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## **Roundtable Review of *The Passage to Cosmos* by Laura Dassow Walls**

Hamblin, Jacob D., ed.

Hamblin, Jacob D. (ed.), Roundtable Review of *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* by Laura Dassow Walls. *H-Environment Roundtable Reviews* 2, no. 4 (2012) [www.h-net.org/~environ/roundtables/env-roundtable-2-4.pdf](http://www.h-net.org/~environ/roundtables/env-roundtable-2-4.pdf).

What does it mean to describe a worldview as Humboldtian? Prussian aristocrat Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) traveled extensively, gathered specimens, produced drawings, formulated grand geophysical theories, and never shied away from describing Earth’s processes on a global scale. While his brother Wilhelm lent his name to “Humboldtian education,” Alexander is associated with “Humboldtian science.” In *The Passage to Cosmos*, literary scholar Laura Dassow Walls shows how Humboldt the explorer produced his unitary worldview. Throughout the book is a sense that the division between the humanistic and scientific traditions is itself an unfortunate historical development. It seems appropriate that the book itself easily crosses over stiff academic boundaries, not just between science and the humanities, but also between literary criticism and history.

(Text adapted from Jacob D. Hamblin’s introduction to the Roundtable Review.)

H-Environment’s Roundtable Book Reviews provide multiple perspectives on books and allow the authors the opportunity to respond. This unique dialogue can be a valuable insight into recent scholarship.

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**Related links:**

- H-Environment Roundtable Reviews  
<http://www.h-net.org/~environ/roundtables.html>
- *The Passage to Cosmos* on the University of Chicago Press website  
<http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/P/bo6732997.html>

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- <http://www.h-net.org/~environ/roundtables/env-roundtable-2-4.pdf>