvian custom of reading a text as if it had something intrinsically valuable to tell us about ourselves and the world in which we dwell.

Robert Milder's Reimagining Thoreau is an exercise in the new textual criticism. Milder styles himself an "empirical critic" whose primary methodology is to accept a text's internal inconsistencies and contradictions "without attempting to sublimate them into a higher unity, and then to investigate their origin in an irresolute or conflicted authorial mind." This approach clearly demands an interweaving of textual deconstruction and psychobiography. The aim is to read the text as primarily an unwitting autobiographical revelation—a product, as William James put it, of "temperament."

But what, in Thoreau's case, is the genesis of his "irresolute or conflicted authorial mind"? Milder tells us it is Thoreau's need to "define [for himself] a satisfactory posture toward experience," to learn how to relate to his fellows, society, history, nature, and God in such a way as to fashion a meaningful identity. Milder observes that Thoreau's convictions and sense of self, in spite of his protestations to the contrary, were "nearly always in flux," and that the palimpsest-like texts he wrote reflect an essential ambivalence. Milder allows that Thoreau remained constant to the general transcendentalist conviction that a human life is a "pilgrimage" embarked on a journey towards "fullness of being." But given his emphasis on the discontinuity that arises from Thoreau's lifelong battle to define a satisfactory posture toward experience, this single line of continuity conceded by Milder tends to get lost in his descriptions of Thoreau's labyrinthine self-imaginings.

Milder follows Thoreau's self-imaginings (or what he sometimes refers to as Thoreau's attempts at self-mythologization) through all the latter's writings, but focuses particularly on Walden. In page after page (fifty of them, in fact) of closely-printed textual analysis, he argues that the book fails to deliver on its initial promise to reveal how to live and what to live for—that, in fact, the book's later chapters tend "to qualify, subvert, or strategically evade" the promise—because Thoreau's own allegiances were fractured during his composition of the book's several drafts. Thus Walden's rhetoric inevitably captures the ambivalence of its author's shifting commitments. Still, observes Milder, there are clear indications of a Thoreauvian "impulse to ascent" in Walden's pages, and the same impulse can be ferreted out in the post-Walden writings. This impulse, which seems a synonym for Milder's earlier characterization of transcendentalism as a pilgrimage towards "fullness of being," is the constant in
Thoreau's life and writings. But his own irresolutions and conflicts tended to fragment the impulse into sometimes bewilderingly multi-layered rhetoric.

What is one to think about Milder's method and conclusion? On the one hand, it can scarcely be denied that it's interesting and at times illuminative to trace the connections between Thoreau's psycho-history and his writings: interesting because most of us are fascinated by biography, illuminative because an understanding of an author's psychological landscape (Wimsatt's intentional fallacy notwithstanding) is helpful in navigating his or her books. But on the other hand, isn't it a commonplace that texts bear the signatures of their authors? And isn't every human being necessarily engaged in the process of figuring out how to relate to his or her experience? If so, one wonders why it's necessary to spend almost three hundred pages (which sometimes risk smothering the reader in minutiae) to underscore the points. Moreover, one may ask whether the "empirical critic's" choice to focus on the fragmentation of an author's thought and writings doesn't trivialize the very real possibility of a philosophical message arising from the text that, at the end of the day, is much more important than psycho-biographical analysis. In fairness to Milder, he is not a philosopher. He is a literary critic writing (presumably) for other literary critics, and the language game he plays has a set of norms and priorities and expectations not necessarily shared by players of the philosophical language game. His analysis of Thoreau's rhetoric helps us understand the complexity of the authorial process, even if it may not in the long run shed much light on the ideas which that process births.

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Editor Ruth Anna Putnam uses Jacques Barzun's metaphor from his 1983 book, *A Stroll with William James*, to describe the goals of *The Cambridge Companion to William James*. "The contributors to this volume will, I trust, prove to be stimulating, enlightening companions to readers who undertake their own stroll with William James" (p. 1). But where readers could expect Barzun's stroll to include an avid appreciation, a cultural overview, a personal interpretation of theoretical issues, and an informal style, the walk with James in Putnam's book is more earnest in character. Moreover, the eighteen essays do "not attempt ... a single interpretation of James's philosophy" (pp. 9-10), but they all share high standards of rigor and insight. The essays are directed toward an audience of philosophers or philosophical thinkers in related fields, and most are written by philosophers. They cover a variety of psychological, epistemological, and religious topics from James's mature works, ranging from Owen Flanagan's assessment of his theory of consciousness to T. L. S. Sprigge's defense of James against the criticisms of G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, and Richard R. Niebuhr's observations about the "knowledge of acquaintance" (p.223) that form the basis of religious experience.

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