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“Blue Berries Always Surprise Us”: Thoreau, Happiness and Accident

DANIELLE FOLLETT

This article explores the relations between happiness, surprise and accident in Henry David Thoreau’s work. It discusses his epistemology of surprise, understood as a relational engagement with the world that constitutes a form of knowing, as well as his views of chance and accident, which he likewise sees as experiential and subjective. Thoreau’s encounters with natural phenomena during his daily walks are a source of happiness, enhanced by the surprise of unexpected discoveries, and despite undeniable personal grief, Thoreau’s writing abounds with expressions of sincere enjoyment.

Cet article explore les relations entre le bonheur, la surprise et l’accident dans l’œuvre de Henry David Thoreau. Il aborde son épistémologie de la surprise, envisagée comme un engagement relationnel avec le monde qui constitue une forme de connaissance, ainsi que ses idées sur le hasard et l’accident, qui pour lui reposent également sur l’expérience subjective. Ses rencontres avec les phénomènes naturels lors de ses promenades quotidiennes sont une source de bonheur, renforcé par la surprise : malgré son indéniable expérience de deuil, les écrits de Thoreau regorgent d’expressions de joie sincère.

Key Words:

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Mots clés:

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“A man asked me the other night,” wrote Thoreau in his journal in 1857, whether such and such persons were not as happy as anybody, being conscious, as I perceived, of much unhappiness himself and not aspiring to much more than an animal content. “Why!” said I, speaking to his condition, “the stones are happy, Concord River is happy, and I am happy too. When I took up a fragment of a walnut-shell this morning, I saw by its very grain and composition, its form and color, etc., that it was made for happiness. The most brutish and inanimate objects that are made suggest an everlasting and thorough satisfaction; they are the homes of content. Wood, earth, mould, etc., exist for joy. Do you think that Concord River would have continued to flow these millions of years by Clamshell Hill and round Hunt’s Island, if it had not been happy—if it had been miserable in its channel, tired of existence, and cursing its maker and the hour that it sprang?” (J 9:206-7)

In this remarkable statement Thoreau passes beyond the common affirmation that nature’s beauty brings us happiness, to assert that nature itself experiences joy. Thoreau would likely have found it anthropocentric if we were to label this a personification or a pathetic fallacy. Thoreau’s subtle humor is clearly present in this passage, though that should not be seen to undermine its sincerity.¹ Although he does not record the reaction of his interlocutor, the journal entry continues by remarking on the “merry little tree sparrows [...] [which] look very chipper [...]” (J 9:207). This is not an isolated expression. Indeed, Thoreau regularly states that he witnesses the universal happiness of natural entities. In 1841, in one of his earliest entries, he writes: “In the woods there is an inexpressible happiness— Their mirth is just [*sic*] repressed” (PJ 1:343). Walden pond “is the same liquid joy and happiness to itself and its Maker” (W 193). And in 1859: “the first and least audible sounds of awakened nature in the spring [...] [are] in part an expression of happiness, an ode that is sung and whose burden fills the air. It reminds me of the increased genialness of nature” (J 12:147-8). In exploring what Thoreau might mean by saying that joy is inherent in nature itself, our path will, perhaps unexpectedly, take us by way of his philosophy of surprise, and his thoughts on accident.

The pursuit of happiness is one of the main reasons that Thoreau is drawn to the woods. After several days surveying and drawing a plan, he writes in 1857, “I wish again to participate in the serenity of nature, to share the happiness of the river and the woods” (J 9:205). Nature is healing; time and again Thoreau evokes its restorative and salutary

¹ More odd is the contradiction between the statement that the man does not aspire “to much more than an animal content,” which presumably means simply eating and sleeping but not exploring any “higher” experiences, and the location of thoroughgoing happiness in every part of nature, including the animals. It would seem that a hint of the traditional scale of being, or the view widespread at the time that posits a hierarchy of existence with humanity at the top—rare in Thoreau—may inform this phrase.

qualities, and contact with nature is a form of medicine. “This stillness, solitude, wildness of nature is a kind of thoroughwort, or boneset, to my intellect. This is what I go out to seek” (J 9:209). The healing powers of contact with nature are a romantic commonplace, but Thoreau theorized and practiced this contact with an intensity which surpassed his contemporaries, and which perhaps matched his own personal need to heal from deep wounds. In 1842, Thoreau lost his beloved brother John, and in 1843, his close college friend, Charles Stearns Wheeler, with whom he had lived and travelled. He was deeply affected by the shipwreck in which Margaret Fuller Ossoli died in 1850, whose aftermath he witnessed directly, as well as by the ongoing strains in his friendship with Emerson. Branka Arsić has argued that his final twenty years of life were afflicted with grief, giving rise to a “theory of perpetual mourning” (35). Sadness and mourning were very familiar to Thoreau and informed his thought even when not explicitly mentioned. As Edward F. Mooney writes, “tragic undercurrents, figured both as primal sufferings and as literary coping with sufferings, course through Thoreau’s writing” (159).²

In light of this sorrow, let us turn back to our opening passage. Thoreau states that he is “speaking to the man’s condition,” his sadness, witnessed by one who sympathizes. Given the backdrop of melancholy in both the man’s and his own life, Thoreau’s emphatic words about happiness may be somewhat reminiscent of Keats’ sixfold repetition of “happy” in five lines of “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” an overemphasis on joy betraying a hint of its opposite:

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!

Keats’ poem is haunted by melancholy; the excessive repetition leads the reader to suspect that while the urn and its depictions are eternally happy, the absent speaker does not share their joy. Thoreau’s passage also hints subtly to a knowledge of sorrow underlying its repeated, even hyperbolic affirmations of natural gladness. However, Thoreau asserts directly that he, like nature, is also happy; unlike the distant speaker of Keats’ poem, he makes everyday contact with the revitalizing source of joy. Sorrow and happiness are not incompatible but may be experienced alternately or simultaneously; and despite undeniable grief, Thoreau states that joy is primordial. Thoreau’s stoic exercises involving daily contact with the joy of nature constitute a healing regime.

² Kristen Case has argued that Thoreau’s practices of walking, writing and charting, including the Kalendar project, were a response to loss (“Phenology” 260-1).

Happiness and Surprise

The vitality of the wilderness is a source not only of healing but of surprise. The joy of nature for Thoreau stems often from the novelties he finds there, even amid the woods he knows well. Above all, in his journal Thoreau registers variation, or regularity with change, and he is in perpetual wonderment at the fact of novelty in nature. His journal records many moments where happiness is associated with surprise. “No man ever makes a discovery—ever an observation of the least importance—but he is advertised of the fact by a joy that surprises him” (PJ 5:291). Indeed, surprise is one of the most important terms of the journal, especially after 1850, as he writes very often that he was surprised to see or hear a phenomenon.³ We might speak of surprise as a dominant mood in the journal, in the sense used by Russell B. Goodman (after Stanley Cavell) in his discussion of Emerson’s moods, and particularly that of surprise (45-51). Thoreau writes, “It is an agreeable surprise to find in the midst of a swamp so large and edible a fruit as an apple” (PJ 5:351); “The soapwort gentian cheers & surprises with solid bulbs of blue from the shade” (PJ 5:348). Surprise is sparked by a rare discovery or infrequent event; for example, after digging around in a muskrat’s nest, Thoreau writes that he was “incredulous” to find crystals in it: “I was surprised to see at this hour of a pleasant day what I took to be beautiful frost crystals of a rare form [...]. On examining them more closely—feeling & tasting them I found that it was not frost—but a clear crystalline dew in almost invisible drops [...].” (PJ 6:50). But significantly, not only rare events surprise Thoreau. “I hear the universal cock-crowing with surprise and pleasure as if I never heard it before” (PJ 5:106). “Dandelions—how surprising this bright yellow disk— Why study other hieroglyphics?” (PJ 6:88). The simplicity and intensity of his reaction show that the self-contained meaning of the dandelion hieroglyphic has been registered and enjoyed, if not deciphered. Thoreau has attuned himself so finely to the phenomena of nature that the most everyday objects and events are a source of astonishment and delight, recovering the wonder of a child. Concerning the common leek, he exclaims: “What a surprising and stately plant! (J 13:413). A month after remarking on his astonishment at dandelions, Thoreau writes, “Blue berries [*sic*] always surprise us” (PJ 6:237). This sentence is somewhat bewildering, seemingly extravagant, as it combines two theoretically incompatible ideas, regularity and surprise. And yet this link may be precisely part of Thoreau’s intention: to allow every ordinary sensation to be accorded the value of the

³ “He struggled to achieve what he considered a direct perceptual experience of natural events [...] open to the new, the surprising, or the improbable” (Robinson 183).

new, even when of the same or a similar object. Thoreau is astonished as he perceives the novelty in the infinite complexity of familiar phenomena such as blueberries as well as in their minute differences from all similar ones, or perhaps as he can never predict their flavor or ripeness. Thus through sensitive perception is the old reinvigorated, habits are dissolved and the familiar recovers its wildness. In a late journal entry, Thoreau explains: “The old naturalists were so sensitive and sympathetic to nature that they could be surprised by the ordinary events of life” (J 13:180). Thoreau elevates the experience of surprise into a principle that guides him, not through the wild but to it, including toward the wildness and newness of an everyday dandelion or blueberry.

Thoreau’s philosophy of perpetual surprise does not mean that he continuously forgets or sidelines the familiar, or that he approaches nature with the experience and senses of a newborn. In noticing subtle difference and novelty we perceive both regularity and variation, both the known and the unknown. He says that the old naturalists were sympathetic to nature, which implies familiarity. The surprise we may feel when perceiving subtle variations in a phenomenon is predicated upon a past encounter with it as well as the memory of that encounter, and this intimacy leads to sympathy. Presumably without sympathy all would be foreign to the perceiver, and the result would be simple incomprehension rather than surprise. This may be one reason that Thoreau did not especially seek “new worlds” outside of the Concord area: not only was it unnecessary to go far to find the wild, but the sensitivity to minute variation that he most appreciated could only be built up over years of experience in tasting one place, in sympathizing regularly with his natural neighbors.⁴ In “Walking,” Thoreau states similarly that “The highest that we can attain to is not Knowledge, but Sympathy with Intelligence. I do not know that this higher knowledge amounts to anything more definite than a novel and grand surprise on a sudden revelation of the insufficiency of all that we called Knowledge before [...]” (*Excursions* 215). Thoreau here would mean the divine intelligence immanent in nature. This is not a form of negative theology or an approach to higher intelligence through ignorance. Rather, the experience of surprise presupposes a knowledge that is surpassed. “But taste the world. & digest it,” Thoreau wrote in 1851 (PJ 4:158). Digesting would mean assimilating and remembering past experiences, which are not forgotten but superseded when we are surprised. Surprise is central to Thoreau’s philosophy of conscious tasting, recognizing novelty against the

⁴ On Thoreau’s epistemology of “neighboring,” see Case, “Knowing.”

background of familiarity, renewing the link between knowledge and tasting inherent in the Latin *sapere*.

Surprise is thus one of Thoreau's higher principles, guiding him toward the vital, the new and the wild. However, it is difficult to seek surprise in itself. One cannot expect the unexpected, nor plan to find the unforeseen. Just as Thoreau explores the meeting places of the regular and the novel in nature, likewise his methods of walking, perceiving and writing attempt to strike a balance between deliberation and accident. Despite his emphasis on surprise, Thoreau is quite clear that his habits of daily walking and writing are a form of disciplined and deliberate activity. He also states that perception itself must be intentional and oriented; otherwise it will miss those experiences that are most delightful and surprising. Comparing the naturalist to a hunter, he writes in 1856, "How much more game he will see who carries a gun, *i.e.* who goes to see it! Though you roam the woods all your days, you never will see by chance what he sees who goes on purpose to see it" (J 8:192). Purposeful seeing is an element of purposeful living. Thoreau further develops the analogy with the hunter in a later entry, describing the "bright-red tops or crescents of the scarlet oaks":

Complete trees standing exposed on the edges of the forest where you have never suspected them [...]. All this you will see, and much more, if you are prepared to see it,—if you *look* for it. [...] There is just as much beauty visible to us in the landscape as we are prepared to appreciate,—not a grain more. [...] Why, it takes a sharpshooter to bring down even such trivial game as snipes and woodcocks; he must take very particular aim, and know what he is aiming at. He would stand a very small chance if he fired at random into the sky, being told that snipes were flying there. And so it is with him that shoots at beauty. (J 11:284-5, 286)

This emphasis on intentionality would seem to enter into tension with the importance of surprise as the highest form of knowledge; it appears contradictory to say that one will see something unexpected only if one looks for it. With this apparent paradox, Thoreau seems to be attempting to theorize a delicate balance between deliberation and non-intentionality. Willful action is a necessary prerequisite for the conditions of possibility of surprise. He elaborates this view in 1856, where he recounts the story of going into a swamp in search of a particular kind of cranberry which he had heard of but never tasted. Not only did he gather the new cranberries, but also he discovered a hairy variety of wild huckleberry, "a new kind to [him]" (J 9:41), that gave him "a shock, a thrill, an agreeable surprise" (J 9:42-43). As he writes up his notes about the joy he felt upon finding "that wild hairy huckleberry, inedible as it was" (J 9:43), he reflects on the idea that the deliberate decision to go on the excursion was an essential first step to encountering the unexpected:

If you would really take a position outside the street and daily life of men, you must have deliberately planned your course [...]. I have always reaped unexpected and incalculable advantages from carrying out at last, however tardily, any little enterprise which my genius suggested to me long ago as a thing to be done [...]. Both a conscious and an unconscious life are good. Neither is good exclusively, for both have the same source. (J 9:36, 37)

Only deliberate action will put us in a position to see unexpected phenomena; as Thoreau says, we need both a conscious and an unconscious life. Seeking surprise directly would be impossible, but one may actively foster the conditions for the possibility of astonishment. Random, inadvertent wandering, or worse, the simple, unconscious repetition of habit, will very seldom yield the hairy fruit of surprise. Thoreau is very much a philosopher of willful, conscious action; it suffices to remember one of his most famous lines from *Walden*: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately [...].” (W 90). Purposeful walking allows him to witness and register the unexpected, infinite variations of his neighborhood. Thoreau thus seeks a balance between discipline and openness, conscious and unconscious activity, purpose and surprise.

Surprise and Accident

This balance forms the context in which we should understand Thoreau’s philosophy of surprise, as well as the role of accident and chance in his writings. He sometimes describes his surprise discoveries as having happened by accident—that is, unintentionally—and he frequently says that he “chanced to” see or hear a certain phenomenon. In 1850, as he was beginning his new habit of daily walking and writing, he noted: “There is a place whither I should walk today though oftenest I fail to find when by accident I ramble into it, great is my delight” (PJ 3:142) The accidentality of the discovery enhances the happiness it procures. In 1858, he discovers a very tall aspen that he had never seen before: “It is perhaps the largest of its species that I know. It was by merest accident that I stumbled on it [...].” (J 11:268). Interestingly, Thoreau transfers the accidentality of his experience of discovery into his conception of the writing process, foregrounding the experience of disjunction associated with surprise findings. He evokes this explicitly even in one of his earliest journal entries: “[My Journal] is always a chance scrawl and commemorates some accident—as great as earthquake or eclipse” (PJ 1: 259). Thoreau here puns on the word accident, meaning both an unintentional action and a catastrophe. The content of the journal, a “chance scrawl,” is unforeseen in advance, like the surprise encounters of the field. In a later entry he writes:

Thoughts accidentally thrown together become a frame—in which more may be developed—& exhibited. [...] Having by chance recorded a few disconnected thoughts and then brought them into juxtaposition—they suggest a whole new field in which it was possible to labor & to think. (PJ 4:277-8)

The order of the thoughts in the journal was not chosen deliberately but was guided only by temporal sequence, as opposed to a constructed essay on a single topic. This reflects Thoreau's decision around this time to consider the journal a work in itself, and not a simple warehouse for thoughts to be used in later publications; the journal becomes a deliberate work that incorporates an element of unintentionality or accident. Critics have remarked on Thoreau's welcoming of the accidental aspects of writing, which makes him a forerunner of certain post-war theorists of the aesthetics of chance. Sharon Cameron writes, "Thoreau strives toward a randomness of impressions" (50); François Specq comments that the poetics of the journal "accepts contingency rather than aspires to formal necessity" (224); and Laura Dassow Walls states that Thoreau "wove [chance] into the fabric of his life and journal" (224). Thoreau's embrace of an element of inadvertence in the journal seems to reflect his process of discovery and his enjoyment of surprise in the field. He states that thoughts arranged this way "are now allied to life" (PJ 4:296). He writes: "There is always some accident in the best things, whether thoughts or expressions or deeds. The memorable thought, the happy expression, the admirable deed are only partly ours. [...] We must walk consciously only part way toward our goal, and then leap in the dark to our success" (J 12:39). In a late passage Thoreau develops these ideas further; here Thoreau brings together surprise and pleasure as well as sympathy with the higher intelligence:

I am surprised that my affirmations or utterances come to me ready-made,—not fore-thought,—so that I occasionally awake in the night simply to let fall ripe a statement which I had never consciously considered before, and as surprising and novel and agreeable to me as anything can be. As if we only thought by sympathy with the universal mind, which thought while we were asleep. (J 13:238)

Again, sympathy with universal intelligence yields surprise. The importance of inadvertence and "ready-made" production for Thoreau may be seen in his statement: "I think that the one word which will explain the Shakspeare miracle—is unconsciousness" (PJ 4:294).

In these passages, accidentality, like surprise, is a subjective phenomenon; it is linked to unintentional action in the writing process. In the rare passages in which the terms chance and accident are related to natural and not human activity, Thoreau seems to indicate the idea of subjectively unpredictable or unknown causes, rather than the positive principle of ontological chance, causelessness or absolute unpredictability. When using a noun, Thoreau

appears to prefer the term accident to chance. The former is most often used in its common sense to mean an event with catastrophic consequences and with identifiable though unforeseeable causes, though it is sometimes used with more neutral events. He writes in “The Dispersion of Seeds” that oak groves have arisen due to an unexpected cause, animals which hide acorns for future food: “Thus, one would say that our oak forests, vast and indispensable as they are, were produced by a kind of accident, that is, by the failure of animals to reap the fruit of their labors” (*Faith* 130). In another example, he speaks of the origin of “wild apple pastures—where the trees stand without order having many if not most of them sprung up by accident or from pomace sown at random [...]” (PJ 6:192). Here Thoreau may mean that the origin of the wild apple orchard is accidental in opposition to deliberately planted ones, as he does not tend to say that wild huckleberries, for example, grow at random. As for chance, Thoreau uses the term mainly as a verb and an adjective, again in conjunction with events having unknown or unpredictable causes, such as the placement of trees “where the wind chanced to let the seed lie at last” (J 13:114). Used as an adjective, chance seems to mean rare or unexpected: “I am on the alert for the first signs of spring, to hear the chance note of some arriving bird [...]” (W 302). The birdsong cannot be said to arise by chance, but in the early spring it is rare and unpredictable. On an old stone wall in disuse, Thoreau writes that he is “surprised to see slight stones still lying one upon another as the builder placed them while this huge oak has grown up from a chance acorn on the soil” (PJ 3:136). And on the discovery of an impressive appletree unknown to its owner, he exclaims, “Who knows but this chance wild fruit may be equal to those kinds which the Romans and the English have so prized [...]” (J 10:136). In these last two examples, the presence of the oak and appletree are unexpected in the context of some human situation: the oak has arisen from the ruins of a wall, and the wild fruit is unappreciated even by the owner of the land. It would seem that the presence of chance in these examples might be explained by the disjunction between the phenomenon and its human context, which enhances its surprising quality. There seems to be no evidence that Thoreau’s use of the concepts of chance and accident reveals a principle of objective indeterminism or ontological chance, but these ideas appear rather to participate in his philosophy of subjective surprise, or human, experiential unpredictability.⁵ Thoreau’s philosophy of surprise as well as his conception of chance and accident should be understood in the context of his subjective, relational or

⁵ Thoreau had “a dysteleological understanding of creation, which [...] necessarily and extravagantly surpasses the human mind’s capacity to anticipate” (Leach 234).

embodied epistemology analyzed recently by various critics.⁶ Surprise is a key element of this relational way of knowing, as it emphasizes both the mode of perception with its embodied reaction of happy astonishment, and the undeniable particularity of the nonhuman entity encountered. We might thus speak not only of a mood but an epistemology of surprise. Understood as “a novel and grand surprise,” higher knowledge is grounded in the experience of perception and engagement with the world’s dynamism. Thoreau’s conception of chance appears to be based in his epistemology of surprise rather than constituting a philosophy of ontological indeterminacy. Unpredictability is a phenomenological experience and not an objective attribute; an event is unpredictable to the situated subject and not absolutely. Indeed, Thoreau clearly states that nature is governed by laws, which would include that of causality. “Next to us the grandest laws are continually being executed,” he writes in *Walden* (W 134). And, “Now we know only a few laws, and our result is vitiated, not, of course, by any confusion or irregularity in Nature, but by our ignorance of essential elements in the calculation” (W 290). For Thoreau, confusion or irregularity in nature, or that which today we would likely call indeterminacy or chance, does not objectively exist but is a subjective impression due to our lack of understanding of natural laws. As David Robinson writes, “Thoreau consistently tries to see a particular fact or event not as a random or unique occurrence but as indicative of a more comprehensive idea or law” (109). Just as he seeks a balance between conscious and unconscious human activity, he sees that in nature both natural law and novel particularity play an equal role.

Accident and Happiness

However, although he understands that nature’s processes are governed by natural law, Thoreau especially enjoys particularity, novelty and variation. He clearly aspires to heighten the experience of surprise and the revelation of the insufficiency of all previous knowledge, provoked by such unexpected discoveries. “Let me not be in haste to detect the *universal law*, let me see more clearly a particular instance” (PJ 4:223). He desires to reside on the outer edge of knowledge; he especially savors lingering in the borderland between knowledge and novelty, where surprising phenomena happen to be found. This brings us back to happiness. He would have been pleased to note the etymological link between happiness and happenstance, or things that happen to occur. The archaic word *hap* meant

⁶ See especially Peck 66-78 (“relational seeing” 66), Walls (“relational knowing,” “epistemology of contact” 147), Robinson 182-5 (“participatory observation” 183), Furtak (“Thoreau’s representation of the world as emphatically *not* value-neutral can be viewed as a contribution to phenomenology” 120) and Case “Knowing as Neighboring” and “Radical Empiricism” (“relational epistemology” 194).

chance, luck, good fortune, or simply event; happy meant fortunate or prosperous before coming to mean very glad. Thoreau plays on the root of this word in the passage cited above: “There is always some accident in the best things [...]. The memorable thought, the happy expression, the admirable deed are only partly ours” (J 12:39).⁷ Thoreau’s association of accident with happiness is surprisingly thorough-going. Even natural accidents normally considered tragic because they involve a loss of life are redeemed by the “universal innocence” of nature’s ways. He remarks on the universal beauty and health of nature despite the death of individuals, and delights in the fact that nature’s abundance is so infinite that accidents can be absorbed without loss:

I love to see that Nature is so rife with life that myriads can be afforded to be sacrificed and suffered to prey on one another; that tender organizations can be so serenely squashed out of existence like pulp,—tadpoles which herons gobble up, and tortoises and toads run over in the road; and that sometimes it has rained flesh and blood! With the liability to accident, we must see how little account is to be made of it. The impression made on a wise man is that of universal innocence. Poison is not poisonous after all, nor are any wounds fatal. (W 318)

The rhetoric here shows that Thoreau deeply enjoys the idea that no accident is truly tragic, and that nature is fundamentally sanguine, even when blood is spilled. This is an extraordinary statement of optimism, akin to our opening passage. Nature—the same nature that Thoreau turns to for solace and healing—is a destroyer, and yet the elemental quality of nature is innocence. Nature knows no tragedy. Despite its violence, nature is ultimately harmonious; it subsumes individual suffering into universal health, the sad into the glad. This is likely what Thoreau meant by saying that joy is inherent in nature itself; in its continuous renewal, whatever happens in nature is happy. It is surely true that his pursuit of happiness in nature is in part motivated by his need to heal from grief, but when we read the extraordinary abundance and variation of his expressions of pleasure and surprise at his discoveries there, it is clear that he also goes walking simply to increase his enjoyment, accumulated during his everyday encounters with nature and overflowing in his journal. Such is Thoreau’s stoic epicureanism.

⁷ He would also have appreciated the etymology of random, which stems from the Old French *randir*, to run wild, giving us the modern French *randonner*, to hike. The deliberate part of his search for surprise is sometimes limited to simply deciding to go for a walk, but without intentional direction; when confronting the uninviting weather of November he writes that “I have to force myself to it often and at random. But then I am often unexpectedly compensated, and the thinnest yellow light of November is more warming and exhilarating than any wine they tell of [...].” (J 10:203-4).

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