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BY

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Norman, Oklahoma

1976

A FRUITFUL PROFUSION: THE WILD BERRY MOTIF

IN THOREAU'S JOURNAL

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PREFACE

This study is the result of my fascination with the life and art of Henry David Thoreau--a fascination which began early in my graduate work. Although I had read Walden when I was an undergraduate, it was not until I took a Transcendentalism course, taught by Dr. Bruce Granger, that I recognized the craftsmanship of Thoreau the writer and the integrity of Thoreau the man. Since that time, I have never ceased to experience a sense of discovery and excitement when I read anything written by Henry David Thoreau; I invariably feel that I am joining him in his search for beauty and truth.

This excitement is one of the reasons for my choosing Thoreau as the writer on whom I would write my doctoral dissertation. Another reason for this study is my discovery that, although Thoreau is a writer about whom a great deal has already been written, his massive Journal has been too frequently overlooked. Throughout my reading, I had encountered numerous allusions to these volumes and occasional excerpts from them used to support a critic's contention or used to illuminate some biographical problem; however, few critics, even those who seem to recognize the

significance of this body of Thoreau's writings, actually deal with the Journal as a whole.

After deciding to work in this relatively neglected area, I became more and more intrigued with the idea of tracing an image or a group of images through the Journal; this approach suggested to me a more comprehensive way of reaching the mind of Thoreau than working within the limits of one essay or one book. I began to see one of these recurring images as particularly significant; from the first volume through the fourteenth Thoreau again and again focuses on the wild berry and his berry excursions. This fact, together with three others, led me to the conclusion that this image is central to an understanding of Thoreau. First, when Emerson delivered his eulogy for Thoreau, he commented on Thoreau's failure to have any ambition greater than being the captain of a huckleberry party. Second, as everyone who has any awareness of Thoreau knows, he spent one night in the Concord jail as a result of his continual refusal to pay his poll tax. It is, however, what he did immediately after being released from jail that I find provocative: he picked up his shoe which he had taken to the cobbler and proceeded to go huckleberrying. Finally, just before Thoreau became fatally ill and could no longer write, he was working on a new lecture that focused on huckleberries. Such facts as these assured me that an examination of the role of the huckleberry and possible other

berries in the Journal was needed and would contribute to an understanding of Thoreau.

The purpose of this study is to examine the significance of the wild berry as a symbol in Henry David Thoreau's Journal. The first chapter establishes the validity of considering the Journal in isolation and examines its unique nature among Thoreau's other writings. The second chapter establishes through references to his Journal his belief that man needs an intimate relationship with nature and that he must also recognize the significance of her many emblematic gifts--especially the wild berry. The third chapter examines the complexity of the berry as a symbol throughout the Journal. The fourth chapter reveals the importance of berries and berrying in Thoreau's quest for the art of living. The fifth chapter summarizes the validity of viewing the berry as a major symbol throughout Thoreau's Journal.

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A FRUITFUL PROFUSION: THE WILD BERRY MOTIF IN THOREAU'S JOURNAL

CHAPTER I

THE JOURNAL OF AN ACTUAL HERO

> Why can we not oftener refresh one another with original thoughts? If the fragrance of the dicksonia fern is so grateful and suggestive to us, how much more refreshing and encouraging--re-creating--would be fresh and fragrant thoughts communicated to us fresh from a man's experience and life! I want none of his pity, nor sympathy, in the common sense, but that he should emit and communicate to me his essential fragrance, that he should not be forever repenting and going to church (when not otherwise sinning), but, as it were, going a-huckleberrying in the fields of thought, and enrich all the world with his visions and his joys.[1]

[1]Henry David Thoreau, The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (2nd. ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906; rpt. 14 vols. in 2, New York: Dover, 1962), XII, 399-400. I used the 1962 Dover unabridged republication; however, because the 1906 Houghton Mifflin edition is more often available for reference, I have indicated the pagination of that original edition. All subsequent references to Thoreau's Journal will be documented in the body of the text within parentheses following the reference. The editors of the 1906 edition numbered the pages of each volume separately; consequently, I have included the volume number in Roman numerals preceding the page number.

Torrey and Allen published all of the Journal which was available to them. Portions of the Journal which have

Although he rarely received from his fellow man those original thoughts which he desired, Henry David Thoreau recorded his own "fresh and fragrant thoughts" in a massive journal, which eventually contained the equivalent of over seven thousand printed pages. In this Journal, which he kept for twenty-four years (1837-1861), he preserved his own "refreshing and encouraging--re-creating" perceptions for all who care to follow him "a-huckleberrying in the fields of thought . . . ." Those who are willing to join Thoreau on this excursion will discover "fresh and fragrant thoughts communicated . . . fresh from a man's experience and life," and they will discover that Thoreau has indeed enriched "all the world with his visions and his joys."

In keeping a journal, Thoreau was following in the tradition of many reflective Americans before him. Perry Miller observes that the practice was considered so important that "John Quincy Adams would as soon have thought of going to bed with face and hands unwashed as to retire

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been published separately can be found in F. B. Sanborn's First and Last Journeys of Thoreau (Boston: Bibliophile Society, 1905) and Perry Miller's Consciousness in Concord: The Text of Thoreau's Hitherto "Lost Journal" (1840-1841) Together with Notes and a Commentary (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1958). A new edition of the complete works of Thoreau is in the process of being published by the Princeton University Press with Professor William Howarth as editor-in-chief. Additions to and revisions of the 1906 edition of the Journal will be made.

before he brought his diary up to date."[2] The reasons for this commitment to keeping a daily record are varied. First, those who were living during the Revolution, Miller theorizes, were aware of being part of history and thus felt compelled to keep a record for posterity. Another reason, probably the most significant one in colonial America, was the Puritans' and Quakers' desire to keep a record of their spiritual growth.[3] Among the many extant journals and diaries of colonial America are those of John Winthrop, Michael Wigglesworth, Samuel Sewall, Cotton Mather, Sarah Kemble Knight, Jonathan Edwards, John Woolman, and William Byrd. Later, in the nineteenth century, other factors added to or replaced the earlier motivations; foremost among these was the Romantic emphasis on the worth of the individual man and the validity of that man's vision, an important aspect of Transcendental philosophy. In his discussion of the "American preoccupation with self," Lawrence Buell concludes that three traditions--"spiritual examination, romantic self-consciousness, and democratic individualism--converged for the first time in American history, with the result that the self became a more important entity for the Transcendentalists than for any of their forbears."[4] The

[2]Miller, pp. 46-47.

[3]See Daniel B. Shea, Jr., Spiritual Autobiography in Early America (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968).

[4]Lawrence Buell, Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973), p. 267.

Transcendentalists' "main motive for introspection," he observes, "was self-improvement, in which respect they were the heirs of the Puritans." And, he adds, "the most obvious sign of this link is the diary."[5] Indeed, many of the Transcendentalists did keep journals: Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Ellery Channing, Margaret Fuller, Theodore Parker--all continued the tradition.[6] Although keeping a journal had been a practice for many generations of Americans, for the Transcendentalists it was especially important because they were convinced "of the primacy of the self's version of things . . . ."[7] Thoreau was, thus, one of many New Englanders who kept a daily record of his own "version of things."

One reason for the journal's special appeal to any writer is that it does not impose the restraints that other genres do. There is no need to condense in order to meet a publisher's requirements, and there is no limit to the number of words it may contain. There is no need to think of public demand, no need to consider what will be acceptable to others, no need to try to anticipate what might sell; for the audience is, in one sense, the writer himself--in

[5]Buell, p. 274.

[6]For a discussion of the Transcendentalists' journalizing in comparison to that of their Puritan forbears, see Buell, pp. 265-283.

[7]Shea, p. 258.

another sense, anyone who in the far distant future wishes to examine someone else's record of living, another "self's version of things." There is no need to structure the work, to formulate an introduction or to present a conclusion. There is no need to apologize for digressions; for with no specific, predetermined theme, there can be no digressions. There is no need to be concerned with consistency and continuity; these are established as a result of all the entries' being the daily observations of one person. An extended soliloquy of sorts, the journal format allows the writer the freedom to move from one incident to another without transition. The ultimate result is similar to that of stream-of-consciousness writing: the writer is allowed the liberty of free association, moving at will to the next sight which meets his eye and the next reflection which crosses his mind.

The earliest written record of Thoreau's evaluation of this genre is a composition he wrote at Harvard when he was a student in Edward T. Channing's rhetoric course. The assigned topic was "The Advantages of Keeping a Journal"; and although Thoreau had not yet begun to keep a journal, he responded to the topic by "dutifully (and prophetically)" discussing three advantages. "In ascending order of importance they were: (1) 'preservation of our scattered thoughts'; (2) self-expression; and inevitably (3)

self-improvement."[8] Fifteen years after beginning his own Journal, he would write, "A journal, a book that shall contain all your joy, your ecstasy" (IV, 223). Throughout his Journal, he records those joys and ecstasies, as well as those thoughts and observations which are important to him; and because those things which are most worthwhile to him are not those valued by the mass of men, his record does not include much of the information which the average reader would expect to find. In the words of Joseph Wood Krutch, ". . . few of what are ordinarily called biographical facts get into it . . . ."[9]

Instead of biographical data, Thoreau records such phenomena as a glorious day. On a particularly beautiful August day in 1853, Thoreau writes that although men record in their journals the amount of rainfall and the daily temperature, they are unaware of the beauty of the day. He feels that if the day passes by unobserved and subsequently unrecorded by man it will be like a "beautiful flower unnamed":

> It is a glorious and ever-memorable day. . . .
> It is a day affecting the spirits of men, but there is nobody to enjoy it but ourselves. What do the laborer ox and the laborer man care for the beautiful days? Will the haymaker when he comes home to-night know that

[8]Buell, p. 274. See Edwin I. Moser, "Henry David Thoreau: The College Essays Edited, with an Introduction" (M.A. thesis, New York University, 1951), who reproduces the text of Thoreau's twenty-nine surviving undergraduate essays in Channing's class.

[9]Joseph Wood Krutch, Henry David Thoreau (New York: W. Sloan Associates, 1948), p. 101.

> this has been such a beautiful day? This day itself has been the great phenomenon, but will it be reported in any journal, as the storm is, and the heat? It is like a great and beautiful flower unnamed. I see a man trimming willows on the Sudbury causeway and others raking hay out of the water in the midst of all this clarity and brightness, but are they aware of the splendor of this day? The mass of mankind, who live in houses or shops, or are bent upon their labor out of doors, know nothing of the beautiful days which are passing about and around them. Is not such a day worthy of a hymn? (V, 382-383)

Like the men struggling for survival in Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat," the mass of men do not even see "the color of the sky." They are literally bent on their labor and therefore cannot see "the beautiful days which are passing about and around them." It would seem that "the laborer ox and the laborer man" plod on together, simply existing from day to day. Most men will notice the quality of each day only as it affects the crops, the source of their sustenance. Earlier Thoreau had written, "The mass of men are very unpoetic, yet that Adam that names things is always a poet" (V, 347). So it is that in the midst of the quiet, Thoreau's poetic voice can be heard; he preserves the glory of the day by recording it in his Journal. Just as Shakespeare immortalized his young friend in the lines, "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this and this gives life to thee," Thoreau immortalizes the glorious day.

In his Journal entry for November 11, 1851, Thoreau suggests a motto for this collection of daily observations and thoughts: "'Says I to myself' should be the motto of my journal" (III, 107). This practice of writing to himself

was, however, questioned a few months later. One of his friends complained that, instead of conversing, he wrote in his Journal. "He finds fault with me," writes Thoreau, "that I walk alone, when I pine for want of a companion; that I commit my thoughts to a diary even on my walks, instead of seeking to share them generously with a friend; curses my practice even. Awful as it is to contemplate, I pray that, if I am the cold intellectual skeptic whom he rebukes, his curse may take effect, and wither and dry up those sources of my life, and my journal no longer yield me pleasure nor life" (III, 390). If he had shared his thoughts orally in lieu of keeping his Journal, Thoreau might have pleased his friend (assuming, of course, that his friend had ears to hear); but then he would have forfeited an irreplaceable aspect of his development.

This loss would have been tragic, for Thoreau had discovered yet another advantage in keeping a journal. In January of 1852 he writes that perhaps the main value of keeping a journal is the fact that one's own recorded thoughts engender other thoughts:

> To set down such choice experiences that my own writings may inspire me and at last I may make wholes of parts. Certainly it is a distinct profession to rescue from oblivion and to fix the sentiments and thoughts generally, that the contemplation of the unfinished picture may suggest its harmonious completion. Associate reverently and as much as you can with your loftiest thoughts. Each thought that is welcomed and recorded is a nest egg, by the side of which more will be laid. Thoughts accidentally thrown together become a frame in which more may be developed and exhibited. Perhaps this is the main value of writing, of keeping a journal--that

> so we remember our best hours and stimulate ourselves. My thoughts are my company. They have a certain individuality and separate existence, aye, personality. Having by chance recorded a few disconnected thoughts and then brought them into juxtaposition, they suggest a whole new field in which it was possible to labor and to think. Thought begat thought (III, 217).

Although "thoughts of different dates will not cohere" (III, 288), the juxtaposition of these disconnected thoughts suggests to Thoreau "a whole new field in which it was possible to labor and to think." He considers this recording of thoughts to be such an important undertaking that he calls it "a distinct profession."

The passage of time plays an important part in this lifelong process of accumulating nest eggs of thought. "You only need to make a faithful record of an average summer day's experience and summer mood, and read it in the winter, and it will carry you back to more than that summer day alone could show" (V, 454). Thoreau exclaims that when he meets with such a reminiscence in his Journal, it affects him "as poetry," and he appreciates "that other season and that particular phenomenon more than at the time" (V, 454). Five years later he comments that time reveals an earlier observation to be not only richer but also truer: "I would fain make two reports in my Journal, first the incidents and observations of to-day; and by to-morrow I review the same and record what was omitted before, which will often be the most significant and poetic part. I do not know at first what it is that charms me. The men and things of to-day are

wont to lie fairer and truer in to-morrow's memory" (IX, 306). What might seem trivial when he first records it may later seem an exotic gem, and Thoreau admits that this transformation is inexplicable:

> Of all strange and unaccountable things this journalizing is the strangest. It will allow nothing to be predicated of it; its good is not good, nor its bad bad. If I make a huge effort to expose my innermost and richest wares to light, my counter seems cluttered with the meanest homemade stuffs; but after months or years I may discover the wealth of India, and whatever rarity is brought overland from Cathay, in that confused heap, and what perhaps seemed a festoon of dried apple or pumpkin will prove a string of Brazilian diamonds, or pearls from Coromandel (I, 182).

The entries are transformed by time: old thoughts beget new ones, and pumpkins become pearls.

A question which comes to one's mind when reading Thoreau's Journal is whether or not he intended anyone else to see these "pearls of Coromandel." Most likely no one will ever be certain whether Thoreau intended--consciously or unconsciously--for his Journal of twenty-four years to be published. He constantly revised and polished it, and on one occasion he entertained the thought that if his Journal were published, it should be in the form it had been written down (III, 239). However, he customarily characterized it as a deeply personal and private record, calling it in one entry his correspondence with the gods (I, 206-207) and in another entry his conversation with himself. Believing that being true to his own genius was more important than seeking public acceptance, Thoreau apparently did not give serious

consideration to the publication of his Journal. However, being a man who genuinely believed in the validity of his vision, he must have hoped that someday someone would share his Journal with a receptive world.

As a record of the hypotheses and conclusions of Thoreau's daily existence, of "truth and thought in the process of evolution,"[10] this massive chronicle offers the scholar a seemingly inexhaustible mine of information and insight. If read only in small portions, the Journal may seem fragmented and lacking in artistic unity; but if read in its entirety, it becomes a communicative collage, a panorama of the life of a man who possessed a special kind of vision.

In an entry of 1857 Thoreau asks, "Is not the poet bound to write his own biography?" Then, he answers himself: "Is there any other work for him but a good journal? We do not wish to know how his imaginary hero, but how he, the actual hero, lived from day to day" (X, 115). Thus, the best way of knowing the actual hero of the Journal is to follow him as he daily goes "a-huckleberrying in the fields of thought . . . ." This venture requires leaving the trodden paths of the mass of men for the unexamined fields of thought, and these are the fields which Thoreau's Journal explores.

[10]Edith Seybold, Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1951), p. 14.

CHAPTER II

A NATURAL SYMBOL

The hero of the Journal spent his days exploring the fields of thought and the fields of Concord. Once, in the midst of describing a cold March day, Thoreau interjects this suggestion: "Might not my Journal be called 'Field Notes?'" (V, 32). And, at times, there is no more appropriate name for the pages which capture the richness and variety of the fields and forests around Concord. The Journal entries offer insight into Thoreau's interaction with this natural world. Because he knows that nature, unlike the institutions of man, offers abundant gifts which are so pure and beautiful that they inspire reverence, Thoreau emphasizes the necessity of man's regaining his lost intimacy with nature. Because he believes that natural objects are symbols, Thoreau uses these concrete phenomena to express abstractions. This symbolic vision caused many scientists of his day to question his worth as a naturalist, and their lifeless objectivity caused him to criticize their methods. Refusing to be bound by the laws

of science, Thoreau describes the fruits of nature in both scientific terminology and poetic metaphor.

In August of 1853 heavy rains produced an unusually large quantity of berries, and Thoreau comments on the overabundance of Nature's gift: "There are berries which men do not use, like choke-berries, which here in Hubbard's Swamp grow in great profusion and blacken the bushes. How much richer we feel for this unused abundance and superfluity! Nature would not appear so rich, the profusion so rich, if we knew a use for everything" (V, 368). This suggestion, that Nature gives man more than can be used, leads to the realization that she also gives him some things which are simply to be admired and appreciated. In November of the same year, Thoreau restates this idea, adding a new consideration: "This is the time for our best walnuts; the smallest, say the last of October. Got a peck and a half shelled. I did not wish to slight any of Nature's gifts . . . . How can we expect to understand Nature unless we accept like children these her smallest gifts, valuing them more as her gifts than for their intrinsic value?" (V, 487) Again, man is to appreciate the gifts not merely for their use or value but simply as gifts. In addition, Thoreau has here described the way man is to accept the gifts of Nature--as a child does. Just as this insistence on valuing the smallest fruits appears throughout the Journal, so does this belief in the necessity of seeing once again with the eyes of a child.

These abundant gifts of Nature are a "constant surprise and novelty" (XII, 96). Although much of life offers only "a wearisome monotony," Nature "has arranged such an order of feasts as never tires" (XII, 96). Yet this is not a feast for decadent, corrupt, or even ambitious men; in the midst of winter Thoreau had dug up a small, slumbering bud which was awaiting spring, and its patient faith, "informed of a spring which the world has never seen," awakened in Thoreau a sense of awe:

> It affected me, this tender dome-like bud, within the bosom of the earth, like a temple upon the earth, resounding with the worship of votaries. Methought I saw the flamens in yellow robes within it. The crowfoot buds--and how many beside!--lie unexpanded just beneath the surface. May I lead my life the following year as innocently as they! May it be as fair and smell as sweet! I anticipate nature. Destined to become a fair yellow flower above the surface to delight the eyes of children and its Maker. It offered to my mind a little temple into which to enter and worship. It will go forth in April, this vestal now cherishing her fire, to be married to the sun. How innocent are Nature's purposes! How unambitious! Her elections are not Presidential. The springing and blossoming of this flower do not depend on the votes of men (IV, 461).

The images of a "temple," "votaries," "robes," and the "vestal" are effectively used by Thoreau to create an aura of innocence, purity, and reverence--all of which do not depend upon politics or ambition but, in fact, are evoked by a tiny flower whose destiny is "to delight the eyes of children and its Maker."

Less than a week before, Thoreau had declared that his love for Nature was due in part to the fact that

> . . . she is not man, but a retreat from him. None of his institutions control or pervade her. There is a different kind of rightness prevails. In her midst I can be glad with an entire gladness. If this world were all man, I could not stretch myself, I should lose all hope. He is constraint, she is freedom to me. He makes me wish for another world. She makes me content with this. None of the joys she supplies is subject to his rules and definitions. What he touches he taints. In thought he moralizes. One would think that no free, joyful labor was possible to him. How infinite and pure the least pleasure of which Nature is basis, compared with the congratulation of mankind! (IV, 445)

Thoreau here has contrasted both the constricting institutions and the joyless taint of man with the infinity and purity of pleasures evoked by Nature. The danger of never knowing these pleasures is clear. If he cannot stretch, Thoreau says he will lose not only contentment, but also hope. In a later entry, he suggests that without Nature he might also lose his sanity:

> We must go out and re-ally ourselves to Nature every day. We must make root, send out some little fibre at least, even every winter day. I am sensible that I am imbibing health when I open my mouth to the wind. Staying in the house breeds a sort of insanity always. Every house is in this sense a hospital. A night and a forenoon is as much confinement to those wards as I can stand. I am aware that I recover some sanity which I had lost almost the instant that I come abroad (IX, 200).

Clearly, Thoreau requires frequent expeditions into the natural world.

In an entry a week later, he elaborates on the reasons for his frustration with the affairs of men:

> How many there are whose principal employment it is nowadays to eat their meals and go to the post office!
>
> After spending four or five days surveying and drawing a plan incessantly, I especially feel the

> necessity of putting myself in communication with nature again, to recover my tone, to withdraw out of the wearying and unprofitable world of affairs. The things I have been doing have but a fleeting and accidental importance, however much men are immersed in them, and yield very little valuable fruit. I would fain have been wading through the woods and fields and conversing with the sane snow. Having waded in the very shallowest stream of time, I would now bathe my temples in eternity. I wish again to participate in the serenity of nature, to share the happiness of the river and the woods. I thus from time to time break off my connection with eternal truths and go with the shallow stream of human affairs, grinding at the mill of the Philistines; but when my task is done, with never-failing confidence I devote myself to the infinite again (IX, 205).

This is only one of the many times Thoreau contrasts the majesty of Nature with the profit-conscious mass of men who spend their time in the world of affairs; ironically their search for profit is ultimately unprofitable. Six years earlier, Thoreau observed that "though man's life is trivial and handselled, Nature is holy and heroic. With what infinite faith and promise and moderation begins each new day!" (II, 384) Thoreau's use of "holy" creates here the same tone as that of the passage on "the tender dome-like bud," and his use of "heroic" contributes to the picture of the "actual hero" (X, 115) who lives daily in communion with Nature. It is because the affairs of the world are usually trivial and temporal that man needs the holy and heroic influence of Nature. As Walter Harding points out, "There is a constant need for the urbanized man to return to nature to fulfill his needs."[1]

[1]Walter Harding, A Thoreau Handbook (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1959), p. 151.

Man must not only return to nature but also establish a personal relationship with her. "To insure health," Thoreau contends, "a man's relation to Nature must come very near to a personal one; he must be conscious of a friendliness in her; when human friends fail or die, she must stand in the gap to him . . . . Unless Nature sympathizes with and speaks to us, as it were, the most fertile and blooming regions are barren and dreary" (X, 252). In spite of the enrichment Nature offers, many men appear to be satisfied in their barren existences, and Thoreau is perplexed at their lack of interest in the natural world all around them: "It is surprising how little most of us are contented to know about the sparrows which drift in the air before us just before the first snows" (V, 480). Thoreau is never content to know only a little; he wants to know Nature completely and truly and consequently to be able to speak to her with truth instead of with "the mealy-mouthed enthusiasm of the lover of nature" (I, 237). Unfortunately, few men genuinely seek to know Nature and therefore "very few men can speak of Nature with any truth" (I, 237).

Knowing that in order "to speak of Nature with any truth" he must first see her clearly, Thoreau seeks to describe "the most familiar object with a zest and vividness of imagery as if he saw it for the first time, the novelty consisting not in the strangeness of the object, but in the

new and clearer perception of it" (XIV, 120). This ability to perceive an object with all his senses and to describe it with "a zest and vividness of imagery" is precisely what F. O. Matthiessen considers to be a central factor in Thoreau's style:

> What separates Thoreau most from Emerson is his interest in the varied play of the senses, not merely of the eye, a rare enough attribute in New England and important to dwell on since it is the crucial factor in accounting for the greater density of Thoreau's style. You think first, to be sure, of his Indian accuracy of sight that could measure distances like the surveyor's instrument and tell time almost to the minute by the opening of the flowers. This alertness remained constant. Indeed, the last notation in his journal, before it was broken off by the consumption from which he died, considers the precise shape of some furrows made by the rain and concludes: "All this is perfectly distinct to an observant eye, and yet could easily pass unnoticed by most." But usually he felt that sight alone was too remote for the kind of knowledge he wanted . . . .[2]

Matthiessen gives further examples of Thoreau's use of sensory appeal and then remarks that Thoreau was determined "never to record an abstraction, but to give himself and his reader the full impression of the event."[3] In addition to bringing all the senses into play, says Matthiessen, Thoreau "spanned the gap between the idea and the object. This power to unite thought with sense impression, the immediate feeling with the reflection upon it, is what Eliot has discerned to be the distinguishing attribute of the

[2]F. O. Matthiessen, American Rennaissance (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), pp. 87-88.

[3]Matthiessen, p. 88.

English metaphysical poets, and has called--in a term now somewhat worn by his followers but still indispensable for its accuracy--their 'unified sensibility.'"[4]

Thoreau does "unite thought with sense impression"; in fact, as he notes in October of 1859, he believes that "natural objects and phenomena are the original symbols or types which express our thoughts and feelings . . ." (XII, 389). A few months later he asserts that the physical fact "in all language is the symbol of the spiritual . . ." (XIII, 145). In a lengthy passage written in December of 1851 Thoreau rejects as inadequate a factual, mechanical explanation of a beautiful crimson cloud as "a mass of vapor which absorbs all other rays and reflects the red . . . ." This kind of knowledge is worthless, he writes, for it is bereft of the symbolicalness and mystery which speak to the imagination:

> I witness a beauty in the form of coloring of the clouds which addresses itself to my imagination, for which you account scientifically to my understanding, but do not so account to my imagination. It is what it suggests and is the symbol of that I care for, and if, by any trick of science, you rob it of its symbolicalness, you do me no service and explain nothing. I, standing twenty miles off, see a crimson cloud in the horizon. You tell me it is a mass of vapor which absorbs all other rays and reflects the red, but that is nothing to the purpose, for this red vision excites me, stirs my blood, makes my thoughts flow, and I have new and indescribable fancies, and you have not touched the secret of that influence. If there is not something mystical in your explanation, something

[4]Matthiessen, p. 98.

> unexplainable to the understanding, some elements of mystery, it is quite insufficient. If there is nothing in it which speaks to my imagination, what boots it? What sort of imagination is that which enriches the understanding, but robs the imagination? Not merely robs Peter to pay Paul, but takes from Peter more than it ever gives to Paul? That is simply the way in which it speaks to the understanding, and that is the account which the understanding gives of it; but that is not the way it speaks to the imagination, and that is not the account which the imagination gives of it. Just as inadequate to a pure mechanic would be a poet's account of a steam-engine.
>
> If we knew all things thus mechanically merely, should we know anything really? (III, 155-156)

These remarks from the Journal reveal Thoreau's view of the concrete as a symbol of the abstract and, when they are considered in relation to his close involvement with the natural world, lead inevitably to certain significant natural phenomena.

Although numerous Thoreau scholars have discussed such symbols as the pond, the spring thaw, fire, and the ocean shore, one extremely important natural object has never been sufficiently studied: the wild berry. The wild berry appears frequently and significantly throughout Thoreau's Journal. Perhaps the wild berry does not for the average reader possess intrinsically symbolic qualities (it is not, after all, a pond or a river). However, a close study of the Journal will show that this small, seemingly insignificant object is not peripheral to but is, in fact, integral to an understanding of Thoreau. It was, moreover, Emerson's failure to understand this which led to his inability to comprehend Thoreau's ambition. After Thoreau

died, his friend and mentor, Ralph Waldo Emerson, gave a eulogy in which he expressed his disappointment in a life which he felt had been regrettably unfulfilled because of Thoreau's lack of ambition and subsequent loss of "powers of action": "Had his genius been only contemplative, he had been fitted to his life, but with his energy and practical ability he seemed born for great enterprise and for command; and I so much regret the loss of his rare powers of action, that I cannot help counting it a fault in him that he had no ambition. Wanting this, instead of engineering for all America, he was the captain of a huckleberry-party."[5]

"It was unfortunate," says Sherman Paul "that Emerson never read Thoreau's notes on the meaning of huckleberrying--he would have understood, then, that Thoreau's life was not without ambition or perversely unsocial, that in his way his brave Henry was engineering for America."[6] Indeed, it is unfortunate that many students of Thoreau have apparently never read his comments on the meaning of the huckleberry, for it is possible to understand many of Thoreau's concepts only after understanding the significance of this seemingly insignificant little berry. Although the

[5]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoreau," Atlantic Monthly, 10 (August 1862), 248.

[6]Sherman Paul, The Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration (Urbana: The Univ. of Illinois Press, 1958), p. 18.

berry makes an occasional appearance in his other works, it is in Thoreau's Journal that it actually becomes a motif. In the Journal the berry serves as a concrete fact of existence around which Thoreau constructs a multi-faceted metaphor, and the spirit of Thoreau is, in essence, "the spirit of the huckleberry" (XIV, 295).

This metaphorical view of a natural phenomenon has caused much speculation about and disagreement concerning the relationship of poetry to fact in Thoreau's works and consequently the relationship of his poetic and scientific tendencies. It is interesting, and somewhat paradoxical to note that although many men of letters criticize Thoreau for being too scientific, that is, for accumulating too much dry, objective data, many men of science refuse to let him be considered one of their vocation because he is too poetic. Although many admirers of Thoreau from the literary world refer to him as a "naturalist," Donald Culross Peattie in his classic, Green Laurels: The Lives and Achievements of the Great Naturalists, doesn't include the works of Thoreau in his bibliography. He explains his omission of Thoreau in this way: "Our own American Thoreau was no scientist; he took many an occasion to deride and deplore science, and so on his own pleading we must applaud him rather in his chosen role of Transcendental moralist and poet of nature."[7] The omission of Thoreau is especially

[7]Donald Culross Peattie, Green Laurels: The Lives

ironic in light of Peattie's own conception of a naturalist as a man who has "eyes that understand what we all see,"[8] a description which fits Henry David Thoreau. Whereas Peattie at least acknowledges Thoreau's reputed achievement, Alexander Adams, in his book, Eternal Quest: The Story of the Great Naturalists, makes no reference whatsoever to Thoreau. He writes that great naturalists have taught us "that man is not necessarily here to stay unless he can find a better means of preserving both himself and his environment,"[9] another comment that seems to describe Thoreau. Yet neither Peattie nor Adams considers Thoreau a naturalist.

There are, of course, understandable reasons for their conclusions. Thoreau frequently ignored much of the existing botanical information available to him, preferring to start from scratch and form his own inductive conclusions. He explains:

> It is only when we forget all our learning that we begin to know. I do not get nearer by a hair's breadth to any natural object so long as I presume that I have an introduction to it from some learned man. To conceive of it with a total apprehension I must for the

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and Achievements of the Great Naturalists (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1936), p. xx.

[8]Peattie, p. xix.

[9]Alexander B. Adams, Eternal Quest: The Story of the Great Naturalists (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), p. 11.

> thousandth time approach it as something totally strange. If you would make acquaintance with the ferns you must forget your botany. You must get rid of what is commonly called knowledge of them. Not a single scientific term or distinction is the least to the purpose, for you would fain perceive something, and you must approach the object totally unprejudiced (XII, 371).

Clearly, Thoreau looked at nature with a different kind of vision than a purely scientific one. In his biography of the nineteenth-century American botanist Asa Gray, Dupree writes that Gray "was hostile" to Emerson's and Thoreau's "whole way of looking at nature . . . ."

> On the other side Thoreau saw in Gray only a disembodied Manual of Botany whose descriptions did not please him and who slavishly followed the rules of nomenclature. When Thoreau was struck by a passage in Gray, he read into it a symbolism which changed the matter-of-fact scientific prose beyond recognition. He pondered a statement by Gray that roots "not only spring from the root-end of the primary stem in germination, but also from any subsequent part of the stem under favorable circumstances, that is to say, in darkness and moisture, as when covered by the soil or resting on its surface." It is certain that Gray meant here exactly what he said, but for Thoreau these words meant that "the most clear and ethereal ideas (Antaeus-like) readily ally themselves to the earth, to the primal womb of things." The discrepancy between these two ways of looking at the same phenomenon is the measure of the great gap between transcendentalism and Gray's empiricism.[10]

The passage Dupree is quoting is only a small part of a lengthy Journal entry for May 20, 1851, throughout which Thoreau offers similar symbolic renderings of Gray's "matter-of-fact prose." He begins the entry by asserting

[10]A. Hunter Dupree, Asa Gray (Cambridge: The Balknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), p. 222.

what he considers to be an incontrovertible truth: "There is, no doubt, a perfect analogy between the life of the human being and that of the vegetable, both of the body and the mind" (II, 201). It is, of course, this symbolic way of viewing nature that separates Thoreau from the world of natural science.

Paradoxically, Thoreau incorporates scientific terminology into his record of the natural world. He frequently quotes Gray's comments on various phenomena and, when he chooses, uses Gray's terms and classifications. While it is this mixture of scientific and poetic statement that confuses critics, it is that same tension which enriches the Journal. Thoreau sought to see and record all facets of reality, to paint an object in several dimensions simultaneously and thereby make "wholes of parts" (III, 217). The same observer who includes in his Journal for July 14, 1858, an annotated list of sixteen berries including Vaccinium uliginosum, Vaccinium angustifolium, Vaccinium Vitis-Idaea, Vaccinium Oxycoccus, etc. (XI, 41-42), less than a month later composes a dramatic eulogy (complete with Latin epigram) lamenting the regulation and commercialization of huckleberry-fields and the subsequent passing away of a glorious way of life:

> I hear of pickers ordered out of the huckleberry-fields, and I see stakes set up with written notices forbidding any to pick there. Some let their fields, or allow so much for the picking. Sic transit gloria ruris. We are not grateful enough that we have lived

> part of our lives before these evil days came. What becomes of the true value of country life? What if you must go to market for it? Shall things come to such a pass that the butcher commonly brings round huckleberries in his cart? It is as if the hangman were to perform the marriage ceremony, or were to preside at the communion table. Such is the inevitable tendency of our civilization,--to reduce huckleberries to a level with beefsteak. The butcher's item on the door is now "calf's head and huckleberries." I suspect that the inhabitants of New England and of the Continent of Europe have thus lost their natural rights with the increase of population and of monopolies. The wild fruits of the earth disappear before civilization, or are only to be found in large markets. The whole country becomes, as it were, a town or beaten common, and the fruits left are a few hips and haws (XI, 78-79).

This impassioned passage makes clear Thoreau's refusal to be bound by the laws of science. For Thoreau, a berry is much more than simply a member of a particular genus; it is that, of course, but it is also a symbol.

Defining and therefore clarifying the term "berry" is valuable in providing a basis for later metaphorical musings, but the task is not an easy one. The berry is, of course, a fruit; and a clear definition of "fruit" is readily available. One of the leading contemporary textbooks in the field of botany defines a fruit as "a ripened ovary (or sometimes a group of ovaries) and its contents, together with any adjacent parts that may be fused with it. Since fruits arise only from floral organs, their production is limited to the flowering plants."[11] This definition of "a

[11]Carl L. Wilson and Walter E. Loomis, Botany, 3rd. ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 250.

fruit" is clear and adequate for the purposes of this study; it contains the basis for the universally-made association of the term "fruit" with such abstractions as growth, fertility and productivity. However, there is no general agreement on a definition of the term "berry." Wilson and Loomis note that there is a distinction between the botanist's idea of "berry" and the layman's: "In the botanist's definition of a berry are included more fruits than the layman calls by that name. The fruits of the date, tomato, grape, avocado, eggplant, persimmon, and red pepper are berries." Today's botanist does not consider the cranberry, the gooseberry, and currant to be berries--but instead "accessory fruits"--often termed "false berries." Scientifically speaking, say Wilson and Loomis, the raspberry is not a berry either, but rather an "aggregate fruit"; and what we know as blackberries and strawberries are "aggregate accessory fruits."[12] The problem with this explanation is that it is given by two contemporary botanists, and nineteenth-century botanists did not make these same distinctions.

One way of attaining some degree of accuracy in this area is to look at the botany books which were a part of Thoreau's library and at those books and botanists to which Thoreau made reference in his Journal. The authoritative source for all information concerning what books Thoreau had

[12]Wilson and Loomis, pp. 255-257.

in his library is Walter Harding's compilation, Thoreau's Library. Although this list shows what books were in Thoreau's library, it rarely indicates which edition of the book Thoreau possessed. Harding explains that although Thoreau kept a catalog listing many of his books, he "almost invariably uses a short title rather than a full title--and often the title from the spine of the book, apparently, rather than the correct title page entry. What is more, he frequently omits the place of publication, rarely lists the date of the edition, and almost never gives the name of the publisher." Harding offers this warning to the user of the list:

> Only in those cases where the actual volume used by Thoreau has been located can we be certain of the bibliographical description. In cases where only one edition of a work appeared before Thoreau's death in 1862, we can be reasonably sure that the description is accurate. But in altogether too many cases, several editions were available to him and I have had to guess which one Thoreau owned. I have based my guesses almost entirely on what I have thought to be the edition most likely to have been available when Thoreau acquired it.[13]

One of the books which Thoreau is known to have had in his library is the 1848 edition of Gray's botany manual. In his manual, Gray lists the following berries as belonging to the Suborder Vacciniae (the whortleberry family): box-leaved huckleberry, small cranberry, common American cranberry, cowberry, squaw huckleberry, dwarf bilberry, low

[13]Walter Harding, Thoreau's Library (Charlottesville, Va.: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1957), pp. 6, 9.

bog bilberry, low shining-leaved blueberry, downy-leaved blueberry, small glaucous blueberry, pale swamp blueberry, common swamp blueberry, black blueberry, and creeping snowberry.[14] Furthermore, as late as 1887, Gray was still including the gooseberry, the currant, and the cranberry in his category of fruits known as "The Berry"[15]--three species which, according to Wilson and Loomis, are not considered to be berries by contemporary botanists. Further complicating the situation is Thoreau's frequent rejection of a statement by Gray or by some other recognized authority if the authority's conclusion didn't concur with his own. Although Thoreau frequently uses Gray's classifications and identifications, he is also apt to disagree: he dismisses Gray's description of a certain plant by saying it is "poorly described" (VIII, 406), he contradicts Gray's observations on the sand berry (VIII, 431-432) and on the wood of a large bush (IX, 67), and he carefully notes the inaccuracy of still another of Gray's plant descriptions (XII, 208). Another major source, which was a part of Thoreau's personal library and to which he refers often in his Journal, is Loudon's Encyclopedia of Plants.[16]

[14]Asa Gray, Manual of the Botany of the Northern United States (Boston and Cambridge: James Munroe and Co., 1848), pp. 258-263.

[15]Asa Gray, The Elements of Botany (New York: Ivison, Blakeman, and Co., 1887), p. 119.

[16]Mrs. Loudon, ed., Loudon's Encyclopedia of Plants (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855).

Although Thoreau frequently copies passages verbatim from this book into his Journal as apparently reliable information, in the Journal entry for December 30, 1860, he cites Loudon by page and then denies Loudon's assertion concerning the type of soil required for huckleberries (XIV, 297). This tendency of Thoreau's to reject the information of authorities whose observations differ from his own makes it impossible to draw solid conclusions about all the details of berry classification.

Indeed, the complexity of berry classification remains a problem for botanists today. Arthur Cronquist explains: "The form, texture, and structure of fruits are almost infinitely variable, and any attempt to name and classify the kinds is necessarily arbitrary and imperfect." He offers as an example of the problem the "blueberries (Vaccinium) of the Eastern United States . . . in which [because of hybridizing] the identification of species is still not easy in spite of the careful and competent taxonomic attention they have received." It is such groups as Rubus (blackberries and raspberries) "that have usually produced the greatest disagreements among taxonomists."[17] These comments are from a book published in 1961, nearly one hundred years after Thoreau's death! Consequently, because contemporary taxonomists still disagree on berry

[17]Arthur Cronquist, Introductory Botany (New York: Harper, 1961), pp. 628, 751-752.

classification and because Thoreau, with his characteristic eclecticism, incorporated only those methods which appealed to him philosophically (for years he refused to use a microscope, claiming that only the unaided eye could properly view an object), the concept of the berry will be greatly simplified for the purposes of this study. The motif of the wild berry will be traced through Thoreau's references to the term "berry" either by itself or in compounds ("berries," "berrying," "huckleberry," etc.).

Thoreau's views of the wild berry as a natural symbol and as a natural object worthy of appreciation merge to become one way of perceiving reality. Consequently, as Laurence Stapleton has suggested, ". . . in the process of studying and knowing what seems to be symbol or allegory, we may encounter the heart of reality, and in knowing nature as art, we may know the source of being."[18] The process of studying and subsequently knowing the wild berry in Thoreau's Journal reveals the berry's importance to the heart of Thoreau's reality and the source of his being. For Thoreau, the berry was associated with innocence and youth, invigorating wildness and discovery, individualism and freedom--essential elements in the art of living.

[18]Stapleton, p. 208.

CHAPTER III

THE SPECTRUM OF THE BERRY SYMBOL

Thoreau uses the wild berry throughout his Journal as a multi-faceted and evocative symbol. His descriptions of its brilliant colors and exhilarating flavors as well as his interlacing of its many abstract connotations result in a montage of color and ideas. Because of his intricate weaving of the multiple associations of the berry, it is difficult to isolate any one association without referring to others. Religious terminology blends with ethereal qualities; wholesomeness and purity combine with innocence and simplicity; spontaneity is juxtaposed with wildness; vivid colors reveal maturity. The result is a richly woven fabric whose threads are difficult to untangle for analysis, yet this density of images is what makes the berry the rich symbol that it is in the world of Thoreau.

In Thoreau's estimation, berries, being among the many emblematic gifts of Nature, retain an ambrosial quality. Although they are given to man by the gods, their essence can be understood by a small child; for unlike an

abstract theological doctrine, the berries are, in a sense, the embodiment of simplicity and innocence. Children appreciate these simple fruits--unaware that exotic and imported fruits are valued more highly by their parents. Children are curious and exuberant; they love to go searching through the woods for berries, unlike their parents who have gradually lost interest in such expeditions and who have lost the rich color and taste of life. One value of the berry for these listless adult members of society is its invigorating wildness which, if they allow it to, can stimulate their breathing, their thinking, and eventually their way of life. In taming the wilderness, man has obliterated all sense of quest, of discovery, of exploring the unknown. Literally, this means he sits behind a desk; figuratively, it means he hides behind convention. Only by leaving the established society for brief excursions into uncharted wilderness can man keep his leg muscles and his brain from shriveling. Only by going where the berries grow can he begin to find himself. If one goes a-berrying in the fields of nature, he will be in search of a fruit whose taste is invigorating, whose colorful beauty is exhilarating, and whose location draws him from a world frequently characterized by complexity and corruption into a regenerating wildness where he can renew his original relation with Nature.

Sometimes Thoreau brings many of these concepts together in a single entry; one such passage is in his

Journal record for November 26, 1860. After beginning the day's entry with a discussion of pitch pines and oaks, Thoreau comments on a nuthatch, birch fungi, and an old Indian woman before he abruptly shifts to berries: "The value of these wild fruits is not in the mere possession or eating of them, but in the sight or enjoyment of them" (XIV, 273). Here Thoreau has introduced the idea of aesthetic appreciation, devoid of any considerations of practical usefulness. In support of the validity of this contention, he adds, "The very derivation of the word 'fruit' would suggest this. It is from the Latin fructus, meaning that which is used or enjoyed. If it were not so, then going a-berrying and going to market would be nearly synonymous expressions" (XIV, 273). Far from being synonymous expressions, "going to market" and "going a-berrying" are polar opposites. In going to market, one must go to town with one's money and buy what another man has to sell; in addition, the value of the article is determined by the seller who bases it on supply and demand. How unlike berrying this is! In order to gather berries, one must leave the town, one needs no money, and one is not restricted to those goods which another man chooses to sell; and, of course, the value of the experience is in "the sight or enjoyment" of the berries themselves. Moreover, Thoreau adds, ". . . it is the spirit in which you do a thing which makes it interesting, whether it is sweeping a room or pulling turnips.

Peaches are unquestionably a very beautiful and palatable fruit, but the gathering of them for the market is not nearly so interesting as the gathering of huckleberries for your own use" (XIV, 273). Throughout the Journal, Thoreau reiterates this emphasis on the importance of the "spirit" in which one does a thing.

As Thoreau begins the next paragraph of this entry, he introduces his own definition of "a successful venture," a definition which is certainly not that held by the mass of men:

> A man fits out a ship at a great expense and sends it to the West Indies with a crew of men and boys, and after six months or a year it comes back with a load of pineapples. Now, if no more gets accomplished than the speculator commonly aims at,--if it simply turns out what is called a successful venture,--I am less interested in this expedition than in some child's first excursion a-huckleberrying, in which it is introduced into a new world, experiences a new development, though it brings home only a gill of huckleberries in its basket. I know that the newspapers and the politicians declare otherwise, but they do not alter the fact. Then, I think that the fruit of the latter expedition was finer than that of the former (XIV, 273-274).

Here again he sets in opposition the concepts of commercial success and personal success, and he introduces the association of children with berries. What Thoreau considers to be a "successful" undertaking is an experience in which one "is introduced into a new world, experiences a new development." The suggestion of a new world is one which Thoreau uses elsewhere to develop his concept of wildness. Here Thoreau acknowledges that neither newspapers nor

politicians would consider a child's discovery of the world of huckleberries to be noteworthy (or newsworthy). Thoreau, nevertheless, calmly asserts that their opinions "do not alter the fact." At this point Thoreau makes a pun in which the earlier discussed Latin meaning of the word "fruit" is implicit: "It was a more fruitful expedition." He then concludes the paragraph: "The value of any experience is measured, of course, not by the amount of money, but the amount of development we get out of it. If a New England boy's dealings with oranges and pineapples have had more to do with his development than picking huckleberries or pulling turnips have, then he rightly and naturally thinks more of the former; otherwise not" (XIV, 274).

In the next paragraph of the same entry, Thoreau emphasizes the necessity of recognizing the worth of New England fruits for New Englanders. "Do not think that the fruits of New England are mean and insignificant, while those of some foreign land are noble and memorable. Our own, whatever they may be, are far more important to us than any others can be. They educate us, and fit us to live in New England. Better for us is the wild strawberry than the pineapple, the wild apple than the orange, the hazlenut or pignut than the cocoanut or almond, and not on account of their flavor merely, but the part they play in our education" (XIV, 274). Sheer enjoyment, the discovery of a new world, the development and education of a child--all of

these are associations with the wild berry, associations which are revealed in three paragraphs of a single entry.

This is only one of hundreds of berry entries, and it is only one of the many varied kinds of berry entries which range from Thoreau's actual drawing of the root system of the huckleberry bushes, Vaccinium vacillans (XIV, 153) to his evocative descriptions of the beauty of berries. ("The high blueberry delights singularly in these localities. . . . Think of its wreaths and canopies of cool blue fruit in August, thick as the stars in the Milky Way," X, 197) to figurative uses of the term such as his wish that men would go "a-huckleberrying in the fields of thought . . ." (XII, 400). Thus, the berry occurs in diverse kinds of contexts throughout the Journal. A closer look reveals the fullness of apprehension with which Thoreau approaches the berry and the recurring themes with which he associates berries and berrying.

The first mention of "huckleberries" in Thoreau's Journal introduces the nearly divine atmosphere of simplicity and confidence which Thoreau associates with the process of gathering these berries. The words he uses to describe the experience are those of religious ritual: "The devout attitude of the hour asked a blessing on that repast." The participants in the scene are Thoreau and his brother John; after traveling seven miles on the Concord River, they have just moored their boat for the night. The berries seem to

have been developing for an extended period of time in preparation for Henry and John: "Scrambling up the bank of our terra incognita we fall on huckleberries, which have slowly ripened here, husbanding the juices which the months have distilled, for our peculiar use this night." This image of nature's wine is followed by Thoreau's comment that even "if they had been rank poison, the entire simplicity and confidence with which we plucked them would have insured their wholesomeness." Thus, Thoreau has introduced his huckleberries in a vignette characterized by youth, simplicity, confidence, wholesomeness, and an overriding tone of reverence. The scene was, he concludes, "fit for the setting sun to rest on" (I, 88-89). This scene suggests several of the qualities of life valued most highly by Thoreau.

Many years later Thoreau once again describes berrying in religious terminology when he refers to the experience as a "sacrament" and a "communion" "in remembrance of" Nature. He describes the abundance of huckleberries and blackberries on Fair Haven Hill where Nature has prepared a feast. In this passage, as elsewhere in the Journal, Thoreau mixes Christian and pagan allusions; he refers to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, alludes to the Last Supper of Christ, and describes the berry feast as a "Saturnalia":

> Nature does her best to feed man. The traveller need not go out of the road to get as many as he wants; every bush and vine teems with palatable fruit. Man for once stands in such relation to Nature as the animals that pluck and eat as they go. The fields and hills are a table constantly spread. Wines of all kinds and qualities, of noblest vintage, are bottled up in the skins of countless berries, for the taste of men and animals. To men they seem offered not so much for food as for sociality, that they may picnic with Nature,--diet drinks, cordials, wines. We pluck and eat in remembrance of Her. It is a sacrament, a communion. The not-forbidden fruits, which no serpent tempts us to taste. Slight and innocent savors, which relate us to Nature, make us her guests and entitle us to her regard and protection. It is a Saturnalia, and we quaff her wines at every turn (V, 330-331).

Two weeks after this entry Thoreau writes, "Nature is now a Bacchanal, drunk with the wines of a thousand plants and berries" (V, 356). Thoreau lists "berries" and concludes with a passage that harks back to the first huckleberry passage of the Journal (I, 88-89): "I have felt, when partaking of this inspiring diet, that my appetite was an indifferent consideration; that eating became a sacrament, a method of communion, an ecstatic exercise, a mingling of bloods, and [a] sitting at the communion table of the world; and so have not only quenched my thirst at the spring but the health of the universe"(I, 372). Earlier that summer (1845) Thoreau made still another religious reference--this time an allusion to the food provided for the Israelites in the wilderness: "The strawberries may perhaps be considered a fruit of the spring, for they have depended chiefly on the freshness and moisture of spring, and on high lands are already dried up,--a soft fruit, a sort of manna which falls

in June,--and in the meadows they lurk at the shady roots of the grass" (V, 294).

The strawberries may be food from the gods, but Thoreau also considers berries to be food fit for the gods. In August of 1853 he writes, "When I see, as now climbing Fair Haven, the hills covered with huckleberry and blueberry bushes bent to the ground with fruit,--so innocent and palatable a fruit, I think of them as fruits fit to grow on Olympus, the ambrosia of the gods . . ." (V, 360). Thoreau uses this idea of berries as ambrosia several times: in August of 1860, he describes blueberries as "little blue sacks full of swampy nectar and ambrosia commingled . . ." (XIV, 62). The amazing fact is, writes Thoreau, that when man can grow ambrosia, he grows tobacco instead. After referring to the Whortleberry Family as a "crop" which "grows wild all over the country,--wholesome, bountiful, free,--a real ambrosia," Thoreau observes that, in spite of this magnificent crop, "men--the foolish demons that they are--devote themselves to culture of tobacco, inventing slavery and a thousand other curses as the means, --with infinite pains and inhumanity go raise tobacco all their lives. Tobacco is the staple instead of huckleberries. Wreaths of tobacco smoke go up from this land, the incense of a million sensualists. With what authority can such distinguish between Christians and Mahometans?" (VI, 309-310). So it is that the foolish "demon" who is man

propagates not ambrosia but tobacco and thus places his offering upon the altar of sensuality. By this choice man has bound himself to dusty tobacco fields. If, however, he were to choose blueberries as his crop, he could be transported to heavenly spheres, for as Thoreau suggests in 1852 berries seem to be made "of the ether itself": "These blueberries on Fair Haven have a very innocent, ambrosial taste, as if made of the ether itself, as they plainly are colored with it" (IV, 204). Thoreau's association of "ambrosial" with "innocent" here and in the passage quoted earlier from August, 1853, is a natural one; for it is guilt that is associated with man, innocence with the gods. The different species of berries all suggest to Thoreau this innocence, for they are wholesome, pure, and sweet.

One August morning Thoreau discovers this wholesomeness when he leaves his home at 1:00 for a swim and a walk. "Though man's life is trivial and handselled, Nature is holy and heroic. With what infinite faith and promise and moderation begins each new day! It is only a little after 3 o'clock, and already there is evidence of morning in the sky. . . . It is not easy to realize the serene joy of all the earth when the moon commences to shine unobstructedly, unless you have often been a traveller by night. . . . How wholesome the taste of huckleberries, when now by moonlight I feel for them amid the bushes" (II, 384-385). So it is

that at three o'clock in the morning in the serenity of moonlight Thoreau seeks out the wholesome huckleberry.

On one of his walks, Thoreau observes many plants including the amelanchier berry, the strawberry, the June berry (blue berry), the dwarf choke-cherry, the barberry, and the huckleberry (IV, 129-130). He chooses to walk in the fields and pastures rather than in the road: "These are very agreeable pastures to me; no house in sight, no cultivation" (IV, 132). And as he walks, he thinks of the vast difference between this world and that of the city:

> As I walk through these old deserted wild orchards, half pasture, half huckleberry-field, the air is filled with fragrance from I know not what source. How much purer and sweeter it must be than the atmosphere of the streets, rendered impure by the filth about our houses! It is quite offensive often when the air is heavy at night. The roses in the front yard do not atone for the sink and pigsty and cow-yard and jakes in the rear (IV, 133).

Thoreau hated the pollution in the air over one hundred years before our complex society began to concern itself with the "impure" atmosphere. And no air freshener--not even the front-yard roses--could disguise the impurity. Thoreau's use of the word "atone" emphasizes the gravity of the situation: the atmosphere has been prophaned. It is only in the half-pasture, half-huckleberry field that Thoreau can find once again pure and sweet air "filled with fragrance."

Several days later, Thoreau again describes the simplicity and wholesomeness of wild berries:

> I picked a handful or two of blueberries; though strawberries are now in their prime. They follow hard upon the first red amelanchier berries. Blueberries and huckleberries deserve to be celebrated, such simple, wholesome, universal fruits, food for the gods and for aboriginal men. They are so abundant that they concern our race much. Tournefort called some of this genus, at least, Vitis Idaea, which apparently means the vine of Mount Ida. I cannot imagine any country without this kind of berry. Berry or berries. On which men live like birds. Still covering our hills as when the red men lived here. Are they not the principal wild fruit? Huckleberry puddings and pies, and huckleberries and milk, are regular and important dishes (IV, 158-159).

In addition to reiterating that blueberries and huckleberries are "simple" and "wholesome," Thoreau in this passage introduces the concept of universality. The fruit of the gods as he earlier referred to them and the fruit of the old Indian woman as he described them in a later passage--are one and the same: "food for the gods and for aboriginal men." In addition, the berries are one of the staples of a healthy diet and a happy life.

Thoreau also associates innocence with the first blueberries of the season: "I hear of the first blueberries brought to market. What a variety of rich blues their berries present, i.e. the earliest kind! Some are quite black and without bloom. What innocent flavors!" (IX, 482) This early fruit is special, and Thoreau suggests why. After mentioning strawberries and huckleberries, he explains: "It is natural that the first fruit which the earth bears should emit and be as it were an embodiment of that vernal fragrance with which the air has teemed. Strawberries are

its manna, found ere long where that fragrance has filled the air. Little natural beds or patches on the sides of dry hills, where the fruit sometimes reddens the ground. But it soon dries up, unless there is a great deal of rain. Well, are not the juices of fruit distilled from the air?" (V, 236) Once again, Thoreau has described berries as food from the gods--manna. In addition, his image here of the early fruit as an "embodiment" of the "vernal fragrance" suggests spring, and the word "vernal" also denotes freshness and youth.

In describing the raspberry, Thoreau incorporates these qualities of innocence and spirituality, as well as the characteristic of simplicity: "Some of the raspberries are ripe, the most innocent and simple of fruits, the purest and most ethereal" (II, 281). His use of "ethereal" again suggests a relationship to the heavenly spheres. Five days later he writes of the danger of man's profaning his mind "by the habit of attending to trivial things . . ." (II, 290); this concept suggests the danger of losing those very qualities possessed by the raspberry. "Shall the temple of our thought be a public arena where the most trivial affairs of the market and the gossip of the tea-table is discussed, --a dusty, noisy trivial place? Or shall it be a quarter of heaven itself, a place consecrated to the service of the gods, a hypaethral temple?" (II, 289) As the raspberry is simple, pure, ethereal, so man's mind should be "a

hypaethral temple." However, this can be achieved only through conscious effort. Thoreau writes, "I think that we should treat our minds as innocent and ingenuous children whose guardians we are,--be careful what objects and what subjects we thrust on their attention" (II, 290). Conventions are among those dangerous objects and subjects. "Routine, conventionality, manners, etc., etc.--how insensibly an undue attention to these dissipates and impoverishes the mind, robs it of its simplicity and strength, emasculates it . . . ! Conventionalities are as bad as impurities" (II, 290-291). None of this is new, of course, to the student of Thoreau. "Simplicity" is a motif found throughout his writings, as well as in his own way of living. But here the proximity of these remarks and those on berries to those on children helps to form a cluster of related concepts: "The senses of children are unprofaned. Their whole body is one sense; they take a physical pleasure in riding on a rail, they love to teeter. So does the unviolated, the unsophisticated mind derive an inexpressible pleasure from the simplest exercise of thoughts" (II, 291). And we shall see that only the unviolated and unsophisticated mind will derive pleasure from the berry, the simplest of fruits.

The unique value of a child's response is its freshness and joy, and it is this very quality in Gerard, a sixteenth-century botanist, which causes Thoreau to consider

his "admirable though quaint descriptions" to be "greatly superior to the modern more scientific ones." Thoreau explains:

> He describes not according to rule but to his natural delight in the plants. He brings them vividly before you, as one who has seen and delighted in them. It is almost as good as to see the plants themselves. It suggests that we cannot too often get rid of the barren assumption that is in our science. His leaves are leaves; his flowers, flowers; his fruit, fruit. They are green and colored and fragrant. It is a man's knowledge added to a child's delight. Modern botanical descriptions approach ever nearer to the dryness of an algebraic formula, as if $x + y$ were = to a love-letter. It is the keen joy and discrimination of the child who has just seen a flower for the first time and comes running in with it to his friends (XIII, 29-30).

Thoreau himself possesses this childlike delight, and Samuel Storrow Higginson, one of the young boys whom Thoreau introduced to many of Nature's gifts for the first time, describes this quality in his companion and instructor:

> . . . In the wood, his [Thoreau's] spirits were always most elastic and buoyant. At such times he evinced the liveliest interest in our conversation, entering into our feelings with an earnestness and warmth of sentiment which only bound us still closer to him, and taught us to look upon him rather as a glorious boy, than one who had arrived at full maturity; one whose healthy life and vigorous thought had put to flight all morbidness, leaving his mind yet unclouded by the sorrows which too often tinge the years of riper manhood. He climbed and leaped as though he knew every "rope" of the wood, and quite shamed our efforts, the results of bars, racks, and wooden contrivances unknown to him.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And so in the afternoon walk, or the long holiday jaunt, he first opened to our unconscious eyes a thousand beauties of earth and air, and taught us to admire and appreciate all that was impressive and

> beautiful in the natural world around us. When with him, objects before so tame acquired new life and interest.[1]

The ambrosial berries mentioned earlier are among those beautiful natural objects which Thoreau views with the delight of a child. In his Journal entry for July 11, 1852, he writes that, transformed into youth again by the whetting of his senses, he is thrilled to discover he has been inspired by the taste of the ambrosial berries; he then celebrates the abundance of the life of the senses as a "healthy intoxication." In a tone reminiscent of that created by Emily Dickinson's "inebriate of air" and "Debauchee of Dew," Thoreau praises the intoxicating power of "each sight and sound and scent and flavor . . . ." The first flavor included in this passage is, appropriately, that of berries:

> What is called genius is the abundance of life or health, so that whatever addresses the senses, as the flavor of these berries, or the lowing of that cow, which sounds as if it echoed along a cool mountain-side just before night, where odoriferous dews perfume the air and there is everlasting vigor, serenity, and expectation of perpetual untarnished morning,--each sight and sound and scent and flavor, --intoxicates with a healthy intoxication (IV, 218-219).

This "healthy intoxication" is as vital and enriching to life as water to a dry and parched stream:

[1]Samuel Storrow Higginson, "Henry D. Thoreau," Harvard Magazine, VII (May 1862), 315, quoted in Thoreau: Man of Concord, ed. Walter Harding (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 12.

> The shrunken stream of life overflows its banks, makes and fertilizes broad intervals, from which generations derive their sustenances. This is the true overflowing of the Nile. So exquisitely sensitive are we, it makes us embrace our fates, and, instead of suffering or indifference, we enjoy and bless. If we have not dissipated the vital, the divine, fluids, there is, then a circulation of vitality beyond our bodies (IV, 219).

The effect of this circulation of vitality, Thoreau continues, is to change the perceptions:

> The cow is nothing. Heaven is not there, but in the condition of the hearer. I am thrilled to think that I owe a perception to the commonly gross sense of taste, that I have been inspired through the palate, that these berries have inspired my brain (IV, 219).

And, as a result of the inspiration of these berries, Thoreau is transformed: "After I had been eating these simple, wholesome, ambrosial fruits on this high hillside, I found my senses whetted, I was young again, and whether I stood or sat I was not the same creature" (IV, 219). Thus, the "divine" fluids have caused "the shrunken stream of life to overflow its banks." And Thoreau, by refusing to remain in the confines of the lowlands, has ascended to "this high hillside" where he has eaten of the food of gods and been given a drink from the fountain of youth.

On July 16, 1851, Thoreau, in a Wordsworthian vein, celebrates his own youth. "I think that no experience which I have to-day comes up to, or is comparable with, the experiences of my boyhood. . . . My life was ecstasy. In youth, before I lost any of my senses, I can remember that I was all alive, and inhabited my body with inexpressible

satisfaction; both its weariness and its refreshment were sweet to me" (II, 306-307). After describing himself as audience to the "glorious musical instrument of earth," Thoreau gives us the time and location, describes the song sparrow, and then writes:

> Berries are just beginning to ripen, and children are planning expeditions after them. They are important as introducing children to the fields and woods, and as wild fruits of which much account is made. During the berry season the schools have a vacation, and many little fingers are busy picking these small fruits. It is ever a pastime, not a drudgery. I remember how glad I was when I was kept from school a half day to pick huckleberries on a neighboring hill all by myself to make a pudding for the family dinner. Ah, they got nothing but the pudding, but I got invaluable experience beside! A half a day of liberty like that was like the promise of life eternal. It was emancipation in New England. O, what a day was there, my countrymen! (II, 307-308)

In this rich paragraph then, the berry is described as a means of initiating the child into the fields and woods. Berry picking is even an occasion for missing school and therefore "liberty." Thoreau refers to his half a day of picking huckleberries all alone on a neighboring hill as being like "the promise of life eternal." The lack of rules and regulations, the spontaneity, the freedom associated with this experience are aspects of berrying which Thoreau continually reiterates.

Eight years after writing this, Thoreau again reminisces about those times when, as "a lad of ten," he was frequently "dispatched to the huckleberry hills, all alone" to collect huckleberries so that his mother could make a

huckleberry pudding for a dinner guest. Thoreau stresses the value of the experience: "I served my apprenticeship and have since done considerable journey work in the huckleberry field, though I never paid for my schooling and clothing in that way. It was itself some of the best schooling I got, and paid for itself" (XII, 299).

> When I used to pick the berries for dinner on the East Quarter Hills I did not eat one till I had done, for going a-berrying implies more things than eating the berries. They at home got only the pudding: I got the forenoon out of doors, and the appetite for the pudding.
>
> It is true, as is said, that we have as good a right to make berries private property as to make grass and trees such; but what I chiefly regret is the, in effect, dog-in-the-manger result, for at the same time that we exclude mankind from gathering berries in our field, we exclude them from gathering health and happiness and inspiration and a hundred other far finer and nobler fruits than berries, which yet we shall not gather ourselves there, nor even carry to market. We strike only one more blow at a simple and wholesome relation to nature. As long as the berries are free to all comers they are beautiful, though they may be few and small, but tell me that is a blueberry swamp which somebody has hired, and I shall not want even to look at it. In laying claim for the first time to the spontaneous fruit of our pastures we are, accordingly, aware of a little meanness inevitably, and the gay berry party whom we turn away naturally look down on and despise us. If it were left to the berries to say who should have them, is it not likely that they would prefer to be gathered by the party of children in the hay-rigging, who have come to have a good time merely? (XIV, 56-57)

The fruit is beautiful only when the berries are free, and the "spontaneous fruit of our pastures" should remain free, not marketable; spontaneous, not cultivated. Because he attaches this importance to the experience of berrying, he condemns property rights on berries which consequently

prevent people from gathering "health and happiness and inspiration," and if someone were to ask the berries to whom they wish to belong, Thoreau fancies they would probably prefer to be gathered by the children.

The early berries are found where only those who search can find them, and most men are content to wait in town. A few do go into the countryside, but they remain in the lowlands. It is the child with his special way of seeing and his curiosity who sees them first. The one exception is Thoreau who has the unjaded, unquenched curiosity of a child; he is not confined to the lowlands, and he too has a special way of seeing.

> The early blueberries ripen first on the hills, before those who confine themselves to the lowlands are aware of it. When the old folks find only one turned here and there, children, who are best acquainted with the localities of berries, bring pailfuls to sell at their doors. For birds' nests and berries, give me a child's eyes. But berries must be eaten on the hills, and then how far from the surfeiting luxury of an alderman's dinner! (IV, 196)

Thoreau realizes the value of the freshness and innocence of youth in man's relationship with Nature, and he knows that only the person who values these qualities will truly appreciate the significance of a berrying party. He looks around him and sees that the mass of men have lost the freshness, the curiosity, the innocence of their youth and have replaced these qualities with the staleness of daily routine, the apathy of acceptance, and the corruption of their original relation with Nature. As a child becomes a

man, he tends to lose his simplicity, spirituality, innocence, and spontaneity--qualities which Thoreau clearly associates with the wild berry.

In addition, Thoreau relates the quality of wildness to the berry. He contrasts "the effeminating luxury of civilized life" with "the invigorating influence of rude, wild, robust nature" (IV, 84), and he considers wildness to be the source of life and truth. He admits that he avoids this "effeminating luxury" whenever possible: "The too exquisitely cultured I avoid as I do the theatre. Their life lacks reality. They offer me wine instead of water. They are surrounded by things that can be bought" (IV, 154). The problem is, Thoreau suggests, that man has not progressed spiritually and morally:

> Again and again I am surprised to observe what an interval there is, in what is called civilized life, between the shell and the inhabitant of the shell,--what a disproportion there is between the life of man with his conveniences and luxuries. The house is neatly painted, has many apartments. You are shown into the sitting room, where is a carpet and couch and mirror and splendidly bound Bible, daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, photographs of the whole family even, on the mantlepiece. One could live here more deliciously and improve his divine gifts better than in a cave surely. In the bright and costly saloon man will not be starving or freezing or contending with vermin surely, but he will be meditating a divine song or a heroic deed, or perfuming the atmosphere by the very breath of his natural and healthy existence. As the parlor is preferable to the cave, so will the life of its occupant be more godlike than that of the dweller in the cave. I called at such a house this afternoon, the house of one who in Europe would be called an operative. The woman was not in the third heavens, but in the third kitchen, as near the woodshed or to outdoors and to the cave as she could instinctively get, for there she belonged,--a coarse

> scullion or wench, not one whit superior, but in fact inferior, to the squaw in a wigwam,--and the master of the house, where was he? He was drunk somewhere on some mow or behind some stack, and I could not see him. He had been having a spree. If he had been as sober as he may be to-morrow, it would have been essentially the same; for refinement is not in him, it is only in his house,--in the appliances which he did not invent (XII, 330-331).

Man is not civilized; only his appliances are! Thoreau has effectively illustrated the discrepancy between the appearance of civilization as it is manifested in man's conveniences and the reality of civilization as it should be apparent in man himself. After vividly sketching this tragic truth, Thoreau continues with an observation on the state of so-called civilization:

> So it is in the Fifth Avenue and all over the civilized world. There is nothing but confusion in our New England life. The hogs are in the parlor. This man and his wife--and how many like them! . . . They wear these advantages helter-skelter and without appreciating them, or to satisfy a vulgar taste . . . . Some philanthropists trust that the houses will civilize the inhabitants at last. The mass of men, just like savages, strive always after the outside, the clothes and finery of civilized life, the blue beads and tinsel and centre-tables. It is a wonder that any load ever gets moved, men are so prone to put the cart before the horse (XII, 331-332).

Although for many seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Americans, civilization was the ultimate goal and symbol of progress, for Thoreau the quality of the kind of civilization which has been attained is questionable. He is convinced that instead of discovering a finer, more natural, and healthier existence, "civilized" man frequently allows himself to develop an artificial and empty existence

in which he becomes separated from his natural environment. Man civilizes his buildings and his appliances, but not himself.

Thoreau calls this kind of civilization the ". . . war with the wilderness,--breaking nature, taming the soil, feeding it on oats. The civilized man," he continues, "regards the pine tree as his enemy. He will fell it and let in the light, grub it up and raise wheat or rye there. It is no better than fungus to him" (III, 269). In this war with the wilderness, man seeks to eradicate the enemy, the fungus, and in the process destroys many forests and animals. In taming the wilderness, man also emasculates the countryside, leaving what Thoreau describes as a "maimed" nature (VIII, 221):

> . . . when I consider that the nobler animals have been exterminated here . . . I cannot but feel as if I lived in a tamed, and, as it were, emasculated country. . . . Many of those animal migrations and other phenomena by which the Indians marked the season are no longer to be observed. I seek acquaintance with Nature,--to know her moods and manners. Primitive Nature is the most interesting to me. I take infinite pains to know all the phenomena of spring, for instance, thinking that I have here the entire poem, and then, to my chagrin, I hear that it is but an imperfect copy that I possess and have read, that my ancestors have torn out many of the first leaves and grandest passages, and mutilated it in many places. I should not like to think that some demigod had come before me and picked out some of the best of the stars. I wish to know an entire heaven and an entire earth (VIII, 220-221).

By violently severing their relations with Nature, men lose a part of themselves. The result is that if most city dwellers do choose to leave the "effeminating luxury" of

the town and make a brief expedition back into nature, they will not fit in well. Thoreau explains: "Artificial, denaturalized persons cannot handle nature without being poisoned. If city-bred girls visit their country cousins, --go a-berrying with them,--they are sure to return covered with blueberry bumps at least. They exhaust all the lotions of the country apothecary for a week after. Unnamable poisons infect the air, as if they were pursued by imps. I have known those who forbade their children going into the woods at all" (VIII, 448-449). Thus, the sad state of affairs which Thoreau sees around him is a civilization which has destroyed the wilderness and consequently is unable to enjoy its fruits.

Thoreau realizes that the only hope for the stale and stagnant life of routine is to receive new energy from the wilderness, from that portion of Nature which man has not yet domesticated or tamed. At the same time, as Lewis Mumford explains, "Thoreau, having tasted the settled life of Concord, knew that the wilderness was not a permanent home for man: one might go there for fortification, for a quickening of the senses, for a tightening of all the muscles; but that, like any retreat, is a special exercise and wants a special occasion: one returned to Nature in order to become, in a deeper sense, more cultivated and civilized, not in order to return to crudities that man had

already discarded."[2] A higher civilization--the kind of progress that frees man rather than makes him the slave of his appliances or his job--this is Thoreau's dream for his fellow man. In the words of John Broderick, "Thoreau's originality was in accepting the advantages of civilization without sacrificing the benefits of the wild."[3] Thoreau visualizes "a certain refinement and civilization in nature which increases with the wildness. The civilization that consists with wildness, the light that is in night" (II, 477).

On one occasion he hears a robin singing in the woods; and, though Thoreau admits that he has "always associated this sound with the village and the clearing," he now detects "the aboriginal wildness in his strain, and can imagine him a woodland bird, and that he sang thus when there was no civilized ear to hear him. . . ." The conclusion Thoreau reaches is that "every genuine thing retains this wild tone, which no true culture displaces" (III, 451). Throughout his writings Thoreau uses such expressions as the "aboriginal wildness" and "wild tone." The concept of "wildness" is an integral part of Thoreau's philosophy, and the wild berry partakes of and contributes to that wildness.

[2]Lewis Mumford, The Golden Day: A Study in American Experience and Culture (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926), p. 116.

[3]John C. Broderick, "Thoreau's Principle of Simplicity," Ph.D. diss., Univ. of North Carolina, 1953, p. 279, as cited by Walter Harding in Handbook, p. 150.

The berry, with its wild color and taste, grows wild, uncultivated by man. In order to go berrying, one must venture into the wilderness.

The Oxford English Dictionary offers many different shades of meaning for the words, "wild," "wilderness," and "wildness." Several of these suggest the significance of the concept in Thoreau's philosophy: The adjective "wild" is used to describe an animal "living in a state of nature; not tame, not domesticated. . . ." Certainly Thoreau would advocate this kind of wildness, for it suggests a natural state free from the spirit-breaking domestication of man. Another meaning of "wild" given is in reference to a plant: "not cultivated." Again, there is no regulatory control; man has not confined the wild flower to his ordered garden rows. Another definition is one which is applied to persons; the wild person is said to be "not accepting, or resisting, the constituted government; rebellious." No doubt many of Thoreau's townsmen would have agreed that this man who resisted paying a poll tax and who chose to go to jail, was, indeed, a wild man. Examining the meaning of the phrase "wild man," Thoreau, in his Journal, takes some liberties with its traditional connotations and reaches some provocative conclusions: "Trench says a wild man is a willed man. Well, then, a man of will who does what he wills or wishes, a man of hope and of the future tense, for not only the obstinate is willed, but far

more the constant and persevering. The obstinate man, properly speaking, is one who will not. The perseverance of the saints is positive willedness, not a mere passive willingness. The fates are wild, for they will; and the Almighty is wild above all, as fate is" (IV, 482). A second group of meanings of the term "wild" includes such diverse denotations as "unconfined" and "licentious" and "demented." Clearly, there are various degrees of refusing to submit to imposed controls. For Thoreau the desirable degree would be that of "acting or moving freely without restraint; going at one's own will; unconfined, unrestricted."

The term "wilderness" also suggests the characteristic of being uncultivated; in addition, however, several of the definitions given denote a wasteland, a desolate region, and figuratively a region "in which one wanders or loses one's way," a place "in which one is lonely or 'lost.'" Conversely, Thoreau goes to the wilderness to escape the desolation of the commercial world and find himself in the energizing and truth-offering natural world which is as yet untamed by man. In the first volume of the Journal he reflects that "it does seem as if mine were a particularly wild nature, which so yearns toward all wildness" (I, 296). Later he suggests that the man who lacks that yearning is not alive.

The refreshing, energizing, invigorating wilderness is available to man only if he has the courage to explore the unknown and uncharted seas. In the last volume of the Journal, Thoreau is still describing the opportunities for discovery:

> Most of us are still related to our native fields as the navigator to undiscovered islands in the sea. We can any autumn discover a new fruit there which will surprise us by its beauty or sweetness. So long as I saw one or two kinds of berries in my walks whose names I did not know, the proportion of the unknown seemed indefinitely if not infinitely great.
>
> Famous fruits imported from the tropics and sold in our markets--as oranges, lemons, pineapples, and bananas--do not concern me so much as many an unnoticed wild berry whose beauty annually lends a new charm to some wild walk, or which I have found to be palatable to an outdoor taste.
>
> The tropical fruits are for those who dwell within the tropics; their fairest and sweetest parts cannot be exported or imported. Brought here, they chiefly concern those whose walks are through the market-place. It is not the orange of Cuba, but the checkerberry of the neighboring pasture, that most delights the eye and the palate of the New England child. What if the Concord Social Club, instead of eating oranges from Havana, should spend an hour in admiring the beauty of some wild berry from their own fields which they never attended to before? It is not the foreignness or size or nutritive qualities of a fruit that determine its absolute value (XIV, 261).

Thoreau always emphasizes that the delight of discovery can be found only in the wilderness. The wilderness cannot be packaged and sent to men, for when it is, it ceases to be wilderness. Man, therefore, in order to reap the benefits of the wild, has to do the harvesting himself. Thoreau continues his observations on the berry by stressing this idea:

> It is not those far-fetched fruits which the speculator imports that concerns us chiefly, but rather those which you have fetched yourself in your basket from some far hill or swamp, journeying all the long afternoon in the hold of a basket, consigned to your friends at home, the first of the season.
>
> We cultivate imported shrubs in our front yards for the beauty of their berries, when yet more beautiful berries grow unregarded by us in the surrounding fields (XIV, 262).

The following day he reflects further upon this concept: "We do not think much of table-fruits. They are especially for aldermen and epicures. They do not feed the imagination. That would starve on them. These wild fruits, whether eaten or not, are a dessert for the imagination. The south may keep her pineapples, and we will be content with our strawberries" (XIV, 265). Thus, the wild berry is food for the eye, for the palate, and for the imagination.

The association of berries with wildness is one of the most significant themes in Thoreau's Journal. The wildness is clearly placed in opposition to civilization. In a lengthy descriptive passage Thoreau extols Miles' beautiful blueberry swamp which is surrounded by "wild-looking woods":

> These are the wildest and richest gardens that we have. Such a depth of verdure into which you sink. They were never cultivated by any. Descending wooded hills, you come suddenly to this beautifully level pasture, comparatively open, with a close border of high blueberry bushes. You cannot believe that this can possibly abut on any cultivated field. Some wood or pasture, at least, must intervene. Here is a place, at least, which no woodchopper nor farmer frequents and to which no cows stray, perfectly wild, where the bittern and the hawk are undisturbed. The men, women, and children who perchance come hither blueberrying in their season get more than the value of the berries in the influences of the scene (IV, 281).

The importance of these expeditions into the wilderness is the basis for the importance of the idea of berrying throughout the Journal. In August of 1856 Thoreau devotes several consecutive pages to the "many wild-looking berries about now" (IX, 30). Among the array of berries Thoreau sees and describes are "choke-berries, which no creature appears to gather." He makes clear the fact that their value is not in their thirst-quenching taste, for although "they have a sweet and pleasant taste enough," they "leave a mass of dry pulp in the mouth." What is significant, Thoreau argues, is that ". . . it is worth the while to see their profusion, if only to know what nature can do" (IX, 31).

Two days later he records another expedition in such a way that one discovers along with Thoreau the essential and unique worth of the cranberry swamps, "little oases of wildness in the desert of our civilization . . ." (IX, 44). Thoreau begins the narrative with an explanation telling why he hesitated to make the excursion:

> I have come out this afternoon a-cranberrying, chiefly to gather some of the small cranberry, Vaccinium Oxycoccus . . . . This was a small object, yet not to be postponed, on account of imminent frosts, i.e. if I would know this year the flavor of the European cranberry as compared with our larger kind. I thought I should like to have a dish of this sauce on the table at Thanksgiving of my own gathering. I could hardly make up my mind to come this way, it seemed so poor an object to spend the afternoon on. I kept foreseeing a lame conclusion,--how I should cross the Great Fields, look into Beck Stow's, and then retrace my steps no richer than before (IX, 35-36).

Thoreau's innate curiosity to "know this year the flavor of the European cranberry as compared with our larger kind," coupled with his desire to have his own genuine sauce on the dinner table, is temporarily at odds with a doubt as to the success of the venture, the recognition that there might be only a few and perhaps not any cranberries in Beck Stow's Swamp. However, the question whether "To go or not to go?" seems to be merely a rhetorical one, and immediately Thoreau begins to contemplate the many "fruits" to be gathered from such a walk, with or without the discovery of the sought-after cranberries: "In fact, I expected little of this walk, yet it did pass through the side of my mind that somehow, on this very account (my small expectation), it would turn out well, as also the advantage of having some purpose, however small, to be accomplished,--of letting your deliberate wisdom and foresight in the house to some extent direct and control your steps" (IX, 36). At this point the metaphorical movement becomes clear, and the little walk becomes a venture away from the paths chosen by most men:

> If you would really take a position outside the street and daily life of men, you must have deliberately planned your course, you must have business which is not your neighbor's business, which they cannot understand. . . . You shall have your affairs, I will have mine. You will spend this afternoon in setting up your neighbor's stove, and be paid for it; I will spend it in gathering the few berries of the Vaccinium Oxycoccus which Nature produces here, before it is too late, and be paid for it also after another fashion (IX, 36).

In the concluding sentence of this paragraph Thoreau incorporates a harvest image as he explains what he has "reaped" from this philosophy of existence: "I have always reaped unexpected and incalculable advantages from carrying out at last, however tardily, any little enterprise which my genius suggested to me long ago as a thing to be done,--some step to be taken, however slight, out of the usual course" (IX, 36).

Departing from the usual course, Thoreau is able to avoid those deep ruts which most members of society merely continue to wear deeper and deeper. By venturing out on his own with only his genius to guide him, Thoreau discovers the flavor of life. In the very next paragraph of this same Journal entry, he explains:

> How many schools I have thought of which I might go to but did not go to! expecting foolishly that some greater advantage or schooling would come to me! It is these comparatively cheap and private expeditions that substantiate our existence and batten our lives, as, where a vine touches the earth in its undulating course, it puts forth roots and thickens its stock. Our employment generally is tinkering, mending the old worn-out teapot of society. Our stock in trade is solder. Better for me, says my genius, to go cranberrying this afternoon for the Vaccinium Oxycoccus in Gowing's Swamp, to get but a pocketful and learn its peculiar flavor, aye, and the flavor of Gowing's Swamp and of life in New England, than to go consul to Liverpool and get I don't know how many thousand dollars for it, with no such flavor (IX, 36-37).

The cranberry expedition as a means of substantiating one's existence is the theme of this lengthy, impassioned entry. The venture offers the flavor of life to those who have spent their days "mending the old worn-out teapot of

society." Rather than vainly attempting to mend society, Thoreau writes, a person should remain true to his genius, no matter how insignificant the goal, in order to give life its own particular flavor or "sauce":

> Many of our days should be spent, not in vain expectations and lying on our oars, but in carrying out deliberately and faithfully the hundred little purposes which every man's genius must have suggested to him. Let not your life be wholly without an object, though it be only to ascertain the flavor of a cranberry, for it will not be only the quality of an insignificant berry that you will have tasted, but the flavor of your life to that extent, and it will be such a sauce as no wealth can buy (IX, 37).

Assuredly, Thoreau recognizes that the truly zestful, flavorful life cannot be purchased. Later in the same entry, he refers to cranberries as "jewels" and "swamp pearls" (IX, 39). He alone, however, values these gems of Nature for their intrinsic qualities, rather than their market value:

> I enjoyed this cranberrying very much, notwithstanding the wet and cold, and the swamp seemed to be yielding its crop to me alone, for there are none else to pluck it or value it. I told the proprietor once that they grew here, but he, learning that they were not abundant enough to be gathered for the market, has probably never thought of them since. I am the only person in the township who regards them or knows of them, and I do not regard them in the light of their pecuniary value. I have no doubt I felt richer wading there with my two pockets full, treading on wonders at every step, than any farmer going to market with a hundred bushels which he has raked, or hired to be raked (IX, 40).

The contrast is vivid: the farmer carries to market the cranberries which he has hired someone to rake; Thoreau seeks his cranberries in the cold, wet swamp, and in the process, treads "on wonders at every step . . . ."

Because Thoreau continues to allow his genius to guide him, he is physically--and spiritually--far removed from the town:

> I got further and further away from the town every moment, and my good genius seemed [to] have smiled on me, leading me hither, and then the sun suddenly came out clear and bright, but it did not warm my feet. I would gladly share my gains, take one, or twenty, into partnership and get this swamp with them, but I do not know an individual whom this berry cheers and nourishes as it does me. When I exhibit it to them I perceive that they take but a momentary interest in it and commonly dismiss it from their thoughts with the consideration that it cannot be profitably cultivated. You could not get a pint at one haul of a rake, and Slocum would not give you much for them. But I love it the better partly for that reason even (IX, 40-41).

Because the berry cheers and nourishes him, Thoreau would gladly share this experience, as well as the berries themselves, with others. However, other men are not interested in what they consider to be an unprofitable undertaking. Thoreau, on the other hand, loves the berry even more because it enriches--not his bank account--but his spirit.

By straying from the well-worn paths of his fellow Concordians, he discovers a new, wild world: "I seemed to have reached a new world, so wild a place that the very huckleberries grew hairy and were inedible. I feel as if I were in Rupert's Land, and a slight cool but agreeable shudder comes over me, as if equally far away from human society. What's the need of visiting far-off mountains and bogs, if a half-hour's walk will carry me into such wildness and novelty?" (IX, 42) The discovery of this new world causes Thoreau to reflect upon the condition of

wildness:

> But why should not as wild plants grow here as in Berkshire, as in Labrador? Is Nature so easily tamed? Is she not as primitive and vigorous here as anywhere? How does this particular acre of secluded, unfrequented . . . quaking bog differ from an acre in Labrador? Has any white man ever settled on it? Does any now frequent it? Not even the Indian comes here now. I see that there are some square rods within twenty miles of Boston just as wild and primitive and unfrequented as a square rod in Labrador, as unaltered by man. Here grows the hairy huckleberry as it did in Squaw Sachem's day and a thousand years before, and concerns me perchance more than it did her (IX, 42).

Associating the berry with invigorating wildness, Thoreau continues: "That wild hairy huckleberry, inedible as it was, was equal to a domain secured to me and reaching to the South Sea. That was an unexpected harvest. I hope you have gathered as much, neighbor, from your corn and potato fields. I have got in my huckleberries. I shall be ready for Thanksgiving." Several pages earlier in this same entry for August 30, 1856, Thoreau records that he had momentarily hesitated to cross into Beck Stowe's because he doubted he would find the cranberries needed for his Thanksgiving sauce. After pages on the subsequent value of the expedition in enabling one to taste the actual flavor of his life, he describes still another harvest--the discovery of a world so wild that it transports him out of society's domain into the primitive and vigorous recesses of Nature. Furthermore, the experience leaves him with an understanding that the wildness must ultimately be both external and internal:

> It is in vain to dream of a wildness distant from ourselves. There is none such. It is the bog in our brain and bowels, the primitive vigor of Nature in us, that inspires that dream. I shall never find in the wilds of Labrador any greater wildness than in some recesses in Concord, i.e. than I import into it. A little more manhood or virtue will make the surface of the globe anywhere thrillingly novel and wild. That alone will provide and pay the fiddler; it will convert the district road into an untrodden cranberry bog, for it restores all things to their original primitive flourishing and promising state (IX, 43).

"The district road" must be converted into "an untrodden cranberry bog" if there is to be the restoration of life and hope to the "original primitive flourishing and promising state." Lacking the courage to venture out into the cold, the unknown, the wild, man will stagnate; but confronting the unexplored recesses of Nature and his own mind, he will flourish:

> Wading in the cold swamp braces me. I was invigorated, though I tasted not a berry.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Better it is to go a-cranberrying than to go a-huckleberrying. For that is cold and bracing, leading your thoughts beyond the earth, and you do not surfeit on crude or terrene berries. It feeds your spirit, now in the season of white twilights, when frosts are apprehended, when edible berries are mostly gone.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I see that all is not garden and cultivated field and crops, that there are square rods in Middlesex County as purely primitive and wild as they were a thousand years ago, which have escaped the plow and the axe and the scythe and the cranberry-rake, little oases of wildness in the desert of our civilization . . . (IX, 44).

So it is that as Thoreau begins to draw this unusually long entry to a close, the captain of huckleberry parties declares a cranberry expedition to be superior to a

huckleberry expedition because going a-cranberrying is more bracing, less surfeiting. And, more importantly, what begins as a search for Thanksgiving sauce ends as a fruitful harvest of experience and insight. Typically, Thoreau has used such terms as "reap" and "harvest" paradoxically to illustrate the great gains of a trek through uncultivated, unplowed Nature. Again, paradoxically, those lands which have gardens and cultivated fields compose "the desert of our civilization," and those wild worlds "which have escaped the plow and the axe and the scythe and the cranberry-rake" are "little oases of wilderness," clearly the only source of life in the barrenness of civilization's wasteland.

In order to preserve some of the existing wilderness for posterity, Thoreau suggests that each town should have its own forest and its own huckleberry-field:

> Each town should have a park, or rather a primitive forest, of five hundred or a thousand acres, where a stick should never be cut for fuel, a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation. We hear of cow-commons and ministerial lots, but we want men-commons and lay lots, inalienable forever. Let us keep the New World new, preserve all the advantages of living in the country. There is meadow and pasture and wood-lot for the town's poor. Why not a forest and huckle-berry field for the town's rich? All Walden Wood might have been preserved for our park forever, with Walden in its midst, and the Easterbrooks Country, an unoccupied area of some four square miles, might have been our huckleberry-field. If any owners of these tracts are about to leave the world without natural heirs who need or deserve to be specially remembered, they will do wisely to abandon their possession to all, and not will them to some individual who perhaps has enough already. As some give to Harvard College or another institution, why might not

> another give a forest or huckleberry-field to Concord? A town is an institution which deserves to be remembered. We boast of our system of education, but why stop at schoolmasters and schoolhouses? We are all schoolmasters, and our schoolhouse is the universe. To attend chiefly to the desk or schoolhouse while we neglect the scenery in which it is placed is absurd. If we do not look out we shall find our fine schoolhouse standing in a cow-yard at last (XII, 387).

Thoreau would have been greatly saddened had he known that future generations would deprive schoolchildren not only of huckleberry-fields, but also of cow pastures, leaving the schoolhouse to stand in the middle of an asphalt parking lot--isolated from all association with flourishing wildness.

For Thoreau, the society which thinks of itself as the promised land lacks the lasting qualities of the wilderness. Although he can "see nothing permanent in the society" around him, he finds great promise in wilderness: "I too, love Concord best, but I am glad when I discover, in oceans and wilderness far away, the materials out of which a million Concords can be made,--indeed, unless I discover them, I am lost myself,--that there too I am at home" (II, 46-47). The element of discovery is crucial. The use of the word "discovery" in conjunction with the word "lost" suggests the paradox which Thoreau is offering: only after a man loses himself in the wilderness will he begin to discover himself, and only in discovering himself will he cease to be lost; until the lost member of society loses himself in the wilderness, he will never find himself.

A common misconception concerning Thoreau's philosophy is the assumption that he would advocate abandoning the advances of civilization and substituting in their place an unrealistic primitivism which pretends to be unaware that such advances ever existed. On the contrary, Thoreau envisions a true civilization where not only man's appliances, but also man himself, is civilized; he wishes "to secure all the advantage without suffering any of the disadvantage" (III, 301) of living together in a social state. It is in going to the wilderness of Nature and the wilderness of mind that man can acquire the new and invigorating energy to discover himself: "This stillness, solitude, wildness of nature is a kind of thoroughwort, or boneset, to my intellect. This is what I go out to seek. It is as if I always met in those places some grand, serene, immortal, infinitely encouraging, though invisible, companion, and walked with him. There at last my nerves are steadied, my senses and my mind do their office" (IX, 209).

Joseph Wood Krutch discusses the value Thoreau places on wildness: "Wildness, the merely natural and almost animal life, is not sought for its own sake. Thoreau was no mere romantic admirer of the noble savage . . . . But the human race has lost its way. The road upward from the savage does not lead to the cluttered, materialistic, and desperate life such as that he sees his neighbors

leading. To find the right road one must return in reality as well as in imagination to the origins. From them one might go forward again to a truly civilized, not a merely artificial, way of life."[4] One of the tragedies of this civilization is the division of labor which separates man from contact with the huckleberry-field:

> To such a pass our civilization and division of labor has come that A, a professional huckleberry-picker, has hired B's field and, we will suppose, is now gathering the crop, perhaps with the aid of a patented machine; C, a professed cook, is superintending the cooking of a pudding made of some of the berries; while Professor D, for whom the pudding is intended, sits in his library writing a book,--a work on the Vaccinieae, of course. And now the result of this downward course will be seen in that book, which should be the ultimate fruit of the huckleberry-field and account for the existence of the two professors who come between D and A. It will be worthless. There will be none of the spirit of the huckleberry in it. The reading of it will be a weariness to the flesh. To use a homely illustration, this is to save at the spile but waste at the bung. I believe in a different kind of division of labor, and that Professor D should divide himself between the library and the huckleberry-field (XIV, 295).

If man removes himself from actual contact with the huckleberry-field, his work is "a weariness to the flesh"; it lacks the necessary "spirit."

Even when some men do leave their libraries for an afternoon of picking berries, most stay only on the fringes of the wilderness. In this last entry for the year 1860, Thoreau observes that during the berry season, the mountain

[4]Joseph Wood Krutch, Introduction to "In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World," by Eliot Porter, ed. (New York: Sierra Club & Ballantine Books, 1967), p. 12.

tops of New England "will be swarming with pickers." However, not all the pickers have the necessary curiosity to explore past the tame areas into the wilderness:

> The timid or ill-shod confine themselves to the land side, where they get comparatively few berries and many scratches, but the more adventurous, making their way through the open swamp, which the bushes overhang, wading amid the water andromeda and sphagnum, where the surface quakes for a rod around, obtain access to those great dropping clusters of berries which no hand has disturbed. There is no wilder and richer sight than is afforded from such a point of view, of the edge of a blueberry swamp where various wild berries are intermixed (XIV, 301-302).

The wildest and richest sights are not for the timid, but rather for "the more adventurous," those who are willing to venture out into the unknown to find fruits "which no hand has disturbed."

The fruits "which no hand has disturbed," the earth where no man has walked--these are the sights Thoreau seeks. When he discovers "an unusual quantity of amelanchier berries," he calls the experience "a very agreeable surprise." Although these berries, "the 'service-berries' which the Indians of the north and the Canadians use," are, in Thoreau's estimation, the sweetest of the bush berries, "several old farmers say, 'Well, though I have lived seventy years, I never saw nor heard of them.'" Presumably it is because they do not usually appear in abundance that the mass of men fail to notice them. Thoreau, of course, does notice them; and the picking of this rarely seen berry transports Thoreau out of the known world into an unknown

one: "I felt all the while I was picking them, in the low, light, wavy shrubby wood they make, as if I were in a foreign country" (V, 302-303). Once again, Thoreau has transformed what most men call a meadow into a wilderness where the mind is discovering new and "agreeable" surprises.

A month later, Thoreau records in his Journal a similar incident when he unexpectedly discovers in a "seemingly untrodden" area a profusion of berries, a wilderness "with no print of man or beast . . . .":

> I broke through Heywood's thick wood, north of Moore's land, going toward Beck Stowe's in the Great Fields, and unexpectedly came into a long, narrow, winding, and very retired blueberry swamp which I did not know existed there. A spot seemingly untrodden,--a deep withdrawn meadow, sunk low amid the forest and filled with green waving sedge, three feet high, and low andromeda and hardhack, for the most part dry to the feet and with no print of man or beast, interspersed with islands of blueberry bushes and surrounded by a dense hedge of high blueberry bushes, panicled andromeda, high chokeberry, wild holly, with its beautiful crimson berries, etc., etc., this being the front rank to a higher wood. Thus hedged about these places are, so that it is only at some late year that you stumble upon them. Crouching you thread your way amid some dense shrub oak wood some day, descending next through the almost impenetrable hedge, and stand to your surprise on the edge of this fair open meadow with a bottom of unfathomed mud, as retired and novel as if it were a thousand miles removed from your ordinary walks (V, 341-342).

Once again, the huckleberry hero leaves the "ordinary walks" and in so doing discovers a "novel" world which is as far away from the footpaths of Thoreau's townsmen as a foreign country. "It is as far off as Persia from Concord" (V, 342).

Thoreau has made it clear that the best berries will be found only by those who are not afraid of leaving the well-worn paths created by the undeviating steps of the mass of men. He further suggests that these most valuable fruits will be found growing in the types of land least valued by most men. Even if they do recognize the potential value of the land, most men are unwilling to work at cultivating rocky soil: "Warren Brown, who owns the Easterbrooks place, the west side the ride, is picking barberries. Allows that the soil thereabouts is excellent for fruit, but it is so rocky that he has not patience to plow it. That is the reason this tract is not cultivated" (X, 111). (Several years later, Thoreau enters in his Journal a conclusion concerning this phenomenon: ". . . the worst rocks are the best for blueberries and for poets," XIV, 309.) Not only was Brown out berrying that day, but so was Thoreau's friend Melvin, of whom Thoreau writes, "Trust him to find where the nuts and berries grow." Later in the same entry Thoreau exclaims about this tract of land which attracts men like Brown and Melvin:

> What a wild and rich domain that Easterbrooks Country! Not a cultivated, hardly a cultivatable field in it, and yet it delights all natural persons, and feeds more still. Such great rocky and moist tracts, which daunt the farmer, are reckoned as unimproved land, and therefore worth but little; but think of the miles of huckleberries, and of barberries, and of wild apples, so fair, both in flower and fruit, resorted to by men and beasts; Clark, Brown, Melvin, and the robins, these, at least, were attracted thither this afternoon. There are barberry bushes or clumps there,

> behind which I could actually pick two bushels of berries without being seen by you on the other side. And they are not a quarter picked at last, by all creatures together. I walk for two or three miles, and still the clumps of barberries, great sheaves with their wreaths of scarlet fruit, show themselves before me and on every side, seeming to issue from between the pines or other trees, as if it were they that were promenading there, not I (X, 112).

In this entry Thoreau has used the term "sheaves" to indicate not sheaves of grain, which would be considered the profitable crop for land to produce, but sheaves of barberries, the truly valuable crop produced in a field which farmers considered to be unworthy of cultivation. Here again is a provocative paradox: the rocky soil which farmers reckon "as unimproved land, and therefore worth but little" delights Thoreau and "all natural persons" who see it as "a wild and rich domain."

Although most roads are too tame for berrying, there is one which is not. It is a road which "leaves towns behind" and which is "not <u>accepted</u> by the town and the travelling world." It is the "old Carlisle road,

> --road for walkers, for berry-pickers, and no more worldly travellers; road for Melvin and Clark, not for the sheriff nor butcher nor the baker's jingling cart; road where all wild things and fruit abound, where there are countless rocks to jar those who venture there in wagons; which no jockey, no wheelwright in his right mind, drives over, no little spidery gigs and Flying Childers; road which leads to and through a great but not famous garden, zoölogical and botanical garden, at whose <u>gate</u> you never arrive . . . (XII, 345).

Continuing the entry with a description of the "sweet fragrance" of the decaying fern which suggests "unexhausted

vigor" and the ancient, wilder Silurian Period, Thoreau then writes, "Though you may have sauntered near to heaven's gate, when at length you return toward the village you give up the enterprise a little, and you begin to fall into the old ruts of thought, like a regular roadster" (XII, 346-347). To avoid falling into these ruts, one must go back to the relative wildness of that old Carlisle road "that leaves towns behind; where you put off worldly thoughts; where you do not carry a watch, nor remember the proprietor; where the proprietor is the only trespasser,--looking after his apples!--the only one who mistakes his calling there, whose title is not good; where fifty may be a-barberrying and you do not see one" (XII, 348). Although others may be in the same area, the wildness allows each to have his solitude, "an endless succession of glades where the barberries grow thickest, successive yards amid the barberry bushes where you do not see out" (XII, 348-349). Thoreau characterizes this old road as the greatest one of all. The reasons for his claim are numerous:

> Others are called great roads, but this is greater than they all. The road is only laid out, offered to walkers, not accepted by the town and the travelling world. To be represented by a dotted line on charts, or drawn in lime-juice, undiscoverable to the uninitiated, to be held to a warm imagination. No guide-boards indicate it. No odometer would indicate the miles a wagon had run there. Rocks which the druids might have raised--if they could (XII, 349).

Thus, it is a road which is discoverable only to those who have "a warm imagination," for there are no signs along the way giving directions or distances. It is where one will lose the town and find the wilderness, and it is where Thoreau goes to find the tart, wild acid of fruit: "There I go searching for malic acid of the right quality, with my tests. The process is simple. Place the fruit between your jaws and then endeavor to make your teeth meet. The very earth contains it. The Easterbrooks Country contains malic acid" (XII, 349).

The desirability of this acid lies in its clean, exhilarating tartness which jolts one out of drowsiness or complacency. It is "an agreeable acid" (VI, 412). The man who wants no surprises or challenges and who is satisfied with a bland life and ruts of thought will probably find this juice, as George Emerson did, to be "austere" (XIV, 15,n); however, the man who spends his days out in nature hungers and thirsts after such an acid. After discovering some mountain cranberries which weren't quite ripe, Thoreau and his companion "stewed these berries for our breakfast the next morning, and thought them the best berry on the mountain, though, not being quite ripe, the berry was a little bitterish--but not the juice of it. It is such an acid as the camper-out craves" (XIV, 15). Earlier Thoreau remarked on the "pleasant acid" of the cranberries (III, 438), and later he emphasizes the

necessity of this acid:

> No tarts that I ever tasted at any table possessed such a refreshing, cheering, encouraging acid that literally put the heart in you and set you on edge for this world's experiences, bracing the spirit, as the cranberries I have plucked in the meadows in the spring. They cut the winter's phlegm, and now I can swallow another year of this world without other sauce. Even on the Thanksgiving table they are comparatively insipid, have lost as much flavor as beauty, are never so beautiful as in water (IV, 36).

By going into the meadows and plucking the berries there, Thoreau experiences a berry unknown to those who sit at tables. The berry in its own environment has lost none of its natural flavor or beauty, and it serves as an invigorating tonic, "a refreshing, cheering, encouraging acid" to brace the spirit, to "literally put the heart in you and set you on edge for this world's experiences . . ." (IV, 36). These cranberries are the sauce of life.

Just as the taste of berries invigorates, so do their colors. And just as the berries taste best when eaten in the meadows, so do they look most beautiful while still on the bush. Countless times Thoreau describes their visual displays of brilliance:

> Returning over the causeway from Flint's Pond the other evening . . . I observed that while the west was of a bright golden color under a bank of clouds, --the sun just setting,--and not a tinge of red was yet visible there, there was a distinct purple tinge in the nearer atmosphere, so that Annursnack Hill, seen through it, had an exceedingly rich empurpled look. It is rare that we perceive this purple tint in the air, telling of the juice of the wild grape and poke-berries. The empurpled hills! (III, 14)

These visual effects of the profusion of color are frequently breathtaking: ". . . the patches of cranberry in the swamp, seen at some distance toward the sun, are a beautiful crimson, which travels with you, keeping between you and the sun, like some rare plant in bloom there densely. I could not believe it was cranberry" (VII, 358). Several years later Thoreau exclaims: "What a list of bright-colored, sometimes venomous-looking berries spot the swamps and copses amid changing leaves! For colors they will surpass the flowers, methinks. There is something rare, precious, and gem-like about them" (IV, 312). Even their vines display the dazzling red: "White birches have fairly begun to yellow, and blackberry vines here and there in sunny places look like a streak of blood on the grass" (X, 48). A few weeks later, Thoreau again uses this image as he describes "the sand banks, solid and warm, and streaked with bloody blackberry vines" (X, 92).

The brilliance of the berries' colors creates beauty in contrast to the colors of other vegetation: "The green pines springing out of huckleberries on the hillsides look as if surrounded by red or vermilion paint" (IV, 378). Another startling contrast is that of the red berries against the snow; from one point of view the effect is analogous to that of a sunset:

> I saw a prinos bush full of large berries, by the wall in Hubbard's field. Standing on the west side, the contrast of the red berries with their white incrustration or prolongation on the north was admirable. I

> thought I had never seen the berries so dazzlingly bright. The whole north side of the bush, berries and stock, was beautifully incrusted. And when I went round to the north side, the redness of the berries came softened through and tingeing the allied snow-white bush, like an evening sky beyond (IV, 437).

These dazzling colors add "a new and variegated wildness to the swampy sprout-lands" (IX, 59). Once again, the berry provides life with beauty, variety, and wildness.

Thoreau observes that his response to these dazzling reds and purples and crimsons is one of excitement: "The prinos berries are pretty red. Any redness like cardinal-flowers, or poke, or the evening sky, or cheronaea, excites us as a red flag does cows and turkeys" (II, 502). Later he reiterates: "At sight of any redness I am excited like a cow" (III, 442). In another entry, he explains: "I love to see any redness in the vegetation of the temperate zone. It is the richest color. I love to press these berries between my fingers and see their rich purple wine staining my hand. It [the poke] asks a bright sun on it to make it show to best advantage, and it must be seen at this season of the year. It speaks to my blood" (II, 489). For Thoreau, this "redness in the vegetation . . . is the richest color"; and this richest of colors speaks directly to his blood.

Thoreau discusses, in his entry for October 24, 1858, the symbolic value of color and relates it to the color of fruit:

> The brilliant autumnal colors are red and yellow and the various tints, hues, and shades of these. Blue is reserved to be the color of the sky, but yellow and red are the colors of the earth flower. Every fruit, on ripening, and just before its fall, acquires a bright tint. So do the leaves; so the sky before the end of day, and the year near its setting. October is the red sunset sky, November the later twilight. Color stands for all ripeness and success. We have dreamed that the hero should carry his color aloft, as a symbol of the ripeness of his virtue. The noblest feature, the eye, is the fairest-colored, the jewel of the body. The warrior's flag is the flower which precedes his fruit. He unfurls his flag to the breeze with such confidence and brag as the flower its petals (XI, 243).

Thoreau's extensive use of color as a symbol is the subject of a study by Richard Colyer who notes that "Thoreau was probably scientist enough to know the relationship between light rays and natural color phenomena. Certainly he was trancendentalist enough to see the implications for his symbolic system, and artist enough to recognize the wide range of sensory appeal inherent in color."[5] After examining Thoreau's use of green, white, blue, and yellow, Colyer asserts:

> Of all his color symbols, however, red was the most personally significant for Thoreau. It was a sensible quality in many natural phenomena of his New England countryside, particularly as a dominant color of the autumn, the climax of the seasonal cycle. For him autumn was the season of man's intellectual and spiritual harvest as well as of his physical maturity. Red was also the color of the western sky at sunset, the analogous climax of the sun's daily cycle. Going westward in Thoreau's transcendentalist terms was going heavenward; in terms of his social doctrine it meant pilgrimaging in search of new horizons in

[5]Richard Colyer, "Thoreau's Color Symbols," PMLA, 86 (1971), 999.

> America. It was the color of autumn leaves and ripening fruit, particular manifestations to him of fruition in the organic life. But red held still other natural advantages for his symbolizing. Like white, it had ideal associations which were independent of the cycles of nature. It was the traditional symbol of the warlike attributes of strength and heroism, and it was the color of blood and wine, the symbol of physical and spiritual union.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Thoreau usually introduced red as a symbol by accenting it as a quality in natural objects which were symbolic in themselves.[6]

After illustrating Thoreau's mention of red in such natural objects as blossoms, fish, sunrise and sunset, Colyer emphasizes that ". . . it was in the later essays, in intense images of reddening fruit and leaves, that this color reached the height of its significance. Here, as his own life was maturing, he achieved a skillful use of red to symbolize simultaneously the goal of perfection and the conditions of progressing toward it."[7] Examples of these fruits and leaves which Colyer cites are wild apples, red maples, and oaks. He then concludes that "red was Thoreau's 'color of colors.' In many ways the most obvious of his five color symbols, it gives dramatic evidence of his subjective involvement, especially his vital concern with his own progress toward the promised goal of fruition and spiritual renewal."[8] In the Journal, Thoreau lists the

[6]Colyer, p. 1005.

[7]Colyer, p. 1006.

[8]Colyer, p. 1007.

three "phenomena" of ripeness as "color and mellowness and perfectness" (XI, 244). As he has affirmed, "Color stands for all ripeness and success" (XI, 243).

It is therefore clear that the wild berry, one of nature's most richly significant emblems, is valued by Thoreau for its many physical qualities and its even more numerous abstract connotations. The brilliance of its color and the pungency of its taste are invigorating. This evocative symbol suggests to him the positive aspects of life: simplicity, spirituality, innocence, spontaneity, wildness, richness, and ripeness. The berry with all its associations actually becomes in his Journal the symbol for a successful life, afire with ripeness. To seek the wild berry is a worthy quest; moreover, an expedition made in search of the wild berry is essential in Thoreau's attempt to master the art of living.

CHAPTER IV

THE ART OF LIVING

The multiple metaphorical meanings of the wild berry as suggested by Thoreau throughout the Journal constitute a basis for viewing the experience of berrying as a means of enriching life, a way of discovering the art of living. The qualities of the wild berries themselves coupled with the characteristics of the experience of berrying offer to the sensitive seer all of the clues necessary to discover the secrets of this art. The innocence of the berry; its purity and wholesomeness; its simplicity; its wildness and tonicity; its association with ambrosia; solitude, youth; its special relationship to America; its flavor and beauty; its ripeness--all of this is available to anyone who seeks out the wild berry. Ultimately, through the adventure of berrying, Thoreau was embarking upon a quest--the search for the art of living.

In the process of seeking this small fruit, the searcher discovers the freedom and joy of walking and of seeing. The excursion for berries becomes a kind of

pilgrimage. In contrast to this venture is the frequently chaotic frenzy of many lives. In January of 1852, Thoreau observes that "we sometimes find ourselves living fast,--unprofitably and coarsely even,--as we catch ourselves eating our meals in unaccountable haste. But in one sense we cannot live too leisurely. Let me not live as if time was short. Catch the pace of the seasons; have leisure to attend to every phenomenon of nature, and to entertain every thought that comes to you. Let your life be a leisurely progress through the realms of nature . . ." (III, 182). Thoreau would be appalled that modern men jet above the clouds and drive along charted highways at high speed, for his own way of leisurely progressing was "sauntering," a term which in his entry for January 10, 1851, he associates with a religious pilgrimage:

> I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of taking walks daily--not [to] exercise the legs or body merely, nor barely to recruit the spirits, but positively to exercise both body and spirit, and to succeed to the highest and worthiest ends by the abandonment of all specific ends,--who had a genius, so to speak, for sauntering. And this word "saunter," by the way, is happily derived "from idle people who roved about the country [in the Middle Ages] and asked charity under pretence of going <u>à la Saint Terre</u>," to the Holy Land, till, perchance, the children exclaimed, "There goes a <u>Saint-Terrer</u>," a Holy-Lander. They who never go to the Holy Land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed mere idlers and vagabonds (II, 140-141).

Thoreau, with his characteristically unconventional outlook, thus delights that "sauntering" suggests an idler; for it is only to go <u>somewhere</u> that the mass of men will

take walks; and most men consider walking for the sake of walking to be sheer idleness. Thoreau, however, contends that it is only by abandoning "all specific ends" that one can truly understand and attain the art of walking. In 1841 Thoreau states, "It is a great art to saunter" (I, 253). Ten years later he writes: "You must walk sometimes perfectly free, not prying nor inquisitive, not bent upon seeing things. Throw away a whole day for a single expansion, a single inspiration of air" (II, 416). Actually Thoreau does not consider it a waste to "throw away a whole day" in this manner; for him the walk is always profitable. In March of 1860, he explains this paradox of the profit derived from aimless sauntering: "Nature abhors a vacuum, and if I can only walk with sufficient carelessness I am sure to be filled" (XIII, 170). Even if one's sauntering takes him to barren hollows, he may discover a profusion of berries:

> Here grows a pretty thick patch of the shad-bush, about a rod and a half long, the bushes about three feet high, and quite interesting now, in fruit. . . . The ripest and largest dark-purple <u>berries</u> are just half an inch in diameter. You are surprised and delighted to see this handsome profusion in hollows so dry and usually so barren and bushes commonly so fruitless (XIII, 426-427).

Thus, nature provides man with the lively, thirst-quenching berry if he will only leave his house and go walking.

Walking is movement and activity; it is antithetical to the sluggish, sleepy routine existence of many men. Sherman Paul stresses the symbolic significance of this

activity in Thoreau's life:

> Walking, of course, was the fundamental metaphor of his art of life, his mode of discovery, and in explaining it he was once more defending himself against the charge of idleness. But in recounting the necessities of "leisure, freedom, and independence" it required, in setting the saunterer against the villain or degenerate villager, in speaking of his need for the tonic of walking in the Concord vicinity and his presentiment of the "evil days" when the landscape would be fenced in, he was arguing from the small to the large, from Concord to America. . . .
>
> Moreover, when he turned from his reflections on the art of walking to the direction of his walks, he was able to establish his spiritual associations with the West by identifying the "subtile magnetism in Nature" that compelled him to the West and Southwest with the westering tendency of mankind. With Whitman . . . Thoreau saw the westward movement of history as a progressive march toward freedom, as an attempt to repossess the vigor and the unshackled condition that had been forfeited by too much civilization.[1]

The problem with "too much civilization" is that it makes a man "begin to fall into the old ruts of thought, like a regular roadster" (XII, 347).

Routine, confinement, conformity--these are the pitfalls awaiting housedwellers, and Thoreau concludes that "a great part of our troubles are literally domestic or originate in the house and from living indoors" (IX, 344). Even when a man does emerge from his house, he will probably follow the roads already made by other men--thus confining himself to the same avenues travelled by the mass of men. The best fruits, the ripest berries are not to be found near those roads; instead ". . . you find them in

[1]Paul, p. 413.

some rocky sprout-land, far from any road, fully ripe, having escaped the pickers, weighing down their stems and half hidden amid the green leaves of other plants, black and shiny, ready to drop, with a spirited juice. Who will pretend that, plucked and eaten there, they are the same with those offered at the tea-table?" (IV, 316) This tendency to remain confined exasperates Thoreau: "Think of a man--he may be a genius of some kind--being confined to a highway and a park for his world to range in! I should die from mere nervousness at the thought of such confinement. I should hesitate before I were born, if those terms could be made known to me beforehand. Fenced in forever by those green barriers of fields, where gentlemen are seated! Can they be said to be inhabitants of this globe? Will they be content to inhabit heaven thus partially?" (II, 451-452) Walking in the paths of other men is not only confining; it is also conforming. In an entry recorded three months earlier, Thoreau offers this warning:

> When you get into the road, though far from the town, and feel the sand under your feet, it is as if you had reached your own gravel walk. You no longer hear the whip-poor-will, nor regard your shadow, for here you expect a fellow-traveller. You catch yourself walking merely. The road leads your steps and thoughts alike to the town. You see only the path, and your thoughts wander from the objects which are presented to your senses. You are no longer in place. It is like conformity,--walking in the ways of men (II, 239-240).

Thoreau seeks to direct his "steps and thoughts alike" away from the town in order to discover and communicate

truth. He writes, "I fear only lest my expressions may not be extravagant enough,--may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of our ordinary insight and faith, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced (VI, 100). If a man confronts the wilderness of the mind, he leaves the conventional paths of tradition and confronts each idea as a new phenomenon to be explored. As Stapleton notes, "Thoreau links his concept of wildness with both art and nature as belonging to what is undiluted by custom or routine, and though it may be the outcome of the most highly civilized faculty, is unpredictable and procreative in its energies."[2] Thus, in this vein, Thoreau contends, "To live in relations of truth and sincerity with men is to dwell in a frontier country. What a wild and unfrequented wilderness that would be!" (III, 185).

The idea of avoiding the well-worn paths of the unthinking man is dramatized in Thoreau's hauntingly beautiful description of being the first to walk in newly fallen snow: "You cannot walk too early in new-fallen snow to get the sense of purity, novelty, and unexploredness" (VI, 135). Here is both purity and unexplored wilderness, not yet marred by the plodding boots of men on their unseeing way to work.

> When we descend on to Goose Pond we find that the snow rests more thickly on the numerous zigzag and horizontal branches of the high blueberries that bend over it

[2]Stapleton, p. 208.

> than on any deciduous shrub or tree, producing a very handsome snowy maze, and can thus distinguish this shrub, by the manner in which the snow lies on it, quite across the pond. It is remarkable also how very distinct and white every plane surface, as the rocks which lie here and there amid the blueberries or higher on the bank,--a place where no twig or weed rises to interrupt the pure white impression. In fact, this crystalline snow lies up so light and downy that it evidently admits more light than usual, and the surface is more white and glowing for it. It is semitransparent. This is especially the case with the snow lying upon rocks or musquash-houses, which is elevated and brought between you and the light. It is partially transparent, like alabaster. Also all the birds' nests in the blueberry bushes are revealed, by the great snow-balls they hold (XIII, 148).

He contrasts the purity of unspoiled snow with the discolored snow in well-travelled city streets: "What a difference between life in the city and in the country at present,--between walking in Washington Street, threading your way between countless sledges and travellers, over the discolored snow, and crossing Walden Pond, a spotless field of snow surrounded by woods, whose intensely blue shadows and your own are the only objects. What a solemn silence reigns here!" (VIII, 154-155)

The expansiveness and the infinity of nature are only available to Thoreau when he leaves the confines of his house. No longer restricted by walls, Thoreau is able to see other worlds. In a beautiful passage he compares the multitude of the stars in the sky to the profusion of berries on ripe summer hills: "After whatever revolutions in my moods and experiences, when I come forth at evening, as if from years of confinement to the house, I see the few

stars which make the constellation of the Lesser Bear in the same relative position,--the everlasting geometry of the stars. How incredible to be described are these bright points which appear in the blue sky as the darkness increases, said to be other worlds, like the berries on the hills when the summer is ripe! Even the ocean of birds, even the regions of the ether, are studded with isles" (IV, 402). Truly, Thoreau's metaphorical vision allows him to see in one glance the hills of berries, "the ocean of birds," and the points of light reputed to be "other worlds."

Thoreau's walks, whether he is searching for actual huckleberries or huckleberrying through the fields of thought, are characterized by such sights and insights. The discovery of a common object in uncommon surroundings, the viewing of something previously known only in books, the viewing of an object with the fresh, unprejudiced eyes of a child--all of these are a part of what Thoreau, the seer, sees. Thoreau achieved that facility which he admired in Gerard--the ability to describe a familiar object with "a zest and vividness of imagery as if he saw it for the first time, the novelty consisting not in the strangeness of the object, but in the new and clearer perception of it" (XIV, 120). Clearly, this way of describing presupposes a way of seeing objects with a fresh curiosity as if one has never before encountered such a thing. Thoreau

considers this kind of perception to be the essence of inspiration; he observes that "it is only necessary to behold . . . the least fact or phenomenon, however familiar, from a point a hair's breadth aside from our habitual path or routine, to be overcome, enchanted by its beauty and significance. . . . To perceive freshly, with fresh senses, is to be inspired" (VIII, 44).

In order to attain this fresh perception, Thoreau knows it is necessary to free his senses so that they can wander from the worn paths of habit and routine:

> I must walk more with free senses. It is as bad to study stars and clouds as flowers and stones. I must let my senses wander as my thoughts, my eyes see without looking. Carlyle said that how to observe was to look, but I say that it is rather to see, and the more you look the less you will observe. I have the habit of attention to such excess that my senses get no rest, but suffer from a constant strain. Be not preoccupied with looking. Go not to the object; let it come to you. When I have found myself looking down and confining my gaze to the flowers, I have thought it might be well to get into the habit of observing the clouds as a corrective; but no! that study would be just as bad. What I need is not to look at all, but a true sauntering of the eye (IV, 351).

At times Thoreau feels he requires this careless, purposeless "sauntering of the eye," but at other times he asserts that only an educated eye can delineate and appreciate the "pied beauty" of Nature:

> How much of beauty--of color, as well as form--on which our eyes daily rest goes unperceived by us! No one but a botanist is likely to distinguish nicely the different shades of green with which the open surface of the earth is clothed,--not even a landscape painter if he does not know the species of sedges and grasses which paint it. With respect to the color of

> grass, most of those even who attend peculiarly to the aspects of Nature only observe that it is more or less dark or light, green or brown, or velvety, fresh or parched, etc. But if you are studying grasses you look for another and different beauty, and you find it, in the wonderful variety of color, etc., presented by the various species (XIV, 3).

He describes this wonderful variety in two kinds of cranberries:

> I found these cunning little cranberries. . . . They were of two varieties, judging from the fruit. The one, apparently the ripest, colored most like the common cranberry but more scarlet, i.e. yellowish-green, blotched or checked with dark scarlet-red, commonly pear-shaped; the other, also pear-shaped, or more bulged out in the middle, thickly and finely dark-spotted or peppered on yellowish-green or straw-colored or pearly ground,--almost exactly like the smilacina and convallaria berries now, except that they are a little larger and not so spherical,--and with a tinge of purple. A singular difference (IX, 38-39).

The secret of seeing wholly is to see Nature both ways: with the discriminating eye of the scientist and with the uneducated, hence unprejudiced, eye of a child or a "natural" man. The sacrifice of either way of seeing results in only a partial picture--a picture which lacks the fullness of Truth:

> As it is important to consider Nature from the point of view of science, remembering the nomenclature and system of men, and so, if possible, go a step further in that direction, so it is equally important often to ignore or forget all that men presume that they know, and take an original and unprejudiced view of Nature, letting her make what impression she will on you, as the first men, and all children and natural men still do. For our science, so called, is always more barren and mixed up with error than our sympathies are (XIII, 168-169).

Thoreau himself saw with both kinds of vision, sometimes alternately, sometimes simultaneously.

In order to sharpen his senses and further clarify his visions, he frequently finds it necessary to walk alone. "I see that my neighbors look with compassion on me, that they think it is a mean and unfortunate destiny which makes me to walk in these fields and woods so much and sail on this river alone. But as long as I find here the only real elysium, I cannot hesitate in my choice" (IX, 121). In December of that same year, he comments, "I thrive best on solitude" (IX, 200). Leaving town and society behind, Thoreau often continues to seek solitude despite the bitter weather: "I love to wade and flounder through the swamp now, these bitter cold days when the snow lies deep on the ground, and I need travel but little way from the town to get to a Nova Zembla solitude,--to wade through the swamps, all snowed up, untracked by man, into which the fine dry snow is still drifting till it is even with the tops of the water andromeda and halfway up the high blueberry bushes" (VIII, 99). In fact, this solitude in the midst of Nature is far more valuable to him than even the society of the Greek sages: "A day passed in the society of those Greek sages, such as described in the 'Banquet' of Xenophon, would not be comparable with the dry wit of decayed cranberry vines, and the fresh Attic salt of the moss beds" (I, 141). Even the <u>decayed</u> cranberry vines speak more eloquently to Thoreau than any member of society, be he Concordian or Greek.

No descriptions will suffice as a substitute for the exhilaration of walking, the illumination of seeing, the eloquence of silence and solitude; no dissertation on wild berries will substitute for an afternoon of berrying. Hopefully, however, a knowledge of Thoreau's vision of this energizing, enlightening venture will enrich one's own expedition. When Thoreau was asked if he "was still looking after the beautiful," he answered "yes" and that he wished "to hire two or three good observers" (XII, 160). Surely Thoreau would have been pleased to know that future generations would attempt to serve in that capacity, following him as he points out the wonders of the world, opens the eyes of many who never look, and focuses the picture for many who look but do not see.

In looking after the beautiful, Thoreau seeks berries which are food not for the palate, but for the eye: "Now is the season for those comparatively rare but beautiful wild berries which are not food for man. If we so industriously collect those berries which are sweet to the palate, it is strange that we do not devote an hour in the year to gathering those which are beautiful to the eye. It behooves me to go a-berrying in this sense once a year at least" (V, 417). One explanation for man's omission of this valuable experience is his tendency to be concerned with the pragmatic instead of the aesthetic. Throughout his life, in fact, Thoreau had to contend with criticism from many

sides that what he did with his time was of no use and therefore worthless. His Aunt Maria wished "he could find something better to do than walking off every now and then."[3] His father asked him what the use was of his making sugar out of the maple sap; he records their discussion in his Journal on March 21, 1856: "Had a dispute with Father about the use of my making this sugar when I knew it could be done and might have bought sugar cheaper at Holden's. He said it took me from my studies. I said I made it my study: I felt as if I had been to a university" (VIII, 217).

Just as Thoreau has his own definition of "study," so he has his own unconventional definition of "idleness":

> How trivial and uninteresting and wearisome and unsatisfactory are all employments for which men will pay you money! The ways by which you may get money all lead downward. To have done anything by which you earned money merely is to have been truly idle. If the laborer gets no more than the wages his employer pays him, he is cheated, he cheats himself (V, 357).

Characteristically, Thoreau has turned society's value system upside down so that the mere earning of money becomes the idlest of pursuits. Later in the Journal, he implies that the usual methods of making money condemn man to a noncreative, fragmented, passive existence in which his "nobler faculties" are unemployed (VI, 226). Although Thoreau could make money by manufacturing pencils and

[3]Aunt Maria Thoreau, letter to the Ward family (Sept. 7, 1848), quoted in Henry Seidel Canby, Thoreau (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1965), p. 22.

surveying land, he disliked spending his precious time in this way. He preferred employment for his "nobler faculties"; and when the residents of Concord expressed little or no interest in engaging Thoreau as a lecturer, he warned, "Woe be to the generation that lets any higher faculty in its midst go unemployed!" (VI, 21) In the summer of 1852 he was offered a three-week digging job; and, although he knew that the community would consider this a commendable kind of industry, he refused--fully aware that as a result of his refusal, he would confirm their opinion of him as an idle loafer: "But, as I do not need this police of meaningless labor to regulate me, and do not see anything absolutely praiseworthy in his undertaking, however amusing it may be to him, I prefer to finish my education at a different school" (IV, 253). As he later observes, "I served my apprenticeship and have since done considerable journey work in the huckleberry field, though I never paid for my schooling and clothing in that way. It was itself some of the best schooling I got, and paid for itself" (XII, 299).

Choosing to devote himself "to labors which yield more real profit" (such as the health, happiness, and contentment to be found as a byproduct of an afternoon spent berrying), Thoreau weighs the cost of labor and its rewards in terms of how much living the task costs the laborer and how much enrichment it offers in return: "One

moment of life costs many hours, hours not of business but of preparation and invitation. Yet the man who does not betake himself at once and desperately to sawing is called a loafer, though he may be knocking at the doors of heaven all the while, which shall surely be opened to him" (IV, 433). Thoreau was definitely not a "loafer." Ironically, while his neighbors were criticizing his lack of industry, he was--in addition to producing a remarkable quantity of poetic prose--helping preserve the fruits of the gods: "I have watered the red huckleberry . . . which might have withered else in dry seasons" (I, 435). He was also spending many afternoons sharing the joys of nature with children who perhaps never forgot the taste of the wild berry. On one of these expeditions, Thoreau writes, ". . . a boy spilled his huckleberries in the pasture . . . (V, 358). After this entry, the editors add Moncure Conway's version of the incident:

> Then there were huckleberrying parties. These were under the guidance of Thoreau, because he alone knew the precise locality of every variety of the berry. I recall an occasion when little Edward Emerson, carrying a basket of fine huckleberries, had a fall and spilt them all. Great was his distress, and our offers of berries could not console him for the loss of those gathered by himself. But Thoreau came, put his arm around the troubled child, and explained to him that if the crop of huckleberries was to continue it was necessary that some should be scattered. Nature had provided that little boys should now and then stumble and sow the berries. We shall have a grand lot of bushes and berries in this spot, and we shall owe them to you. Edward began to smile.[4]

[4]Moncure Daniel Conway, Autobiography (Boston, 1904), I, 148, rpt. in Journal, V, 358-359n.

The Emerson boy accidentally helped Nature by scattering seeds, but Thoreau purposefully planted, in his writing and his living, seeds of thought which would develop through the years. As leader of huckleberry parties, Thoreau scattered the seeds of observation. He wondered if his neighbors appreciated what he was trying to do: "Will not my townsmen consider me a benefactor if I . . . can show them that there is some beauty awake while they are asleep . . . ?" (II, 478-479) Many men are asleep; and many, even when awake, cannot see. As Thoreau observes, "some eyes cannot see, even through a spy-glass" (XII, 347). Thus, devoting himself to truly profitable labors, Thoreau preserves and shares the life and beauty of nature by watering the berries in the dry seasons, by leading children to the wild berry, by awakening men and opening their eyes, and by recording all of this for posterity.

He contrasts truly profitable labor with that which forces a man to remain in one position for so long, repeating the same task, that he eventually loses his agility, hence his ability to do other things:

> Saw to-night Lewis the blind man's horse, which works on the sawing-machine at the depot, now let out to graze along the road, but at each step he lifts his hind legs convulsively high from the ground, as if the whole earth were a treadmill continually slipping away from under him while he climbed its convex surface. It was painful to witness, but it was symbolical of the moral condition of his master and of all artisans in contradistinction from artists, all who are engaged in any routine; for to them also the whole earth is a treadmill, and the routine results instantly in a similar painful deformity. The horse may bear the

> mark of his servitude on the muscles of his legs, the man on his brow (V, 276-277).

Thoreau has here offered a painful analogy as a warning of the dangers of routine. If one spends his days in thoughtless repetition on earth's treadmill, he may become permanently deformed.

Although Thoreau considers all professions restrictive, he values some more than others. The farmer's occupation is an "honorable" one because he "redeems" the land and "makes soil" (III, 327, 329). By working closely with nature, he is more in harmony with the universe than is the merchant: "The farmer keeps pace with his crops and the revolutions of the seasons, but the merchant with the fluctuations of trade" (I, 78). In a Journal entry for 1854 Thoreau observes that "trade has always been regarded to some extent as a questionable mode of getting a livelihood" (VI, 106). His strong denunciation of the inferiority and danger of a profession in trade is even more interesting in light of the fact that several years earlier Thoreau considered trading in huckleberries! That the berries must remain free and scattered for hikers to gather and that they mustn't be used for monetary gain would seem obvious, and yet Thoreau was tempted to combine business with pleasure:

> When formerly I was looking about to see what I could do for a living, some sad experience in conforming to the wishes of friends being fresh in my mind to tax my ingenuity, I thought often and seriously of picking huckleberries; that surely I could do; and its

> small profits might suffice, so little capital it required, so little distraction from my wonted thoughts, I foolishly thought. While my acquaintances went unhesitatingly into trade or the professions, I thought of this occupation as most like theirs; ranging the hills all summer to pick the berries which came in my way, which I might carelessly dispose of; so to keep the flocks of King Admetus. My greatest skill has been to want little. I also dreamed that I might gather the wild herbs, or carry evergreens to such villagers as loved to be reminded of the woods and so find my living got. But I have since learned that trade curses everything it handles; and though you trade in messages from heaven, the whole curse of trade attaches to the business (II, 319-320).

Just as aspiring writers through the ages have searched for a means of making a living which would offer the least interference in the pursuit of their true profession, Thoreau fancied that in the huckleberry business he could continue doing what he loved: roaming the hills, thinking the thoughts he chose to think, stumbling over huckleberries waiting to be picked. With the subsequent sale of these symbols of the natural world, he could acquire an adequate income. However, he then discovered the danger of the "curse" of trade. The words of this entry have prophetic echoes that frequently ring in our ears. In a recent newspaper editorial the issue of "government intervention into regional tradition and personal privacy" is discussed in relation to Maine's $4 million blueberry industry. In an effort to correct health and sanitation violations, the federal government also "began to enforce the Child Labor Law. In so doing, they unknowingly trampled on an almost

sacred local custom."[5] Thus, ironically, according to the new ruling, children are no longer allowed to pick blueberries. In our own day the "curse of trade" has again prevailed.

Two days after the previous entry Thoreau writes, "There is no glory so bright but the veil of business can hide it effectually" (II, 328). Unlike the obscuring "veil of business," the presence of berries growing stimulates Thoreau's reflections. In the same entry he makes four separate references to berries in association with expansive clear thinking:

> When I am against this bare promontory of a huckleberry hill, then forsooth my thoughts will expand. Is it some influences, as a vapor which exhales from the ground, or something in the gales which blow there, or in all things there brought agreeably to my spirit?
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> . . . . . .
>
> A little hardhack and meadowsweet peep over the fence --nothing more serious to obstruct the view,--and thimble-berries are the food of thought, before the drought, along by the walls.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> To eat berries on the dry pastures of Conantum, as if they were the food of thought, dry as itself!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I eat these berries as simply and naturally as thoughts come to my mind" (II, 323-330).

These thoughts stimulated by berries lead him to formulate values which differ radically from those of merchants. Although Thoreau had no desire to prospect for the gold valued in the marketplace, he used prospectors' techniques

[5]"Blueberry Blues," The Boston Globe, rpt. in The Christian Science Monitor, 11 September 1975.

to wash cranberries: "Then, draining off the water, I jarred the cranberries alternately to this end and then to that of the trough, each time removing the fine chaff--cranberry leaves and bits of grass--which adhered to the bottom, on the principle of gold-washing, except that the gold was what was thrown away, and finally I spread and dried and winnowed them" (V, 514-515). Ironically, Thoreau has employed here the techniques of greedy gold miners to wash cranberries, nature's true treasures.

The contrast is clear: business and trade are corrupting influences which encourage conformity and conventionality; berries stimulate and expand Thoreau's thinking processes. Because the berries stimulate and inspire as does all of Nature, Thoreau recognizes the necessity of discovering a simple vocation which stands not in opposition to but rather is in harmony with Nature. He writes that the broker who ". . . makes haste to Boston in the cars, and there deals in stocks, not quite relishing his employment,--and so earns the money with which he buys his fuel" is "postponing" life. In contrast, "one-eyed John Goodwin, the fisherman" collects his own driftwood fuel on a beautiful evening when ". . . a clear amber sunset lit up all the eastern shores . . . ." The broker's "indirect and complicated business . . . does not harmonize with the sunset." Thoreau concludes that "no <u>trade</u> is simple, but artificial and complex. It postpones life and substitutes death. It goes against the grain" (V, 444-445).

Three days later he expresses concern that a man's vocation in this potentially corrupting world can spoil his natural innocence: "Ah! the world is too much with us, and our whole soul is stained by what it works in, like the dyer's hand. A man had better starve at once than lose his innocence in the process of getting his bread" (V, 454). (The stain of corruption on the innocent soul is ugly in contrast to the beautiful stain of nature's wine on Thoreau's hand: "I love to press these berries between my fingers and see their rich purple wine staining my hand" II, 489). The dangers are numerous: man runs the risk of losing his innocence, his purity, his freedom. Earlier in the same entry, Thoreau expresses the dangers by using an extended figure of speech in which man's original self is a crystal well: "How watchful we must be to keep the crystal well that we were made, clear!--that it be not made turbid by our contact with the world, so that it will not reflect objects. What other liberty is there worth having, if we have not freedom and peace in our minds,--if our inmost and private man is but a sour and turbid pool? Often we are so jarred by chagrins in dealing with the world, that we cannot reflect" (V, 453). Thoreau's use of "reflection" here is especially effective when both meanings of the word are considered: a turbid pool will not reflect the objects around it, and a mind "jarred by chagrins in dealing with the world" cannot reflect.

Clearly, Thoreau does avoid trade, but in his search to find a vocation in harmony with nature, he discovers that most men interpret his actions as his way of making money. In April of 1859, he records several such misconceptions:

> Men's minds run so much on work and money that the mass instantly associate all literary labor with a pecuniary reward. They are mainly curious to know how much money the lecturer or author gets for his work. They think that the naturalist takes so much pains to collect plants or animals because he is paid for it. An Irishman who saw me in the fields making a minute in my note-book took it for granted that I was casting up my wages and actually inquired what they came to, as if he had never dreamed of any other use for writing. I might have quoted to him that the wages of sin is death, as the most pertinent answer. "What do you get for lecturing now?" I am occasionally asked. It is the more amusing since I only lecture about once a year out of my native town, often not at all; so that I might as well, if my objects were merely pecuniary, give up the business. Once, when I was walking on Staten Island, looking about me as usual, a man who saw me would not believe me when I told him that I was indeed from New England but was not looking at that region with a pecuniary view,--a view to speculation; and he offered me a handsome bonus if I would sell his farm for him (XII, 111).

Because they have difficulty believing that Thoreau is willing to spend his time observing, lecturing, and writing without financial compensation, most men misunderstand his aspirations. He himself remarks that he ". . . would fain be a fisherman, hunter, farmer, preacher, etc., but fish, hunt, farm, preach other things than usual" (VI, 45).

His departure from the usual is not by any means limited to his fishing, hunting, farming, or preaching. It is, in fact, his uncanny ability to alter the traditional

meanings of words or concepts which gives his writing its impact. In an example of this inversion used earlier in this study, Thoreau defines "idleness" as doing something merely for money; in his Journal entry for October 29, 1857, he offers his own conceptions of "amusement." Significantly, the first "profitable" amusement he proposes is picking berries:

> I know of no such amusement,--so wholesome and in every sense profitable--for instance, as to spend an hour or two in a day picking some berries or other fruits which will be food for the winter, or collecting driftwood from the river for fuel, or cultivating the few beans or potatoes which I want. Theatres and operas, which intoxicate for a season, are as nothing compared to these pursuits. And so it is with all the true arts of life (V, 146).

These amusements are clearly not merely aesthetic: the berries "will be food for the winter," and the driftwood will be fuel. It is in fact these qualities of amusement, profitableness, and wholesomeness which characterize "all the true arts of life." In order for these arts to fulfill their proper functions, however, they must be, as Thoreau stresses earlier in the entry, "temperately indulged in." Only then will they continue to give joy: "Farming and building and manufacturing and sailing are the greatest and wholesomest amusements that were ever invented (for God invented them), and I suppose that the farmers and mechanics know it, only I think they indulge to excess generally, and so what was meant for a joy becomes the sweat of the brow." Later in the same entry, Thoreau re-emphasizes

the joy to be gained from berrying and then reflects upon the significance of such amusements:

> It is a great amusement, and more profitable than I could have invented, to go and spend an afternoon hour picking cranberries. By these various pursuits your experience becomes singularly complete and rounded. The novelty and significance of such pursuits are remarkable. Such is the path by which we climb to the heights of our being; and compare the poetry which such simple pursuits have inspired with the unreadable volumes which have been written about art (V, 146).

Inverting traditional values, Thoreau suggests that we can "climb to the heights of our being" not by going to the opera but by going to the cranberry bog where we will discover poetry superior to "the unreadable volumes which have been written about art." Furthermore, he suggests that the "most profitable companion" is not "he who has been attending the opera all his days" but rather "he who has been picking cranberries and chopping wood . . . ." Continuing his discussion of these simple amusements, he contends that they are the means of attaining perception, enjoyment, and happiness:

> I find when I have been building a fence or surveying a farm, or even collecting simples, that these were the true paths to perception and enjoyment. My being seems to have put forth new roots and to be more strongly planted. This is the true way to crack the nut of happiness. If, as a poet or naturalist, you wish to explore a given neighborhood, go and live in it, i.e. get your living in it. Fish in its streams, hunt in its forests, gather fuel from its water, its woods, cultivate the ground, and pluck the wild fruits, etc., etc. This will be the surest and speediest way to those perceptions you covet. No amusement has worn better than farming. It tempts men just as strongly to-day as in the day of Cincinnatus. Healthily and properly pursued, it is not a whit

> more grave than huckleberrying, and if it takes any airs on itself as superior there's something wrong about it.
>
> I have aspired to practice in succession all the honest arts of life, that I may gather all their fruits (X, 146-147).

Thus, seeking to gain all the fruits of "all the honest arts of life," Thoreau formulates his own definitions of "profit," "amusement," and consequently "life."

His quest is simply "How to live. How to get the most life." In explaining this ambition, he compares himself to a bee searching for the nectar of nature:

> How to get the most life. . . . How to extract its honey from the flower of the world. That is my everyday business. I am as busy as a bee about it. I ramble over all fields on that errand, and am never so happy as when I feel myself heavy with honey and wax. I am like a bee searching the livelong day for the sweets of nature. Do I not impregnate and intermix the flowers, produce rare and finer varieties by transferring my eyes from one to another? I do as naturally and as joyfully, with my own humming music, seek honey all the day. With what honeyed thought any experience yields me I take a bee line to my cell. It is with flowers I would deal. Where is the flower, there is the honey,--which is perchance the nectareous portion of the fruit,--there is to be the fruit, and no doubt flowers are thus colored and painted to attract and guide the bee. So by the dawning or radiance of beauty are we advertised where is the honey and the fruit of thought, of discourse, and of action. We are first attracted by the beauty of the flower, before we discover the honey which is a foretaste of the future fruit (II, 470-471).

In this extended analogy, Thoreau affirms his search for "honey and the fruit of thought," and later in the same entry he suggests that the way to find the nectar of life is to learn "the art of spending a day"; that, he contends, is the best form of employment:

> I am convinced that men are not well employed, that this is not the way to spend a day. If by patience, if by watching, I can secure one new ray of light, can feel myself elevated for an instant upon Pisgah, the world which was dead prose to me becomes living and divine, shall I not watch ever? shall I not be a watchman henceforth? If by watching a whole year on the city's walls I may obtain a communication from heaven, shall I not do well to shut up my shop and turn a watchman? Can a youth, a man, do more wisely than to go where his life is to [be] found? (II, 471)

Later in the entry, his sentences cease to be interrogative and become imperative: "Go in search of the springs of life, and you will get exercise enough. Think of a man's swinging dumb-bells for his health, when those springs are bubbling in far-off pastures unsought by him! The seeming necessity of swinging dumb-bells proves that he has lost his way" (II, 472). ("Think of a man's swinging dumb-bells for his health" when he could, for example, be out in the meadows tasting cranberries with their "refreshing, cheering, encouraging acid that [can] literally put the heart in you and set you on edge for this world's experiences, bracing the spirit . . . ." IV, 36) In a world where many men have lost their way and spend their time in unprofitable employment, Thoreau chooses a vocation which enables him to "get the most life." In this same Journal entry for September 7, 1851, he concludes: "My profession is to be always on the alert to find God in nature, to know his lurking-places, to attend all the oratorios, the operas in nature" (II, 472).

The operas in nature are the only ones which Thoreau is interested in attending; they are not held indoors but outside in the midst of the natural world. This is another of the many paths which Thoreau prefers; unlike his fellow men who gathered inside a building to hear some acclaimed singer, Thoreau chooses to listen to the sounds of the woodlands. His rather wistful awareness of the fact that he alone chooses his path is reflected in a portion of his entry for March 28, 1856: "Farewell, my friends, my path inclines to this side of the mountain, yours to that. For a long time you have appeared further and further off to me. I see that you will at length disappear altogether" (VIII, 231). He cannot do otherwise, for the footsteps of most men lead in a direction which he believes to be disastrous: "Almost all that my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad. . . . I hear an irresistible voice, the voice of my destiny, which invites me away from all that" (II, 137). In a later entry, he emphasizes the importance of following this voice: "If I should sell both my forenoons and afternoons to society, neglecting my peculiar calling, there would be nothing left worth living for. I trust that I shall never thus sell my birthright for a mess of pottage" (II, 141). Thoreau's calling <u>was</u> "peculiar" in the various senses of the word: it was uniquely his, but it was also considered by many to be strange or eccentric. His neighbors' inability to understand Thoreau's peculiar calling is clearly illustrated in

the words of one of these farmers as related by Mrs. Daniel French:

> I loved to hear the farmers talk about him. One of them used to say:
> "Henry D. Thoreau--Henry D. Thoreau," jerking out the words with withering contempt. "His name ain't no more Henry D. Thoreau than my name is Henry D. Thoreau and everybody knows it, and he knows it. His name's Da-a-vid Henry and it ain't never been nothing but Da-a-vid Henry. And he knows that! Why one morning I went out in my field across there to the river, and there, beside that little old mud pond, was standing Da-a-vid Henry, and he wasn't doin' nothin' but just standin' there--lookin' at that pond, and when I came back at noon, there he was standin' with his hands behind him just lookin' down into that pond, and after dinner when I come back again if there wan't Da-a-vid standin' there just like as if he had been there all day, gazin' down into that pond, and I stopped and looked at him and I says, 'Da-a-vid Henry, what air you a-doin'?' And he didn't turn his head and he didn't look at me. He kept on looking down at that pond, and he said, as if he was thinkin' about the stars in the heavens, 'Mr. Murray, I'm a-studyin'--the habits--of the bullfrog!' And there that darned fool had been standin'--the livelong day--a-studyin' --the habits--of the bull-frog!"[6]

For most of Thoreau's neighbors his chosen profession of being "always on the alert to find God in nature" (II, 472) was indeed a peculiar one.

Because Thoreau remains true to his genius, he differs fundamentally from his acquaintances. Unfortunately, they fail to recognize that he is "of another nature," and they judge him according to their own nature. In his Journal entry for December 21, 1851, Thoreau offers a lengthy and lucid response to his acquaintances' implication

[6]Mrs. Daniel Chester French, Memories of a Sculptor's Wife (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), pp. 94-95, rpt. in Thoreau: Man of Concord, ed. Harding, p. 153.

that he is "cold":

> My acquaintances sometimes imply that I am too cold; but each thing is warm enough of its kind. Is the stone too cold which absorbs the heat of the summer sun and does not part with it during the night? Crystals, though they be of ice, are not too cold to melt, but it was in melting that they were formed. Cold! Fire itself is cold to whatever is not of a nature to be warmed by it. A cool wind is warmer to a feverish man than the air of a furnace. That I am cold means that I am of another nature (III, 147).

The same acquaintances who considered Thoreau cold probably are the same ones who considered the wild berry an unprofitable crop and who think its taste too tart to be enjoyable. Several years after the entry which contains his defense of what others interpret as coldness, Thoreau offers another example of how his nature differs from that of his fellow man: "I inhale with pleasure the cold but wholesome air like a draught of cold water, contrasting it in my memory with the wind of summer, which I do not thus eagerly swallow. This, which is a chilling wind to my fellow, is decidedly refreshing to me, and I swallow it with eagerness as a panacea" (VII, 275). The very air which invigorates Thoreau as a panacea is a chilling wind to others.

If a man's instincts, calling, and nature all differ from those of his acquaintances, he must choose to live either their lives or his own. Thoreau's choice is clear: "It is unsafe to defer so much to mankind and the opinions of society, for these are always and without exception heathenish and barbarous, seen from the heights of

philosophy" (III, 194). He later writes that those who do defer to the opinions of society are like the andromeda plants ". . . regular and in community as if covered by a film"; they are not ". . . like the huckleberry, irregular and independent each of the other . . ." (IV, 386-387). Thoreau warns of the dangers to those who aren't independent like the huckleberry. In his entry for October 19, 1855, he records the essence of a conversation he had with F. A. T. Bellew, the artist, in New York City: "Talking with Bellew this evening about Fourierism[7] and communities, I said that I suspected any enterprise in which two were engaged together. 'But,' said he, 'it is difficult to make a stick stand unless you slant two or more against it.' 'Oh, no,' answered I, 'you may split its lower end into three, or drive it single into the ground, which is the best way; but most men, when they start on a new enterprise, not only figuratively, but really, pull up stakes. When the sticks prop one another, none, or only one, stands erect" (VII, 500).

Thoreau notes that a man must "consult his genius" instead of relying on the opinions of others. He also offers a provocative assertion concerning how future generations will respond to the man of today who follows his own

[7]Fourierism was a system for social reform advocated by Charles Fourier in early nineteenth-century France, proposing that society be organized into self-sustaining communal groups.

peculiar calling fruitfully:

> In all important crises one can only consult his genius. . . . Show me a man who consults his genius, and you have shown me a man who cannot be advised. You may know what a thing costs or is worth to you; you can never know what it costs or is worth to me. All the community may scream because one man is born who will not do as it does, who will not conform because conformity to him is death,--he is so constituted. They know nothing about his case; they are fools when they presume to advise him. The man of genius knows what he is aiming at; nobody else knows. And he alone knows when something comes between him and his object. In the course of generations, however, men will excuse you for not doing as they do, if you will bring enough to pass in your own way (XI, 379-380).

By following his own genius in his living and his writing, Thoreau eventually became one of those men who "in the course of generations" was excused for his irregular independence because he left the world unique yet universally applicable insights.

He understood that he could fulfill his quest without leaving his native soil because he believed:

> A man is worth most to himself and to others, whether as an observer, or poet, or neighbor, or friend, where he is most himself, most contented and at home. There his life is the most intense and he loses the fewest moments. Familiar and surrounding objects are the best symbols and illustrations of his life. . . . The poet has made the best roots in his native soil of any man, and is the hardest to transplant. The man who is often thinking that it is better to be somewhere else than where he is excommunicates himself. If a man is rich and strong anywhere, it must be on his native soil. Here I have been these forty years learning the language of these fields that I may the better express myself (X, 190-191).

Thoreau uses the theme which grew out of his own soil and the soil around Concord--the theme of the wild berry--to

make an observation about the kinds of crops produced by different writers: "Some poets mature early and die young. Their fruits have a delicious flavor like strawberries, but do not keep till fall or winter. Others are slower in coming to their growth. Their fruits may be less delicious, but are a more lasting food and are so hardened by the sun of summer and the coolness of autumn that they keep sound over winter. The first are June-eatings, early but soon withering; the last are russets, which last till June again" (VI, 190-191). The fruit of Thoreau's own enriched and enriching soil retains the flavor of the soil from which it came, and in 1880 William Sloane Kennedy commented on this phenomenon: "He [Thoreau] is coming to be admiringly read for that very ferity, that fresh sylvan flavor as of crushed wild grapes, and scent of earth and moss, with which the pages of his books are redolent, and which, strange to say, at first experience of it, causes a shudder to pass through the frame of the morbid and enervated reader who lives under glass in the hot air of city houses."[8] Like the cold, invigorating air which one inhales when on a cranberry expedition, Thoreau's writing may shock the man whose constitution has only encountered "the hot air of city houses."

[8]William Sloane Kennedy, "A New Estimate of Thoreau," The Penn Monthly, Oct. 1880, pp. 794, 808, rpt. in The Recognition of Henry David Thoreau, ed. Wendell Glick (Ann Arbor: The Univ. of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 101.

What really matters, Thoreau insists, is ". . . how much alive you are" (VI, 237). Unfortunately, as he observes, most men who walk the earth are not alive: "Methinks that many, if not most, men are a sort of natural mummies. The life having departed out of them, decay and putrefaction, disorganization, has not taken place, but they still keep up a dry and withered semblance of life" (V, 10). This stale, dry "semblance of life" is the result of man's separation from the springs of life: nature. Thoreau reminds us that "it is important, then, that we should air our lives from time to time by removals, and excursions into the fields and woods . . ." (XII, 343). Even Thoreau, who is writing his "fresh and fragrant thoughts" (XII, 399), finds it necessary to leave his chambers for such an airing because, he says, "we must go out and re-ally ourselves to Nature every day. . . . Staying in the house breeds a sort of insanity always" (IX, 200). When he does go out, he finds nature's "inexhaustible abundance" awaiting him: "I spend the forenoon in my chamber, writing or arranging my papers, and in the afternoon I walk forth into the fields and woods. I turn aside, perchance, into some withdrawn untrodden swamp, and find these bilberries large and fair, awaiting me in inexhaustible abundance" (V, 363-364). Often where he walks, he finds the huckleberry growing:

> The huckleberry grows on the top of our highest hills; no pasture is too rocky or barren for it; it

> grows in such deserts as we have, standing in pure sand; and, at the same time, it flourishes in the strongest and most fertile soil. One variety is peculiar to quaking bogs where there can hardly be said to be any soil beneath, not to mention another but unpalatable species, the hairy huckleberry, which is found in bogs. It extends through all our woods more or less thinly, and a distinct species, the dangle-berry, belongs especially to moist woods and the edges of swamps.
>
> Such care has nature taken to furnish to birds and quadrupeds, and to men, a palatable berry of this kind, slightly modified by soil and climate, wherever the consumer may chance to be (XIV, 297-298).

Thoreau's excursion into the fields of Concord results in a harvest of fresh air and huckleberries, and this excursion is paralleled in the "expedition of the mind": "What is hope, what is expectation, but a seed-time whose harvest cannot fail, an irresistible expedition of the mind, at length to be victorious?" (IX, 275) Regrettably, "most men are so taken up with the cares and rude practice of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked" (I, 381).

Because men do not take time to gather these fruits, they themselves fail to mature and ripen. If, however, a man keeps pace with the seasons, instead of his companions, his experience is "condensed and matured":

> It is so cool a morning that for the first time I move into the entry to sit in the sun. But in this cooler weather I feel as if the fruit of my summer were hardening and maturing a little, acquiring color and flavor like the corn and other fruits in the field. When the very earliest ripe grapes begin to be scented in the cool nights, then, too, the first cooler airs of autumn begin to waft my sweetness on the desert airs of summer. Now, too, poets nib their pens afresh. I scent their first-fruits in the cool evening air of the year. By the coolness the experience of the summer is

> condensed and matured, whether our fruits be pumpkins or grapes. Man, too, ripens with the grapes and apples (XII, 302).

The man who truly desires a rich and flourishing life will reject the values of society: money, power, prestige. Instead he will seek to live his life in harmony with nature:

> Nature never makes haste; her systems revolve at an even pace. The bud swells imperceptibly, without hurry or confusion, as though the short springs days were an eternity. All her operations seem separately, for the time, the single object for which all things tarry. Why, then, should man hasten as if anything less than eternity were allotted for the least deed? (I, 92)

Instead of relying on the products of society for sustenance, man should seek the drink and fruit of nature which hold flavor, health, and life. After walking amidst the pokeberries, "these upright branching casks of purple wine," Thoreau writes:

> Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each. Let them be your only diet drink and botanical medicines. In August live on berries, not dried meats and pemmican, as if you were on shipboard making your way through a waste ocean, or in a northern desert.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Drink of each season's influence as a vial, a true panacea of all remedies mixed for your especial use. The vials of summer never made a man sick, but those which he stored in his cellar. Drink the wines, not of your bottling, but Nature's bottling; not kept in goat-skins or pig-skins, but the skins of a myriad fair berries (V, 394-395).

Only the man who lives in harmony with nature--viewing her beauty, drinking her drink, tasting her fruit--can live a fruitful life. "Do you not feel the fruit of your spring

and summer beginning to ripen, to harden its seed within you? Do not your thoughts begin to acquire consistency as well as flavor and ripeness? How can we expect a harvest of thought who have not had a seed-time of character? Already some of my small thoughts--fruit of my spring life --are ripe, like the berries which feed the first broods of birds; and other some are prematurely ripe and bright, like the lower leaves of the herbs which have felt the summer's drought" (VI, 426). So it is that only by extracting the nutriment from the earth's soil and cultivating one's own character can man expect to harvest a crop of ripe, flavorful, berry-like thoughts.

Meditating on how to perfect the art of living, Thoreau reached several conclusions: walking outdoors away from the road close to nature enabled him to discover her finer fruits; seeking the wild berry allowed him to expand his thoughts; avoiding trade kept him from its corruption and the idleness of merely making money; writing gave him a record of his living but restricted his interaction with nature. By recording in his Journal these conclusions as he developed them hour by hour and season by season, he gave the world a new perspective concerning the successful life. As he explains, "I yet lack discernment to distinguish the whole lesson of to-day; but it is not lost,--it will come to me at last. My desire is to know what I have lived, that I may know how to live henceforth" (I, 9). His aspiration,

his hope, his dream was to know "how to live," to attain "that rare art of living" (VIII, 26).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Throughout the Journal of Henry David Thoreau, the wild berry functions as an embodiment of many qualities which Thoreau believed to be an essential part of living, and the experience of berrying serves as the means of achieving those qualities. In the words of Sherman Paul, "He had gone a-berrying so much that it had become the symbol of his vocation . . . . To go a-berrying was to explore a new world . . . ." Paul's perceptive understanding of the value which Thoreau attaches to the berrying experience is evident in his observation that ". . . huckleberrying was the symbol of his first and last joys and of that ripeness that communicated nothing less than its own beauty and fragrance." To Emerson's criticism Paul replies, "[Thoreau] would engineer for America by huckleberrying, for by 'going a-huckleberrying in the fields of thought' he could 'enrich all the world with his visions and his joys.'" Ultimately, as Paul observes,

"the end of life was not to gather fruit but like it to become ripe oneself."[1]

Another critical response to Emerson is Henry S. Salt's explanation that the object of Thoreau's "quest and labour was not the actual huckleberry nor the tangible bean, but the glorified and idealised fruit of a lifetime spent in communion with nature, which imparted to his writings a freshness and fragrance as of nature itself."[2] Although it is true, as Salt remarks, that Thoreau sought the fruit of a lifetime, it is also important to realize that Thoreau sought the berry itself; for it is by going in search of the tangible berry that one attains "communion with nature."

In the same year that Torrey and Allen published The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, Torrey also published a book entitled Friends on the Shelf in which he makes several observations about the fruit of Thoreau's own tree, his writings:

> His work, humorous or serious, transcendental or matter-of-fact, is all the fruit of his own tree. Whatever its theme, nature or man, it is all of one spirit. Think what you will of it, it is never insipid. As his friend Channing said, it has its "stoical merits," its "uncomfortableness." Well might its author express his sympathy with the barberry bush, whose business is to ripen its fruit, not to sweeten it,--and to protect it with thorns.

[1]Paul, pp. 401-403.

[2]Henry S. Salt, The Life of Henry David Thoreau (London: Walter Scott, Limited, 1896), p. 193.

> "Seek the lotus, and take a draught of rapture," was Margaret Fuller's rather high-flown advice to him; yet she too perceived that his mind was "not a soil for the citron and the rose, but for the whortleberry, the pine, or the heather."[3]

Torrey's analogy is quite apt: Thoreau's business, like that of the barberry bush, was to ripen his fruit, "not to sweeten it." This metaphorical use of maturing berries in relation to his own maturation is illustrated well in his Journal entry for August 9, 1853:

> I spend the forenoon in my chamber, writing or arranging my papers, and in the afternoon I walk forth into the fields and woods. I turn aside, perchance, into some withdrawn, untrodden swamp, and find these bilberries, large and fair, awaiting me in inexhaustible abundance, for I have no tame garden. They embody for me the essence and flavor of the swamp,--cool and refreshing, of various colors and flavors. I prefer the large blue, with a bloom on them, and slightly acid ones. I taste and am strengthened. This is the season of small fruits. I trust, too, that I am maturing some small fruit as palatable in these months, which will communicate my flavor to my kind (V, 363-364).

Sometimes, in his efforts to "communicate his flavor" Thoreau has to spend too much time in his chambers, thus losing valuable time in the fields and woods: "Winter has come unnoticed by me, I have been so busy writing. This is the life most lead in respect to Nature. How different from my habitual one! It is hasty, coarse, and trivial, as if you were a spindle in a factory. The other is leisurely, fine, and glorious, like a flower. In the first case you

[3]Bradford Torrey, Friends on the Shelf (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1906), pp. 122-123.

are merely getting your living as you go along" (VII, 80). The resultant situation was, of course, paradoxical: writing about berries, Thoreau would say, is less valuable than observing, gathering, tasting; yet because he recorded his berrying and his living, he shares with a reader who without his insights might have spent all of his life plodding the trodden paths of men. Surveying and pencil making gave Thoreau an income, writing gave him insight, but living gave him joy. In 1851, he exclaims: "How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live! Methinks that the moment my legs begin to move, my thoughts begin to flow, as if I had given vent to the stream at the lower end and consequently new fountains flowed into it at the upper" (II, 404-405). Upon leaving his chambers, Thoreau walked into the fields and woods; and in doing so, he cleared away the debris, thus allowing the stream of life to flow freely.

Venturing into an area where there were berries in abundance Thoreau describes the spot as "some up-country Eden": "Every bush and bramble bears its fruit; the sides of the road are a fruit garden; blackberries, huckleberries, thimbleberries, fresh and abundant, no signs of drought; all fruits in abundance; the earth teems. . . . I seem to have wandered into a land of greater fertility, some up-country Eden. . . . Great shining blackberries peep out at me from under the leaves upon the rocks" (VI, 403). This fruit is not forbidden--only neglected. By bringing a bit of Eden

to men, or, more accurately, by leading men on excursions to Eden, Thoreau offers them glimpses into the kind of heaven which is possible on earth.

Thoreau perceived the patterns and motifs of nature, and he gave a concrete dimension to many of his abstractions by using some of these phenomena as embodiments of his perceptions. He explained, "My thought is a part of the meaning of the world, and hence I use a part of the world as a symbol to express my thought" (IV, 410). In this way Thoreau, recorder of wonders and messenger of miracles, transmitted his vision of life.

In January of 1861, he wrote that he believed it unnecessary to ". . . offer an apology if I make huckleberries my theme this evening" (XIV, 310). Indeed, he did not need to apologize for frequently making various wild berries his theme. In form, the berry is perfect--symmetrical and spherical; and the berry excursion offers the color of life, the taste of wildness, the smell of crisp air, the sounds of silence. Throughout his Journal, Thoreau returned again and again to this motif: even in the final paragraphs of the last volume, the berry is a part of his recorded observation. Thus, when Emerson expressed his disappointment over Thoreau's failure to engineer for all America, he ironically revealed not Thoreau's failure but his own failure to understand Thoreau and the significance of huckleberry parties to Thoreau's very being. To avoid

corruption and complexity; to regain and retain simplicity, innocence, an original relationship with the gods, and natural wildness; to develop unfailingly into a mature, fruitful man whose life has "an epic integrity" (I, 436), Thoreau sought the wild berry. "Do you know on what bushes a little peace, faith, and contentment grow? Go a-berrying early and late after them" (II, 48). The Journal of Henry David Thoreau reveals that the living is richer, more flavorful, more fruitful if one has seen and tasted and known, as Thoreau did, the wild berry.

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