Richard J. Schneider, *Civilizing Thoreau: Human Ecology and the Emerging Social Sciences in the Major Works* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2016), 212 pp.

Thanks largely to the magnificent work of Robert Richardson (*Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*, 1986) and Robert Sattelmeyer (*Thoreau's Reading*, 1988), Thoreauvians have for some time been aware of the enormous extent of Thoreau's reading. A "chain reader" (Richardson), Thoreau immersed himself about as much in books as he did in nature, with his interests ranging from natural history, philosophy, literary classics, travel and exploration, to local history, geography, ethnography, and the Indians.

The area most fully explored so far is Thoreau's familiarity with the natural sciences of his day. As Laura Walls, William Rossi, Benjamin Berger, and others have shown, Thoreau developed his stance (or rather, stances) toward nature and his characteristic brand of nature writing not only on the basis of his own observations—vast and meticulous as these were—but also in response to an impressive array of scientists ranging from old-style natural historians such as Gilbert White to more recent and contemporary authorities including Georges Cuvier, Louis Agassiz, Asa Gray, Robert Hunt, Charles Darwin, and most importantly, Alexander von Humboldt.

Richard Schneider's *Civilizing America* is all the more welcome as it draws attention to an area whose impact has not been fully appreciated (despite several essays by Schneider himself published earlier and now integrated into a comprehensive study): Thoreau's reading in the social sciences. We need to be aware of these sources not so much for their own sake or because they took up quite a bit of Thoreau's time, but because they are, in fact, intimately related to his nature studies. Right from the start Schneider establishes the close link between the social sciences and the study of nature, both with an eye to the sciences in general and Thoreau in particular. Contrary to popular assumption, such key concepts of biology as species dispersion or dissemination, evolution, succession, and survivorship were first introduced by social scientists and only later adapted to the study of nature. Right around the time when he was engaged in his final revisions of *Walden*, Thoreau immersed himself in such studies as Louis Agassiz's essays on "The Diversity of Origin of the Human Races" (1850), Charles Pickering's *The Races of Man* (1851), and Arnold Guyot's *The Earth and Man* (1851)—books that propose and develop sweeping hypotheses about the history of the earth, the origins and evolution of humankind, the spread of races across the globe, and the processes of civilization as these were affected by climate and geography.

The link taken for granted by these writers between the realms of nature and society anticipates the notion of "human ecology" introduced by Robert Ezra Park in 1936 and amply documented in Donald Worster's masterful survey, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (1977). From the perspective of Guyot, Pickering, and others, the degree to which Thoreau conflates ecology and economics, nature and civilization, appears less as a matter of rhetorical paradox than as part and parcel of a considered argument. While not identical, the two form an almost seamless whole, and it is perfectly legitimate to interpret one in terms of the other.

Some of the consequences may not appeal to most Thoreauvians. His fascination with the Indians notwithstanding, Thoreau accepts their doom as inevitable in keeping with the notion of natural "succession," the displacement of plant and animal communities that goes on all the time. In the same vein, he assigns to African Americans and the Irish the role of 'pioneers' that, much like pioneer plants, prepare the way for the advance of a superior species. We may balk at these ideas, but the evidence that Schneider presents is overwhelming, not only from *Walden*, but actually from the early essays and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* all the way to *Cape Cod* and the late manuscripts (thus incidentally providing an element of continuity that qualifies the widely held view of a major shift or even break in Thoreau's intellectual development).

Among the wealth of insights that Schneider offers, some of the most exciting fall under the heading of "Self-Culture and Ecological Survivorship." While subscribing to Guyot's teleological view of history, Thoreau strongly dissents from the linkage, crucial in Guyot's scheme, between progress, increasing wealth, and intellectual development. At the same time, both agree in emphasizing the role of heroic individuals in advancing the progress of civilization. Thoreau's admiration for a masculine ideal of virtue has long been noted, but reading such pieces as "Sir Walter Raleigh,"

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"Civil Disobedience," and "A Plea for Captain John Brown" not from the perspective of Carlyle or Emerson but in light of the notion of the ecological struggle for life adds an exciting facet to the debate.

The most challenging and potentially controversial chapter is Schneider's analysis of "Walking" and the ideology of Manifest Destiny. True, whole paragraphs of Thoreau's essay do sound like a paraphrase of Guyot's progressivist myth of history in terms of the westward advance of civilization across the globe. Nevertheless, to my mind, the paean to the West provides merely a kind of prologue to the central message of the essay, the remarks on wildness. (The rhetoric of the text indicates as much: "what I have been preparing to say".) And wildness is only tangentially tied to geography; a principle of creativity and exploration, it is, ultimately, a metaphysical concept. Ever the Transcendentalist, Thoreau here—as well as in the "Conclusion" of *Walden* or the ending of *Cape Cod*—envisions a new world beyond America, a world that like the "true places" in *Moby-Dick* is "not down on any map" (ch. 12). The closest Thoreau can come to a new world is by imaginatively joining John Polis in *The Maine Woods* ("The Allegash and East Branch") on his trip home, a journey that will take the Indian to "Places where he might live and die and never hear of the United States, which make such a noise in the world,—never hear of America, so called from the name of a European gentleman."

Schneider is the author of a monograph (*Henry David Thoreau*, 1987) and two teacher's guides (*Approaches to Teaching Thoreau's Walden and Other Works*, 1996; *A Teacher's Guide to Walden*, 1997) as well as the editor of an essay collection on environmentalism (*Thoreau's Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing*, 2000). His new book once again shows him to be one of our foremost authorities on Thoreau. Thanks to *Civilizing America*, the "Thoreau problem" (Rebecca Solnit)—the split between the nature lover and ecologist on the one hand and the social critic and activist on the other—may not disappear altogether, but it seems a lot less intractable.

Dieter Schulz (Heidelberg)

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