

Notes & Queries

by Brent Ranalli

Congratulations to Evie Shockley for being selected as a finalist for the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Of her book *semiautomatic*, one reviewer writes: "Evie Shockley suggests that poetry is necessary to seeing, surviving with equilibrium and wholeness in this period's vital and precarious junctures. The poems in *semiautomatic* are on fire." Ms. Shockley's poem "interlude: the west coast" appeared in the Summer 2016 issue of the *Bulletin*.

You will notice that the "Additions" is unusually long this spring. This is the harvest of a bumper crop of writings from Thoreau's bicentennial year. The anniversary was an occasion for conferences as well: News has arrived of events not only in France (this issue) and Japan (issue #299), but also in India—and not one or two, but three of them. On February 4 of this year, as reported by **Bijay Kumar Das**, the Researchers' Association of Odisha held a "National Seminar on the Relevance of Thoreau, Gandhi and Tolstoy to The Twenty-first Century" in the city of Cuttack, with an inaugural address by Professor Rupin W. Desai. Then, on February 17, over 400 gathered at Gurukul Mahila Arts and Commerce College in Porbandar, Gujarat for a one-day conference on "Henry David Thoreau and Indian Thought." The indispensable Professor Desai provided the keynote at this event as well, speaking (according to a summary provided by **Dr. Anupam R. Nagar**) about "how deeply the American transcendentalists were influenced by Indian philosophical thought. In particular, he spoke at length on Thoreau's ideas about civil disobedience and his advocacy of 'simple living and high thinking' that greatly influenced Mahatma Gandhi who went on to coin the term Satyagraha." Finally, on March 15-17 the University of Delhi's Bharati College and the India International Centre hosted a three-day conference in Delhi on

"Thoreau and the Transcendentalists: Their Philosophy and Related Concerns," which included, according to **Robert Cochran**, in addition to keynotes, plenaries, and panel discussions, a bilingual, student-produced dramatic performance, "A Night in Jail."

From Iran, **Ali Taghdarreh** reports that 35 years after first being electrified by words of Thoreau heard on a shortwave pocket radio, spoken by Phil Irwin of Voice of America, he was invited to share his thoughts on Persian classical literature, *Walden*, and Thoreau with millions of his countrymen and -women on Iranian National Radio. Interviewed on a program called "Arts Café," produced by Mrs. Zohre Sarbazi, he spoke of his travels in the U.S. and his conversations with Americans. "I threw a few pebbles into Thoreau's pond in Iran. Who knows how far every single ripple will travel?"

The "Thoreau-Alcott" house on Main Street in Concord, in which the Thoreau family lived from 1840 until the early 1870s, is on the market (see back cover). A Thoreauvian on social media comments: "How about we all chip in and start a commune?" Henry would no doubt feel honored—and decline to join.

Mark Sullivan writes: "I just came across Benjamin Reiss's *Wild Nights* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), which deals with the mysteries surrounding sleep. Reiss tells the reader that Thoreau, who suffered from insomnia, is his 'guiding spirit and lead witness.' Reiss contrasts Honoré de Balzac's habit of drinking large amounts of coffee while he wrote, with Thoreau's avoidance of artificial stimulants and his claim that communion with nature was a better stimulant."

In her award-winning *Anesthesia: The Gift of Oblivion and the Mystery of Consciousness* (Berkeley, Calif.: Counterpoint, 2017), Australian journalist Kate Cole-Adams quotes "American philosopher-poet Henry David Thoreau," fresh from a visit to the dentist, on the recreational potential of anesthetics: "If you have an inclination to travel, take the ether: you go beyond the farthest star." **Michael Gionfriddo**, who brought this to our attention, also observes that the website Cole-Adams got the quote from (www.general-anesthesia.com) is a project



Photograph courtesy of Dr. Anupam R. Nagar

L to R: Dr. Anupam R. Nagar (Principal, Gurukul Mahila Arts & Commerce College, Porbandar); Prof. Kamal Mehta (Department of English, Saurashtra University, Rajkot); Prof. Rupin Walter Desai (Former Professor of English, Delhi University, Delhi); Mrs. Jyoti Desai (wife of Prof. Desai); Prof. Prashant Sinha (Former Professor of English, Pune University, Pune) & Shri Suresh Kothari (Honorary Secretary, Arya Kanya Gurukul Trust, Porbandar)