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A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS:
AN EXPERIMENT IN THE COMMUNICATION OF
TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE.

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ROSEMARY WHITAKER

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS:

AN EXPERIMENT IN THE COMMUNICATION
OF TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
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by

ROSEMARY WHITAKER

Norman, Oklahoma

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APPROVED BY

Bruce C. Brown

V. A. Elson

J. L. Kendall

Wm. B. Smith

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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DISSERTATION

A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS:

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OF TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE

Since its publication in 1849, critics have been prone to dismiss Thoreau's A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers as a poorly constructed work, possessing little literary value of its own but serving as a learning experience through which Thoreau proceeded to the composition of Walden. But since recent scholarship has established the fact that, in writing A Week as well as in composing Walden, Thoreau was a careful writer, deliberately drawing his ideas from his Journal, then working them into lectures, essays, and finally into books, it has become necessary to ponder the implications of the fact that he was well aware of the unorthodox structure of his book and of the effect it would have upon readers. It follows, then, that an understanding of A Week, and a just evaluation of it, must consider not only the facts of his unusual method of construction, but also his motivation for such a method and his purpose behind it.

An examination of the influences of Harvard, of Orestes Brownson, Emerson, and the Transcendental Club, and an analysis of certain college essays and other writings done prior to and during the composition of A Week, trace Thoreau's development as a writer and establish his motivation and purpose. In his art as well as his life, he embraced the Transcendental philosophy and put it to the test. His life was an experiment in living according to Transcendental principles to discover if they could sustain a man. His art was an experiment in the communication of this experience through the literary process of transforming his Transcendental principles into aesthetic theory.

At the heart of Transcendental philosophy, and at the heart of Thoreau's literary method, was the principle of organic creation. Nature revealed to him that a creation was the result of an orderly, conscious plan in the mind of the creator, and of an intuitive process which mirrored the creator's inner sources of inspiration. Thoreau followed nature's lesson in writing A Week. He created an orderly

plan by patterning his work around a two-weeks' voyage he had made with his brother John; then, transcending the autobiographical level, he made of this voyage an archetypal journey into the realm of the mind and transformed himself, through the development of several key symbols which enabled him to universalize his own experience, into a mythical hero in search of self-identity.

In a further application of the principle of organic creation, Thoreau patterned his work around the simultaneous journeying of the body and the mind. Through his senses he perceived the world of nature, but simultaneously his mind responded to nature. As his physical self engaged in the literal act of journeying, his mind carried out its own exploration into the infinite.

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A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS:

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CHAPTER ONE

THE FORMULATION OF THE EXPERIMENT

On the afternoon of Saturday, August 31, 1839, few citizens of Concord, Massachusetts, took note of the departure on a river voyage of the brothers Henry and John Thoreau. Indeed there was no reason for the townspeople to give particular attention to this undertaking by two of their youthful members, for neither brother had achieved any special prominence in the community. Henry had received a Harvard degree in 1837, but in the two years since he had shown little likelihood that he would succeed in a profession suitable for a college graduate--the law, medicine, the ministry, or, as a last resort, teaching. It was true that, in making the voyage, he and John were taking leave of their private school, but it was quite an unusual school with a demonstrated disdain for tradition that afforded it little chance of longevity. Indeed, Henry had shown his inability to work within the established profession by walking out on his first teaching job after two weeks because he could not practice his own methods. The fact that the brothers had devoted so much energy from spring to the time of departure

to the building and equipping of their boat was evidence of their propensity for devoting time and effort to frivolous occupations.

During the evening of August thirtieth, the brothers had loaded their boat at the door of their home with expectations of leaving early the next morning, but rain delayed their departure until afternoon. When the sun broke through the clouds, they moved their heavily-laden boat, equipped with wheels for hauling around falls and rapids, half a mile to the river's bank. There they removed the wheels, slid the boat into the water, fired their guns in a salute to the few friends who were seeing them off, and set out on a two-weeks' voyage.

The brothers passed from the concord to the Merrimack River by noon on Sunday and followed it until Thursday. Sometimes one of them would go ashore to look over the country, visit farmhouses, or hunt Indian relics while the other tended the boat. There was much to occupy the attention of the boattender, for many boatmen plied the river and often hailed the strange craft. When both the brothers were tired of rowing, they would beach the boat and swim, eat, read from their one book, John Hayward's The New England Gazetteer, or simply rest and engage in their separate contemplations.

On Thursday, September fifth, the brothers left their boat at Hooksett, New Hampshire, and began a trip by foot and by stage to the White Mountains. They ascended Mount Washington, the highest of the White Mountains, the following Tuesday,

made the return trip to the boat on Wednesday and Thursday, and started down-river at noon on Thursday. On Friday, with a cold wind from the northwest spurring them on, they traveled fifty miles and beached their boat at Concord late in the evening.

Thus the uneventful journey came to an end, recorded only in the memory of the brothers and in Henry's diary. Yet Henry used his account of the journey as the nucleus of his first book, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, which was published ten years after the voyage. There is no evidence that he undertook the journey for the purpose of gathering materials for future literary endeavors, and it seems unlikely that, at the time, Henry and John considered it as any more than a welcome interlude in their schoolteaching. It was, then, the events and influences of the intervening years that were responsible for the eventual creation of a book with the journey as its framework.

Thoreau's published Journal for the years relevant to A Week (1839-1849) shows that as early as 1840 he was working with his record of the trip, for many of his entries during this year, especially those during June, are transcripts he made from his original records. He did the bulk of the writing, however, between the time of John's death in January, 1842, and the end of his stay at Walden in September, 1847. Yet he was still making revisions and additions in 1848. Carl F. Hovde, whose unpublished dissertation is the

best study to date of the process by which Thoreau composed his book, states that there were definitely two and probably three separate drafts, each of which Thoreau may have considered complete.¹

The first evidence that Thoreau's friends in the Transcendental circle knew of his contemplated book is a statement by Margaret Fuller in her letter to him on October 18, 1841. As editor of the Dial, one of the periodicals established by the Transcendental group, she had been corresponding with him on literary matters since its founding in 1840. In this particular letter, devoted to a criticism of a poem he had submitted, she added a postscript regarding a "pencilled paper" Emerson had given her. After defending the forthright expression of deeply felt emotions, she concluded, "Will you not send me some other records of the good week."²

By the end of 1844, Thoreau had completed much of an early draft.³ Also by this date fifteen items which became

¹Carl F. Hovde, "The Writing of Henry David Thoreau's A Week: A Study in Textual Materials and Techniques" (unpublished dissertation, Princeton University, 1956), p. xi.

²Walter Harding and Carl Bode, eds., The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau (New York: New York University Press, 1958), p. 57.

³In chap. 3 of his dissertation, Hovde describes this early draft, which is labeled H.M. 956 in the Huntington Library. Much of it is printed in vol. 1 of F. B. Sanborn's The First and Last Journeys of Thoreau (Boston: The Bibliophile Society, 1905).

a part of A Week had appeared in the Dial.¹ During his years at Walden Pond, Thoreau continued to work on the book and apparently was nearing completion by the middle of 1846, for on July sixteenth, Emerson wrote his friend, Charles King Newcomb: "In a short time if Wiley & Putnam smile, you shall have Henry Thoreau's 'Excursion on Concord & Merrimack rivers,' a seven days' voyage in as many chapters, pastoral as Isaak Walton, spicy as flagroot, broad & deep as Menu. He read me some of it under an oak on the river bank the other afternoon, and invigorated me."² Publication did not take place in a short time, however, and in the early months of 1847 Emerson was still anticipating the book's appearance. On February twenty-seventh, he wrote Thomas Carlyle, "You are yet to read a good American book made by this Thoreau, & which is shortly to be printed, he says."³ And on the twenty-eighth of the same month, he repeated the expectation to Margaret Fuller: "Henry Thoreau's paper on Carlyle is printed in Graham's Magazine: and his Book, 'Excursion on Concord & Merrimack rivers' will soon be ready."⁴

¹These fifteen items are listed by Raymond Adams in "The Bibliographical History of Thoreau's A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," Papers of the Bibliographical Association of America, XLIII (1949), 40.

²The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. by Ralph L. Rusk (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), III, 338.

³Ibid., III, 376.

⁴Ibid., III, 377.

Finally, in the spring of 1847, Thoreau must have completed a draft which he desired to publish, for on March twelfth Emerson wrote Evert Duyckinck, whose firm, Wiley & Putnam, was contemplating a series of American books to counteract the flow of English books on the American market.

Mr. Henry D. Thoreau of this town has just completed a book of extraordinary merit, which he wishes to publish. It purports to be the account of 'An excursion on the Concord & Merrimack Rivers,' which he made some time ago in company with his brother, in a boat built by themselves. . . . I have represented to Mr. Thoreau, that his best course would undoubtedly be, to send the book to you, to be printed by Wiley & Putnam, that it may have a good edition & wide publishing. . . . Would you like to print this book into your American library? It is quite ready, & the whole can be sent you at once. It has never yet been offered to any publisher. If you wish to see the MS. I suppose Mr Thoreau would readily send it to you. I am only desirous that you should propose to him good terms, & give his book the great advantages of being known which your circulation ensures.¹

Duyckinck replied that he would read the manuscript, but it was May before Thoreau sent it.² Then on June fourteenth Thoreau requested that his draft be returned to him for revision.³ On July third he sent the manuscript back to Duyckinck,⁴ and when he did not receive an immediate reply, he sent a letter of inquiry on July twenty-seventh.

¹Ibid., III, 384.

²Correspondence of Thoreau, p. 181.

³Ibid., p. 173. In a personal letter of March 4, 1969, Mr. Harding stated that this letter is misdated in the Correspondence of Thoreau. It should read June 14, 1847, instead of January 14, 1847.

⁴Ibid., p. 184.

It is a little more than three weeks since I returned my mss. sending a letter by mail at the same time for security, so I suppose that you have received it. If Messrs Wiley & Putnam are not prepared to give their answer now, will you please inform me what further delay if any, is unavoidable, that I may determine whether I had not better carry it elsewhere--for time is of great consequence to me.¹

Thoreau's letter of August twenty-eighth to James Munroe & Co. is evidence not only that Duyckinck had not responded favorably, but also that an arrangement Munroe had offered was not satisfactory.² Then on November fourteenth, Thoreau revealed to Emerson the fate of his manuscript at the hands of not just Wiley & Putnam and James Munroe & Co., but of other publishers as well.

I suppose you will like to hear of my book, though I have nothing worth writing about it. Indeed, for the last month or two I have forgotten it, but shall certainly remember it again. Wiley & Putnam, Munroe, the Harpers, and Crosby & Nichols have all declined printing it with the least risk to themselves; but Wiley & Putnam will print it in their series, and any of them, anywhere, at my risk. If I liked the book well enough, I should not delay; but for the present I am indifferent.³

Despite the additional efforts of Emerson's minister friend, W. H. Furness, with Philadelphia publishers, and of William Emerson with New York publishers, no one had been willing to take a risk on Thoreau's book. His letter to Emerson is a proud but futile attempt to hide his disappointment.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 185.

³Ibid., p. 191.

Thus delay was forced upon Thoreau, and he continued to revise and enlarge his book. Early in 1848 he made a significant addition in the lengthy essay on friendship, which he inserted in the "Wednesday" chapter. Emerson urged him to publish at his own expense¹ and instructed his wife Lidian to add her encouragement.² Despite his feigned indifference, publication did remain on Thoreau's mind, as he revealed to James Elliot Cabot on March 8, 1848: "My book, fortunately, did not find a publisher ready to undertake it, and you can imagine the effect of delay on an author's estimate of his own work. However, I like it well enough to mend it, and shall look at it again directly when I have dispatched some other things."³ Indeed, at least a month before this writing, Thoreau had sent the manuscript to Ticknor & Co., where, again, he received the offer to print at his own expense.⁴ He then turned to James Munroe & Co. a second time and accepted their offer to let him pay the cost of printing out of sales with a guarantee that they would receive full payment.⁵ He received proofs late in 1848, but they were so

¹Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, ed., Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1894), p. 187.

²Letters of Emerson, IV, 16.

³Correspondence of Thoreau, p. 210.

⁴Ibid., pp. 237-38.

⁵The Writings of Henry David Thoreau, ed. by F. B. Sanborn and Bradford Torrey, Walden Edition (20 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1906), XI, 521.

badly done that he requested over a thousand corrections.

Finally, in May of 1849, A Week was published.

The book did not sell and left Thoreau in debt. More than four years later, on October 27, 1853, he recorded in his Journal:

For a year or two past, my publisher, falsely so called, has been writing from time to time to ask what disposition should be made of the copies of "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers" still on hand, and at last suggesting that he had use for the room they occupied in his cellar. So I had them all sent to me here, and they have arrived to-day by express, filling the man's wagon,--706 copies out of an edition of 1000 which I bought of Munroe four years ago and have been ever since paying for, and have not quite paid for yet. The wares are sent to me at last, and I have an opportunity to examine my purchase. They are something more substantial than fame, as my back knows, which has borne them up two flights of stairs to a place similar to that to which they trace their origin. Of the remaining two hundred and ninety and odd, seventy-five were given away, the rest sold. I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself. Is it not well that the author should behold the fruits of his labor? My works are piled up on one side of my chamber half as high as my head, my opera omnia. This is authorship; these are the work of my brain.¹

In typical fashion, he asserted that, despite this publishing failure, he continued to receive immeasurable profit from his work.

Nevertheless, in spite of this result, sitting beside the inert mass of my works, I take up my pen to-night to record what thought or experience I may have had, with as much satisfaction as ever. Indeed, I believe that this result is more inspiring and better for me than if a thousand had bought my wares. It affects my privacy less and leaves me freer.²

¹Ibid., XI, 459.

²Ibid., XI, 460.

Then on November twenty-eighth of the same year, he noted that he had paid off his debt.

Settled with J. Munroe & Co., and on a new account placed twelve of my books with him on sale. I have paid him directly out of pocket since the book was published two hundred and ninety dollars and taken his receipt for it. This does not include postage on proof-sheets, etc., etc. I have received from other quarters about fifteen dollars. This has been the pecuniary value of the book.¹

Thus at a time when books of travel were normally welcomed by a substantial number of readers, Thoreau's book about his voyage was a publishing failure; but essential to an understanding of the causes of its failure is the fact that, while the narrative of the voyage is the unifying feature of the book, A Week is not a travelogue. Of foremost significance is the fact that the account of the journey does not make up the major portion of the book. The narrative comprises approximately thirty percent of the content; the rest consists of poetry and essays by Thoreau as well as selections from the works of other writers. Thoreau gathered the contents from various sources and then deliberately constructed a work of diverse parts which he saw as a whole. Hovde has determined that there must have been three bodies of material from which he worked: (1) his record of the journey itself, perhaps extracted from his original Journal, and at least partially represented by an extant notebook in the Morgan Library; (2) his notebooks, published as the early volumes of his Journal, which are transcriptions from his first Journals,

¹Ibid., XI, 521.

carefully edited by Thoreau to be a record of his significant ideas and contemplations; (3) his literary commonplace books containing quotations gleaned from his reading beginning with his college years.¹

Thoreau's method of literary development started with the idea or collection of ideas he had recorded in his Journal. Some of these ideas he incorporated directly into essays, but others he first used in lectures, then worked into essays, and finally into books. For example, from his Journal material he prepared a lecture for the Concord Lyceum on March 25, 1845, entitled "Concord River." He then incorporated this material into the first two chapters of A Week. His lecture on ancient poets, which he gave before the Concord Lyceum on November 29, 1843, was published in the Dial, and later he partially incorporated it into A Week.² In an undated fragment of his Journal, he described his own method:

From all points of the compass, from the earth beneath and the heavens above, have come these inspirations and been entered duly in the order of their arrival in the journal. Thereafter, when the time arrived, they were winnowed into lectures, and again, in due time, from lectures into essays.³

¹Hovde discusses this material in his introduction and in chapters one and two of his dissertation.

²For further information concerning Thoreau's lectures and his use of lecture material in his essays and books, see Walter Harding, "A Check List of Thoreau's Lectures," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LII (1948), 78-87; and Walter Harding, "The Influence of Thoreau's Lecturing upon His Writing," BNYPL, LX (1956), 74-80.

³Writings of Thoreau, VII, 413.

There is, then, ample evidence that Thoreau was a careful, deliberate writer who worked and reworked his materials, searching for just the right word and the right phrase in the order that he deemed most effective.¹ Nevertheless, his method of construction was uniquely his own and frequently resulted in a lack of traditional order and unity. Especially is this true of A Week; and because the structure has baffled the majority of its critics, they have been inclined to dismiss it as a first book unworthy of careful, critical appraisal. The fact remains, however, that Thoreau composed the final drafts of the book during his Walden years and that it is not a collection of juvenilia, that the book he composed was the book he set out to write, and that any just criticism of it must consider not only the demonstrable facts of his unusual method of construction, but also his motivation for such a method and his purposes behind it.

In A Week, Thoreau uses his account of his journey as a framework upon which he places his varied writings, and he condenses the voyage from two weeks to one so that the days of the week become the units of organization. The first chapter, entitled "Concord River," is an introductory section in which he establishes the nature and the purpose of his voyage. He precedes the chapter with selections from Ovid and Emerson and includes one of his own poems in it. Then

¹Through his examination of the extant manuscripts of A Week, in chapters three, four, and five of his dissertation, Fovde has clearly demonstrated the high quality of Thoreau's literary workmanship.

in the "Saturday" chapter, he begins his narrative with the brothers' departure from Concord. The careful attention that he gives to the landscape on this first day is evidence of his immediate curiosity about the new country that he is viewing. The chapter also includes lines by Quarles, Plutarch, Emerson, and Chaucer, a couple of stanzas from a Robin Hood ballad, four of Thoreau's own poems and his essay on freshwater fish.¹ In the "Sunday" chapter the brothers cover twelve miles and start their way up the Merrimack River. It is a beautiful Sabbath, and in his writing, Thoreau engages in his own act of worship. In addition to the narrative, the chapter contains over forty excerpts from other authors' works, eleven of Thoreau's poems, ranging from couplets to the six-stanza poem beginning "Low in the eastern sky," and essays on mythology and religion, books, poets and their poetry. The narrative of the "Monday" chapter is Thoreau's account of the brothers' explorations ashore interspersed with some of the history of the area. He ends the chapter by telling of their camp that night away from the settlements but near enough for them to hear dogs baying and a drum calling young men to muster. Thoreau makes over twenty insertions from the works of others in this chapter and includes ten of his own poems, an essay on reformers, a comparison of Eastern and Western religions and religious and philosophical writings,

¹Identification of the works by other authors is made by Ernest E. Leisy in "Sources of Thoreau's Borrowings in A Week," American Literature, XVIII (1946), 37-44.

and a brief consideration of the effects of time and sound on his perception. Then in the "Tuesday" chapter he relates the events of a day which begins long before daybreak and takes the brothers as far upriver as Bedford, New Hampshire. Thoreau tells of meetings with canal-boatmen and other inhabitants of the area and also continues to give careful attention to the landscape. In addition, he includes in the chapter his account of his previous walking trip to Saddleback Mountain in Massachusetts, his narration of a previous journey when he met the primitive man he calls Rice, over a dozen poetic quotations by others, including his own translations of eleven lyrics by Anacreon, and eight of his own poems. In the "Wednesday" chapter, the brothers pass the manufacturing town of Manchester, stop at a farmhouse to purchase supplies, and camp that night near Hooksett, New Hampshire. As well as continuing the actual narrative, Thoreau draws upon his memories of his short residence on Staten Island in 1843, and includes a brief essay on the real nature of antiquity, a long essay on friendship, and an account of his Transcendental exploration of the life of the mind. The insertions consist of over fifteen selections from the works of other authors and thirteen of his own poems. Several of these, including some of his most impressive verses, appear in the essay on friendship. In the "Thursday" chapter Thoreau covers a week of his actual voyage, as he moves from the Thursday on which the brothers began their overland trip to

the White Mountains to the following Thursday when they returned to their boat and began their journey downriver. The chapter also contains excerpts from the works of nine other writers, an essay on Persius, and remarks on Goethe which introduce Thoreau's contrast between an artist and a man of genius. Finally, the last chapter of the book, the "Friday" chapter, takes the brothers fifty miles from their encampment at Merrimack, New Hampshire, back to their Concord home. The excerpts from other writers are numerous, comprising over thirty insertions. Thoreau also includes his essays on poets and poetry, one of which contains his evaluation of Chaucer, a brief discussion of sound and silence, and his final Transcendental treatment of the potentialities of the human mind. This last chapter also contains eleven of Thoreau's poems, including the fine "I am a parcel of vain strivings."

There are, then, within the pages of A Week, over three hundred insertions from the works of other authors, the majority of them appearing in the "Sunday," "Monday," "Wednesday," and "Friday" chapters. A perusal of these quotations shows Thoreau's partiality for the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English poets, since he quotes from the works of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Daniel, Quarles, Herbert, Drayton, Donne, and others. Prominent among the classical writers that receive his attention are Homer, Virgil, and Ovid, while he chooses Chaucer and Gower from the medieval

English writers. The contemporary authors whom he frequently quotes are his fellow Transcendentalists, Emerson and William Ellery Channing. The prose work which he most often draws material from is Charles J. Fox's History of the Old Township of Dunstable. Throughout the narrative of his journey, he gives attention to the history of the land, its original Indian inhabitants, and its white settlers. Fox's book is his favorite reference for this historical information.

In addition, A Week includes sixty of Thoreau's own poems, ranging from couplets to complete poems of several stanzas. While these are interspersed throughout the book, the majority of them appear in the same chapters as do the borrowed quotations--the "Sunday," "Monday," "Wednesday," and "Friday" chapters. The prose material that does not directly relate to the narrative of the journey is also interspersed throughout the book, but the bulk of it falls in these same chapters. In contrast, the "Saturday," "Tuesday," and "Thursday" chapters contain more of the narrative, the description of the landscape, and the accounts from local history.

This résumé of the contents clearly reveals that Thoreau's primary concern was not the communication of the events of the journey itself. It is necessary, then, to determine just what his purpose was and to consider why he chose to accomplish it by unorthodox methods. In the chapters that follow I intend to show, first, that his purpose was to

share his Transcendental experience through his artistic communication of it, and, second, that his method was determined by the application of his Transcendental philosophy to the artistic process. Just as the Transcendental experience itself was not within the bounds of ordinary experience, so the relating of it was not possible within the limitations of traditional methods. When Thoreau went to Walden in 1845 in order to devote himself to his experiment in Transcendental living, he was aware that no one, not even his fellow Transcendentalists, completely understood what he was doing; therefore it is reasonable to assume that he was also aware of the difficulty prospective readers would have in understanding an account of his experiences. Yet the account was one he had to give, for the communication of the Transcendental experience became his true vocation.

The publication of A Week in 1849 was the culmination of a decade of literary endeavor. Thoreau finally offered to the public the record of his ten years of labor--his account of the physical and mental activity of a Transcendental artist. Just as the experience itself had been an experiment, the relation of it was an artistic experiment in communication. Thoreau's integrity demanded that he put theory to the test, for if a man's principles would not stand the strain of his living by them, then his position at the pinnacle of God's creation was a hoax of unbearable proportions. Thus his commitment to the Transcendental experience, and, as an artist,

to the communication of that experience, was a testing of life itself. Few men have had the courage to make the experiment. Thoreau, whose early essays reveal his serious attention to the character of a brave man, was one of those few.

CHAPTER TWO

THOREAU'S INTELLECTUAL AND LITERARY DEVELOPMENT TO 1849

While A Week was Thoreau's first book, he had been interested in writing as a profession for at least a decade prior to its publication. He began to keep his Journal in the fall of 1837, delivered his first public lecture before the Concord Lyceum on April 11, 1838, and saw his work regularly printed in the Dial from its inception in July 1840 until its discontinuance in April 1844. Various influences had combined to lead him to the writing profession, and an awareness of these influences is essential to an understanding of his purpose and his artistic method. Thus it is necessary to consider his development both as a man of ideas and as a writer.

Nothing in Thoreau's experiences prior to his years at Harvard indicates that in these early years he occupied himself with any thoughts or activities unusual for a boy of his era. He attended Concord Academy, was reasonably dutiful to his studies, and demonstrated considerable dexterity with his hands. By the community, school, church, and home, he was taught to be virtuous and law-abiding. He loved to be outdoors and welcomed opportunities to ramble through the surrounding countryside. In short, he was a child in a nineteenth-century New England village, and he was more

typical than extraordinary. But in 1833 he was selected over his brother John to attend Harvard because, though their pencil-making business was beginning to prosper, the family could not afford to send both brothers and Henry was the more scholarly of the two.

At Harvard primary emphasis in the curriculum was on Latin, Greek, rhetoric, moral philosophy, mathematics, and Christian ethics. Thoreau enriched his studies by adding French, Italian, German, Spanish, and, in his senior year, lectures on German and northern literature, mineralogy, anatomy, and natural history. In the classroom, Harvard's conservatism was quite apparent. Kant, Carlyle, Wordsworth, and Coleridge were not taught: the ideas of John Locke, William Paley, Dugald Stewart, and Bishop Butler were central to the lessons in philosophy and theology.¹ Yet these teachings, narrow though they were, were important to Thoreau's mental growth. Especially was this true of his introduction to Scottish common-sense philosophy, for the common-sense philosophers were questioning Lockean sensationalism and cautiously affirming the existence of innate ideas. They were asserting that while the senses recorded the existence of material things, the powers of the memory and imagination were evidence of a higher level of consciousness. Thus

¹Kenneth Walter Cameron, Thoreau's Harvard Years (Hartford, Conn.: Transcendental Books, 1966), pp. 13-19. Also see Christian P. Gruber, "The Education of Henry Thoreau; Harvard, 1833-1837" (unpublished dissertation, Princeton University, 1953), chap. 2, pp. 23-50.

awareness was the result of both experience and intuition. Their tendency to blend empirical and a priori appeals points toward Thoreau's own balance of sensual experience and intuitive perception.¹

Despite the conservative curriculum, Harvard College did offer Thoreau and his classmates opportunities to read and contemplate the latest contributions to nineteenth-century thought.² The library was up-to-date, and the students' schedules provided ample time for extra-curricular reading. Thoreau took advantage of two libraries available to him: that of the College itself and that of the Institute of 1770, a debating society of which he was a member. Records from both these libraries give evidence of his personal selections. In his freshman and sophomore years, he preferred books of history, travel, and biography; but toward the end of this period he began to read the English poets. Then in his junior and senior years, he read widely in English poetry, ranging from the Anglo-Saxons to the Romantics. Among his prose selections were works by Goethe, Cousin, and Coleridge as well as

¹Useful examinations of the impact of the study of common-sense philosophy at Harvard are Edgeley Tood. "Philosophical Ideas at Harvard College, 1817-1837," New England Quarterly, XVI (March, 1943), 63-90; and Joseph J. Kwiat, "Thoreau's Philosophical Apprenticeship," New England Quarterly, XVIII (March, 1945), 51-69.

²On p. 24 of his dissertation, Gruber points out that Francis Bowen, instructor of moral philosophy, read and wrote about Kant, that Edward Tyrrell Channing, professor of rhetoric and oratory, read Wordsworth and talked about him informally, and that Thoreau's roommate, James Richardson, reviewed Sartor Resartus for the Harvardiana.

classical books. His extant notes on and extracts from books he read offer further evidence of his wide reading and of the direction of his interests.¹

In December of 1835, during his junior year, Thoreau left Harvard to teach temporarily at Canton, Massachusetts. There he lived with Orestes Brownson, a forthright, liberal man who at that time was concerned with bringing about both moral and political reform. The influence that exposure to Brownson had on Thoreau is suggested by a passage in his letter to Brownson of December 30, 1837:

I have never ceased to look back with interest, not to say satisfaction, upon the short six weeks which I passed with you. They were an era in my life--the morning of a new Lebenstag. They are to me as a dream that is dreamt, but which returns from time to time in all its original freshness. Such a one as I would dream a second and a third time, and then tell before breakfast.²

Brownson did have new life to offer to a young man, indeed to all men, for he taught an inspirational doctrine

¹For evidences of Thoreau's Harvard reading, see Kenneth Walter Cameron, "Books Thoreau Borrowed from Harvard College Library," in Companion to Thoreau's Correspondence (Hartford, Conn.: Transcendental Books, 1964), pp. 286-88; Cameron, "Thoreau's Reading at the Institute of 1770," chap. 6, vol. I of The Transcendentalists and Minerva (3 vols.; Hartford, Conn.: Transcendental Books, 1958), pp. 81-89; Cameron, "Thoreau's Notes on Harvard Reading," chap. 8, vol. I of The Transcendentalists and Minerva, pp. 130-358; and Ethel Seybold, Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1951), Appendix A, pp. 91-102. Useful surveys of Thoreau's reading are Norman Foerster, "The Intellectual Heritage of Thoreau," Texas Review, II (1917), 192-212; and Raymond Adams, "Thoreau's Literary Apprenticeship," Studies in Philology, XXIX (1932), 617-29.

²Correspondence of Thoreau, p. 19.

which he explained in his New Views of Christianity, Society, and the Church, published in 1836. He called his doctrine the "idea of atonement" and believed that its dissemination was his mission. He began his explanation of it by distinguishing between religion and religious institutions, and by recognizing only religion as natural to man. Then he identified Christianity as a ruined institution, with a body but no spirit left in it. The church, even in its most noble days, had not come up to Christ's conception of it, and the passing years had witnessed its deterioration. The major cause of its ruin was its lack of comprehension of Christ's purpose and hence the true purpose of religion. The church had made spirit and body antithetical, whereas Jesus had come to earth to stand between spirit and matter as God-Man, the representative of both. This union was Christ's attempt at atonement, whereby ". . . Christianity declares as its great doctrine that there is no essential, no original antithesis between God and man; that neither spirit nor matter is unholy in its nature; that all things, spirit, matter, God, man, soul, body, heaven, earth, time, eternity, with all their duties and interests are in themselves holy."¹ Brownson concluded that exclusive spiritualism was no more the answer than was exclusive materialism. Therefore his mission was not to substitute one for the other but rather to reconcile the two.

¹Orestes A. Brownson, New Views of Christianity, Society, and the Church, in The Works of Orestes A. Brownson, ed. by Henry F. Brownson (Detroit: Thorndike Nourse, 1883), IV, 10.

Brownson also called upon men to trust in their own natures because, through man's God-given faculties, God revealed truths. The man of both thought and action was the representative of the union of spirit and matter, the God-Man.

The God-Man indicates not the antithesis of God and man, nor does it stand for a being alone of its kind; but it indicates the homogeneousness of the human and divine natures, and shows that they can dwell together in love and peace. The Son of Man and the Son of God are not two persons but one--a mystery which becomes clear the very moment that the human nature is discovered to have a sameness with the divine.¹

Views quite similar to Brownson's regarding Christianity, man's dual nature, and his need to rely on his own perceptions appear later as a part of Thoreau's personal philosophy.²

It was during his college years that Thoreau first felt the influence of Emerson. While he did meet him at this time (as a member of the Board of Overseers, Emerson examined the sophomore Thoreau on Richard Whately's Rhetoric),³ and while Emerson thought well enough of him to write President Josiah Quincy some time in 1837 on his behalf,⁴ it was through the essay Nature that Thoreau first confronted

¹Ibid., p. 19.

²Both Gruber, in chap. 7 of his dissertation, and Henry S. Canby in Thoreau (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), pp. 57-62, assert that Brownson made a distinct contribution to Thoreau's intellectual growth.

³Kenneth Walter Cameron, "Chronology of Thoreau's Harvard Years," Emerson Society Quarterly, XV (II Quarter, 1959), p. 15.

⁴Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, Henry D. Thoreau (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1882), pp. 52-54.

Emersonian idealism. He checked out a copy of Nature from the private library of the Institute of 1770 on April 3, 1837, and again on June 23.¹ Later he bought at least two copies, placing one in his own library and giving one to his classmate, William Allen, as a graduation gift.² The essay undoubtedly was of lasting value to him, for in 1841 he recommended it to Isaiah Williams.³ The most immediate appeal of Nature was probably to that youthful idealism which Thoreau shared with other young men of the age, for Emerson spoke to the nationalistic as well as the individualistic spirit: "The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? . . . There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship." But beyond this stirring appeal lay Emerson's theories concerning the nature of man and his relation to God. A student already roused by Kant, Coleridge, and Carlyle would have found in Nature a decisive declaration of an organic conception of the universe, and of the necessity for an intuitive apprehension of reality. Above all, Nature

¹Kenneth Walter Cameron, Thoreau Discovers Emerson (New York: The New York Public Library, 1953), p. 12.

²Walter Harding, Thoreau's Library (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1957), p. 47. See also Harding, The Days of Henry Thoreau (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 60.

³Williams' reply is printed in the Correspondence of Thoreau, p. 48.

taught the reader yearning for a faith more satisfactory than that provided through a rational approach to religion that God could be known, that by linking the mind to the spirit within nature, one could fashion his own personal relationship with God. The external world, then, was the manifestation of infinite knowledge.

. . . behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present; one and not compound it does not act upon us from without, that is, in space and time, but spiritually, or through ourselves; therefore, that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old. As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws at his need inexhaustible power.

Man's potentialities thus soared far above his achievements, for "man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the creator in the finite." He did not have to limit his awareness of truth simply to knowing it, for he could possess it and be possessed by it, and thereby he could experience a moral rebirth. Thus the essay summoned a man to individualistic action based upon moral principle. "Every spirit builds itself a house, and beyond its house a world, and beyond its world a heaven. Know then that the world exists for you. . . . Build therefore your own world. As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions."¹

¹The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. by Edward Waldo Emerson, Centenary Edition, I (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1903), 7-77 passim.

Thoreau's college essays are the best record of the ways in which these various influences were shaping his thinking. These fortnightly exercises, assigned by Professor Edward Tyrrell Channing, were designed to test both intellectual and verbal skills. The subjects were moral and didactic in nature and therefore offered the students the opportunity to express opinions central to their emerging characters. Thoreau's essays show clearly his growing desire for independence and for the kind of wholeness that the Transcendentalists made the goal of all their spiritual quests.¹

Before he read Nature, Thoreau was arguing against conformity. In an essay which F. B. Sanborn assigned to his sophomore year and entitled "Following the Fashion," he stated that "the majority of mankind are too easily induced to follow any course which accords with the opinion of the world. . . ." Such people, he said, were mere tools of others, who allowed their fear of displeasing society to influence their actions. Instead of looking outward for a guide to action, he advocated looking inward.² In "Fate Among the Ancients," which Sanborn assigned to the spring of 1836, he echoed the call for

¹The first editing of Thoreau's college essays was done by Franklin Benjamin Sanborn in The Life of Henry David Thoreau (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917). The latest and more accurate editing is that of Edwin I. Moser in "Henry David Thoreau: The College Essays" (unpublished thesis, New York University, 1951). I have used Sanborn's titles and dates and Moser's editing of the essays.

²Moser, pp. 167-68.

individualism but added an appeal to seek truth beyond the level of sensation: "There appear to have been those of any age and nation, who have risen above the sensuous conceptions of the multitude--who, satisfied if they could search out the causes of things by the mental eye alone, have thus from time to time rescued small fragments of truth from the general wreck."¹

Also in 1836 Thoreau prepared a review of Henry Nelson Coleridge's Introductions to the Study of the Greek Classic Poets.² He quoted the poet's nephew on his uncle's distinction between Fancy and Imagination. About the same time he composed an essay on "Imagination as an Element of Happiness." In it he said that it was man's duty to cultivate all the faculties of the mind, including that of the imagination. First man needed to develop his reason, but this alone left him barren. He could truly learn of the universe only through the imaginative faculty, for "its province is unbounded, its flights are not confined to space, the past and the future, time and eternity, all come within the sphere of its range."³

The essays of Thoreau's senior year show that, without doubt, the principles of idealism, which came to be called Transcendental, were firmly implanted in his mind before he

¹Ibid., pp. 118-20.

²See Carl Bode, "A New College Manuscript of Thoreau's," American Literature, XXI (November, 1949), 311-20.

³Moser, pp. 142-44.

left college. In "The Superior and the Common Man," he spoke of the "embryo philosopher" who respected the opinions of others but did not consider common agreement a guarantee of truth. Instead, it was often the solitary man who defended truth. "The opinions of the few, the persecuted, the dreamers of this world, he [the philosopher] has a peculiar respect for--he is prepossessed in their favor. Man does not wantonly read [rend?] the manifest tie that binds him to his fellow; he would not stand aloof, even in the most odious, did not the stern demands of truth, backed by conscience, require it."¹ A man could stand aloof, then, if true to himself in such a position, and Thoreau took up this position in "Whether Moral Excellence tend directly to increase Intellectual Power?" He said that moral excellence was not objectionable to Scripture or to popular morality. "It consists rather in allowing the religious sentiment to exercise a natural and proper influence over our lives and conduct--in acting from a sense of duty, or, as we say, from principle." He therefore rejected institutionalized religion as the first step to moral excellence because it was too often merely a habit. True morality was a universal quality, not a product of expediency.² In "Barbarism and Civilization" he argued that, since moral excellence was a universal quality, civilization did not help man achieve it. "Civilization is the influence of Art, and

¹Ibid., pp. 145-49.

²Ibid., pp. 115-17.

not Nature, on Man." Education was essential to life, but familiarity with books alone did not produce an educated man. "The end of life is education. . . . if it tend to cherish and develope [sic] the religious sentiment--continually to remind man of his mysterious relation to God and Nature--and exalt him above the toil and drudgery of this matter-of-fact world, it is good." Too often civilization did not do this; instead it made man the "slave of matter." On the other hand, "Nature is continually exerting a moral influence over man. . . ." For this reason Thoreau admired the Indian. He concluded that the "bringing out, or development, of that which is, in a man, by contact with the Not Me, that is by life, is safer in the hands of Nature than of Art."¹

When Thoreau returned to Concord after graduation, he continued with the general patterns of reading he had established in college, making notes and extracts from this reading. By 1840 he had gathered a respectable private library which included works by Carlyle, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, and Emerson.² He also continued to borrow books from the Harvard library. Some were books he

¹Ibid., pp. 172-75.

²Harding, Thoreau's Library, pp. 27-100, passim.

had borrowed before--Conybeare, Chalmers, Chaucer, Shakespeare¹--but his notebooks show that he also branched out considerably during the 1840's. His growing interest in the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets is indicated by the passages he copied from Herbert, Marvell, Lovelace, Crashaw, Herrick, Cowley, and Donne. He also extracted large portions of Sir Thomas Browne's Religio Medici and of two Oriental works--the Heetopades of Veeshnoo-Sarma and the Laws of Menu.² Moncure D. Conway, who in 1853 accompanied Thoreau on walks and conversed with him at length, was impressed by the broad knowledge he had acquired.

He had studied carefully the old English Chronicles, & Chaucer, Froissart, Spenser, and Beaumont & Fletcher. He recognized kindred spirits in George Herbert, Cowley & Quarles. . . . He explored the old books of voyages--Drake, Purchas, and others, who assisted him in his circumnavigation of Concord. The Oriental books were his daily bread; the Greeks (especially Aeschylus, whose "Prometheus" and "The Seven against Thebes" he translated finely) were his luxuries. He was an exact Greek scholar. Of moderns he praised Wordsworth, Coleridge, and, to a less extent, Carlyle and Goethe.³

¹Cameron, "Books Thoreau Borrowed from Harvard College Library," Companion to Thoreau's Correspondence, pp. 288-89.

²Cameron, "Thoreau's Notes on Harvard Reading," The Transcendentalists and Minerva, pp. 130-358. Also in this volume are other lists which offer evidence of Thoreau's reading interests: the "Ungathered Thoreau Reading List" (II, 59-65); the "Dated Reading List" (II, 368-70); the "Staten-Island Reading List" (II, 371-73); and the "Legenda in Oriental Literature" (II, 376-78).

³An excerpt from the Autobiography, Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway. Reprinted as "A Century Ago with Thoreau" in the Thoreau Centennial Variorum (Berkeley Heights, N. J.: Oriole Press, 1962), pp. 11-12.

By the time Thoreau returned to Concord, Emerson had become the leader of a group of American idealists, many of them influential in theological and intellectual circles, who had been labeled Transcendentalists. Among the group, who by 1837 were making the Emerson home their most frequent meeting place, were Orestes Brownson, Jones Very, Bronson Alcott, Frederick Henry Hedge, George Ripley, Elizabeth Peabody, Margaret Fuller, and Theodore Parker. These people were essentially like-minded, yet not without differences of opinion. Orestes Brownson found it difficult to imagine them as a group at all.

How the name, Transcendentalist, came to be applied to the members of this movement party, we are not informed. They did not themselves assume it, nor does it with any justice describe them. They differ widely in their opinions, and agree in little except in their common opposition to the old school. They do not swear by Locke, and they recognize no authority in matters of opinion but the human mind, whether termed the reason with some of them, or the soul with others. . . .¹

Despite differences, it was the "common opposition to the old school" that brought the group together. George Ripley recognized this fundamental bond as the identifying characteristic of the Transcendentalists. "There is a class of persons who desire a reform in the prevailing philosophy of the day. These are called Transcendentalists, because they

¹The Transcendentalists, ed. by Perry Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 242.

believe in an order of truths which transcends the sphere of the external sense. . . ."1

Thoreau began attending the meetings of this group in the fall of 1837. Certainly he was already a kindred spirit, and thus his relationship with them served not to instill a new philosophy in him, but rather to establish more firmly those beliefs that were already shaping his character. He became well acquainted with Bronson Alcott, with whom he maintained a close relationship throughout his life, and he came under the strong influence of Emerson, who thought so well of him that in his Journal on February 11, 1838, he recorded, "I delight much in my young friend, who seems to have as free & erect a mind as any I have ever met."2

In April of 1841, Thoreau moved into the Emerson home. His and John's school had closed and he had found no other teaching opportunity; neither had he discovered any other mode of living that he could willingly enter at this time. Emerson's pleasure with the arrangement is apparent in his letter of June 1, 1841, to William Emerson.

Our household is now enlarged by the presence of Mary Russell for the summer; of Margaret Fuller for the last fortnight; & of Henry Thoreau who may stay with me a year. I do not remember if I have told you about him: but he is to have his board &c for what labor he chooses to do: and

¹Ibid., p. 255.

²The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. by William H. Gilman, et al, V (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 452.

he is thus far a great benefactor & physician to me for he is an indefatigable & a very skilful [sic] laborer & I work with him as I should not without him. . . . Thoreau is a scholar & a poet & as full of buds of promise as a young apple tree.¹

Emerson tried to help Thoreau publish his writings,² and, despite evidences that living with Thoreau was not always a pleasant experience, he did not waver from his conviction that under his roof he was nurturing an outstanding talent. In September of 1841 he wrote to Margaret Fuller:

H.T. is full of noble madness lately, and I hope more highly of him than ever. I know that nearly all the fine souls have a flaw which defeats every expectation they excite but I must trust these large frames as of less fragility--than the others. Besides to have awakened a great hope in another, is already some fruit is it not?³

Thoreau's Journal entries and his extant correspondence for the two years that he resided with the Emersons make infrequent reference to the living arrangement. But these writings offer ample evidence that the Emersons gave him complete freedom to devote as much time as he wished to writing and to reading. During the first year of his stay, he spent a considerable amount of his time composing verse, but before the two years had ended, he had shifted the emphasis to prose. Emerson's library had long been at his disposal,

¹Letters of Emerson, II, 402.

²See Letters of Emerson, II, 435 and 442; and Harding, Days of Thoreau, p. 129.

³Letters of Emerson, II, 447.

but with it so near at hand, he became better acquainted with its contents, including Emerson's generous collection of translations of Oriental literature. This was not Thoreau's introduction to Oriental literature, but it was his opportunity for extensive reading which developed into a life-long appreciation of Oriental philosophy and scripture.

While many of the members of the Transcendental group were writers, they had few opportunities for publication, since their views were not suitable to periodicals seeking wide acceptance from the reading public. Therefore in 1840 they began publication of the Dial, their own periodical, under the editorship of Margaret Fuller with assistance from George Ripley. The Dial was introduced in "The Editors to the Reader" column in the first issue of July, 1840, as a reaction to "that rigor of our conventions of religion and education which is turning us to stone, which renounces hope, which looks only backward, which asks only such a future as the past, which suspects improvements and holds nothing so much in horror as new views and the dreams of youth."¹ The purpose was stated thus: ". . . to give expression to that spirit which lifts men to a higher platform, restores to them religious sentiment, brings them worthy aims and pure pleasures, purges the inward eye, makes life less desultory, and, through raising men to the level of nature, takes away its melancholy from the landscape and reconciles the practical with the

¹Dial, I, No. 1 (July, 1840), 1-2.

speculative powers."¹ Hence the emphasis was on the upward-striving ideals which the editors wished to put before their readers. These ideals were given historical perspective in a lofty pronouncement under the title, "Editor's Table," in the January, 1842, issue.

The more liberal thought of intelligent persons acquires a new name in each period or community; and in ours, by no very good luck, as it sometimes appears to us, has been designated as Transcendentalism. We have every day occasion to remark its perfect identity, under whatever new phraseology or application to new facts, with the liberal thought of all men of a religious and contemplative habit in other times and countries.²

Emerson had great hopes for the Dial and expended much energy and thought upon its publication. He helped with the editing (and in 1842 took over the editorship from Margaret Fuller), contributed his own works, and sought writings from those whose work he respected. Among these was Thoreau. In speaking of the contributors to the Dial in a letter to his brother on September 26, 1839, he said, "My Henry Thoreau will be a great poet for such a company, & one of these days for all companies."³ Emerson saw to it that the Dial introduced Thoreau to the world of letters. Throughout the four-year existence of the periodical, Thoreau's contributions--poems, essays, and translations--appeared frequently.

¹Ibid., pp. 3-4.

²Ibid., II, No. 3 (January, 1842), 382.

³Letters of Emerson, II, 225.

There is no pronouncement from Thoreau that at a certain time, in a certain place, he decided to become a writer. Indeed, he refused to identify himself as a practicing member of any profession. In March of 1847, he received from Henry Williams, the secretary of his Harvard Class of 1837, a form letter requesting personal information about each graduate.¹ One of the questions concerned the profession each had chosen. Thoreau replied on September 30, 1847:

I dont know whether mine is a profession, or a trade, or what not. It is not yet learned, and in every instance has been practiced before being studied. The mercantile part of it was begun here by myself alone.

- - It is not one but legion. I will give you some of the monster's heads. I am a Schoolmaster-- a Private Tutor, a Surveyor--a Gardener, a Farmer-- a Painter, I mean a House Painter, a Carpenter, a Mason, a Day-Laborer, a Pencil-Maker, a Glass-paper Maker, a Writer, and sometimes a Poetaster. If you will act the part of Iolas, and apply a hot iron to any of these heads, I shall be greatly obliged to you.

. . . My present employment is to answer such orders as may be expected from so general an advertisement as the above--that is, if I see fit, which is not always the case, for I have found out a way to live without what is commonly called employment or industry attractive or otherwise. Indeed my steadiest employment, if such it can be called, is to keep myself at the top of my condition, and ready for whatever may turn up in heaven or on earth.²

This résumé of Thoreau's activities during the decade since graduation must have been one of the most unique replies

¹Correspondence of Thoreau, pp. 176-77.

²Ibid., p. 186.

that Williams received. Yet anyone who remembered Thoreau's commencement address would probably not have been too startled. In this address, entitled "The Commercial Spirit of Modern Times," he had called attention to the energy which characterized modern man: "Man thinks faster and freer than ever before. He moreover moves faster and freer. He is more restless, for the reason that he is more independent, than ever." But he had been disturbed by the manner in which most men were expending their vigor, for the influence of the commercial spirit had led them to a "blind and unmanly love of wealth." He had therefore advocated a quite different use for man's energy.

Let men, true to their natures, cultivate the moral affections, lead manly and independent lives; let them make riches the means and not the end of existence. . . . The order of things should be somewhat reversed,--the seventh should be man's day of toil, wherein to earn his living by the sweat of his brow, and the other six his sabbath of the affections and the soul, in which to range this wide-spread garden, and drink in the soft influences and sublime revelations of Nature.¹

In the years since his graduation, Thoreau had always met the necessity to secure a living, but he had resisted the pressures of a society that would have had him seek ever greater financial rewards. A portion of his Journal entry for April 7, 1841, is evidence of his early rejection of a traditional vocation:

My life will wait for nobody, but is being matured still irresistibly while I go about the streets and

¹Moser, pp. 182-85.

chaffer with this man and that to secure it a living. It will cut its own channel, like the mountain stream, which by the longest ridges and by level prairies is not kept from the sea finally.¹

Then on September second of the same year, he recorded in his Journal his firm conviction regarding a man's true purpose in life:

There is but one obligation, and that is the obligation to obey the highest dictate. None can lay me under another which will supersede this. The gods have given me these years without any incumbrance; society has no mortgage on them.²

It is thus apparent that Thoreau considered himself impervious to society's example and under no obligation other than that dictated by his own conscience. This obligation, however, he was totally subservient to; therefore, while society held no mortgage on his years, his own sense of moral responsibility certainly did. He was, above all, committed to a life of virtue; then, having proved himself worthy, he considered it his duty to perform a service for mankind that was suitable to his arduous preparation.

A quotation from his college essay, "The Varying Pursuits of Men," is evidence that he was imbued with a sense of social responsibility before he left Harvard.

There appears to be something noble, something exalted in giving up one's own interest for that of his fellow beings, which excites in us feelings

¹Writings of Thoreau, VII, 244-45.

²Ibid., VII, 279.

of admiration and respect. He is a true patriot who, casting aside all selfish thoughts, and not suffering his benevolent intentions to be polluted by thinking of the fame he is acquiring, presses forward in the great work he has undertaken, with unremitting zeal. . . .¹

This sense of a moral commitment to humanity was partially responsible for his rejection of the usual professions open to a college graduate. Because he could not see that man was being improved by his institutions, he could not determine any moral value that could give significance to the vocations that perpetuated these institutions. Yet his act of rejection was not totally free of emotional distress, for his moral sense was exerting a constant pressure that would not be lifted until he was sure that he had dedicated himself to the proper service. In his Journal, on March 26, 1841, he took note of his distress, defended his delay in stating his decision, and then revealed it in figurative language that is itself a revelation of the intensity of his resolve.

I must confess I have felt mean enough when asked how I was to act on society, what errand I had to mankind. Undoubtedly I did not feel mean without a reason, and yet my loitering is not without defense. I would fain communicate the wealth of my life to men, would really give them what is most precious in my gift. I would secrete pearls with the shellfish and lay up honey with the bees for them. I will sift the sunbeams for the public good. I know no riches I would keep back. I have no private good, unless it be my peculiar ability to serve the public.²

¹Moser, p. 177.

²Writings of Thoreau, VII, 350.

The influences of Harvard, of Brownson, Emerson, and the Transcendental Club had reached their culmination. Thoreau was prepared to perform his obligation to mankind: he would communicate the wealth of his life. In sharing the inspirations and ideas he received through his relationship with the Divine, he would be offering to all mankind the most precious of his possessions. When he answered Henry Williams' query in 1847, he seemed to attach no more importance to writing than he did to gardening or pencil-making; but five years before, in the privacy of his Journal, he had dedicated his life to the one talent that was the richest of all his gifts.

There can be no question, then, but that, in writing A Week, Thoreau was pursuing his chosen vocation; he had therefore a higher purpose than to prepare a book of travel and nature study. The time would come when he would compose narratives of his journeys to Maine, Cape Cod, and Canada, but at this time he was resolved to "secrete pearls with the shellfish and lay up honey with the bees"; in other words, he was resolved to communicate his Transcendental experience. An examination of certain writings other than A Week which he composed during the decade of 1839 to 1849 offers further evidence of his total dedication to his resolution. In keeping with his practice, his Journal was his major source for these writings.

In the spring and summer of 1840, Thoreau composed the essay, "The Service." Apparently written for the Dial, it was rejected by Margaret Fuller and remained unpublished until 1902. She rightly took exception to its pompous tone and straightforwardly stated her criticism in a letter to Thoreau. "It is true, as Mr. E[merson] says, that essays not to be compared with this have found their way into the Dial. But then these are more unassuming in their tone, and have an air of quiet good-breeding which induces us to permit their presence. Yours is so rugged that it ought to be commanding."¹ Whatever its shortcomings, the essay is important as evidence of those ideas upon which Thoreau was concentrating when he began to write for publication. The emphasis in "The Service" is upon the nature of the individual and his response to experience. Thoreau was much concerned with the quality of bravery and attempted to distinguish between the brave man and the coward. He depicted the coward as a weak creature who presented a flat, unresisting surface to the world; the brave man, on the other hand, was "a perfect sphere, which cannot fall on its flat side, and is equally strong every way." The coward lay passively on one side or another, depending on the direction in which society pushed him, but the brave man possessed an inner force that made it possible for him to resist outer pressures, find his own axis

¹Correspondence of Thoreau, p. 42.

"coincident with the celestial axis," and thereby "acquire a perfect sphericity." "What shame . . . that our lives, which might so well be the source of planetary motion, and sanction the order of the spheres, should be full of abruptness and angularity, so as not to roll nor move majestically!" The brave man rejected creed and kept the fires of faith burning within himself. He was the well-rounded man who, by resisting the forces that would have misshapen him, had placed himself in harmony with the spheres.¹

In 1842 Thoreau composed an essay on Sir Walter Raleigh, whom he presented as the well-rounded man described in "The Service." Raleigh was not without fault, for he possessed the weaknesses of both a courtier and a soldier, but to Thoreau he was a man of heroic dimensions, capable of service to mankind with either sword or pen. He was a man of action, whose style in a physical exploit was as healthy and sound as was his style with a pen.

He wields his pen as one who sits at ease in his chair, and has a healthy and able body to back his wits, and not a torpid and diseased one to fetter them. In whichever hand is the pen we are sure there is a sword in the other. He sits with his armor on, and with one ear open to hear if the trumpet sound, as one who has stolen a little leisure from the duties of the camp; and we are confident that the whole man, as real and palpable as an Englishman can be, sat down to the writing of his books, and not some curious brain only.²

¹H. D. Thoreau, The Service, ed. by F. B. Sanborn (Boston: Charles E. Goodspeed, 1902).

²H. D. Thoreau, Sir Walter Raleigh, ed. by Henry Aiken Metcalf (Boston: The Bibliophile Society, 1905), pp. 89-90.

Raleigh's virtue was that of the heroic man; that is, he was not virtuous because he conformed to public morality but because he dared to adventure for the public good. He had thereby left a worthy example before the world.

We have considered a fair specimen of an Englishman in the sixteenth century; but it behoves us to be fairer specimens of American men in the nineteenth. The gods have given man no constant gift, but the power and liberty to act greatly. How many wait for health and warm weather to be heroic and noble! We are apt to think there is a kind of virtue which need not be heroic and brave,--but in fact virtue is the deed of the bravest; and only the hardy souls venture upon it, for it deals in what we have no experience, and alone does the rude pioneer work of the world.¹

Thoreau's conception of the heroic man was still much like that portrayed in the college essays: he was a man of independence, of virtue, and of action. Anyone who aspired to the highest service of humanity should strive to emulate this ideal.

Thoreau also considered the nature of the heroic man in his poem, "The Black Knight," which was published in the Dial in October 1842. In this poem he affirmed his own strength and individuality and thus transferred the characteristics of the heroic man to himself.

My life more civil is and free
Than any civil polity.

Ye princes keep your realms
And circumscribed power
Not wide as are my dreams,
Nor rich as is this hour.

¹Ibid., pp. 89-90.

What can ye give which I have not?
 What can ye take which I have got?
 Can ye defend the dangerless?
 Can ye inherit nakedness?

To all true wants time's ear is deaf,
 Penurious states lend no relief
 Out of their pelf--
 But a free soul--thank God--
 Can help itself.

Be sure your fate
 Doth keep apart its state--
 Not linked with any band--
 Even the nobles of the land

In tented fields with cloth of gold--
 No place doth hold
 But is more chivalrous than they are.
 And sigheth for a nobler war.
 A finer strain its trumpet rings--
 A brighter gleam its armor flings.

The life that I aspire to live
 No man proposeth me--
 No trade upon the street
 Wears its emblazonry.¹

Thoreau did not believe that society was encouraging the development of such a figure. Instead he believed that the men of his age were enamored with mechanization and had forgotten that the application and industry of a talented, dedicated individual had conceived the machine. In 1843 he reviewed a work entitled The Paradise within the Reach of All Men, without Labor, by Powers of Nature and Machinery, by J. A. Etzler. He entitled his review "Paradise (to be) Regained" and in it took a stand against the growing worship of mechanization as well as against the various social and

¹Carl Bode, ed., Collected Poems of Henry Thoreau (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965, pp. 132-33.

communal reform experiments of his day. He stated that the sin of the age was its lack of recognition of the worth of one man, acting as an individual. "We must first succeed alone, that we may enjoy our success together." The really important work of the world would not be done by a machine, or by a corporation, but rather by a lone man who realized that the starting point was his inner self. When he had brought himself in harmony with the universal forces of nature, he would then be able to use the unutilized power of nature for the betterment of society. One of the forces which had barely been applied toward man's improvement was that of love. All the combined horsepower of manmade instruments could not approach the virtually untapped power of this instrument of nature.¹

Thoreau's sympathy and admiration were always directed toward the individual laborer whose talents permitted him to be independent. But he distinguished between the individual who labored for earthly goals and the one who labored for heavenly goals. In his essay, "Thomas Carlyle and His Works," published in Graham's Magazine in 1847, he stated this distinction clearly: "Two men I honor, and no third. First, the toil-worn craftsman that with earth-made implement laboriously conquers the earth, and makes her man's A second man I honor, and still more highly; him who is seen toiling for the spiritually indispensable; not daily bread,

¹Writings of Thoreau, IV, 280-305.

but the bread of life." The sublime man would be a combination of the two, but he knew of none save the man of Nazareth. Of men actively engaged in labor, the second man lived most supremely in the person of the literary artist, "not earthly craftsman only, but inspired thinker, that with heaven-made implement conquers heaven for us."¹

Thus several of the essays composed during the years that A Week was in progress reveal Thoreau's constant concern for the nature of the individual most capable of compelling men to seek beyond the finite for the kind of awareness that would give life sublime meaning. First, he recognized that such a person had to be a man of action, a laborer in both physical and mental areas of endeavor. Second, he had to be a man of independence, for if he were not, his labors would be those of slave for master and gone would be all possibility for creative, upward-striving accomplishment. Third, he had to be a man of virtue, but not in the sense that society used the term. He would be virtuous not because he followed an established moral code, but because he ventured into the unknown and sought to enlarge man's powers of comprehension. Finally, Thoreau asserted that the man who best fulfilled these qualifications was the literary artist, for it was possible for him not only to live a life of action, independence, and virtue, but also to instill these qualities in other men through his powers of communication.

¹Ibid., IV, 316-355.

Other significant essays from this period are concerned with the environment in which the individual could flourish. One of these, "The Natural History of Massachusetts," was written at the urging of Emerson, who suggested that Thoreau comment for the Dial on the Scientific Survey of the Commonwealth made by the state of Massachusetts. When the essay appeared in the Dial in July, 1842, Emerson, who by that time was editor, introduced it as the work of a nature poet. "We begged our friend to lay down the oar and fishing line, which none can handle better, and assume the pen; that Isaak Walton and White of Selborne might not want a successor, nor the fair meadows, to which we also have owed a home and the happiness of many years, their poet."¹ In the essay the poet of nature is more prominent than is the critic of a scientific report, and he is a Transcendental poet. Thoreau contrasted the environment of nature with that of society and concluded, "In society you will not find health, but in nature." He believed that the sounds of nature were far more likely to give joy to life than were those from lyceums, pulpits, and parlors.²

Many of his poems of this period are, in the same fashion, the work of a nature poet who is also a Transcendental poet, for in them Thoreau sought to convey not only his awareness of the beauty and serenity in nature, but also his belief

¹Dial, III, No. 1 (July, 1842), 19.

²Writings of Thoreau, V, 103-31.

that through this awareness he could achieve a sublime level of inspiration. Several of these poems first appeared in the Dial, and then, because they were so well suited to his purpose in A Week, he incorporated them into the book.

In turning his attention to the various aspects and attitudes of nature, he began to see the endless possibilities for symbolism. Thus in "The Natural History of Massachusetts," he defended the gathering of details and dissemination of facts, recognizing that the fact "will one day flower into a truth," that the examination of a particular fact was only a prelude to the revelation of a universal truth. Such a revelation was slow to come: "We must look a long time before we can see."¹ But it would come to the individual with the will and patience to seek it. In "A Walk to Wachusett," published in 1843, he began his search for that revelation by transforming an ordinary, uneventful nature hike into a Transcendental journey of awareness. The valleys and plains, where civilization was established, symbolized the lowest levels of man's spiritual experience; the mountains, grand in their isolation, symbolized the level of spiritual awareness to which man could aspire. Most men would remain in the valleys, mired in their folly and frustration; but certain men would rise to the task of ascending the mountain, and by moving above and beyond their self-imposed boundaries, would purify themselves and thus be able to lead those men unable

¹Ibid., V, 131.

to ascend alone. Thoreau asserted that society was badly in need of more men who were capable of infusing it with mountain grandeur, for "no part of the earth is so low that the heavens may not be seen from, and we have only to stand on the summit of our hour to command an uninterrupted horizon."¹

In this essay, as well as in "A Winter Walk," also published in 1843, Thoreau used the times of the day and the seasons of the year as symbols of the varying degrees of man's inspiration. The morning and the spring were a period of new birth, of renewal, when in full vigor man began to ascend the mountain. Noon and summer were a period of contemplation, for he had climbed as far as his inspiration could take him, and he needed repose in order to prepare himself for the approaching period of evening and winter. Nature taught that when cold and darkness threatened to rob him of his life's heat, he could survive only if the fires of the spirit burned within him. "There is a slumbering, subterranean fire in nature which never goes out, and which no cold can chill. . . . This subterranean fire has its altar in each man's breast. . . ." ² Every man faced repeated struggles with cold and darkness, and too often he sought to find light and warmth in external sources. The individual who was in harmony with nature would possess the true source of life.

¹Ibid., V, 133-52.

²Ibid., V, 163-83.

In these two essays Thoreau also developed the metaphor of the journey. He envisioned every man as a traveler who was participating in a journey in search of spiritual reality. Emerson had pointed out in Nature that natural facts were symbols of spiritual facts; therefore, a physical journey could symbolize the more significant journeying of the mind. In particular, a physical journey into primitive nature could operate metaphorically as a journey of the soul, for it was in nature that intuitive truths could be comprehended.

These essays and poems of the 1840's, through their consideration of the character of the committed individual and of the environment which could sustain him, and through their concern for a symbolic language by which the individual could communicate his experience, help to demonstrate the purpose to which Thoreau's literary and intellectual development had led him, and they point toward the methods by which he would attempt to achieve that purpose. In A Week he brought together all the aspects of the Transcendental experience which he had considered in the various essays and poems of the 1839-1849 decade. Within the framework of the river voyage, he united his varied contemplations in order to communicate the ecstasy of a life devoted to upward-striving.

This examination of Thoreau's maturation as a man of ideas and as a writer has clearly revealed the purpose for which he composed A Week. It remains, then, to consider the method of composition to which his contemplations on character

and environment and on the nature of a language suitable to communication led him. First he created his own personal mythology--a mythology that was closely allied to that being formed by the prevailing spirit of nationalism in American letters. His mythical hero was a man of individual purpose, but also a man committed to playing a role in the destiny of mankind. His natural environment was the uncorrupted land, the source of vision and promise. Then, after creating his myth, Thoreau determined that the communication of the myth could best be accomplished through the development of a symbolic language by which experience could be universalized. The source of the symbols was to be found in nature, for not only was the natural scene the proper environment for the mythical hero, but it was also the common bond of humanity. Other elements in man's existence changed radically or disappeared altogether, but nature remained--the one universal source of knowledge and experience.

As well as having to create the proper myth and symbols whereby he could universalize his own experience, Thoreau had to develop a structure which would convey his sense of the essential unity of all experience, whether related to the activity of the mind or the body. In the Journal fragment in which he revealed the process by which his thoughts developed from journal to lecture to essay to book, he also considered the unconventionality of his structure:

And at last they [his inspirations] stand, like the cubes of Pythagoras, firmly on either basis; like

statues on their pedestals, but the statues rarely take hold of hands. There is only such connection and series as is attainable in the galleries. And this affects their immediate practical and popular influence.¹

In light of his deliberate choice of an unorthodox method of construction and his own recognition of the results of that choice, it is unfair to Thoreau to conclude, as Perry Miller did, that he "shoves onto some theoretical cosmic economy the responsibility for coherence."² Thoreau did not shirk his responsibility; rather he took on himself the task of putting theory into practice. In going to Walden, he conducted his experiment in living according to Transcendental principles; in writing A Week, he applied these same principles to his art. At the heart of Transcendental philosophy was the belief in organic creation, the belief that nature generated life and growth from within. Thus the product was a constant revelation, taking on new facets and qualities throughout its period of growth. Not totally unpredictable, for the laws of nature did operate to maintain order and harmony, it was not totally predictable either. And herein was the miracle, the fascination of creation. As a Transcendental artist, Thoreau followed the lessons of nature. He, too, generated life from within and did not know what the final result would be until it had been achieved. But he, too, followed laws of order

¹Ibid., VII, 413

²Perry Miller, Consciousness in Concord (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), p. 32.

and harmony. Thus he sought to establish and maintain the proper relationship between form and content, between the intellect that placed words on a page and the spirit that determined the significance that the words would hold. A Week is Thoreau's first major experiment in organic creation, and an evaluation of it cannot justly be made until it has been analyzed according to the plan of organization by which it was conceived.

CHAPTER THREE

MYTH AND SYMBOL

F. O. Matthiessen states, "Where the age of Emerson may be most like our own is in its discovery of the value of myth."¹ Here he calls attention to that quality which links the Transcendentalists not only to the writers of this century but also to their contemporaries; that is, he points to their awareness of the necessity within American culture to search for national as well as individual identity by participating in the process of myth-making. The Transcendentalists saw little value in the romances of Melville and Hawthorne, being led by their Puritan heritage into the narrow conviction that fiction could not carry the burden of truth; in turn, the novelists feared that the Transcendentalists were wasting their noble ideas by clothing them in expressions too ethereal to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, the novelists and the essayists were united in their perception of the necessity for cultural as well as individual identification, for a sense of self within the family of man. Thus, in their separate fashions, they were myth-makers who helped to give Americans not only a knowledge of their unique character but also a sense of their destiny.

¹American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 626.

By the nineteenth century the myth-making process was well established in American letters. As Constance Rourke and Daniel Hoffman have clearly demonstrated, no single myth has evolved in American writing; instead there are many myths, some inherited and some invented.¹ One myth that has played a significant role in the identification of American character is the archetypal myth of innocence. Hoffman states it thus: "Relics of the unfallen pagan world survived in rituals asserting man's happy place in the cycle of Nature."² This particular myth evolved through the colonial period despite the Puritan emphasis upon man's depraved state, for supporting it were the colonial attitudes concerning the New World and its opportunities. The Puritan settlers came to the wilderness in search of a new Zion. Certainly they found much in the harsh, new environment to cause them to visualize their settlements as heaven's outposts, surrounded by the devil's emissaries who were striving to gain control of the earth. But because of their sense of mission, they could not be shaken from their belief that ultimately, if they proved worthy of the task, the land would be another Eden, where God's plan for man would be carried to fruition. And in the Southern colonies, writers were countering the

¹Constance Rourke, American Humor: A Study of the National Character (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1931); Daniel Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

²Hoffman, p. xii.

fears and skepticism of their countrymen by sending back to England glowing reports of an idyllic land, as John Hammond did in Leah and Rachel:

The Country is not only plentiful but pleasant and profitable, pleasant in regard of the brightness of the weather, the many delightful rivers, on which the inhabitants are settled (every man almost living in sight of a lovely river) the abundance of game, the extraordinary good neighbour-hood and loving conversation they have one with the other.¹

The Puritans never achieved their Biblical Eden, for as hardships lessened and prosperity grew, the goals of a secular society replaced the visions of a pious citizenry. But the vision of a secular Eden remained, since the presence of the frontier nurtured the belief in a continent so large and rich in natural resources that it could support an unlimited number of inhabitants. In Europe, Rousseau blamed the decadence of the Old World upon its lost innocence, as civilization and urbanization destroyed man's natural role in nature. In America, Crèvecoeur and Jefferson portrayed the new land as the one undefiled portion of the earth, where a man could live an uncorrupted existence in harmony with his natural surroundings. Crèvecoeur contrasted the hopelessness of the European condition with the promise in America:

The rest of the earth, I am told, is in some places too full, in others half depopulated. Misguided

¹Tracts and Other Papers Relating Principally to the Origin, Settlement, and Progress of the Colonies in North America, collected by Peter Force (Washington, D. C.: William Q. Force, 1844), III (No. 14), 18.

religion, tyranny, and absurd laws, every where depress and afflict mankind. Here we have in some measure regained the ancient dignity of our species; our laws are simple and just, we are a race of cultivators, our cultivation is unrestrained, and therefore every thing is prosperous and flourishing.¹

With a similar emphasis upon the virtues of the simple life, Jefferson stated his conviction that the well-being of the nation depended upon the people's devotion to agrarianism: ". . . the United States . . . will be more virtuous, more free and more happy, employed in agriculture, than as carriers or manufacturers. It is a truth, and a precious one for them, if they could be persuaded of it."²

Thus the setting for an American myth of innocence was established, a myth which would assume a major place in American folklore. And at the same time a mythical hero was created, whose attributes were in perfect harmony with his environment. He was a rustic, uncorrupted by the evils of cities and civilization, and he was a free man, who owned the land he tilled and protected and was not obliged to work for anyone but himself and his family. Although he valued learning, he knew he did not have the refinement of his European ancestors; but he believed he possessed advantages that far outweighed any cultural disadvantages. Royall Tyler expressed this attitude in his prologue to The Contrast:

¹Letters from an American Farmer (New York: Fox, Duffield & Co., 1904), pp. 8-9.

²The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, ed. by H. A. Washington (New York: John C. Riker, 1853), II, 11-12.

Why should our thoughts to distant countries roam,
 When each refinement may be found at home?
 Who travels now to ape the rich or great,
 To deck an equipage and roll in state;
 To court the graces, or to dance with ease,
 Or by hypocrisy to strive to please?
 Our free-born ancestors such arts despis'd;
 Genuine sincerity alone they priz'd;
 Their minds, with honest emulation fir'd,
 To solid good--not ornament--aspir'd;
 Or, if ambition rous'd a bolder flame,
 Stern virtue throve, where indolence was shame.¹

The myth of innocence gave Americans a defense against their European detractors who claimed that the New World nurtured barbarians, but more importantly, it was a step toward the securing of a national identity. In his Autobiography, Benjamin Franklin portrayed the new man who had been formed by the American environment. Despite the lack of a national past, of a self-defining culture, Franklin had risen to a position of eminence, recognized for his virtues and abilities both at home and abroad; and he had achieved these goals through his own determination, temperance, and integrity. The pattern was clearly delineated; its imitation would doubtless prove rewarding. But implicit in this portrayal of the new man was the emphasis on individual responsibility. Opportunities were abundant, but a man had to be able to grasp them. No outside force, natural or supernatural, would determine his destiny. A man's role in life was, then, the evidence of his personal talents and zeal.

¹Arthur Hobson Quinn, ed., Representative American Plays (New York: The Century Co., 1917), p. 48.

By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, this image of the self-made man seemed naive and even dangerous in light of the problems evident in rapid industrialization and mechanization. Consequently the myth-makers' perceptions of the fables through which Americans could continue their search for identification became darker and more profound. Increasingly, the myth of innocence was jeopardized by events which revealed man in an image truer to the depraved creature of Puritan conscience than to the descendant of a pre-lapsarian Adam. It was therefore apparent that the myth which would point toward a true American identity would be that which embraced a search for self-realization, not only within the finite world but also within the realm of the infinite--a search that could expose a creature better acquainted with darkness than with light. Thus the process of myth-making took on the complexities of the search for self-discovery, as Hoffman says of the writings of Hawthorne, Melville, and Twain:

Their romances reflect the isolation of the individual, his rebellion against authority and tradition, his solitary confrontation of primal forces, his consequent need to discover or redefine his own identity. Archetypal patterns derived from myth and folklore and ritual, enacted in both individual and communal experience, provide structures for their explorations of these themes.¹

These themes are also present in the works of the Transcendentalists, and for them also the archetypal patterns

¹Hoffman, p. 354.

of myth, folklore, and ritual became structural elements. But even more than the romancers of the period, the Transcendentalists embraced the American myth of innocence, using its setting and its hero as fundamental aspects of the Transcendental vision of man--a vision of what man could be rather than of what he was. Not unaware of the condition of man in a fallen world, they clung to the ideal--a being created in an unfallen state in perfect harmony with his uncorrupted natural environment. But in this corrupted world, the individual could seek identification with the ideal only by being responsible for shaping his own destiny. Emerson's plea for self-reliance was directed to this end:

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better or worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given him to till.¹

Emerson also believed that the truly cultured person was he who recognized that every man possessed within himself the source of all knowledge: "I have no churlish objection to the circumnavigation of the globe for the purposes of art, of study, and benevolence, so that the man is first domesticated or does not go abroad with the hope of finding somewhat greater than he knows."² Genuine refinement, then, was obtained

¹Complete Works of Emerson, II, 46.

²Ibid., II, 81.

through an awareness of self within one's own environment, and such an awareness would ultimately lead to the sense of individual being which had become the goal of American myth-making.

In his essay "History" Emerson put forth the fundamental truth upon which a mythology is established:

There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman of the whole estate. What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done, for this is the only and sovereign agent.¹

Emerson saw history as the record of this common mind, and the true historian as the man who gathered facts, not to instruct men about the past but rather to give them an awareness of the values of the present by showing them the unity within universal experience. It was, therefore, his judgment that a superior intellect used objective facts as the sources from which the subjective imagination extracted the eternal truths.

Those men who cannot answer by a superior wisdom those facts or questions of time, serve them. Facts encumber them, tyrannize over them, and make the men of routine, the men of sense, in whom a literal obedience to facts has extinguished every spark of that light by which man is truly man. But if the man is true to his better instincts or sentiments, and refuses the dominion of facts, as one that comes of a higher race; remains fast by the soul and

¹Ibid., II, 3.

sees the principle, then the facts fall aptly and supple into their places; they know their master, and the meanest of them glorifies him.¹

Emerson concluded that "every history should be written in a wisdom which divined the range of our affinities and looked at facts as symbols."² Hence, he considered Greek fablers to have been master historians, for it was in their creations of the imagination that the truths of their own age were recorded, to be recognized thereafter by all men as the eternal verities of mankind.

Like Emerson, Thoreau believed that knowledge of truth followed after an awareness of the common mind encompassing all humanity. In A Week he stated, "The life of a wise man is most of all extemporaneous, for he lives out of an eternity which includes all time."³ Thus to him also mythology was the most ancient of histories: "So far from being false or fabulous in the common sense, it contains only enduring and essential truth, the I and you, the here and there, the now and then, being omitted."⁴ Fables expressed a variety of truths because their creators had recognized facts as only the raw materials from which the finished product, truth, was to be fashioned. In his Journal, on November 8, 1851, Thoreau recorded his ambition to be this kind of creator:

¹Ibid., II, 32-33.

²Ibid., II, 40.

³Writings of Thoreau, I, 332.

⁴Ibid., I, 60.

I, too, would fain set down something beside facts. Facts should only be as the frame to my pictures; they should be material to the mythology which I am writing; not facts to assist men to make money, farmers to farm profitably, in any common sense; facts to tell who I am, and where I have been or what I have thought. . . . My facts shall be falsehoods to the common sense. I would so state facts that they shall be significant, shall be myths or mythologic. Facts which the mind perceived, thoughts which the body thought, --with these I deal.¹

Perry Miller refers to Thoreau's Journal as "a self-conscious effort to create a 'mythology' out of the village Apollo, Henry Thoreau."² And Ethel Seybold argues that Thoreau's experiment at Walden can be interpreted as "a conscious effort to realize the simplicity of Homeric life."³ It is true that Thoreau was the hero of his own mythology. In his Journal, on June 23, 1840, he expressed his conviction that an artist was compelled to rely upon his own experience: "He is the true artist whose life is his material; every stroke of the chisel must enter his own flesh and bone and not grate dully on marble."⁴ He was his own seeker after self-realization, the inhabitant of a fallen world yearning for awareness of man in the realm of the ideal. He was, then, the visionary hero who, despite the dark evidences of evil, persisted in his view of man as a being filled with

¹Ibid., IX, 99.

²Consciousness in Concord, p. 25.

³Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics, p. 51.

⁴Writings of Thoreau, VII, 149.

the potentiality for good. "A century ago," writes R. W. B. Lewis, "the image contrived to embody the most fruitful contemporary ideas was that of the authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history,"¹ This is the image which Thoreau drew of himself in A Week. The facts of his journey became the frame to his picture, the material to his mythology, through which he revealed the nature of his vision and the value it held for mankind.

Throughout recorded myth-making, a physical journey has been conceived as the symbolic search for self-realization. Thus it has been in the development of an American mythology; indeed, the journey has been an especially significant symbol because of the fact that the American character was the result of journeying from the Old World to the New, and because, as long as a frontier existed, the possibility of moving on and starting again was a source of national optimism. It was a yearning for self-discovery that drew Natty Bumppo to the New York and Nebraska frontier, and Huckleberry Finn to the Mississippi River and then Indian Territory. In seeking to communicate his search for Transcendental awareness within the framework of the journey, Thoreau perceived himself as a participator in the archetypal myth of journeying.

By the time he reached the final stages of composing A Week, Thoreau had made various excursions into nature, such

¹The American Adam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. I.

as the four-day walking trip to Wachusett Mountain with Richard Fuller in 1841, the trip with William Ellery Channing in 1843 into the Catskill Mountains, and the excursion on the Sudbury River in 1844 with Edward Sherman Hoar. While he drew upon his Journal accounts of these other excursions for A Week, he chose to give permanent significance to the 1839 journey with John because in so doing he could memorialize his beloved brother, the companion who came closer than anyone else to filling the demanding role of friend. This journey was the one of all his journeys that came closest to fulfilling his desire for total involvement, both external and internal, in a harmonious experience with both man and nature.

In organizing his journey around the period of the week and then around the period of the day, Thoreau was able to structure his own contemplations and emotions within the frame of archetypal symbolism attached to these periods of time. He treated both the week and the day as life cycles, bright with the ecstasy of beginning, mellowed by the acquiring of experience, and, finally, darkened but strengthened by full awareness. He began the week on Saturday simply because he and John had begun their voyage on Saturday, and into his recital of the experiences of this first day, he interjected a tone of high expectation, as the untried voyager anticipated his adventure into unknown lands. Despite his inexperience,

he was confident that he was strong enough to face his destiny: "Naught was familiar but the heavens, from under whose roof the voyageur never passes; but with their countenance, and the acquaintance we had with river and wood, we trusted to fare well under any circumstances."¹ As the week progressed, the optimism of the untried youth was tempered by reality, for each experience was a step toward realization and maturity. Some experiences were glorious ones which he met with high exultation; others were saddening and made him want to cry out at the futility of life. But by the end of the cycle of a week, the sum of the experiences had brought about a transformation. The youth was now the man--not as capable as he had once been of sustained ecstasy but more sure of his ability to face his destiny because he had been tested. Through the process of self-discovery, he had come to know his weaknesses, and he was saddened by them, but he was saved by the knowledge that his strengths were equal to the task of ~~staving~~ off despair.

In similar fashion, Thoreau presented each day as an archetypal life cycle. Of his days he said: "In the morning we do not believe in expediency; we will start afresh, and have no patching, no temporary fixtures. The afternoon man has an interest in the past; his eye is divided, and he sees indifferently well either way."² He began each day on a

¹Writings of Thoreau, I, 20.

²Ibid., VII, 75.

note of renewal. This period of the life cycle saw man at his most perfect, and with some awareness of the state of perfection, he could look ahead with confidence and enthusiasm. By noon he had both past and future to contemplate, and his tempo was therefore slowed by this necessity to look both backward and forward. Then by evening he had arrived at that state of experience where tiredness demands withdrawal. "At night we recline, and nestle, and infold ourselves in our being. . . . The soul departs out of the body, and sleeps in God a divine slumber."¹ Withdrawal was therefore not an experience filled with despair, for not only was there a sense of fulfillment to sustain the voyager, but also the knowledge that renewal would follow the period of slumber. For Thoreau there was, then, in the structure of the week and the day, a satisfying awareness of the organic oneness enveloping all creation, for the cycle of life was the evidence of natural law.

Thus Thoreau fashioned the structure of A Week around the archetypes that served to convey the Transcendental sense of man and his role in the universe: the journey of self-discovery, undertaken by the unfallen hero and framed within the pattern of the life cycle. He was, then, a myth-maker who created on the framework of a two-weeks' voyage into nature a symbolic journey into the limitless realm of the mind. But essential to the communication of his myth were

¹Miller, Consciousness in Concord, p. 167.

the key symbols through which he expressed his sense of Transcendental wholeness. These symbols were the means by which he released his thoughts from the limitations of time and space; for as his senses reacted to the natural scene, his thoughts flowed back and forth in time, accumulating experience into a single awareness. The dominant symbol through which he conveyed this awareness was the river itself.

Nina Baym recognized the pervasiveness of Thoreau's use of water as a symbol:

Water imagery occurs everywhere in Thoreau's work. It is expressed in images of rivers, brooks, ponds, lakes, marshes, waterfalls, rains, dews and watery ditches. Water is the scene of many of his activities such as bathing, boating, fishing. The lengthy exploratory journeys around which many works are organized always proceed on, beside or towards water. Scarcely a single meditative passage in all the journals develops without employing water metaphors.¹

In A Week he fused the journey into nature with the journey into thought by interpreting his physical activities upon the river as symbols of mental activity. In his introductory chapter he wrote of the act of embarkation as a launching into the timeless realm of the mind. "I had often stood on the banks of the Concord, watching the lapse of the current, an emblem of all progress, following the same law and the system, with time, and all that is made; . . . at last I resolved to launch myself on its bosom and float whither it would bear me."²

¹"From Metaphysics to Metaphor: The Image of Water in Emerson and Thoreau," Studies in Romanticism, V, No. 4 (Summer, 1966), 238-39.

²Writings of Thoreau, I, 11.

Floating upon the river, then, was the physical act which corresponded to the mental act of floating out of space and time so that the mind would no longer be encumbered by earthly concerns and would be free to achieve spiritual communication: ". . . we seemed to be embarked on the placid current of our dreams, floating from past to future as silently as one awakes to fresh morning or evening thoughts."¹

Symbolically, the current of the river led him away from the confinement of tradition and society and toward the source of reality--the idea behind experience. The river was the way to an understanding of the eternal, for it was all rivers in all time, and those who lived by it or rode upon it became united by its timeless ebb and flow: "All streams are but tributary to the ocean, which itself does not stream, and the shores are unchanged, but in longer periods than man can measure."² Furthermore, the movement and circulation of the water symbolized the organic continuity of creation, not just in life but in art as well. A river allowed to flow in its destined channel was a symbol of the beauty and harmony which existed when man did not interfere with the natural processes. Its undulations, its rippling motions were symbols of the ideal, instinctive movements of all nature. But a river which man twisted off its course with his dams so that

¹Ibid., I, 17.

²Ibid., I, 128.

industry and commerce could be served, or a man-made body of water created for the same purpose, was robbed of these features. In speaking of a canal which men had formed to connect the Concord and the Merrimack, Thoreau stated,

There appeared some want of harmony in its scenery, since it was not of equal date with the woods and meadows through which it is led, and we missed the conciliatory influence of time on land and water; but in the lapse of ages, Nature will recover and indemnify herself, and gradually plant fit shrubs and flowers along its borders.¹

In the same fashion, an artist's thoughts, at their inception, were as fluid and free as were the ripples in the river and should be permitted to flow naturally into the form that would result in beauty and harmony; pressure to serve any other end would destroy the art. "Thus all works pass directly out of the hands of the architect into the hands of Nature, to be perfected."²

The still river was a reflector of the natural life which thrived in it and on its shores; so perfect was this reflection that it corresponded to the reality that existed in the heavens. Thoreau believed that a man had to possess a special vision to see the ideal manifested through the reflection of nature in water.

We notice that it required a separate intention of the eye, a more free and abstracted vision,

¹Ibid., I, 62-63.

²Ibid., I, 63.

to see the reflected trees and the sky, than to see the river bottom merely; and so are there manifold visions in the direction of every object, and even the most opaque reflect the heavens from their surface.¹

When a skiff containing two men passed the brothers' boat, reflection made it appear to be floating in mid-air, like a bird or a leaf being gently suspended between sky and water. Thoreau called this sensation "a beautiful experiment in natural philosophy," and from it he drew a conclusion regarding the necessity for correspondence: "It reminded us how much fairer and nobler all the actions of man might be, and that our life in its whole economy might be as beautiful as the fairest works of art or nature."²

Finally, the purity of the river symbolized the purity for which man could strive. The river flowed from its source in the clouds, and because of its birth it would never become stagnant, but would maintain its purity until it reached the sea. Thoreau urged man to respond to life in accordance with nature. His birth, too, called upon him to avoid stagnation and to keep his purity until his individual identity was taken up in the flow of time. "A man's life should be constantly as fresh as this river. It should be the same channel, but a new water every instant."³

¹Ibid., I, 47-48.

²Ibid., I, 48.

³Ibid., I, 137.

To aid in his communication of his sense of release from time and space, and of the ecstasy such release gave him, Thoreau transformed both sound and silence into symbol. Uniquely sensitive to sound, he relied upon his ear for the constant renewal of his inspiration. Especially at night, when his eye could no longer serve him, his ear became his instrument of comprehension. He was aware of the sounds from the villages that travelled long distances in the night as well as of the closer sounds made by the animals and insects. The fusion of these sounds filled him with a sense of well-being, for he felt that the blending of these diverse sounds was symbolic of the organic harmony within nature. "All these sounds, the crowing of cocks, the baying of dogs, and the hum of insects at noon, are the evidence of nature's health or sound state."¹

Of all sounds through which he could achieve a sense of the eternal, he considered music supreme, "the sound of the universal laws promulgated," the "communication from age to age, of the fairest and noblest thoughts." Yet he did not restrict the term "music" to just those melodious sounds produced by voice or instrument; indeed, he knew very little about music as an art form. He could respond to a musical performance, according to the conventional use of the term, as he must have done prior to this comment in his Journal on August 12, 1840: "When I hear a strain of music from across

¹Ibid., I, 40.

the street, I put away Homer and Shakspeare, and read them in the original."¹ But more frequently, when he spoke of music, he was referring to any series of sounds which communicated to him the rhythm and harmony of nature. In these sounds there seemed to him to be a communication from a higher level of being. The beat of a distant drummer, calling other young men to muster, called him to a moment beyond time.

No doubt he was an insignificant drummer enough, but his music afforded us a prime and leisure hour, and we felt that we were in season wholly. These simple sounds related us to the stars. Ay, there was a logic in them so convincing that the combined sense of mankind could never make me doubt their conclusions. I stop my habitual thinking, as if the plow had suddenly run deeper in its furrow through the crust of the world. How can I go on, who have just stepped over such a bottomless skylight in the bog of my life.²

The hum of a telegraph wire could arouse in him a similar ecstatic response. He told of a particular early morning walk, during which he heard from some distance away "a faint music in the air like an Aeolian harp." He found that "it was the telegraph harp singing its message through the country, its message sent not by men, but by gods."³ To him this vibration above the earth carried news of far more significance than that which most men would receive from it. "It told of things worthy to hear, and worthy of the electric

¹Miller, Consciousness in Concord, p. 152.

²Writings of Thoreau, I, 181.

³Ibid., I, 185.

fluid to carry the news of, not of the price of cotton and flour, but it hinted at the price of the world itself and of things priceless, of absolute truth and beauty."¹

A strain of music was, then, an organic communication. As the conveyor of the noblest aspirations within man's understanding, it was understood from age to age. "It teaches us again and again to trust the remotest and finest as the divinest instinct, and makes a dream our only real experience."² The harmony of sound which Thoreau called music was the transmitter of health, courage, truth, strength, and beauty. It was an eternal language. If a man understood it, he could speak with the gods.

Yet Thoreau believed that sound--that which a man hears outwardly--was not as direct a communication with the infinite as was silence--that which a man hears inwardly. Certain sounds could be a significant approach to spiritual awareness, but for him solitude and silence were even more necessary. Of silence he said, "All sounds are her servants, and purveyors, proclaiming not only that their mistress is, but is a rare mistress, and earnestly to be sought after."³ Sounds were, then, "heighteners and intensifiers of the Silence." Through acquaintance with sound, a man came to a partial realization of the power that silence held, of the

¹Ibid., I, 185.

²Ibid., I, 183.

³Ibid., I, 418.

untold knowledge that was contained within its vastness. To Thoreau the Grecian era was the greatest historical age because it was a silent age, when a wise man knew that he was most eloquent when he was most silent. Thoreau considered silence "the universal refuge, the sequel to all dull discourses and all foolish acts, a balm to our every chagrin, as welcome after satiety as after disappointment. . . ." ¹ He confessed that he could not interpret it, but it is clear that this was the primary reason he considered it so significant. Silence was a parallel to the spiritual unknown, and he could just as well have directed this statement about silence to the search for spiritual awareness:

A man may run on confidently for a time, thinking he has her under his thumb, and shall one day exhaust her, but he too must at last be silent, and men remark only how brave a beginning he made; for when he at length dives into her, so vast is the disproportion of the told to the untold that the former will seem but the bubble on the surface where he disappeared. ²

In creating the illusion of the lapse of time, Thoreau was following a declaration he had recorded in his Journal on February 15, 1838: "The true student will cleave ever to the good, recognizing no Past, no Present. . . ." ³ Therefore the observations of the journey became observations of all men in all time. "All that is told of mankind, of the inhabitants

¹Ibid., I, 418.

²Ibid., I, 420.

³Ibid., VII, 28.

of the Upper Nile, and the Sunderbunds, and Timbuctoo, and the Orinoko, was experienced here. Every race and class of men was represented."¹ As men lived in Thebes, so they lived in Dunstable. While on the surface, nature made changes perceivable to the eye, to the mind and soul she was unchangeable. "Go where we will, we discover infinite change in particulars only, not in generals."² Thus to study nature was to study universality, to know that life was an endless stream. The freshest flowers grew in soil composed of decayed stumps whose rings numbered centuries of growth. The farmer's body returned to the soil to restore its fertility. Universal law and harmony existed in all nature and man was a part of this whether he realized it or not, but realization was the foundation of all knowledge. "Why, what we would fain call new is not skin deep; the earth is not yet stained by it. . . . The newest is but the oldest made visible to our senses."³

Thus Thoreau structured his book around the myth and the symbols which conveyed his sense of the individual identity seeking to discover itself within the framework of its awareness. To Thoreau, this framework extended far beyond physical or sensuous boundaries; indeed, awareness only began on this level, for facts were of little value until they had been symbolically transformed into the elements of truth.

¹Ibid., I, 127.

²Ibid., I, 128.

³Ibid., I, 160.

His friend and fellow Transcendentalist, Bronson Alcott, recognized that he was more than a writer of nature lore; he was a myth-maker who transformed the facts of his own experiences in nature into the material of his mythology:

Like Homer, Hesiod, and the earliest poets, Thoreau saw and treated Nature as a symbolism of the mind, as a physiological theology. His mysticism is alike solid and organic, animal and ideal. He is the mythologist of these last days--reminds more of the ancients in his mode of seeing and saying than any recent naturalist and poet.¹

¹The Journals of Bronson Alcott, ed. by Odell Shepard (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1938), p. 350.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SIMULTANEOUS JOURNEYS

Analysis of the patterns of myth and symbol in A Week helps to clarify its external unity, but such an examination does not adequately illuminate the process by which Thoreau sought to achieve internal unity. A consideration of this matter requires an analysis of the supremely Transcendental quality of the book--the simultaneous voyaging of the body and mind. This analysis must begin with a study of Thoreau's theory of art, insofar as it had to do with structure, for it is his conception of organic creation that is evident in the internal structure of A Week.

The rejection of mechanical unity and the application of organic unity to art was one of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's major contributions to literary theory, and it is in his literary criticism that the fundamental principles upon which Thoreau based his theory of structure can be found. Basic to Coleridge's conclusions was his belief in the reality of the Transcendental world of the spirit. He asserted that this eternally perfect world was knowable, and in order to defend this belief, he distinguished between two powers of the mind, the understanding and the reason.

By the "understanding," I mean the faculty of thinking and forming judgments on the notices furnished by the sense, according to certain

rules existing in itself, which rules constitute its distinct nature. By the pure "reason," I mean the power by which we become possessed of principles,--the eternal verities of Plato and Descartes, and of ideas, not images. . . .¹

The reason, then, was that supreme faculty which enabled men to know God, who was the pure Idea. The understanding, which operated through the assimilating power of the senses, was a vital faculty to man, but it was inferior to reason, for it offered knowledge of the finite world only.

Through a second distinction, that between imagination and fancy, Coleridge provided a means of uniting the understanding and the reason. While fancy was no more than the exercise of the will upon the memory, imagination was ". . . that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the reason in images of the sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths of which they are the conductors."² Coleridge thus assigned to the imagination the task of uniting the empirical and intuitive faculties of the mind, thereby making it possible for man to assimilate his thoughts into a single perception.

While Coleridge applied these distinctions to the minds of all men, he believed that further delineation was necessary to distinguish the mind of the artist; therefore he divided the imagination into two areas.

¹The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. by W. G. T. Shedd (New York: Harper & Bros., 1853), II, 164.

²Ibid., I, 436.

The IMAGINATION, then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.¹

Thus the true artist possessed no different faculties from those of other men, but his imaginative faculty operated on a different level. He was able to engage in the actual process of creation and recreation, for his imagination was a living, vital organism which, through assimilation and unification, created new forms.

Coleridge called the art created through such a process "the mediatrix between, and reconciler of, nature and man."² It was the artist's relationship with nature which made it possible for him to function as an artist. Nature was the medium through which God revealed Himself, and as an artist developed his powers of communion with nature, his mind became the image of God's mind. He took into himself the laws of nature and fashioned his art in accordance with

¹Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. by J. Shawcross (London: Clarendon Press, 1907), I, 202.

²Ibid., II, 253.

them. The degree of an artist's genius could be measured by the degree of unity he could achieve between the image he created and the idea in nature for which the image stood. The true artist recognized one purpose for his art: ". . . to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought and thought nature."¹ A perfect work of art would be a perfect unification between matter and spirit, for this was God's way of expressing Himself in creation.

Coleridge further asserted that, in a living organism, the whole was primary and the parts secondary. "The difference between an inorganic and an organic body lies in this: --In the first . . . the whole is nothing more than a collection of the individual parts or phenomena. In the second . . . the whole is the effect of, or results from, the parts; it--the whole--is every thing, and the parts are nothing."² In the process of organic growth in nature, the parts lost their individual identity and became elements of the new whole. The artist of genius recognized that such an interdependence of parts was essential to his final creation, also, and that the proper form would evolve from this eternal assimilation. At the same time, he realized that while the process of organic growth was a totally unconscious one in nature, a writer exercised his will in the creation of his form. The man of genius chose the images and the plan that would best reflect

¹Ibid., II, 258.

²Complete Works of Coleridge, VI, 379.

the internal spirit of his work.¹ Therefore he did not create entirely without conscious deliberation and design.

But neither did a true artist superimpose upon his material a predetermined form, for such an attempt could only result in an artificial piece of work that was inferior because it was not in harmony with nature. The only structural process that could produce a true work of art was the organic process.

The form is mechanic when on any given material we impress a predetermined form not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material, as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form.²

Through an analogy Coleridge warned against judging the appropriateness of the form of a work according to preconceived principles established on a generic basis.

Say rather if, having first seen the dove, we abstracted its outlines, gave them a false generalization, called them principle or ideal of bird-beauty and then proceeded to criticize the swan or the eagle;--not less absurd is it to pass judgment on the works of a poet on the mere ground they have been called by the same class-name with the works of other poets of other times and circumstances, or on any ground, indeed save that of their inappropriateness to their own end and being, their want of significance, as symbols and physiognomy.³

¹Coleridge's *Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. by T. M. Raysor (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930), II, 192.

²*Ibid.*, I, 224.

³*Ibid.*, I, 196.

Thus, for each work of art, there was a form appropriate to it alone, and it was a form that originated within and evolved in perfect harmony with the idea and spirit of its creation.

Coleridge was not Thoreau's only source of knowledge of the organic theory; Emerson taught this method of creation also. Thoreau accepted Coleridge's distinction between the understanding and the reason and in Nature described the separate functions of these two faculties of the mind: "The understanding adds, divides, combines, measures, and finds nutriment and room for its activity in this worthy scene. Meantime, Reason transfers all these lessons into its own world of thought, by perceiving the analogy that marries Matter and Mind."¹ In this distinction Emerson seems to have granted to reason that conciliating and assimilating power that Coleridge assigned to the imagination. He asserted that in transferring the knowledge gained through the understanding onto its own level, reason created a single perception of the intuitive and empirical processes. Emerson regretted that most men were applying but half their possible force, working on the world with their understanding alone. Only the poets and philosophers, who were actually the same, were achieving higher levels of intellectual activity by applying the force of reason and thereby penetrating the realm of nature and making its laws their own.

¹Complete Works of Emerson, I, 36.

In "The American Scholar" Emerson explained the process by which the poets absorbed nature's laws:

To the young mind every thing is individual, stands by itself. By and by, it finds how to join two things and see in them one nature; then three, then three thousand; and so, tyrannized over by its own unifying instinct, it goes on tying things together, diminishing anomalies, discovering roots running under ground whereby contrary and remote things cohere and flower out from one stem. It presently learns that since the dawn of history there has been a constant accumulation and classifying of facts. But what is classification but the perceiving that these objects are not chaotic, and are not foreign, but have a law which is also a law of the human mind?¹

A poet was, then, a man who integrated parts in conformity with the laws of nature. He recognized that variety was in itself the source of unity, that "a leaf, a drop, a crystal, a moment of time is related to the whole, and partakes of the perfection of the whole." Emerson called a work of art "an abstract or epitome of the world . . . the result or expression of nature, in miniature."² Its creator, through his perception of nature's higher laws, had glimpsed the harmony of things within the mind of God and had then fashioned his own image of that harmony.

Like Coleridge and Emerson, Thoreau was convinced that the man of genius was he who realized the dual sources of man's awareness. In his Journal, on September 28, 1840, he stated:

¹Ibid., I, 85-86.

²Ibid., I, 23.

The world thinks it knows only what it comes in contact with, and those repelling points give it a configuration to the senses--a hard crust aids its distinct knowledge. But what we truly know has no points of repulsion, and consequently no objective form--being surveyed from within. We are acquainted with the soul and its phenomena, as a bird with the air in which it floats. Distinctness is superficial and formal merely. We touch objects--as the earth we stand on--but the soul--as the air we breathe. We know the world superficially--the soul centrally. In the one case our surfaces meet, in the other our centres coincide.¹

Knowledge of God and of His creation, including self, was possible when man recognized his intuition as the source of Transcendental awareness. Without such recognition, knowledge was limited to that which could be gained through the inferior faculty of the understanding.

Coleridge and Emerson taught that Transcendental awareness came through the recognition of nature's laws as the earthly manifestation of God's laws, but it was Thoreau who determined to test the truth of this assumption. He first devoted himself to an empirical study of nature and thereby developed his sensuous perceptions to a unique degree. Not content merely to observe nature with a leisurely, roving eye, he concerned himself with the minutest details of nature's activities, even if such observations required him to endure the cold for hours on end or walk for miles without rest. "Nature will bear the closest inspection. She invites us to lay our eye level with her smallest leaf, and take an insect view

¹Miller, Consciousness in Concord, p. 36.

of its plain."¹ But such study acquired much deeper significance when he turned to nature as the source of truth. He stated that the perceptions of the eye and ear were of far more value than a mere observer of surface details could imagine.

I believe that there is an ideal or real Nature, infinitely more perfect than the actual, as there is an ideal life of man; else where are the glorious summers which in vision sometimes visit my brain? When Nature ceases to be supernatural to a man, what will he do then? Of what worth is human life if its actions are no longer to have this sublime and unexplored scenery? Who will build a cottage and dwell in it with enthusiasm if not in the Elysian fields?²

In order to achieve such a relationship with nature, Thoreau sought a perfect correspondence with her, that is, a correspondence through both the senses and the spirit. In a Journal entry for July 2, 1840, he summed up the necessity for such a dual relationship: "I am not taken up, like Moses, upon a mountain to learn the law, but lifted up in my seat here, in the warm sunshine and genial light."³

In developing a theory of art, Thoreau worked from the basic premise that a true artist used his life as his material, but that, as Coleridge and Emerson had demonstrated, he fashioned the communication of his experience according to the laws of nature; that is, he made of life an image of the

¹Writings of Thoreau, VII, 92.

²Sanborn, The First and Last Journeys of Thoreau, I. 36.

³Writings of Thoreau, VII, 158.

Idea in nature. In his Journal he attempted a description of such an artist:

He must be something more than natural,--even supernatural. Nature will not speak through but along with him. His voice will not proceed from her midst, but, breathing on her, will make her the expression of his thought. He then poetizes when he takes a fact out of nature into spirit. He speaks without reference to time or place. His thought is one world, hers another. He is another Nature,--Nature's brother. Kindly offices do they perform for one another. Each publishes the other's truth.¹

A poet, then, was "Nature's brother," and in this sublime capacity he communed with the spirit within the universe.

To Thoreau it was axiomatic that such a poet would create a work of art whose form was not predetermined but rather grew from within. He retained, however, his awareness that perception was of a dual but not equal nature; and therefore, in determining the form of his own work, he was guided by this awareness. On the one hand, he formulated a conscious plan, a deliberate method of organization, and on the other hand, he incorporated the organic principle of unconscious growth from within. Yet as he conceived the nature of creation, he saw no reason for a lack of harmony in the form of such a work, for, as Coleridge had pointed out, an artist exercised his will, formed out of his uniquely developed perceptions, to select that plan which would best mirror the internal spirit and as long as that spirit was revealed, the form was organically and artistically appropriate.

¹Ibid., VII, 74-75.

The art which only gilds the surface and demands merely a superficial polish, without reaching to the core, is but varnish and filigree. But the work of genius is rough-hewn from the first, because it anticipates the lapse of time and has an ingrained polish, which still appears when fragments are broken off, an essential quality of its substance. Its beauty is its strength. It breaks with a lustre, and splits in cubes and diamonds. Like the diamond, it has only to be cut to be polished, and its surface is a window to its interior splendors.¹

Thoreau incorporated the organic principle of creation into A Week through his exploration of the simultaneous journeys of the body and mind. Through his senses he perceived the world of nature, but simultaneously his intellect responded to nature. Emerson had made it clear that, from the natural fact, one could extract its intellectual equivalent.

Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture.²

Because of his closer association with nature, Thoreau was better equipped than was Emerson to use the phenomena in nature to symbolize the mind's activity. However, unlike Emerson, he found in nature not just the symbol through

¹Ibid., VII, 275.

²Complete Works of Emerson. I, 26. Emerson stated, "That which intellectually considered we call Reason, considered in relation to nature, we call Spirit." (I, 27) While he was inclined to differentiate between the mind and the spirit, thinking in terms of a tripartite division of mind, body, and spirit, his vision, like Thoreau's, was essentially dual, the spirit being an inseparable element of the mind.

which an intuitive truth could be expressed, but the truth itself, to be perceived and extracted through association and contemplation.¹ Thus the engagement of the physical self in the act of journeying made it possible for the mind to carry out its own explorations into the infinite. The process was sublimely organic. At the beginning of his account of his voyage, he called the port of Concord a place "of entry and departure for the bodies as well as the souls of men."² He launched his craft after ceremonies befitting "those who are embarked on unusual enterprises." (14) A voyage on a New England river was not an unusual undertaking, but a journey into the realm of the mind was an event that merited a ceremonial departure.

In the introductory chapter, entitled "Concord River," Thoreau establishes his intention to be a myth-maker, transforming a New England river into an archetypal river of exploration. By relating the Concord River to all rivers in all time, he makes clear the universal significance of his journey. Before the white man named it Concord River, it was to the Indians the Musketaquid, or Grass-ground River. But

¹In chapter one, pp. 4-15, of his unpublished master's thesis, "A Formal Study of Henry David Thoreau," (University of Iowa, 1948), William Drake develops this premise. He argues that Thoreau's firsthand knowledge of nature led him away from pure idealism toward an empiricist's systematic search for "the material for metaphor with which to describe his own experience"

²Writings of Thoreau, I, 12. Hereafter citations from the first volume of the Writings will be included in the text.

whatever the name, or the time at which it came to have a place in civilized man's awareness, it is as old as the Nile or Euphrates, as significant as the Mississippi or the Ganges. Poets have made famous these other rivers, and he desires that he might be allowed "to associate our muddy but much abused Concord River with the most famous in history." (10) In telling of his own voyage, he portrays himself as one of a select group of adventurers who have sought to know the true meaning of existence. By following "the same law with the system, with time, and all that is made," he voyages beyond the present into the flux of time. Hence, despite the physical limitations of the actual physical journey, he is able to say in all honesty, "I never voyaged so far in all my life." (6)

As an archetypal cycle encompassing his simultaneous journeys, the week begins in the "Saturday" chapter on a note of high expectation as Thoreau immerses himself in nature. In the "Sunday" chapter, as he contemplates the advantages of the natural life, his confidence increases. By the end of the "Monday" chapter he has reached a level of ecstasy that is climaxed by his account at the beginning of the "Tuesday" chapter of climbing Saddle-back Mountain. His revelation of the vision of the infinite which he received at the pinnacle of this mountain marks the high point of his journeying. As he descends the mountain and reenters the world of men, finding that it has been a "drizzling day

wholly," he begins to confront the reality that will diminish his joy and take away his innocence. In the world of nature he has found total harmony and momentarily felt the oneness of organic creation, but in the world of men he has never felt a comparable joy or sense of unity. The "Wednesday" chapter is the evidence of his frustration as he confronts the fact that he cannot reconcile earth and heaven. In this chapter there is a definite falling-away from the rapture of the "Tuesday" chapter; it is the pivotal chapter between the "Monday" and "Tuesday" chapters, with their tone of confidence and joy, and the "Thursday" and "Friday" chapters, which reveal his final mood of acquiescence. By this stage of his journeying, he has lost the enthusiasm of youth as experience has matured and sobered his vision. But awareness has not dispelled all his joy, nor has acquiescence reduced him to a passive state. In the final "Friday" chapter, he reveals the manner in which he will sustain himself in the face of reality.

Throughout the cycle of the week, Thoreau maintains his sense of simultaneous journeying through the use of a single pattern of movement--that of departure and return. The cycle of the week is itself a manifestation of this pattern, as it serves to frame, not only the brothers' departure from and return to Concord, but also the mind's reaching-out toward the infinite and its return to the finite, having captured a spark of the divine essence. At the conclusion of his account of his preparations for the journey

and his purposes in making it, he states, ". . . I resolved to launch myself on its bosom and float whither it would bear me." (11) In making his departure, then, he places himself under the influence of the river, where he will be borne, physically and intellectually, as far as his human faculties will permit. And when that farthest point has been reached, he will return, having taken into himself the wisdom that comes from journeying. In his "Thursday" chapter he speaks of the appropriateness of concluding the voyage upriver at Concord, New Hampshire, thus "uniting Concord with Concord." Rapids prevent the boat's passage to this point, but in wishing for it, he calls attention to the fact that he is thinking in terms of returning to the point of departure.

Within each chapter of A Week, the simultaneous journeys are united by theme and by purpose. The "Saturday" and "Sunday" chapters are closely integrated parts of the book in which Thoreau conveys the sense of high expectation that the prospects of journeying have given him. The theme of the "Saturday" chapter is the establishment of his communion with nature. His whole being journeys into nature, as he sensuously perceives the landscape and its inhabitants and then intuitively responds to this stimulation. He feels that he is responding not only to the beauty and repose of undisturbed nature, but also to his own instinctive yearning for a return to the source of all being. "Thus, by one bait or another, Nature allures inhabitants into all her recesses." (21)

Before undertaking the voyage, the brothers had attempted to overcome any possibility of intruding upon nature. They had painted their boat green with a border of blue to symbolize its relationship to the elements in which it was to move. In telling of this, Thoreau continues to examine the necessity for achieving harmony with nature, as he relates the boat's structure to the native creatures that naturally perform the same movements which it is expected to perform.

If rightly made, a boat would be a sort of amphibious animal, a creature of two elements, related by one half its structure to some swift and shapely fish, and by the other to some strong-winged and graceful bird. The fish shows where there should be the greatest breadth of beam and depth in the hold; its fins direct where to set the oars, and the tail gives some hint for the form and position of the rudder. The bird shows how to rig and trim the sails, and what form to give to the prow, that it may balance the boat and divide the air and water best. These hints we had but partially obeyed. (13)

As Thoreau describes the brother's departure, he conveys his immediate sense of floating out of the present into a timeless existence. He includes Emerson's "Concord Hymn" and two of his own poems to symbolize this sensation. Emerson's poem commemorating Revolutionary War heroes calls attention to a fixed time in man's history, while his own poems emphasize the timelessness of the remote heroes who, before man's recorded history, inhabited the same area. Thus he symbolizes his awareness of himself within the flux of time.

In this recital of his first day of journeying, Thoreau describes with obvious pleasure the river and the late summer foliage upon its banks, but he gives most of his attention to the animal and human life that are a part of the immediate scene. He tells of the bittern and the tortoises, which instinctively seek to avoid their intruding craft, and at some length he tells of the fish which make their home in the river. Although he carefully describes the varieties of fishes, he is more concerned with a symbolic interpretation of these varieties than he is with a scientific examination of their similarities and differences. They are worthy of special consideration because "they are not phenomena confined to certain localities only, but forms and phases of the life in nature universally dispersed." (23) The contemplation of these forms, therefore, is not to discover new species but to discover new contemplations.

The fish illustrate the "grand security and serenity of nature," for they are all content. The common sun-fish, "a perfect jewel of the river," lives in total harmony with its surroundings. The perch, a handsome, daring fish, will rise from the bottom when the surface of the water is disturbed and risk being caught in order to assert its control of its habitat. The shiner, a tender victim of its tougher neighbors, nevertheless holds its own because it is not easily caught. The swift and wary pickerel, the dull and blundering horned pout, the slimy eel--all share the same

natural element despite their differences. One fish, the shad, is especially interesting to Thoreau because it is a fighting fish whose instinct is its faith. It persistently attacks dams, armed only with "innocence and a just cause." Thoreau associates himself with the shad--"I for one am with thee"--and predicts that the time will come when "even thy dull watery dream shall be more than realized." The advice he gives the shad is that which he himself relies upon: Keep a stiff fin, then, and stem all the tides thou mayst meet." (36)

The human beings who interest Thoreau on this first day of the voyage are those who have discovered the way to relate themselves to the natural environment. The last of their townsmen that the brothers see is a fisherman on shore who, as long as he is in their view, stands silently, waiting for fisherman's luck. Thoreau attributes the man's patience to a special lure that nature puts forth, but he believes that many who respond to the lure still do not see all that nature holds: "For lore that's deep must deeply studied be,/ As from deep wells men read star-poetry." (17) However, the one who persists--and Thoreau will be that one--will be rewarded with a glimpse of unforeseen grandeur:

Who would neglect the least celestial sound,
Or faintest light that falls on earthly ground,
If he could know it one day would be found
That star in Cygnus whither we are bound,
And pale our sun with heavenly radiance round? (17)

Men who attain harmony with nature exist in a state of timelessness, for they engage in thoughts and activities

that relate them to a universal present. In the introductory chapter Thoreau bestowed his approval on the men close to the earth and water who instinctively fulfilled their proper function just as did the creatures of the earth. These were the "rude and sturdy, experienced and wise men, keeping their castles, or teaming up their summer's wood, or chopping alone in the woods; men fuller of talk and rare adventure in the sun and wind and rain, than a chestnut is of meat, . . . greater men than Homer, or Chaucer, or Shakespeare, only they never got time to say so; they never took to the way of writing." (6)

In this chapter he contrasts the fisherman whose contemplations lead him to an understanding of the correspondence between the span of human life and the river running down to the sea with the judge whose only discoveries are in bailments. He also recalls the elderly Englishman whom he frequently came across in earlier days as they shared the fishing spots around Concord. An observer, noting the infrequency with which the old man carried fish home, would have thought him either silly or extremely unlucky, unless he understood that his fishing was "not a sport, nor solely a means of subsistence, but a sort of solemn sacrament and withdrawal from the world, just as the aged read their Bibles." (22-23)

Just as much engaged in the partaking of the sacrament are the men haying in the meadows as the brothers pass, for they are in such perfect harmony with their surroundings that their heads seem to be waving in rhythm with the grass they are cutting.

By the end of the "Saturday" chapter, Thoreau has declared his separation from civilized man's normal pursuits and his total devotion to nature. As he tells of the brothers' first night away from Concord, he emphasizes the isolation of their camp. Surrounded by the serenity and majesty of nature, he feels that nature has accepted John and him and will now impart to them that knowledge without which the essence of the divine can never be known.

Having established his relationship with nature, Thoreau proceeds in the "Sunday" chapter to distinguish between the natural existence that he has chosen and the civilized way of life that most men accept. On this Sabbath day he finds it fitting to begin his comparison by emphasizing the great difference between his mode of worship and that of other men. His is a "natural Sabbath," which he observes with "heathenish integrity." While the bells call other New England citizens to worship within their orthodox institutions, he and John drift on the Concord River. While others occupy pews behind closed doors and permit ministers to attempt to interpret divine law for them, they journey down the river and interpret these laws as they receive them sensuously and intuitively. Thus they share a Sabbath with the creatures of nature--the fish which swim more stately in honor of the day, the minnows which rise to the surface to "behold the heavens," and the frogs which meditate, "all Sabbath thoughts, summing up their week, with one eye out on the golden sun,

and one toe upon a reed, eying the wondrous universe in which they act their part. . . ." (48)

In his contemplations upon his own activities as well as upon subjects outside his immediate experience, Thoreau offers pointed contrasts to the experiences that other men call religious. He calls John and himself the "truest observers of this sunny day" and questions whether many of those who profess Christianity have any real awareness of a divine power: "It seems to me that the god that is commonly worshipped in civilized countries is not at all divine, though he bears a divine name, but is the overwhelming authority and respectability of mankind combined. Men reverence one another, not yet God." (65-66) He cannot understand the intolerance that he feels is prevalent. In one of his most caustic statements, he questions: "What are time and space to Christianity, eighteen hundred years, and a new world?--that the humble life of a Jewish peasant should have force to make a New York bishop so bigoted." (67) For Thoreau adherence to a creed is a barrier between earth and heaven. While he loves the New Testament, he also loves the sacred scriptures of the Hindus, Chinese, and Persians. Indeed, he is convinced that Christians do not reverence any scripture, for his observations have convinced him that they do not live by the precepts of the Bible.

There are, indeed, severe things in it which no man should read aloud more than once. "Seek first the kingdom of heaven." "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth." "If thou wilt be perfect, go

and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Think of this, Yankees! "Verily, I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." Think of repeating these things to a New England audience! thirdly, fourthly, fifteenthly, till there are three barrels of sermons! who, without cant, can read them aloud? Who, without cant, can hear them, and not go out of the meeting-house? They never were read, they never were heard. Let but one of these sentences be rightly read, from any pulpit in the land, and there would not be left one stone of that meeting-house upon another. (73-74)

Thoreau asserts that the New Testament is too moral, too much directed to another world; therefore the conscience is over-emphasized, causing men to have "a singular desire to be good without being ~~good~~ for anything." He tells of the minister who warned him of disaster if he did not begin to keep the Sabbath in church. Thoreau calls this admonition an evidence of conscience, not God, in the minister. He says that, because of this kind of superstition, the church is the ugliest building in the community; it is "the one in which human nature stoops the lowest and is most disgraced." (77)

Thoreau concludes, "A man's real faith is never contained in his creed, nor is his creed an article of his faith." (79) Churches make men slaves to God instead of teaching them that they are His children. Thoreau is convinced that Christian dogma is man-made for personal gratification just as was that of any pagan religion. Furthermore,

the authority of priests and ministers is "a very subtle policy, far finer than the politicians', and the world is very successfully ruled by them as the policemen." (75) For him the only way to seek God is through personal commitment to the quest. He must reject the sombre, degrading aspects of institutionalized religion in favor of a joyful, supremely satisfying relationship with the Deity as He manifests Himself in nature.

In rejecting Christianity and embracing a personal religion, Thoreau distinguishes and chooses between the patterns established by civilized institutions and those he observes in nature. He is, then, expressing his yearning for a life that is free from human manipulation. He extends and emphasizes this yearning by contrasting two of the villages the brothers pass by: Billerica, a place now gone to decay, and Carlisle, a more natural "city of the woods." Carlisle does not appear as an encroachment upon its surroundings; it is an example of how harmoniously man can pattern his structures after those of nature. But Billerica was established by men who destroyed the natural growth in planting unnatural vegetation and, in the process, destroyed the homes of the wildlife in the fields and the rivers. It is in this way, Thoreau says, that men "planted" towns; and while they may have achieved the orderliness and conformity that the present Billerica seems to possess, they lost something priceless by attempting to subdue or destroy all that was primitive or wild. Thoreau states, "There is in my nature, methinks, a

singular yearning toward all wildness. . . . What have I to do with plows? I cut another furrow than you see." (54) He does not turn his back on all civilized practices, but he does assert that cultivation, like anything else, can reach a point of excess, and this has occurred when a man's "heaven-born virtues are but good manners." His observation is that the white man gives evidence of this tragic substitution when he attempts to civilize and Christianize the Indian. He does not recognize that this natural man, who has preserved his "intercourse with his native gods," has been admitted into "a rare and peculiar society with Nature." Thoreau concludes, "If we could listen but for an instant to the chant of the Indian muse, we should understand why he will not exchange his savageness for civilization." (56)

In a further application of his preference for the natural way of life, Thoreau discusses the creation of art. To him true art is nature's speech, and hence a conversation with the gods. He asserts that while no mortal can reproduce the life, color, and sublimity of nature in any other form, a poet comes closer than anyone else: "There is no doubt that the loftiest written wisdom is either rhymed or in some way musically measured,--is, in form as well as substance, poetry. . . ." (94) However, the best of the poets are not the product of refined and civilized shaping; rather they are the seers, whose uncommon vision has revealed to them nature's methods of creation. Hence the true poet's writing

is his "natural fruit," and he "needs such stimulus to sing only as plants to put forth leaves and blossoms." The process by which such a poet creates a poem is, to him, as vital a process as breathing and is thus sublimely organic. "As naturally as the oak bears an acorn, and the vine a gourd, man bears a poem. . . ." (94)

The product of this process of creation can only be a work in which form and content blend in perfect harmony. It will be vigorous and natural in style, and possess more attractiveness of thought than of charm and fluency. Thoreau recommends labor to engross the poet in order to remove "palaver and sentimentality" from his style. If a writer has engaged in physical labor through the day, the few lines he composes in the evening "will be more musical and true than his freest but idle fancy could have furnished." The man with calluses on his hands will have the firmness and strength necessary to control the divine inspiration. He will write sentences that will read as if he, "had he held a plow instead of a pen, could have drawn a furrow deep and straight to the end." (110) He will be able to imitate nature's modesty and simplicity, thereby achieving a homeliness that is "next to beauty, and a very high art."

To Thoreau poets are favored beings who dwell in "auroral atmosphere," receiving divine inspiration by intuition. Assigned a holy mission, they fulfill that mission by creating poetry. But such a task requires total

commitment. If a poet wishes to express noble thoughts with noble words, he must be a noble man. If he desires to give life to his writing, he must have abundant vitality. If he wishes to express truth, he must know truth. In a passage invigorated and concretized by imagery from nature, Thoreau outlines the attributes he believes a poet should possess:

He should be as vigorous as a sugar maple, with sap enough to maintain his own verdure, beside what runs into the troughs, and not like a vine, which being cut in the spring bears no fruit, but bleeds to death in the endeavor to heal its wounds. The poet is he that hath fat enough, like bears and marmots, to suck his claws all winter. He hibernates in this world, and feeds on his own marrow. We love to think in winter, as we walk over the snowy pastures, of those happy dreamers that lie under the sod, of dormice and all that race of dormant creatures, which have such a superfluity of life enveloped in thick folds of fur, impervious to cold. Alas, the poet too is in one sense a sort of dormouse gone into winter quarters of deep and serene thoughts, insensible to surrounding circumstances; his words are the relation of his oldest and finest memory, a wisdom drawn from the remotest experience. (101-02)

To Thoreau the poet is "the toughest son of earth and Heaven," singled out to express the truths of all time and all men. His creation, a poem, is as miraculous an event as is the creation of any other organic form.

When Thoreau comments upon the work of other writers, he is not so much interested in revealing his own views as he is in searching literature for expressions of natural and therefore universal truths. Only those works which present the kind of truth that cannot be dated receive his praise.

". . . a good book will never have been forestalled, but the

topic itself will in one sense be new, and its author, by consulting with nature, will consult not only with those who have gone before, but with those who may come after." (112) He pleads for the wisdom of the ages to come forth through the work of contemporary American writers, for he feels that in the beauty and spirit of nature, the true artist can find ample sources of inspiration and revelation. His admonition to his fellow writers is, then, a plea for their recognition of themselves as emissaries from the gods, assigned the task of kindling the spark of the divine that lies within all men.

Having accepted nature as the source of truth, Thoreau in the "Monday" chapter examines the vital lesson which he believes nature will impress upon those who seek her wisdom: the necessity for a balance between action and contemplation. He asserts that, with nature as his guide, man can find a way of life that successfully unites these essential elements of a balanced existence. "There is, indeed, a tide in the affairs of man. . . . and yet as things flow they circulate, and the ebb always balances the flow." (128) He asserts that if a man perceives all he can sensuously while at the same time he intuitively perceives the spirit present in all matter, he will have the steady foundation necessary for proper balance. He will, then, have learned the secret of simultaneous journeying.

Thoreau takes note of various activities that appear to him to be supported by off-balance individuals whose

journeying does not involve their total beings. Reform movements are distasteful to him because he believes they are the evidences of persons so dedicated to physical involvement that they have never taken note of the fact that desirable change is taking place all the time, with the slowest changes perhaps eventually revealed as the most vital. He is convinced that a man must know how to wait as well as how to make haste: ". . . we shall sooner overtake the dawn by remaining here than by hurrying over the hills of the west." (133) It is possible for a man of intelligence and good intention to fail because he does not possess the "prudence to give wisdom the preference." The wise man is he who recognizes that unchangeableness is the fundamental law of existence. "Go where we will, we discover infinite change in particulars only, not in generals." (128)

Another instance of individuals engaged in off-balance activities are those who expend their physical energy in travel. Thoreau is prompted to consider this subject by a group of boatmen beginning a long sea voyage with whom he briefly converses. He wonders what is lacking in life in New Hampshire that would make these men want to leave. He concludes that the men must ultimately be disappointed, for in its essential aspects experience remains the same, no matter what the environment. The kind of journeying that he considers vital can be accomplished even though the physical self is confined to a small portion of the earth.

In contemplating the necessary balance between action and contemplation, Thoreau draws a comparison between Christian and Oriental philosophy. He maintains that Christian culture encourages immediate and practical action while Oriental culture teaches a man the values of contemplation. Hindu scripture is a sublime recital of universal wisdom which leads men to place their ultimate faith in eternal law; in contrast, Christian scripture is "humane, practical, and, in a large sense, radical," thus training men to accept an expedient justice rather than to wait for illumination from the eternal. Thoreau is drawn to Eastern philosophy because it recognizes the universal truths of nature; it "belongs to the noontide of the day, the midsummer of the year, and after the snows have melted, and the waters evaporated in the spring, still its truth speaks freshly to our experience." (156-57) He is also attracted by the intellectualism of the philosophy and its emphasis upon contemplation. He asserts: "The most glorious fact in my experience is not anything that I have done or may hope to do, but a transient thought, or vision, or dream, which I have had." (145) Still he recognizes the elements of impracticality in Eastern thought and, in a comparison of the Oriental and Occidental minds, concludes: "The one looks in the sun till his eyes are put out; the other follows him prone in his westward course." (147) His final resolution is, then, that a proper blending of active and contemplative philosophy calls for a single Scripture,

including the sacred writings of both eastern and western cultures. He concludes, "This would be the Bible, or Book of Books, which let the missionaries carry to the uttermost parts of the earth." (150)

Thoreau is convinced that society does not encourage or reward the individual who seeks to balance physical involvement with mental activity. On the contrary, society encourages the routine that the brothers witness on Monday morning. They observe a group of workmen, children, and travelers impatiently waiting for the ferry to carry them across the Merrimack River to their various destinations. To them the river is nothing but an obstacle; they have neither the time nor the inclination to consider what it might be able to teach them. Therefore they pay their toll and restlessly wait to disembark. In contrast, the brothers glide silently by, riding on the river instead of struggling to get across it, and paying no toll for the service that the river performs--a service which affects their total selves.

For Thoreau, his third day of journeying is an example of the successful alliance of action and contemplation; the result has been the elevation of his spirit--the supreme goal of all activity. He yearns for other men to share such moments of inspiration but fears that they do not. The graves of some early settlers serve him as symbols of the spiritual defeat too many men have suffered. These individuals are buried under stones, a position which

symbolizes the oppression of their spirits. He suggests that if there must be monuments, they should be "star-y-pointing," and instead of being inscribed, "Here lies--," they should have carved upon them, "There rises--." Yet he would prefer, of all monuments, that of the farmer who leaves his body to be ploughed into the soil to restore its fertility. His spirit has thereby been released for its eternal ascension. Thoreau's own spirit, tied though it may be to the earth, has at the same time been united with the heavens. "I see, smell, taste, hear, feel, that everlasting Something to which we are allied, at once our maker, our abode, our destiny, our very Selves. . . ." (182) He has established his communion with nature and has learned how to involve his total self in the experience. He is now at the climax of his journeying.

Following the promise of the "Monday" chapter, the "Tuesday" chapter is a beautifully integrated song of rapture. Opening with his recital of the sublime ascent of Saddle-back Mountain and climaxing his translations of Anacreon's songs of love, the chapter conveys Thoreau's confidence in his ability to unite his sensuous and intuitive perceptions into a single awareness. By introducing the chapter with the opening lines of Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," he once again calls attention to himself as the archetypal hero, a champion whose victories have permitted him to come within sight of the end of his quest.

In this chapter Thoreau squarely confronts the task to which he has dedicated himself--the communication of what he has gained from his Transcendental experience. He attempts to share with his reader those rare moments when his mental journeying has led him close to the source of all being. He does not claim that he has ever attained the goal of his journeying or that he can fully convey with words the sublimity of those moments when he has come close to fulfillment. But in attempting to communicate his experience, he does convey the rapture that can result from a momentary Transcendental vision.

One of these moments of spiritual ecstasy occurred before the river journey when he took a solitary excursion over the Massachusetts hills and climbed Saddle-back Mountain. In relating the experience, he makes of it a symbolic climb toward heaven. He tells of arriving at the foot of the mountain in the afternoon and choosing to take the shortest but most difficult route to the top--a way no one else traveled. As he made his ascent, he felt as if he were walking on "a road for the pilgrim . . . who would climb to the gates of heaven." Reaching the top by evening, he spent the night in an observatory erected by students of Williams College. He arose early to see the daybreak, and as the light increased sufficiently for him to see what was around him, he discovered that he was surrounded by "an ocean of mist," which separated him from the earth. He had the

sensation that he had risen into a new world, such as he had previously envisioned only in dreams. In an intense passage he tries to convey his feelings at that time but finally has to admit that no mortal, even one dedicated to the task, can fully express such sublimity with mere words.

. . . I found myself a dweller in the dazzling halls of Aurora, into which poets have had but a partial glance over the eastern hills, drifting amid the saffron-colored clouds, and playing with the rosy fingers of the Dawn, in the very path of the Sun's chariot, and sprinkled with its dewy dust, enjoying the benignant smile, and near at hand the far-darting glance of the god. The inhabitants of earth behold commonly but the dark and shadowy under side of heaven's pavement; it is only when seen at a favorable angle in the horizon, morning or evening, that some faint streaks of the rich lining of the clouds are revealed. But my muse would fail to convey an impression of the gorgeous tapestry by which I was surrounded. . . . (199)

But he must confront the fact that, on that rare and glorious morning, he could not stay on the mountain-top.

Those elements of nature which had combined to grant him a vision of the eternal were, like him, a part of the finite world and therefore subject to change and decay. While his spirit would be forever altered by the experience, he had to descend the mountain and live in the present once again:

". . . I now steered, descending the mountain by my own route, on the side opposite to that by which I had ascended, and soon found myself in the region of cloud and drizzling rain, and the inhabitants affirmed that it had been a cloudy and drizzling day wholly." (200) Thus he faces the problem of the transitoriness of such a vision, a problem that is always

with him on his quests for inspiration. In an attempt to give some permanence to these moments, he makes a symbol of the springs of clear, pure water which ooze out of the clay banks of the river by asserting that just as these springs flow back into the river to freshen and purify it, so a man's sublime moments flow back into the stream of time and leave their lasting mark upon his consciousness.

While he believes that it is in these solitary experiences with nature that man comes closest to divine communion, Thoreau recognizes that some human relationships also have spiritual significance. He contrasts men whose natural demeanor and instinctive humanity make a brief acquaintance joyously memorable with those whose acquaintance is an affront to both parties. One of these natural men is a canal-boatman he meets, whose surface appearance and manner suggest an indifferent, uncivil nature. But Thoreau believes he sees the true man underneath the surface and is prompted to comment, "A true politeness does not result from any hasty and artificial polishing . . . but grows naturally in characters of the right grain and quality. . . ." (212) He recalls an even more memorable man, a farmer named Rice, whom he encountered on a previous excursion. Rice lived in a beautiful valley concealed from the ordinary comings and goings of civilization. He was said by other residents of the valley to be an uncivil man, and Thoreau did indeed find him to be "as rude as a fabled satyr." When Thoreau asked for overnight

lodging, he was not turned away but neither was he welcomed graciously. Food and lodging were there, and he could have them if he wanted, but Rice had no time nor inclination for the amenities. Yet he pleased Thoreau, who thought him a natural phenomenon. Thoreau contrasts him with an old man of the same area, whom he encountered the next morning. This man's morning routine included praying for strangers, yet he would not share his food with Thoreau or give him the directions he asked for. Thoreau concluded that the stranger, turned away from a house, "leaveth there his own offenses, and departeth, taking with him all the good actions of the owner." (220)

It is his further observation that agricultural and pastoral people are more often like Rice than like the old man. They contentedly till the same land as did their fathers and grandfathers, with no need to travel in order to be wise or humane. Of similar character are the boatmen and boat-builders, who also take into themselves the serenity and homely wisdom of their environment. To Thoreau the tragedy of the present is that the Indians no longer inhabit the land; however, their spirits are in nature itself, and by relating himself to nature, man can link his spirit to that of the being who best understood and partook of nature's services.

As Thoreau turns his attention to his relationship to men, he reveals a sobering awareness that in his communion

with men he has never acquired the sense of unity that he has in his communion with nature. This awareness signals the passing of his period of youthful expectation and the coming of a more mature and less rapturous period of realistic acceptance. In the "Wednesday" chapter he confronts the reality of human existence, which demands communion with men as well as with nature. His introduction to the chapter is a line from Charles Cotton's "The World": "Man is man's foe and destiny." With this quotation he recognizes his obligation to mankind, but at the same time he realizes the difficulty that he faces. He has transcended the world of matter and linked himself to the world of the mind. Thus, in order to find his place among men, he cannot let go of heaven; rather he must strive to help other men achieve the same transcendence, for only then will there be harmony between him and other men and, more significantly, between earth and heaven.

Thoreau's attempt to establish a sense of oneness with both men and nature is doomed to partial failure because the only relationship he can envision is a Transcendental one--a relationship that totally subordinates the world of the flesh to the world of the spirit. He demands as much of other men as he demands of himself, and other men are simply not equal to that demand. The chapter is a record of the terms upon which he believes true communion must be established, his struggle to apply these terms, and his acquiescence to something less than total victory.

Thoreau believes that all men share an instinct for unification, viewing their own images in relation to those of other men. Yet, in calling attention to this instinct, he also comments upon the barriers which separate men. He believes that most men seek a sense of spiritual identification with others through physical association, to the point of making long journeys to unknown lands. He feels that Americans are especially likely to be misled into the false notion that physical journeying is essential to intellectual and spiritual identification because they are sensitive to their country's lack of a cultural past. Therefore he insists that America's antiquities are as ancient and as universal as are those of any other country, for they are in nature.

Our own country furnishes antiquities as ancient and durable, and as useful, as any; rocks at least as well covered with lichens, and a soil which, if it is virgin, is but virgin mould, the very dust of nature. What if we cannot read Rome or Greece, Etruria or Carthage, or Egypt or Babylon, on these, are our cliffs bare? The lichen on the rocks is a rude and simple shield which beginning and imperfect Nature suspended there The walls that fence our fields, as well as modern Rome, and not less the Parthenon itself, are all built of ruins. Here may be heard the din of rivers, and ancient winds which have long since lost their names sough through our woods (265-66)

Nature is, then, the repository of all experience. Hence the mind which can comprehend the truths of nature has access to the source of all knowledge. But in contemplating such a mind, Thoreau is forced to confront the fact that this degree of awareness is a cause of isolation from other men.

My life is like a stroll upon the beach,
 As near the ocean's edge as I can go;
 My tardy steps its waves sometimes o'erreach,
 Sometimes I stay to let them overflow.

My sole employment 't is, and scrupulous care,
 To place my gains beyond the reach of tides,
 Each smoother pebble, and each shell more rare,
 Which ocean kindly to my hand confides.

I have but few companions on the shore,
 They scorn the strand who sail upon the sea,
 Yet oft I think the ocean they've sailed o'er
 Is deeper known upon the strand to me.

The middle sea contains no crimson dulse,
 Its deeper waves cast up no pearls to view,
 Along the shore my hand is on its pulse,
 And I converse with many a shipwrecked crew. (255)

The people that Thoreau has encountered on each day have called forth his comment; he has praised the actions that have brought men into contact with nature and condemned those that have not. He continues such observations in this chapter, but he also includes his essay on friendship. In this way he draws an indirect comparison between the real and the ideal, for his comments upon actual men, such as his observation that a monument to a dead hero is more impressive than are the "inglorious living," stand in contrast to his comments upon the ideal men whom he must create in order to express his views on friendship. In drawing this comparison, he gives evidence of why his attempts to achieve communion with men must fall short of his sublime moments of communion with nature. To him nature is a symbol of the perfection in God's creation, whereas man is a symbol of the imperfection. Only through total dedication to a search for truth can man

improve upon his imperfect state. Because he is all too aware of the distance between the real and the ideal man, and because he does not believe most men are seeking higher levels of spiritual awareness, Thoreau cannot achieve the same sense of communion from his encounters with men that he does from his encounters with nature.

In his essay on friendship Thoreau expresses his conviction that men naturally seek to establish true friendships; however, because they find the task too demanding, they settle for something less and honor it with the name of friendship. "To say that a man is your Friend means commonly no more than this, that he is not your enemy." (282) To Thoreau, friendship is a relationship of equals, with no over-balancing obligation or advantage on either side. And because a man sees his friend as an equal, he can grant to him nobler qualities than he may actually possess, resulting in actions that correspond not to what his friend is, but to what he aspires to be. He warns, "Beware, lest thy Friend learn at last to tolerate one frailty of thine, and so an obstacle be raised to the progress of thy love." (288)

But even friends must frequently withdraw from one another, since silence and solitude prepare them for a loftier relationship. Acquaintances may always have words to exchange, but friends have "an intelligence above language." Such a manner of intercourse leaves each man free, for neither feels compelled to seek the kind of harmony in deed and word that would eventually destroy the relationship.

My love must be as free
 As is the eagle's wing,
 Hovering o'er land and sea
 And everything.

I must not dim my eye
 In thy saloon,
 I must not leave my sky
 And nightly moon.

Be not the fowler's net
 Which stays my flight,
 And craftily is set
 T' allure the sight.

But be the favoring gale
 That bears me on,
 And still doth fill my sail
 When thou art gone.

I cannot leave my sky
 For thy caprice,
 True love would soar as high
 As heaven is.

The eagle would not brook
 Her mate thus won,
 Who trained his eye to look
 Beneath the sun. (297)

A true friend, then, is one who, by retaining his own vision, assists in clothing another's mind rather than his body. A friendship of this nature transcends those relationships commonly shared on earth and anticipates heavenly ones.

Yet, in the course of describing such an ethereal communion among men, Thoreau reveals his fear of its dissolution, since the least unworthiness on either side will destroy it. Indeed, he is not sure that anyone is capable of real friendship: "Perhaps there are none charitable, none disinterested, none wise, noble, and heroic enough, for a true and lasting Friendship." (294) And even if such a

relationship could be achieved, he fears the demands it would make upon both parties. "We have nothing to fear from our foes; God keeps a standing army for that service; but we have no ally against our Friends, those ruthless Vandals." (305)

In his frustration, Thoreau does not turn his back on men to seek consolation in nature, but rather he sadly faces the diminution of his ecstasy. He recognizes that the hold of the earth upon man is strong.

I am astonished at the singular pertinacity and endurance of our lives. The miracle is, that what is, when it is so difficult, if not impossible, for anything else to be; that we walk on in our particular paths so far, before we fall on death and fate, merely because we must walk in some path; that every man can get a living, and so few can do anything more. (311)

The final passages in the chapter convey Thoreau's distress as he contemplates the gap between the way things are and the way they could be. He tells of his dream that night in which he recalls an earlier difference with a friend. This disagreement, though not his fault, has caused him great pain. In his dream, ideal justice is done and he is soothed. He states, "Our truest life is when we are in dreams awake." (316) He has, then, sadly concluded that spiritual communion with men, like universal justice, may be conceivable in visions, but is a state attainable only in dreams.

Thus Thoreau acknowledges the reality to which his journeying has led him--a reality that falls disappointingly short of the high expectations with which his journeying began. Nature has fulfilled all her promise, for she is to

the sensitive individual a source of infinite inspiration; but man has not been able and does not appear to be able to live up to his potentialities, and since one element of creation cannot be isolated from another, here is the source of despair. The "Thursday" chapter is his working-out of this dilemma, and he signals his answer in the epigraph drawn from Emerson's "Woodnotes":

Go where he will, the wise man is at home,
His hearth the earth,--his hall the azure dome;
Where his clear spirit leads him, there's his road,
By God's own light illumined and foreshowed. (317)

He indicates, then, that in order to resist despair, he will cling to his faith in the sanctity of the individual spirit. The chapter serves a twofold purpose: it indicates his resignation to reality and then reveals the sources and extent of his faith.

Thoreau's description of the morning at the beginning of the chapter conveys his sense of resignation. On this rainy morning the realization that he and John are at the furthest extent of their voyage and that the river will carry them no farther is heavy upon him. His mood is far different from the cheerful expectation of the previous mornings. There is fog and grayness--a depression of the atmosphere and of the spirit. However, he controls his despondency and eventually overcomes it by recognizing the optimistic signs in nature: the grayness is streaked with light, and a single bird's trilling seems to him an indication of its "cheery faith" despite the pall cast by the

silence of the "woodland choir." He sees the time spent in taking shelter under a tree as a chance for a closer inspection of nature, and finally he asserts that he counts all days, whether sunny or cloudy, as opportunities for gaining increased knowledge and inspiration. It is his conclusion, then, that all levels of man's awareness, from ecstasy to despair, are essential to true understanding. "Cold and damp,--are they not as rich experience as warmth and dryness?" (320)

His resignation to the realities makes him impervious to physical discomfort and stoic in the face of disappointment. From within himself he draws his source of comfort--his unending delight in his nearness to nature, the source of all being. Nothing grants to him a joy equal to that which he receives from this environment.

My books I'd fain cast off, I cannot read;
'Twixt every page my thoughts go stray at large
Down in the meadow, where is richer feed,
And will not mind to hit their proper targe.

. . .

Here while I lie beneath this walnut bough,
What care I for the Greeks or for Troy town,
If juster battles are enacted now
Between the ants upon this hummock's crown? (320)

In this mood of resignation and awareness of the resulting necessity to derive joy despite the realities, Thoreau considers the results of his journeying. He has not lost his zest for it, but he now knows the risks involved. "It begins with wearing away the soles of the shoes, and making the feet sore, and ere long it will wear a man clean up, after making his heart sore into the bargain. . . . True

and sincere traveling is no pastime, but it is as serious as the grave, or any part of the human journey, and it requires a long probation to be broken into it." (326) Nevertheless, journeying is the essence of life, and a man must welcome the full experience, for it is in this way that he gains universal vision. "The traveler must be born again on the road, and earn a passport from the elements, the principal powers that be for him. . . . His sores shall gradually deepen themselves that they may heal inwardly, while he gives no rest to the sole of his foot, and at night weariness must be his pillow, that so he may acquire experience against his rainy days." (326)

He recognizes that men no longer have physical frontiers, and therefore they are deprived of the excitement and purpose associated with exploration and settlement of new lands. But he sees that the spiritual frontier still exists, for while men have extended their physical range, they have not deepened their spiritual awareness. Therefore the most vital frontier of all remains to lure the individual of vigor, determination, and insight.

The frontiers are not east or west, north or south; but wherever a man fronts a fact, though that fact be his neighbor, there is an unsettled wilderness between him and Canada, between him and the setting sun, or, farther still, between him and it. Let him build himself a log house with the bark on where he is, fronting IT, and wage there an Old French war for seven or seventy years, with Indians and Rangers, or whatever else may come between him and the reality, and save his scalp if he can. (323-24)

Thoreau's essay on Aulus Persius Flaccus is further evidence of his state of acceptance. Here, too, reality falls short of the ideal, but the disciplined mind accepts and even profits from "the least palatable and nutritious food." Especially on a journey, where one learns resignation, a "hard and dry book in a dead language . . . impossible to read at home" is best. Thoreau concludes that just as Persius is worthy of admiration despite the fact that he is not a sublime poet, so life itself can provide joy and fulfillment despite the fact that it falls short of a man's desire.

Thoreau creates a sharp contrast between the return journey and the journey upriver by emphasizing the change in seasons that occurs overnight. "We had gone to bed in summer, and we awoke in autumn" (356) On Friday a chill north wind blows steadily, and there is a sense of urgency in the brothers' descent of the river. But as the boat sweeps downriver, Thoreau's response to nature demonstrates his matured vision. He is now aware that nature has developed her own laws, her own refinements; that she has had "an eternity of practice" in which to perfect herself. It is this awareness that makes it possible for him to gain some optimism regarding man. He builds up hope for the future as he speculates upon the fact that humanity is still in its infancy, that in comparison to nature, man is just beginning his existence.

As Thoreau contemplates the realities that have brought him to this new awareness, he unites the flow of his

thoughts with the rapid flow of the river and creates a sense of a timeless, unceasing current upon which he rides. He feels that he is at the center of a flowing universe where mind, body, and spirit have united into a single perception. Nature has provided him not only with a vision of the infinite but also with the strength and faith to overcome the despair that inevitably results from an awareness of the vast distance between life as it is and as it could be. His energy and enthusiasm have been tempered by experience, but now he gazes at the world about him with increased insight. The summer is gone, and with it have gone the keen vigor and expectancy of his youth. But his sadness is dispelled by his awareness of what he has acquired--the knowledge of reality and the faith to sustain himself in the face of it. He sums up his new perception of himself in verse:

I am the autumnal sun,
 With autumn gales my race is run;
 When will the hazel put forth its flowers,
 Or the grape ripen under my bowers?
 When will the harvest or the hunter's moon,
 Turn my midnight into mid-noon?
 I am all sere and yellow,
 And to my core mellow.
 The mast is dropping within my woods,
 The winter is lurking within my moods,
 And the rustling of the withered leaf
 Is the constant music of my grief. (404)

As Thoreau describes the return journey in the "Friday" chapter, he portrays nature in harmony with his mood. Shadows alternate with sunshine, and the atmosphere seems to muffle sounds as the activity of the summer dwindles away. In the fields the cattle are lowing as if in apprehension of the

approaching winter, while the farmers are withdrawing from the fields and retreating into their houses. Since there are few boats on the river and little activity on the shore, Thoreau gives limited attention to the scenes around him. His concentration is upon his inner self. "He is the rich man, and enjoys the fruits of riches, who summer and winter forever can find delight in his own thoughts." (373-74) Through the faculty of the mind, he has come to realize himself as the possessor of all that he sees and as the center of his universe. There is no spring or autumn, no boundary or limitation within the mind, but always the infinite horizon invites exploration.

These continents and hemispheres are soon run over, but an always unexplored and infinite region makes off on every side from the mind, further than to sunset, and we can make no highway or beaten track into it, but the grass immediately springs up in the path, for we travel there chiefly with our wings. (383)

In this concluding chapter, Thoreau considers himself in his dual role as both man and artist. In contemplating the poet and the nature of his work, he establishes the guidelines that will sustain him as an artist. In summing up the Transcendental life, he restates the philosophy that will sustain him as a man. As his thoughts turn to the character of a poet, he distinguishes between two classes of poets: the genius whose work is the result of inspiration, and the artist whose work reflects only intellect and taste. Thoreau can point to no poets of genius in modern literature,

and only to a few in older works. Even Chaucer he places in the second rank because he did not write transcendent poetry. But he calls the ancient classical poets seers and heroes, because they recognized that facts were only the outward manifestations of divine truths. To Thoreau, then, a poet is he who seeks to go from "seeing things as men describe them, to seeing them as men cannot describe them." The true poet applies an uncommon sense that goes beyond common sense.

Thoreau's journeys of the body and mind have placed him among the ranks of the seekers after the uncommon. "But there is only necessary a moment's sanity and sound senses, to teach us that there is a nature behind the ordinary, in which we have only some vague preemption right and western reserve as yet. We live on the outskirts of that region." (409) He clearly recognizes his tenuous hold on the uncommon, but he does cling to that glimpse of heaven which he has had. "It is but thin soil where we stand; I have felt my roots in a richer ere this," (409) In one of his most successful poems in the book, he analyzes the frustration and yet the hope of his position.

I am a parcel of vain strivings tied
By a chance bond together,
Dangling this way and that, their links
Were made so loose and wide,
Methinks,
For milder weather.

A bunch of violets without their roots,
And sorrel intermixed,

Encircled by a wisp of straw
 Once coiled about their shoots,
 The law
 By which I'm fixed.

A nosegay which Time clutched from out
 Those fair Elysian fields,
 With weeds and broken stems, in haste,
 Doth make the rabble rout
 That waste
 The day he yields.

There seems little chance for the survival of a creature with such an uncertain grasp on life, and it would seem that he would wither away. In this realization, Thoreau reveals ample cause for despair. And yet, despite his awareness of such a state of existence, he is sustained by his faith in an unseen force, a "kind hand," which had purpose in its creation of man and his world.

But now I see I was not plucked for naught,
 And after in life's vase
 Of glass set while I might survive,
 But by a kind hand brought
 Alive
 To a strange place.

In his final stanza, Thoreau expresses his conviction that in due time man will realize a more perfect existence. While this will not occur during his own lifetime, his struggles will have helped to create the firm foundation upon which such a way of life can be achieved.

That stock thus thinned will soon redeem its hours,
 And by another year,
 Such as God knows, with freer air,
 More fruits and fairer flowers
 Will bear,
 While I droop here. (410-11)

His journeys have not brought him pure joy and infinite vision, but they have brought him hope "that we may, even here and now, obtain some accurate information concerning that OTHER WORLD which the instinct of mankind has so long predicted." (412) But such information will not come from men. Rather, it will come through the experience of being not only "spiritualized" but also "naturalized on the soil of earth." Thoreau has felt the stirrings of this experience and is thus able to assert,

I hearing get, who had but ears,
And sight, who had but eyes before,
I moments live, who lived but years,
And truth discern, who knew but learning's lore. (372)

His future efforts, then, must be concentrated on a deeper, more enriching experience than he has yet known. He states his conviction that such an experience yet awaits him and all men: "We need pray for no higher heaven than the pure senses can furnish, a purely sensuous life." (408) Such a life will be gained when men possess senses far superior to those that perceive earthly reality.

The ears were made, not for such trivial uses as men are wont to suppose, but to hear celestial sounds. The eyes were not made for such grovelling uses as they are now put to and worn out by, but to behold beauty now invisible. May we not see God? Are we to be put off and amused in this life, as it were with a mere allegory? Is not Nature, rightly read, that of which she is commonly taken to be the symbol merely? (408)

Thoreau is yearning for the kind of vision that will perfectly unite matter and spirit. He has not attained it, but he has come close enough to assert, "Here or nowhere is our heaven." (405)

He is still burdened by the dualism of perfection and imperfection, earth and heaven, but his experiment in transcendence has implanted unquenchable hope.

Thus ends his experiment in the communication of his Transcendental journeying. In performing the task of journeying, he put to the test the philosophy upon which he based his life, and the philosophy sustained him. In communicating the act of journeying, he tested his conviction that wholeness, whether in life or in art, was the organic result of the operation of universal law, not the mechanical result of capitulation to man-made laws. He believed that, by permitting the free play of the mind upon ideas drawn from the universal laws in nature, he could give evidence of the divine harmony in nature. In all creation the process of organic growth was the manifestation of this divine harmony. Finite laws which attempted to measure this process according to man's conceptions of time and space were obstacles to visions of the infinite. Only by sweeping away these narrow determinations of order and harmony could there be any hope of transcendence. Thoreau placed his hope in the unfettered mind:

The roving mind impatiently bursts the fetters of astronomical orbits, like cobwebs in a corner of its universe, and launches itself to where distance fails to follow, and law, such as science has discovered, grows weak and weary. The mind knows a distance and a space of which all those sums combined do not make a unit of measure,--the interval between that which appears and that which is. (413)

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EVALUATION OF THE EXPERIMENT

In A Week Thoreau states, "There are various tough problems yet to solve, and we must make shift to live, betwixt spirit and matter, such a human life as we can."¹ He believed that he had determined the way to live such a life, the way to approach the solutions to the problems, and he desired to communicate this way of life to all men. The river journey had taught him two essential principles: that nature was the source of sensuous and intuitive awareness, and that the life which achieved the proper relationship between action and contemplation would have established a link between matter and spirit. He saw this life as a heroic endeavor, requiring the individual's utmost determination. Only a brave man would persevere in his search for the perfect harmony that would result from the integration of the life of the body and the life of the mind.

True to the method of organic creation, Thoreau did not draw up one set of principles by which to live and another by which to write. Instead, he believed that his art should be the witness of his life, and therefore that it too should evolve from his experiences in nature. In A Week he developed

¹Writings of Thoreau, I, 74. All the citations in this chapter that are from the Writings will be included hereafter in the text.

his techniques of composition from those principles which he had learned through his living experience. Nature was not only the environment in which he was able to achieve sensuous and spiritual awareness, but it was also his source of artistic stimulation. Furthermore, in his art, as in his life, he was committed to forging a link between matter and spirit.

In applying to his art the principle of the necessity for the integration of matter and mind, Thoreau encountered his major structural problem. He was sensitive to the fact that while he could simultaneously sustain the activities of the body and mind, in the process of composition he had to hold one activity in abeyance while he revealed the other. As long as his mind remained centered upon nature, he found it a relatively simple task to move from the narrative to the rest of the material that makes up the book. But when his mind ranged farther abroad, he sometimes had to resort to mechanical methods of integration. The more material he added to the narrative within a chapter, the more he had to consciously employ transitional devices. He did not always solve his problems in transition, but there is more skill involved than is at first apparent.

The material that is not a part of the narrative consists of both prose and poetry, and both original and borrowed material. Several critics have correctly noted that the quotations, in both prose and poetic form, are too numerous. The fact that the number of quotations in Walden does not

approach the number in A Week perhaps indicates that Thoreau recognized this problem also. In chapter two of his dissertation, Hovde treats the subject of Thoreau's use of his literary quotations. He divides the quotations into three areas--English and American poetry, Eastern literature, and history--and studies the manner in which Thoreau made these materials a part of his own work. He concludes that the quotations, which sometimes retain the spirit of the original work and at other times show Thoreau's deliberate alteration to fit his own context, "are meant to be, in general, self-sufficient as they are--fine examples of imagery and ideas in perfect form."¹ The quotations do not introduce ideas but serve instead to emphasize and strengthen Thoreau's own views. Sometimes a quotation is an obstruction, as in the "Thursday" chapter when Thoreau opens a statement with his own prose and concludes with a poetic quotation. The effectiveness of his imagery is diminished by the shift from his own simple, relaxed style to a more formal, conventionally poetic style.

The ripples curled away in our wake, like ringlets
from the head of a child, while we steadily held on
our course, and under the bows we watched

"The swaying soft,
Made by the delicate wave parted in front,
As through the gentle element we move
Like shadows gliding through untroubled realms." (I,338)

There are also infrequent occasions when a quotation is too brief or too elliptical to be truly meaningful, such as the

¹Hovde, p. 70. Because Hovde has analyzed fully Thoreau's use of his literary borrowings, I have not made a detailed study of this subject in this dissertation.

epigraph by Browne preceding the "Monday" chapter and the line by William Habington, "Some nation yet shut in with hills of ice," which interrupts Thoreau's discussion of the contrast between the Indian's and the white man's understanding of nature. But most of the time the quotations illuminate points Thoreau is making, as do the lines by Herbert which follow Thoreau's comments upon the ability of the eye to see reflection and thereby obtain a separate and unique vision of an object.

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye,
Or, if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And the heavens espy. (I, 48)

At the beginning of the book and at the beginning of each chapter, Thoreau placed one or more epigraphs, the majority of them poetic quotations. Each of the epigraphs is intended to aid in the establishment of mood and theme for the chapter it introduces. Not all of them perform this function, but some are important as initial statements of Thoreau's themes. The book begins with the only original material which Thoreau uses as an epigraph and with a quotation from Ovid. The first of Thoreau's verses is his dedication, in which he remembers the beloved brother with whom he made the journey. The remainder of his verses and the quotation from Ovid call attention to the nature of an archetypal journey, which takes the voyager from familiar and soothing scenes to distant, unknown lands. The journey is at times pleasant, at times fearful, but the treasure

that awaits the successful voyager keeps him faithful to his task. The lines from Emerson which precede the "Concord River" chapter are a contrasting parallel to these lines; they focus upon the local landscape and give Thoreau's myth of innocence its contemporary setting.

The "Saturday" chapter opens with a brief quotation from Quarles which, in Thoreau's context, invites a traveler to become familiar with nature. "Come, come, my lovely fair, and let us try / Those rural delicacies." The lines preceding the "Sunday" chapter affirm that Thoreau's communion with nature has been established and convey his resulting serene mood. The epigraphs that open the "Monday" chapter are the weakest in the book. Taken singly, they seem to have little meaning, but considered together, they awkwardly suggest the theme of action versus contemplation. Gower's line emphasizes the freshness which this day affords--a chance to shift directions and to start anew. The ballad lines and the concluding line from Browne are a contrast which suggests the contrast between the life of the body and the life of the mind.

To introduce his climactic "Tuesday" chapter, Thoreau uses lines from Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott." Thus he conveys, on this special day, his sense of the enchantment of the time and place. Then, to introduce his contrasting "Wednesday" chapter, he selects a terse epigram: "Man is man's foe and destiny." Camelot is in the past, and reality must now be

confronted. For his "Thursday" and "Friday" chapters he chooses lines which signal his state of acquiescence and the resolution that has brought him to this position. The lines from Emerson's "Woodnotes" which open the "Thursday" chapter establish the basis upon which he will build his faith. Donne's lines at the beginning of the "Friday" chapter, introducing the change of seasons, and Spenser's lines, describing the boatman who, though weary, steadfastly maintains his course, prepare the reader for the more somber tone of this concluding chapter.

To integrate his original prose on subjects not part of the narrative with the other material in the book, Thoreau relies basically upon theme. In the "Saturday" chapter, where his purpose is to acquaint himself both physically and intellectually with nature, he creates a natural interplay of matter and mind. Having described for his reader the river and its surroundings, he eases into the contemplative essay on fish. The local history in the chapter, as well as that interspersed throughout the book, also blends smoothly into the narrative, since thoughts upon the history of an area are natural to a traveler. It is true, however, that most travelers would not explore history to the depth that Thoreau does. His keen interest is an indication of his desire to understand thoroughly the relationship between a land and its people.

In the "Sunday" chapter he begins to blend in materials on subjects other than nature and history. He emphasizes his

theme, the superiority of the natural way of life over that of civilization, by applying it to several areas of endeavor, not just to his own singular experience. Thus he includes his comments on literature, in which he praises man's most natural creations, the fable and the myth; his judgments of poets and their poetry, in which he stresses the necessity for a close relationship with nature on the part of the poet; and his distinctions between natural and institutionalized religion. He uses very little transition, relying on such simple devices as mentioning the one book he has brought on the journey and then launching into a discussion of books.

Since the theme of action versus contemplation is perfectly suited to both physical and mental activities, Thoreau readily distinguishes throughout the "Monday" chapter between his times of industry and his times of reflection. He states, "All laborers must have their noonning." and with the boat drawn to the shore, he stretches out beneath a tree and engages in contemplation. To him this is a deliberate experiment in uniting the best aspects of Western and Eastern philosophies; he portrays himself as a partaker in both cultures and feels that he is the better for it.

The "Tuesday" chapter is the most skillfully integrated in the book. It is a triumph in the application of organic creation, since it is also the climax of Thoreau's Transcendental experience. Concentrating upon the Transcendental qualities of his own life, he makes a charming personal essay

of the chapter. Certainly one of the reasons for its harmony is the fact that he centers attention upon himself. For example, he integrates his translations of the songs of Anacreon by imagining the brothers' meal as a feast at the table of the gods, after which singing is appropriate. The songs are a climax to Thoreau's rapturous account of his moments of Transcendental ecstasy.

In form as well as in tone, the "Wednesday" chapter is a contrast to the "Tuesday" chapter. Because it overwhelms the narrative, the long essay on friendship creates an imbalance in the chapter. Furthermore it is repetitious and delivered in a pedantic tone. From a mechanical viewpoint, then, the chapter is poorly structured; but from an organic viewpoint, Thoreau accomplishes his purpose. The form clearly reveals the lack of harmony that he feels as he faces the reality that has diminished his ecstasy. The final pages of the chapter, in which he ponders the power that fate holds over men and then resorts to a dream in order to arrive at some just solution to his dilemma, are disjointed and disturbing; they fittingly conclude a chapter in which Thoreau has revealed his own inner turmoil.

He signals the change that has occurred within him by opening the "Thursday" chapter with a description of the pronounced change in the climate. All previous mornings were bright and invigorating or became so quickly as the morning fog dispersed; but on this morning, the atmosphere

is dismal as a result of an all-night rain. This day also marks the end of the journey upriver, and this is a saddening realization to Thoreau. But more importantly, his sadness results from his awareness that he can go no further in his search for a vision of the divine; that, on this journey at least, he has seen all that he will be permitted to see. Thus he must arrive at a state of reconciliation or be defeated by his despair. The essays on Persius and Goethe are symbolic of his acquiescence to this state. Neither of these writers was, in Thoreau's estimation, a man of genius and thus a true poet, yet he can find qualities to praise in the works of both of them. Similarly, in a life that does not match his expectations, he can find satisfaction and tranquillity.

As Thoreau opens his final chapter, he makes the point that the night before has been the turning-point in the seasons. "We had gone to bed in summer, and we awoke in autumn. . . ." (I, 356) The statement is a summation of the effects of his simultaneous journeying. He began the journey in the innocence of youth and he is ending it in the dawning wisdom of maturity. He looks closely at himself now and considers what the future holds for him. The chapter is a final analysis of an experiment that has fallen short of expectations but still must be carefully studied, for out of it must spring the courage with which to overcome despair.

The prose that is not a part of the narrative ranges from comments on the annual cattle-show to a criticism of

Chaucer. For transition Thoreau relies upon words and phrases that convey separate but related meanings on both the physical and mental levels. For example, he projects the paragraphs on the cattle-show into the chapter by first referring to the cattle along the riverbank restlessly lowing because of their instinctive sense of the approaching winter. But he also includes a play on words to aid in the transition. "Already the cattle were heard to low wildly in the pastures and along the highways, restlessly running to and fro, as if in apprehension of the withering of the grass and of the approach of winter. Our thoughts, too, began to rustle." (I, 358)

Chiefly he relies upon the current of the river and the current of his thoughts uniting transcendently to carry him into his various subject areas. All his subjects are "thoughts of autumn," as he sums up the philosophy by which he will be sustained. As he floats upon the current which is rapidly carrying him back to Concord, he is released from physical activity and thus can "dream yet deeper . . . down the stream of time." He is using these last moments of the journey to make his final preparations for the "autumnal work" that he must do. In the concluding paragraphs he discusses silence, that impenetrable mystery that seems to hold the key to truth; but his final comments upon silence are actually his final comments upon his entire experience in simultaneous journeying.

A man may run on confidently for a time, thinking he has her [i.e., silence] under his thumb, and shall one day exhaust her, but he too must at last be

silent, and men remark only how brave a beginning he made; for when he at length dives into her, so vast is the disproportion of the told to the untold that the former will seem but the bubble on the surface where he disappeared. Nevertheless, we will go on, like those Chinese cliff swallows, feathering our nests with the froth which may one day be bread of life to such as dwell by the seashore.

By including his own poems as well as his prose in A Week, Thoreau demonstrated his rejection of this generic distinction. Although these poems are not always aesthetically pleasing, with few exceptions they are organic. The "Sunday" chapter illustrates his method of integration. Early in the chapter he includes a short stanza which supports his view that this particular morning possesses "heathenish integrity."

An early unconverted Saint,
Free from noontide or evening taint,
Heathen without reproach,
That did upon the civil day encroach,
And ever since its birth
Had trod the outskirts of the earth. (I, 42)

Further on, in his discussion of bells, he turns to poetry in order to suggest the manner in which the sounds of the town bells, echoing across the countryside, are transformed into music played by a "rural Orpheus." In a discussion of the Concord River, a few lines of poetry convey the contrast between the silence of the river and the tumbling and murmuring of the tributaries that flow into it.

A comparison of two poems in the "Sunday" chapter illustrates the occasional irony that results from Thoreau's use of poetry. The poem beginning "Conscience is instinct

bred in the house" is a feeble piece in which his homely vocabulary fails to harmonize with his subject.

I love a life whose plot is simple,
And does not thicken with every pimple,
A soul so sound no sickly conscience binds it,
That makes the universe no worse than 't finds it. (I, 75)

Yet the poem, in its entirety, is appropriate to the theme of the chapter and does emphasize his conviction that men are tyrannized by conscience. In contrast, the poem beginning "Low in the eastern sky" is more pleasing as poetry but detracts from the harmony of the "Sunday" chapter. Thoreau does not successfully integrate his remembrances of a maiden he once took rowing upon the river.

His longest poem, beginning "With frontier strength ye stand your ground," appears in the "Monday" chapter. It is thematically harmonious and, in the final stanza, effectively presents his views on individualism. At the end of this chapter, as he is approaching the climax of his journey, the poem in which he declares himself to be heaven's champion helps to convey the emotion of the moment. Other poems throughout the book perform similar functions, emphasizing themes and conveying the state of Thoreau's mind at various points in his journey.

The poems in the "Wednesday" and "Friday" chapters are especially significant in the latter respect. In the "Wednesday" chapter they help to convey the turmoil of his mind by emphasizing both his ideals and his frustrations. In his stanzas about the gentle boy, his poem on love

beginning "Let such pure hate still underprop," and the stanza beginning "This is my Carnac," he makes clear the standards that he has set for the world; in "My life is like a stroll upon the beach," "Nature doth have her dawn each day," and "The Inward Morning," he seeks to express his disappointment and to move toward resolution. The "Friday" chapter contains the finest poems in the book, emotionally compelling and beautifully integrated. "The Poet's Delay," which appears early in the chapter, is a strong expression of the despair that he must overcome.

In vain I see the morning rise,
In vain observe the western blaze,
Who idly look to other skies,
Expecting life by other ways.

Amidst such boundless wealth without,
I only still am poor within,
The birds have sung their summer out,
But still my spring does not begin.

Shall I then wait the autumn wind,
Compelled to seek a milder day,
And leave no curious nest behind,
No woods still echoing to my lay? (I, 366)

The poems beginning "I am the autumnal sun" and "I am a parcel of vain strivings" strikingly portray the diminution of his ecstasy and his subsequent acquiescence to a life that cannot measure up to his ideals.

An evaluation of A Week leads inevitably to a consideration of the book in relation to Walden. Certainly the first book played a significant part in Thoreau's preparation for Walden, but it was more than just a learning experience. Sherman Paul has correctly identified A Week and Walden as a

continuing narrative of Thoreau's life, as "companion books covering nearly fifteen years of transcendental experience."

. . . the Week has been forgotten in the praise of Walden. It is said to be an inferior work, a hodgepodge of old poems and translations, of essays in history, criticism, and ethics; and its joyfulness has been overlooked in preference to the desperate economies which have long been identified with the stereotype of Thoreau. But Walden was only a half of Thoreau's experiment on life. Without the Week we would scarcely know the first chapters of what amounts to his Prelude; and we would underestimate the hard-won, the conscious and resolute, affirmations of Walden.¹

Without A Week we would also know less about Thoreau's maturation as a writer. A comparison of the two books shows clearly that he made use in Walden of several techniques that he had earlier used in A Week. Sometimes these techniques are unchanged, but in most cases he has followed a reasonable process of adaptation to a different situation. While his purpose in Walden is still to communicate his Transcendental experience, the book is less of an experiment in communication than is A Week. A Week proved to him that it was possible to carry out his purpose; Walden demonstrates the confidence born of that assurance.

In Walden Thoreau once again uses the myth of innocence as a device through which he can convey the search for self-knowledge; in going to Walden, he seeks to expand his vision of truth by immersing himself in an environment of uncorrupted

¹The Shores of America (Urbana, Ill., The University of Illinois Press, 1958), pp. 196-97.

nature. But in presenting himself as the mythical hero, he alters his image of himself, for his experiment in living at Walden is prompted not by innocence but by experience. The journey on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers was born of dreams and ideals; the sojourn at Walden, of displeasure with the life in Concord. Because in Walden Thoreau is not the innocent youth gazing at an untarnished vision, the beginning lacks the forceful enthusiasm that marks the early chapters of A Week.

In order to acquaint readers of Walden with the conventional patterns of living that he rejects, Thoreau develops a two-chapter introduction that contrasts sharply with the brief introductory chapter of A Week. In these opening chapters of Walden, Thoreau is earthbound; his essay on the virtues of the simple life restricts him to the communication of only one level of experience. Not until the end of the second chapter does he indicate that he will move beyond this level and enter the Transcendental portion of his book.

My instinct tells me that my head is an organ for burrowing, as some creatures use their snout and fore paws, and with it I would mine and burrow my way through these hills. I think that the richest vein is somewhere hereabouts; so by the divining rod and the rising vapors I judge; and here I will begin to mine. (II, 109)

In contrast, A Week communicates Thoreau's dual level of awareness from the beginning; in the introductory chapter he makes clear his intention to use the physical journey as a symbol through which he will relate his search for a vision

of the infinite. From its inception A Week is a communication of Transcendental experience; although Walden becomes this kind of communication, the first two chapters are a record of Thoreau's involvement with the world. In this sense, A Week is a more Transcendental book than Walden. In it Thoreau is forever reaching toward heaven. It is no wonder that critics of the book who have possessed little or no understanding of his purpose have found in it a little fine prose about nature and a great deal of chaotic writing on obscure and unrelated subjects.

While the major symbols in Walden are more numerous and more complex than those in A Week, the predominant symbol is once again water. But in working with a still body of water rather than a flowing river, Thoreau invests his symbol with other meanings. Principally the change results from the fact that he engages in activities not only upon the water but also in it. Immersion in Walden Pond is a ritualistic act that symbolizes his desire for purity and renewal; as such it is one of his most significant experiences.

When he rows out onto the pond and sits in his boat, playing the flute, fishing, or just contemplating, he symbolically unites the finite and the infinite in the same manner that he does when he floats on the rivers, permitting the currents to carry him where they will. A memorable instance of this is his description of fishing for pout at midnight. He lowered his line into the water; at length, responding to a jerk, he raised it slowly.

It was very queer, especially in dark nights, when your thoughts had wandered to vast and cosmogonical themes in other spheres, to feel this faint jerk, which came to interrupt your dreams and link you to Nature again. It seemed as if I might next cast my line upward into the air, as well as downward into this element, which was scarcely more dense. Thus I caught two fishes with one hook. (II, 195)

In A Week Thoreau considers the symbolic significance of the water's purity and its quality of casting reflections from its depths, but he treats this symbolism with greater effectiveness in Walden. Because the pond is a fixed body of water, he has opportunities to consider its depth, color, source, and how it changes with the seasons. He also emphasizes the significance of the shore and his own movement from land to water. In A Week he spends most of his time on the rivers, periodically going ashore to explore or to contemplate the events of his journeying, and regularly going ashore to eat and sleep. In Walden he spends most of his time on shore, periodically venturing onto or into the pond. This reversal is partly responsible for a difference in the character of the two books. The Transcendental quality of A Week is enhanced by Thoreau's consistent vision of the ideal which results from his constant physical contact with the water. He easily transforms the journey upon the river, his symbol of the ideal, into a Transcendental voyage into the infinite. His periodic return to land symbolizes his instinctive realization that eventually he must reconcile himself to the world

of men, since "here or nowhere is our heaven."⁶ In Walden he lives on shore, where he is in the grasp of the finite. In order to acquaint himself with the infinite, he must leave the land and seek to relate himself to the pond.

I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven
Than I live to Walden even.
I am its stony shore,
And the breeze that passes o'er;
In the hollow of my hand
Are its water and its sand,
And its deepest resort
Lies high in my thought. (II, 215)

Simultaneous journeying is more difficult to undertake in Walden than it is in A Week. Thoreau must make a concerted effort to release himself from the force which the finite exerts upon him.

In Walden as in A Week, Thoreau recognizes that if a man possesses the degree of awareness necessary to reconcile earth and heaven, he will find it difficult to establish a satisfactory communion with men. "I may be either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it. . . . I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. . . . This doubleness may easily make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes." (II, 149-50) However, whereas his sense of isolation from men is a source of turmoil in A Week, in Walden he is able to overcome this

distress. It is possible that he is more tranquil in the face of this realization because the passing of time has helped him adjust to his brother's death. Also, by establishing residence at Walden, building his hut, and planting a beanfield, he has achieved a sense of belonging; thus he plays host to "brute neighbors" as well as to human visitors from other parts of the woods and from town. But chiefly he is without despair because he has learned well the lesson of A Week: he has placed his faith in the sanctity of the individual spirit and in nature--the environment that sustains his spirit. In Walden he states, "There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of nature and has his senses still." (II, 145) He has reached that point where he can be at peace with a "sweet and beneficent society in Nature."

In the conclusion of Walden, Thoreau sums up the lesson he has learned from his experiment.

. . . if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. (II, 356)

The experiment to which he refers here is not just the two-year and two-month interval spent at Walden; rather he is referring to the experiment that he has conducted throughout his adult life--his effort to live wholly according to

Transcendental principles. Both A Week and Walden are the record of this effort; acquaintance with both of them is necessary to a full understanding of Thoreau's purposes as a man and as an artist. By the end of his journey in A Week, he has confronted despair and determined the manner in which he will overcome it. The book ends tranquilly as he returns to the world of men, equipped both to live in the world and to hold onto his link with heaven. By the end of Walden, he has tested his equipment and found it strong enough to support exaltation. The concluding chapter is an outpouring of gratitude for the Transcendental life. No book has ended on a note of purer ecstasy. "Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star." (II, 367)

Yet it must be remembered that Thoreau reached this level of rapture despite the fact that in neither his life nor his art had he realized his expectations. The problem he could not entirely solve as an artist was identical to the problem he could not entirely solve as a man: the spirit was free, but the physical self was earthbound. Nevertheless, the artist could come closer than anyone else to uniting matter and spirit, for through the process of organic creation, he could fuse the life of the body with the life of the mind. The mind could not literally release the body from the earth, but it could send the spirit soaring to such heights of inspiration that the world could never dispel the ecstasy entirely.

In the final chapter of A Week Thoreau states, "The eye may see for the hand, but not for the mind. We are still being born, and have as yet but a dim vision of sea and land, sun, moon, and stars, and shall not see clearly till after nine days at least." (I, 411) For all his remaining years, he continued to strive to get beyond the nine days, and he continued to strive to communicate both his moments of failure and his more frequent moments of success. A Week was his first major experiment in this communication and served as his artistic and philosophical testing ground. Measured by the world's standards--the number of readers who comprehended his purpose and his message, the experiment was not a success; but measured by his own standards--the degree to which he adhered to his goals in life and in art, he conducted an experiment that, while not flawless, proved that his goals were of immense value and warranted renewed dedication. Furthermore, A Week, measured against other expressions of the idealistic philosophy, stands as a worthy contribution to that body of literature in which men of vision and inspiration have endeavored to persuade all mankind to look to the heavens for light.

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