

matter | 'mætər |

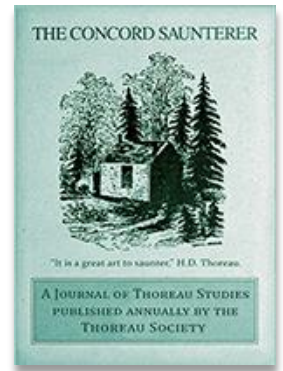
noun

1 physical substance in general, as distinct from mind and spirit; (in physics) that which occupies space and possesses rest mass, esp. as distinct from energy: *the structure and properties of matter*.

- written or printed material: *reading matter*.

verb [no obj.]

1 [usu. with negative or in questions] be of importance; have significance. —*The New Oxford American Dictionary*



Though I've not tested the hypothesis, I suspect that this issue of *The Concord Saunterer* contains more images than any previous issue. In addition to the illustrations accompanying Kathleen Coyne Kelly's contribution to our roundtable and various photographs of objects associated with Thoreau generously provided by the Concord Museum, we are thrilled to present here a series of intaglio prints and a drawing by the artist Hannah West. Taken together, these images evoke what has emerged as the theme of this issue, the complex ways in which Thoreau encourages us to rethink our engagements with the material world. West's meticulous and ethereal evocations of the power of matter—from dividing cells to cracking ice—speak to a recurrent theme within the issue's essays: what Kathleen Coyne Kelly identifies as the "moment when the non-human world announces itself" (100).

Our issue opens with Henrik Otterberg's fascinating reconsideration of *Walden* as autobiography, highlighting both the history of the autobiographical mode in New England and the productive "leaks and lacunae in Thoreau's accounting" (17), particularly in the account of his diet at Walden. From this exploration of this complex relation between material sustenance and its linguistic representation, we turn to a Melissa Sexton's study of "The Bean Field," which likewise engages, via Bruno Latour's concept of "mobilization," the relation between the material and the linguistic. (Sexton's essay also provides an excellent background for readers unfamiliar with the materialist theories engaged by our roundtable). The last in this group of essays is Alfred I. Tauber's expansive overview of Thoreau's position within/alongside twentieth-century philosophy.

At the center of the issue is a trio of lyric readings of *Walden*. Dan Beachy-Quick invites us to consider that text, and Thoreau's writing generally, in terms of its primal silences. Ian Davis's rendering of *Walden's* intimacies and estrangements urges that "neighboring and morning must be thought along lines of obscurity, loss, and mourning" (87). And Christina Davis's long poem "The Discipline of Vicinity" evokes the deep and varied resonances of *neighbor* as both noun and verb. The matter most salient in this cluster of readings is language itself, both Thoreau's and the writers', which emerges here as a vital affective force, matter that *moves*.

Each of our four roundtable participants (see James Finley's introduction on page 98) engages Thoreau in terms of recent theories of materiality. Kathleen Coyne Kelly's lively evocations of Thoreau's flute and James Finley's meditation on the "Contact!" passage of "Katahdin" stress the power of matter

Kristen Case, Editor's Pages

to exceed human perspectives of it and demonstrate the complexity of Thoreau's material engagements. Cristin Ellis's contribution traces Thoreau's critique of science, arguing that this critique did not amount to a claim that science is too materialist, "but rather that it was not yet materialist enough," that is, did not account for the material experience of the participant-observer (120). Finally, Michelle C. Neely revisits Thoreau's depiction of animals, asserting that "for Thoreau the naturalist, philosopher, and poet, anthropomorphism is not simply an act of imagination, it's frequently a fact of attention to the ontology of the non-human" (128)

In the final pages of this issue, a stunning cluster of poems by Christina Davis, Cecily Parks, and Douglas Storm testify to the continuing vitality of Thoreau's words for contemporary poetry.

It seems fitting that on the sesquicentennial of the publication of *The Maine Woods*, the writing and artwork gathered in this issue compels us again, perhaps with new urgency, to consider what it means "daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it," and how such instances of contact can (and do) transform our individual and collective lives.

Kristen Case

Farmington, Maine

July 8, 2014



Become a member of the Thoreau Society.