In a kind of operatic tangle, Lieutenant Manuel, dressed in a uniformed disguise, was ordered to escort or deliver Admiral Horthy, the ex-regent of Hungary, from his Nazi house arrest to American headquarters in Wiesbaden. Was Horthy a wrongly deposed head of state or a war criminal? Manuel conversed with him civilly, asking him why he had collaborated for so long, at the cost of sacrificing so many Hungarian lives at the Eastern front. "*Was konnte ich denn machen?*," he asked. "What could I do? I was the helpless Führer of a little state." Here we can see what the head of a geographically exposed nation in the heart of Central Europe had in common with ordinary Germans: a self-righteous feeling of impotence. Or ignorance.

THIS ISSUE OF complicity and responsibility haunts us still. It was certainly on the minds of the occupying forces of the defeated Germany. They thought that Germans would acknowledge, and might even wallow in, guilt. But that was not their principal concern. They were men, too; in time they broke with General Eisenhower's nonfraternization order, their minds on food and sex and booze. As Manuel records, "occupation is primitive business." And a naïve business, too. This is how he describes American efforts at re-education: "Since you are misguided heathens we are sending you a thousand professors of poetry, journalism, economics, politics, biology and business administration in order to teach you the inner check, to instruct you by example that it's wrong to burn and slaughter six million Jews..."

Some of these vignettes and snapshots of history have a surprising actuality today. The debate over German responsibility is far from over, the past keeps intruding on the German and European present, and the German lament over German suffering, somewhat muted in recent decades, may become louder again. In today's relentless revisionism, the fate of millions of Germans, who were expelled from eastern territories by Czechs, Poles, and Soviets, is also being recalled and re-examined.

Manuel's book is aptly titled. An historian recalls, or tries to re-imagine, unexpected scenes of war; and Manuel has lost none of the talents that he showed as a journalist a half-century ago. He is oddly apologetic for breaking away from the forms of magisterial history, and feels the need to taunt Leopold von Ranke, the Nestor of critical history, for his famous hope that historians might recover "what actually happened." In Manuel's view, this was a "pretentious manifesto." (In the process, Manuel misquotes Ranke and adds to some other minor linguistic inaccuracies in his account.) It has become fashionable to set up Ranke as a strawman of objectivity, the more easily to indulge in present-day subjectivity. But Manuel need have no regret. He has not committed the frequent error of our day, pretending that fiction is enriched history. His own subjectivity is disciplined by knowledge and insight. He lets us see and almost feel "the cloud of unknowing" that once hung over Western Europe at the end of World War II. He has enlivened the reader's historical imagination, and we should be grateful. ■

The Seeded Self

By CALEB CRAIN

Wild Fruits: Thoreau's Rediscovered Last Manuscript by Henry David Thoreau edited and introduced by Bradley P. Dean

(Norton, 409 pp., $29.95)

I.

WILD THINGS ARE hard to package for sale. But in the 1840s, the town of Concord, Massachusetts was home to resourceful thinkers, and the friends and neighbors of Henry David Thoreau thought they knew how to bring him to market. A strategy wasn't far to seek. Everyone knew Gilbert White's *Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*. The Englishman's collection of notes on local wildlife and plants was beloved in nineteenth-century America. It occurred to more than one Transcendentalist: why not have Thoreau knock it off?

In 1842, Emerson had White's book in mind when he gave Thoreau his first grown-up writing assignment: a review for the *Dial* of four new botanical and zoological surveys. Emerson published Thoreau's essay under the *Selborne*-esque title "Natural History of Massachusetts." A few years later, when Hawthorne recommended Thoreau to New York publisher Evert Duyckinck, he had the same marketing instinct. "The only way...," Hawthorne wrote, "in which [Thoreau] could ever approach the popular mind, would be by writing a book of simple observation of nature, somewhat in the vein of White's *History of Selborne*." It was sensible advice.

It might even have turned out to be profitable, but Thoreau never quite got around to taking it. As he once wrote in his journal, "My practicalness is not to be trusted to the last." The *Dial* essay that inaugurated his career was as close as he got. Although Thoreau admired *Selborne*, the two books he saw into print—*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* in 1849, and *Walden* in 1854—were much more ambitious and peculiar. His protest writing broke away from White's quaint model altogether.

Yet the model stuck in his mind. At the end of his life, some of Thoreau's anti-market prickliness seems to have relented. The essays that would eventually become chapters in *The Maine Woods* and *Cape Cod* were conventional travelogues, more or less (except for a few pantheistic outbursts, which magazine editors stumbled over). In 1859 or 1860, Thoreau turned at last to a *Selborne*-like project, on a grand scale. He re-read his journal and indexed nearly a decade of his daily observations in calendrical lists—over 750 pages of them—tracking by month and day the annual appearance of leaves, flowers, birds, fruits, and animals in Concord. It is impossible today to know what Thoreau planned to do with the lists, but they seem to have provided him with the scaffolding for at least two book-length manuscripts of botanical observation, "Wild Fruits" and "The Dispersion of Seeds." Thoreau struggled through several drafts of "Fruits" and "Seeds," but he never finished either.

His death in 1862 released a flood of posthumous publication, but it was not a case of morbid opportunism by his publishers—not at first, anyway. Knowing

CALEB CRAIN is a senior editor at *Lingua Franca*. His book, *American Sympathy: Friendship in Early U.S. Literature*, will be published by Yale next year.

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that his death was near, Thoreau had arranged for most of the publications himself. In James T. Fields, of the *Atlantic Monthly* and the Boston publishing house Ticknor & Fields he had at last found an editor who appreciated and deferred to him. Not only did Fields agree to retain Thoreau's deviations from orthodox Christianity, he even relieved Thoreau of the infamous library that he had written himself: the seven hundred unsold copies of *A Week* that had sat in Thoreau's attic since that book's commercial débacle.

Except for an essay that Thoreau himself had carved out, Fields left "Fruits" and "Seeds" in manuscript. So did the Houghton, Mifflin Company in its twenty-volume Thoreau edition in 1906. Over the last century, Thoreauvians have paid the two texts the wistful compliments that accrue to fruits beyond the reach of harvesters. In 1965, Thoreau's biographer Walter Harding asserted that the manuscripts contain "some of [Thoreau's] best writing," and added that "someday, it is to be hoped, [they] will be edited and published." The responsible, meticulous editors of the Princeton University Press *Writings* have promised to publish them, but Princeton launched its edition in 1971 and to date has got no further than volume five of Thoreau's fourteen-volume journal. It could be decades before Princeton gets to "Fruits" and "Seeds."

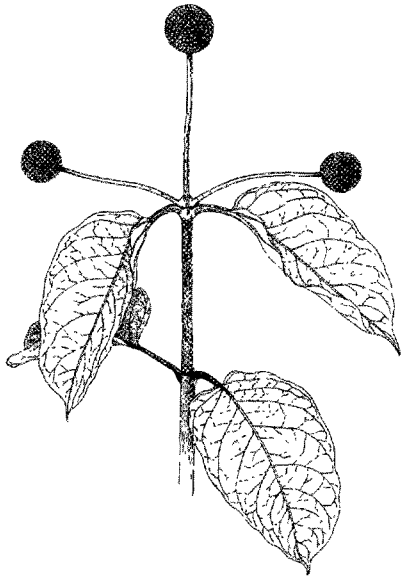
Into this breach has jumped Bradley P. Dean. In 1993, the small Island Press published Dean's edition of "The Dispersion of Seeds" under the pious-sounding but Thoreau-derived title *Faith in a Seed*. As Dean himself later wrote, the "commercial success" of that volume "changed everything." Money often does. Now a much larger publisher has released Dean's version of *Wild Fruits* in a deluxe edition, with dozens of illustrations, color maps on the endpapers, and gold and green leaf on the spine.

The literary marketplace attracted Thoreau even as it appalled him. But it certainly did appall him. "If you would get money as a writer or lecturer," Thoreau wrote in "Life without Principle," "you must be popular, which is to go down perpendicularly." One hundred and thirty-seven years after his death, these uncapitalistic scruples have been swept aside, and Thoreau has at last published a nature book in a safely inoffensive style.

II.

In an irony that Thoreau would relish, for half the price of Dean's *Wild Fruits* you can buy the best of it in Thoreau's *Natural History Essays*, edited by Robert Sattelmeyer. It is not deluxe; in fact, it is all but out of print. Still, *Natural History Essays* is one reason that scholars have resisted printing "Wild Fruits" and "The Dispersion of Seeds." There is a considerable overlap between those two unfinished manuscripts and this collection of essays and lectures, where Thoreau's intentions are much better known.

The best way to describe the overlap is to track Thoreau's literary moves in his last few years. In the winter of 1859-60, probably while compiling his calendrical charts, Thoreau wrote the lecture "Wild Apples." This was the winter when Thoreau told Concord that at Harpers Ferry, John Brown had given "many a man who was lately contemplating suicide... something to live for!" Clashes over the Fugitive Slave Law had raised Thoreau's temperature. In the lectern, his "I's" and "you's" were as sharp as knives. In its subject



Button Bush

matter "Wild Apples" was milder and sweeter than his anti-slavery lectures, but its style was just as personal and direct.

We do not know whether "Wild Apples" came before "Wild Fruits" or after it. The lecture's success may have inspired Thoreau to elaborate it into a longer work, or maybe Thoreau discovered while writing "Wild Fruits" that a lecture on apples ripened and dropped from it naturally. Unfortunately, "Wild Fruits" as a whole did not ripen. Many writers will recognize the problem from a similar, sad experience of their own: the idea for the book was beautiful, but with the kind of regular, mathematical beauty that turns out to be tedious to execute. Thoreau aimed to describe every fruit in Concord, in the order in which it ripened. That would have resulted in a modest, somewhat fussy book, if Thoreau had been content to do no more than to itemize and to describe. He wasn't, to judge by what he achieved in "Wild Apples."

"Wild Apples" was modest only apparently. By means of unassuming notes on apples, Thoreau presented nothing less than his lover's quarrel with civilization. "*Our* wild apple is wild only like myself, perchance," he wrote, "who belong not to the aboriginal race here, but have strayed into the woods from the cultivated stock." Thoreau appreciated the distinctive smacks and tangs of different apples, but he sampled their distinctions in order to reach a more generalized problem: the ideal meaning of fruit, as nature's reluctant tithe to culture.

> I frequently pluck wild apples of so rich and spicy a flavor that I wonder all orchardists do not get a scion from that tree, and I fail not to bring home my pockets full. But perchance, when I take one out of my desk and taste it in my chamber, I find it unexpectedly crude—sour enough to set a squirrel's teeth on edge and make a jay scream.

It was a brilliant strategy for a lecture, but difficult to repeat. Not even Thoreau had in him as many different essay-length ideas about the meaning of fruit as there were kinds of fruit in Concord. There is some very good writing in "Wild Fruits," but for pages and pages Thoreau did no more than collate his notes. The liveliest passages described the fruits that he could eat: strawberry, blueberry, cranberry, huckleberry, watermelon, and apple. If he could not find a Transcendental meaning for an edible, he could at least be juicily anecdotal.

Was "wild fruits" dragged down by its own schematic heaviness, or was it pushed? In early 1860, Thoreau read Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, just months after it was published. Darwin discussed the geographic distribution of seeds by "accidental means," such as sea-water and birds. Soon afterward, Thoreau began to think less about fruits as things-in-themselves and more about seeds. An almost offhand comment by Darwin—"everyone has heard that when an American forest is cut down, a very different vegetation springs up"—seems to have suggested to Thoreau that his minute observations of tree propagation in Concord had a place in a wider scientific debate.

Estimates of Darwin's impact on Thoreau have risen sharply over the last few decades. In 1965, Walter Harding judged that Thoreau read Darwin "too late to have any significant influence on his own thinking"; but in 1993 Robert D. Richardson claimed Thoreau "as a major ally

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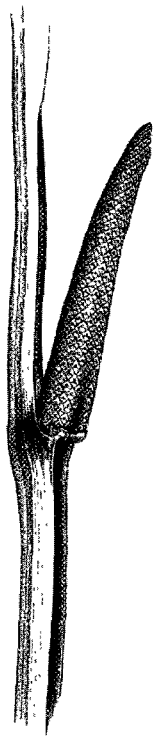

Sweet Flag

of Charles Darwin." Richardson overstates the case. As a scientist, Thoreau reflected Darwin's fire very palely. You would never know from reading Thoreau that putting nature into words was a scientific problem as well as an aesthetic problem—that living things never fit into the neat categories known as species, and that this difficulty with names revealed something crucial.

Thoreau was never precise enough about naming organisms to notice their resistance to his practice. His interest was Romantic. "Modern botanical descriptions approach ever nearer to the dryness of an algebraic formula, as if x + y were = to a love-letter," he regretted in his journal. "How much better to describe your object in fresh English words rather than in these conventional Latinisms." Darwin does seem to have crystallized Thoreau's many observations about seeds; but there is no equivalent in Thoreau to Darwin's patient experiments on the subject, such as when Darwin cleared six square feet of soil, and "marked all the seedlings of our native weeds as they came up, and out of the 357 no less than 295 were destroyed, chiefly by slugs and insects." Thoreau was a saunterer, not a counter.

The climax of Thoreau's Darwinian phase came in September 1860, when Thoreau delivered "The Succession of Forest Trees" to the Middlesex Agricultural Society. Whereas "Wild Apples" had disguised its philosophy as quaint natural history, "Succession" masqueraded as civic-minded science. "Every man is entitled to come to Cattle-Show," Thoreau began, "even a transcendentalist." His scientific point was relatively modest. Like Darwin, Thoreau cited the well-known observation that in America "when a pine wood was cut down an oak one common sprang up, and *vice versa*." Thoreau asserted that this happened because forests were continually planted with the seeds of rival trees, spread by wind, squirrels, and birds.

> If you look through the thickest pine wood, even the seemingly unmixed pitch pine ones, you will commonly detect many little oaks, birches, and other hard woods, sprung from seeds carried into the thicket by squirrels and other animals, and also blown thither, but which are overshadowed and choked by pines.

The lecture's Transcendental content was suggested even more elliptically than that of "Wild Apples," but it was not absent.

"The Succession of Forest Trees" was a hit. Horace Greeley printed it in the *New York Weekly Tribune*, and it was reprinted so often that according to Harding it "achieved the widest circulation of any of Thoreau's shorter essays in his lifetime." As with "Wild Apples," the success seems to have led Thoreau to hope he could turn the lecture into a book. In 1861, he worked to lengthen "The Succession of Forest Trees" into a longer manuscript. Like the earlier "Wild Fruits," "The Dispersion of Seeds" attempted a quasi-encyclopedic survey of Concord's flora. Thoreau recycled many passages from "Fruits" in "Seeds," usually sharpening the prose. But the method of lengthening was different. Thoreau had expanded "Wild Apples" into "Wild Fruits" the way you add to a string of beads: by repetition. He expanded "The Succession of Forest Trees" into "The Dispersion of Seeds" the way you add to a snowball: by layering. He inserted observations and quotations for which he had had no room in his lecture. The result was larger and slower, but roughly the same shape.

In 1862, with his death in sight, Thoreau took "Wild Apples" out of "Wild Fruits." He wrote a new introduction and conclusion, and gave it to Fields for the *Atlantic Monthly*. He began to extract a second essay from "Wild Fruits," about huckleberries, but he didn't live to finish his edition. In 1970, Leo Stoller published this unfinished draft under the title "Huckleberries." Until Bradley P. Dean's efforts at recovery, "Wild Apples," "The Succession of Forest Trees," and "Huckleberries" were the only parts of "Wild Fruits" and "The Dispersion of Seeds" in print. As the chronology above suggests, there is some reason to believe that was how Thoreau wanted it. It is tempting to speculate what Thoreau might have done with the manuscripts if he had had a few more years to work on them. But it is risky to second-guess the publishing decisions that Thoreau himself made.

THAT SAID, THE editors at Island Press were luckier than the editors at Norton. Of the two manuscripts that Dean has edited, "The Dispersion of Seeds" has the better claim to being printed. Its prose is more consistently polished. The evidence is strong that Thoreau abandoned "Wild Fruits" even before illness forced him to abandon it: in addition to removing "Wild Apples" and "Huckleberries" from it, he recycled a number of passages from "Wild Fruits" in "The Dispersion of Seeds." To be specific, he recycled descriptions of the *Ascelpias cornuti*, birch, dandelion, *Desmodium*, elderberry, hazel, *Hieracium*, hound's tongue, lily, maple, mouse-ear, oak, peltandra, pitch pine, pumpkin, shrub oak, thistle, touch-me-not, white pine, and witch hazel. Still, as Emerson once joked, there is a kind of scholar who believes that "to know the tree you should ... eat all the apples." Fervent Thoreauvians will want to be able to read "Wild Fruits," and they will be glad that Dean has given it to them.

BUT NOBODY ELSE should bother—which makes it odd that Dean's is not a scholarly edition, even though it looks like a scholarly edition, and is impastoed with footnotes. In his introduction, Dean claims that "I have edited the manuscript as [Thoreau] left it, making no effort whatever to complete what he began." In a recent letter in the *New York Times Book Review*, Dean protested that his book "does not add a word beyond what Thoreau himself wrote, nor does it organize his thoughts in any way beyond what he intended." But Dean's own footnotes belie him.

The thorniest question facing Dean was how to present Thoreau's editorial instructions to himself. In many places in "Wild Fruits," Thoreau wrote no more than a reference, usually to his journals: "*Vide* October 31," or "See July 3, 1860, still green; and see January 10, 1855, and June 13, 1858, going to seed?" Had he finished "Wild Fruits," Thoreau would have replaced these references with polished prose developed from the texts to which he referred himself. Should an editor print the instructions or follow them?

A scholarly editor would print the instructions as they appear in the manuscript; and if the text to which Thoreau referred were not readily available, a scholarly editor might append it as a footnote. An interventionist editor, by contrast, would insert the cited text directly into the body of the book and relegate Thoreau's instructions to a footnote. Maddeningly, Dean does a little of both, and he does that inconsistently. Sometimes he inserts into the body of "Wild Fruits" the text that Thoreau's instructions point to. Sometimes he prints in a footnote both Thoreau's instructions and the text that they cite. Sometimes he moves Thoreau's instructions to a footnote without printing the text that they cite. The one thing that Dean never does is print Thoreau's

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instructions in the body of the text, where Thoreau left them. That would make *Wild Fruits* look raw and fragmentary.

This inconsistent editorial policy gives Dean an alarming amount of latitude. Consider the turnips. Immediately after a description of wild holly dated July 14, Thoreau wrote, "*Vide* scrap → Turnips." Dean enlarges this cryptic instruction into a paragraph. He finds what he believes to be the scrap of paper in question, which reads, "Pulling turnips 329." This, he determines, refers to a paragraph about turnips on page 329 of volume Thirty-Two of Thoreau's manuscript journal. Dean prints this paragraph in the body of *Wild Fruits*. In a footnote, he records his paper trail.

But all is not well. As Dean explains, he has dated the entry on turnips himself: "I add the date here, July fifteenth, on authority of the dating scheme of the other sections in which Thoreau entered nothing more than the name of the plant and the date." This sounds very proper. The date has to be July 15, after all, because "Wild Fruits" is organized in fairly strict chronological order, and the date for the wild holly is July 14. But the result reads rather oddly. Dean has Thoreau writing, "Raw turnips. July fifteenth./ Another finger-cold evening . . ." A few sentences later, Thoreau refers to "pulling turnips when the first cold weather numbs your fingers." It doesn't sound like the middle of July.

It isn't, but Dean has made this unnecessarily hard to figure out. Perhaps to thicken the patina of scholarship, he claims to have transcribed the turnip paragraph directly from Thoreau's manuscript journal. Unhelpfully, however, he does not give the corresponding volume and page numbers of the Houghton, Mifflin edition of the journal, available in most libraries. If you consult William L. Howarth's census of Thoreau's literary manuscripts, you can figure them out for yourself. As it turns out, this particular paragraph appears on page 256 of volume Fourteen—and Thoreau wrote it on November 21, 1860, a much more plausible date for a finger-cold evening.

Did Thoreau mean to insert a different journal entry at this point in "Wild Fruits"? He may have been thinking of July 14, 1851, when he found some county commissioners eating raw turnips and tried one himself. More likely, he meant to look over the entries from *both* dates when he returned to compose his description of turnips. But by choice or by fate, he never did return to compose it. I do not mean to reproach Dean for failing to read Thoreau's mind adequately; he had no business trying to read Thoreau's mind at all.

The turnips that Dean has cooked up are relatively mild. Much worse are his European cranberries, a six-page gallimaufry of Thoreau quotations "based solely on my judgment," as Dean's footnotes repeatedly concede. And there are other idiosyncrasies. On page 202, for example, Dean emends "Sophia" to "my sister," and explains in a footnote that he made the change "to conform with Thoreau's practice of not using proper names of individuals in his published writings." But this scruple was not with Dean on page 140, when he allowed Sophia to go a-barberrying under her own name. On the other hand, with odd formality Dean expands the abbreviation "R.W.E." to "Ralph Waldo Emerson," though Thoreau almost never spelled out Emerson's first name, because Emerson rarely used it. Dean's treatment of Thoreau's "use marks"—vertical slashes through text to remind Thoreau when he had harvested a passage for reuse elsewhere—also varies considerably.

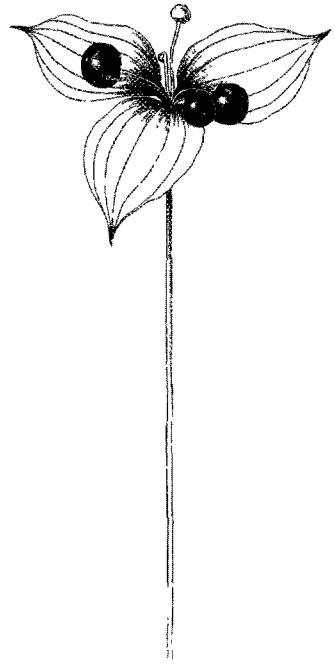
Some of these are small distortions, and it is clear that Dean means well. But they add up to a larger distortion, and meaning well only aggravates the problem. Thoreau famously disavowed good intentions. "If I repent of any thing," he wrote in *Walden*, "it is very likely to be my good behavior." Yet the Thoreau whom Dean finds in *Wild Fruits* is self-effacing and innocuous. Here is the lesson that Dean draws from the book: "If we can realize that we are mysteriously related to matter, we will act to preserve the world because human beings protect what we love or feel related to." Could Thoreau really have intended a message so nice? To lose interest in a project is a kind of decision. By presenting as Thoreau's a work that failed to hold his attention, Dean alters our image of Thoreau. Worse, he tames it. Thoreau knew that the American public liked to read pieties and scenic descriptions, but that is not why he went to the woods.

III.

NO SECOND ACT followed *Walden*, and ever since Emerson scholars of Thoreau have wondered why. Until recently, since almost no one had read "Wild Fruits" and "The Dispersion of Seeds," they were available to represent what Thoreau might have been: the "broken task" that Emerson had famously described in his funeral elegy for Thoreau. Now that the two manuscripts can be seen more or less for what they are, this debate will have to shift its ground, but it is unlikely to dissipate.

Something happened to Thoreau around 1850 or 1851, in the midst of revising *Walden*. His views of nature and of literary work changed, and his journal metamorphosed from "an all-purpose literary storehouse" into something akin to "a biologist's field notebook," as Leo Marx recently observed. Was this change a good or a bad thing? Perry Miller, one of the most famous scholars of Transcendentalism, judged it a narcissistic retreat and a literary tragedy. More charitable critics, including Leo Marx and Alfred Kazin, have argued that although the change in Thoreau may have been regrettable, the transformed journal ought to be considered an aesthetic achievement in its own right.

The environmentalist critic Lawrence Buell has a third opinion. He applauds Thoreau's turn away from society and toward nature. Buell is not disturbed that the late Thoreau no longer sparred with culture. Quite the contrary. In Buell's opinion, *Walden* did not leave humanity far enough behind: it still had Thoreau in it. "In order to focus as intensively as he later did on natural history as a literary subject," Buell writes, "Thoreau had to overcome an intense preoccupation with himself, his moods, his identity, his vocation, his relation with other people." In this view, *Walden* was an important transitional step in Thoreau's development away from anthropocentrism. The increasingly ascetic, increasingly scientific journal continued that development, but the arc remained incomplete at his death. "As I see it," Buell writes, "the later Thoreau had a more coherent sense of intellectual and literary purpose, though he died before he could achieve a syn-



Medeola

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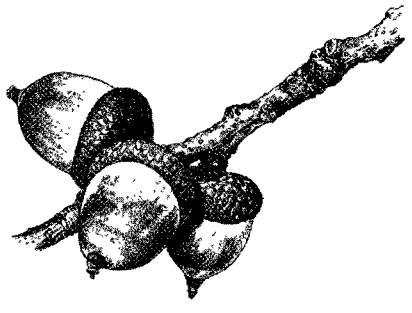
thesis elegant enough to please him." Presumably "Wild Fruits" and "The Dispersion of Seeds" were rough drafts of this synthesis.

This is a startling revision of what an older generation of scholars valued about Thoreau. In 1964, for example, Leo Marx argued that *Walden*'s richest meanings were social and humane. In his account, the book was a pastoral, with an American twist. Thoreau was playing the literary game of withdrawal from the world as if it could be lived rather than merely gestured at: "Instead of writing about it—or *merely* writing about it—he tries it." But this earnestness was itself a further move in the game; and the humor and the power of *Walden* derived from Thoreau's willingness to act the part of the straight man. Buell differs so sharply from Marx's view that he caricatures it: he accuses Marx of believing "Thoreau was not really *that* interested in nature as such; nature was a screen for something else." Thoreau's gradual abandonment of his own meanings for nature's is, in Buell's opinion, his chief merit. He is confident that "the development of Thoreau's thinking about nature . . . move[s] along a path from homocentrism toward biocentrism."

THE PROBLEM WITH Buell's hypothesis is that it depends on a masterpiece that does not exist. Neither "Wild Fruits" nor "The Dispersion of Seeds" need to have been this masterpiece, which can be postponed indefinitely, further and further into the future that Thoreau did not have. Still, it is possible to pause and examine "Fruits" and "Seeds" for what they are. And it is prudent to do so, because what they are suggests sharp limits to what they could have become.



Red Oak Acorns

In each text, there is an attempt at objectivity, and a wish to omit the "I" that *Walden* insolently retained. But the wish fails. When Thoreau does manage to omit himself, the result is leaden. Here are some elderberries, biocentrically observed:

> On the twenty-second of August I have seen the elderberry bushes weighed down with fruit partially turned and *still in bloom* at the extremities of their twigs. The great black cymes begin to be conspicuous, weighing down the bushes along fences near the end of August. The clusters swell and become heavy and therefore droop, bending the bushes down, just in proportion as they ripen. Hence, you see the green cymes perfectly erect, the half ripe more or less drooping, and the perfectly ripe commonly hanging straight down on the same bush. The terminal cyme, when it chances to be held erect, is of a very regular form: four principal divisions drooping toward each quarter around an upright central one, as the lower cymes droop around the upper one.

As Thoreau himself once noted, "Even the facts of science may dust the mind by their dryness."

More often, though, Thoreau cheats on his aspiration to objectivity, and smuggles himself back in. In his day, science was beginning to professionalize, and he knew himself to be an amateur. When the American Association for the Advancement of Science invited him to join in 1853, Thoreau confided to his journal that the proposal bordered on ridiculous, because "the fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot." In the "Huckleberries" essay extracted from "Wild Fruit," he opined that a strictly objective treatise on huckleberries would be "worthless," because it would have "none of the spirit of the huckleberry in it." Some scientist. Darwin, in *On the Origin of Species*, discusses pigeons and barnacles at length, but his book has none of their spirit, and most readers do not lament the lack.

Thoreau once told Emerson that "to detach the description from its connections in my mind would make it no longer true or valuable to me." Although Dean's loose editing blurs the difference between the would-be objectivity of "Wild Fruits" and the highly personal tone of the journals, a modern reader who spends time with both "Fruits" and the journal will confirm Thoreau's insight: where his detached descriptions are not miserably dull, it is because they are still attached to his subjectivity after all.

Like wild fruits themselves, Thoreau's descriptions of nature are best enjoyed in the field where they grew, his journal. Plucked and packaged as science, they are staler. In "Wild Fruits," it is intriguing when Thoreau describes some poison dogwood berries as "yellowish and greenish-white, ovoid, pearly or waxen on its few coarse branches—beautiful as Satan." In the journal entry where it originally appears, however, this simile is richly tangled with other concerns. It follows a passage regretting that Thoreau has "seemingly preferred hate to love" with his friends. "There is no precept in the New Testament that will assist me," Thoreau writes. "My nature, it may be, is secret.... I am under an awful necessity to be what I am." The journal entry hints that in Thoreau's nature, as in nature proper, what attracted attention and interest could prove toxic.

IV.

IT WOULD BE wrong to obscure this darkness. It sometimes seems as if Thoreau turned to nature as a way of continuing to enjoy a self that he felt forbidden to experience directly. In the natural world, he could find both purity and sensuousness, and these conflicting desires—for self-abnegation, for unconventional pleasures—are very far from an altruistic interest in nature for nature's sake. To call Thoreau non-anthropocentric is, for this reason, to choose sides in Thoreau's interior battle: to champion purity over self-indulgence.

In 1993, the Thoreau biographer Robert D. Richardson welcomed Dean's edition of "The Dispersion of Seeds" with a particular kind of relief: at last "the bachelor of thought and nature," as Emerson called him, had a few nice things to say about reproduction. After all, for a celebration of life in the woods, *Walden* is peculiar in its near total silence about the birds and the bees. A few copulating squirrels provide the only moment of sexual tension, and Thoreau tries vigorously to stop them. Richardson had apparently been waiting for the other shoe to drop, and in "Seeds" he thought he heard it. "*Walden* is about the growth and cultivation of the self," Richardson wrote; "*The Dispersion of Seeds* is about the growth of communities and the rise of new generations." Richardson noted that whereas *Walden*'s first chapter praises "the cypress, which bears no fruit," as the only tree that is truly free, *The Dispersion of Seeds* opens with Pliny's observation that seedless trees "are regarded as sinister." In *Dispersion*, Thoreau vows to show that *all* trees bear seeds, despite "a lingering doubt in many minds."

What "lingering doubt" is Thoreau addressing? In 1991, a quarter of a century after publishing his biography of Thoreau, Walter Harding added an important postscript to his analysis of his subject: an essay in the *Journal of Homosexuality* arguing that Thoreau had "a specific sexual interest in members of his own sex." This aspect of Thoreau's sensibility has remained strangely quarantined

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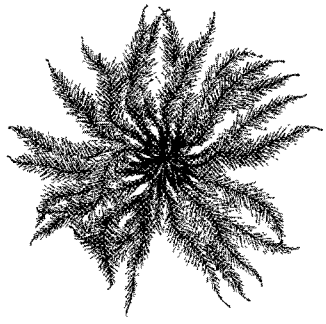
from mainstream Thoreau scholarship, despite Harding and gay scholars such as Henry Abelove, Jonathan Ned Katz, and Michael Warner. Richardson has consistently downplayed it. (So allergic is Richardson to all things Freudian that he took the precaution of omitting Thoreau's childhood and adolescence from his biography.)

Of course, Thoreau could not have thought of himself as a homosexual as we understand the term, but he did think of himself as chaste and childless. A careful reader of Darwin and a close observer of nature, he wondered what it meant that he dispersed no seed of his own. (He half-asserted, half-speculated in his journal that "The end of marriage is not the propagation of the species—If you & I succeed there will have been men enough—any more than the object of the blossom is to mature the seed.") He also knew that in his relationships with men, his emotions were often more turbulent and demanding than his partners.' "Methinks that I carry into friendship the tenderness & nicety of a lover," he admitted in his diary.



Clematis

"The Dispersion of Seeds" and "The Succession of Forest Trees" do celebrate reproduction, but not quite as sunnily as Richardson believes. Thoreau celebrates reproduction by death, devouring, excretion, accident, and inattention. He shows life propagating itself in ways that are neither magical nor obvious. A squirrel buries a nut, and if the squirrel dies, a hickory tree is born. With a cherry, nature bribes "wild men and children" to swallow cherrystones and thus transport them to fallow ground. Though you may not notice it, oak seedlings have already sprouted among your pines, and pine seedlings among your oaks.

There is no more sex in "The Dispersion of Seeds" than in *Walden*. When Thoreau describes male and female willows, he refers to them as "sterile" and "fertile." Generation in nature, as Thoreau describes it, is a paradox. Pine seeds may come from pine trees, but pine trees kill the pine seedlings under their skirts. "Few oaks spring up under an oak wood," Thoreau observes. There is a pun in the title of Thoreau's lecture: by the "succession" of forest trees, he means, strictly speaking, their reproductive failure. Oaks do not succeed to oaks; pines do. It is bad luck for a pinecone—or an apple or an acorn or a writer—not to fall far from the tree that bore it.

As with "Wild Apples," then, Thoreau was continuing his autobiography by other means. It was his fate as a writer, after all, to be seeded by Emerson's genius, and then stunted by his shadow. Failed roots fascinate Thoreau. He digs up roots of hickory, oak, and walnut and counts the rings on each aborted stub—the evidence of years and years of attempts to shoot up into trees, thwarted by frost, fire, rabbits, cows, and men. Scarred, gnarled, and yet still willing to burgeon, the roots speak to Thoreau of his own case. Anyone with a rosy view of the life of intellectuals, he recommends with a snarl, should "go and dig up a dozen seedling oaks and hickories, read their biographies, and see what they here contend with."

This is not quite the "interest in fecundity" that Richardson describes, but the fecundity of Thoreau's life was not a family sort. As a bachelor in nineteenth-century New England, Thoreau was expected to help care for the sick, the dying, and the dead. It was no accident that when Margaret Fuller drowned, Thoreau was deputized to search for her body and any of her manuscripts that may have washed ashore. Nor was it an accident that the sight of the drowned shook him deeply, and should probably be counted among the things that happened to Thoreau in 1850 to change his writing so irrevocably. He was the Transcendentalist assigned to look at death. He saw it differently than the others. Only Thoreau would have praised John Brown and his fellow conspirators by calling them "the very best men you could select to be hung."

In his journal in 1850, Thoreau described "a shrike pecking to pieces a small bird." After recording the details of the image, he noted that "I find that I had not associated such actions with my idea of birds. It was not bird-like." It was certainly not a pretty picture of nature; it would have been difficult to sell. Yet Thoreau detected a kind of strength in the cruelty. Nature could be liberal with life only because it was liberal with death. It stints on neither. That was a fact of its wildness, which Thoreau loved. "It is not the part of a true culture to tame tigers," he once wrote, "any more than it is to make sheep ferocious." Not to look at death would rob life of its edge—which is why we should want to distinguish what Thoreau wrote from what he died without finishing. ■

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