

Alma natura, ars severa

ABSTRACT

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The American naturalist, philosopher and writer Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) lived and wrote in a time of vibrant change. During his short life his rural Concord, a small satellite town to Boston, Massachusetts, was rocked by religious and scientific debates, later by erupting passions over slavery and federal cohesion. Concord's landscape was also transformed by railroad and telegraph technologies, promising economic revival after periods of crisis and stagnation, while radically altering the land and the prospects for those choosing to stay on it. Thoreau took part in many of the wider debates ensuing upon these developments, while remaining loyal to his home environs and to what these still offered him by way of natural surroundings. The present work focuses less on overtly political issues of his writings than on what may be called the egocentric and biocentric Thoreau – the man ruminating on epistemological questions regarding how nature, human as well as environmental, can be understood, and on ensuing aesthetic ones concerning how to portray and promote one's findings. Inspired by the thematic criticism of the so-called Geneva school, involving the simultaneous embrace (*confidence*) and scrutiny (*méfiance*) of issues found pertinent to an authorial consciousness as this emanates from its oeuvre, it also makes use of more recent deconstructive and ecocritical perspectives focusing on the anthropocentric limits and biocentric reach of linguistic representation, respectively. The running queries of the thesis – assumed to be integral to Thoreau and here spread over several, self-contained articles – can be summarized as follows: *How to comprehend, evaluate and convey the natural realm as a self-contained ideal, but also with due attention to its increasing hybridity as transformed by human technologies? Will outward nature taken as a whole present an immanent or transcendent order? Which rhetorical tools to wield in portraying it, and what faith to put in their fidelity to the task of translating its truth, whether empirical or spiritual? Or, for that matter, to what degree may one trust human language to the challenge of conveying the elusive interiorities of the writing self (i.e. human nature)?* Thoreau's at once idealistic and empirical outlook was grounded in his ambitious readings in natural history, in his latent Transcendentalist leanings, and above all in his faithful walking and close observation of his local landscape, host as this was to a wealth of denizens and seasonally shifting features. This much appears already – as explicated here, and in contrast to the proposals of earlier research – from the variably immanent and transcendent approaches to a peaceful natural environment on display in Thoreau's early essay "A Winter Walk." Yet as Concord was transformed by new technology and infrastructure, Thoreau had increasingly to contend with a landscape hybridized by human culture – a troubling insight ultimately bearing also on how the expanses and limits of his own craft were to be conceived. In a social context where powerful discourses of modernity were asserting themselves via technical nomenclatures and contemporary propaganda (saliently "Manifest Destiny" and the "Commercial Spirit," both reified in the railroad's threatening Iron Horse in the "Sounds" chapter of *Walden*), what kind of language could Thoreau seek to muster, defiantly and redemptively appropriate to a vision of a more naturalized (self-)culture such as he sought to ground and formulate in *Walden* and elsewhere? Thoreau's narrator in *Walden* arguably tries everything available to him rhetorically, but in his eventual failure to overcome the momentum of transforming technology seeks not only deflection to this reading, but also sweeping re-naturalizations and a return to direct experience. Thoreau's devastating insight, as thematized subtextually to my view, is that language itself constitutes an intrusive technology, laying its tracks and gradings and causeways in both spoken and written form – and that it is thus laden with the burdens and soilings inherent to the history of human handling of nature. The thesis further discusses how Thoreau could hope to attain an authority of voice sufficient enough to be recognized as a legitimate critic of conventional life and progress in *Walden*, and proposes a deliberate rhetorical strategy of obscurity as complementing Thoreau's reputed perspicuity. The dissertation then turns to address a query regarding Thoreau's vast accumulation of Journal entries on local natural phenomena during the 1850's and early 1860's, an activity the records of which have often prompted the question of how Thoreau would eventually have chosen to present these materials. While the answer must remain a speculation, an analogy to Thoreau's extant attitudes toward (cyclical) myth and (cumulative) human character is here explored, thus deviating from previous interpretations in seeing Thoreau's journal-tending over the years not as a species of antisocial activity in its disdain for figurative language, but as indicative of a long-term plan for a synthesized, archetypal calendar of Concord. Turning finally from the aggregate portrait of outward nature as gleaned from Thoreau's Journal, the thesis considers the composite self-portrait of the author in *Walden*. What could his readers expect of his self-exposure in the book: a full-disclosure, redemptive narrative, or perhaps rather a prompting toward analogous, readerly self-scrutiny? Here as elsewhere Thoreau explores the boundaries and extents of language and communication, revealing a metacritical mind acutely aware of its chosen tools.

KEYWORDS: *Thoreau, nature, nature-writing, ecocriticism, poetics, aesthetics, modernity, technology, railroad, autobiography, immanence, transcendence, rhetoric, perspicuity, obscurity, parable, animals, myth, mythology, Walden, "hound, bay horse, and turtle dove," "A Winter Walk," Journal, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers.*

HENRIK OTTERBERG

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Expanses & Limits of Craft
in Henry David Thoreau

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For Kerstin & Silas

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“In what concerns you much do not think that you have companions – know that you are alone in the world.” So wrote Henry Thoreau to his friend Harrison Blake on March 27, 1848. This is one of several occasions when I would be happy to disagree with him – if he didn’t go on to reverse his remarks in closing the letter, as follows: “I need to see you, and I trust I shall, to correct my mistakes. Perhaps you have some oracles for me.” Friends and mentors, where would we be without them? In my own case they have been many, and deeply appreciated, on this long strange trip toward an anthology on Thoreau. A seventeen-year locust, no less. My thanks are due first of all to my two successive supervisors through the years, professors Lars Lönnroth and Mats Malm. I have benefitted more than I can say from your erudition and energy, and from your unflagging support despite my many lapses and digressions. To Lars I still owe a book on the Swedish poet and musician Carl Michael Bellman, whereas Mats has coaxed and piloted the present work with patience and aplomb in equal measure – invaluable traits in a supervisor handling a mercurial student. I would also like to thank my many advisors, colleagues and friends past and present at what was once the Department of Literature of the University of Gothenburg, now something larger (and I trust you will forgive me for dispensing with your titles): I am indebted first of all to Gunnar D Hansson for turning my attention toward the analysis of nature writing in general and to studying Thoreau in particular; to Tomas Forser for impressing the importance of critical acumen and poise; to Stina Hansson for stressing the necessary influences of history and genre; to Beata Agrell for the joys and pains of theoretical explorations; to Lisbeth Larsson for bettering my grasp of life writing and its various vantages. I am also grateful to Stina Otterberg for generously sharing in the genesis of many of the materials included here,

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With few exceptions Thoreau is reticent about the import of his family and close friends in his writings, acknowledging them obliquely now and then without further identification. I shall break with this tradition, while aware that mere words will not do justice to the task. Beyond the ambit of academe, I extend my kudos to Jesper Löfman, Henrik Olofsson, and David Elo Dean, three genial and loyal musketeers in my perennial struggle against the Richelieu of self-interrogation. My heartfelt thanks to Albin and Tove Otterberg, for putting up with me and my absences with an understanding and forbearance I could not have imagined (now, finally, comes good swimming). A very special ‘without whom’ penultimately to Gabriella Olshammar, whose readings, encouragement, love and support have been essential to the completion of the present work. I dedicate it, finally, with devotion to my beloved parents, Kerstin and Silas Gustafsson.

Gothenburg, October 3, 2014

HENRIK OTTERBERG

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INTRODUCTION

“Where is the literature which gives expression to Nature? He would be a poet who could impress the winds and streams into his service, to speak for him; who nailed words to their primitive senses, as farmers drive down stakes in the spring which the frost has heaved; who derived his words as often as he used them – transplanted them to his page with earth adhering to their roots; – whose words were so true, and fresh, and natural that they would appear to expand like the buds at the approach of spring, though they lay half smothered between two musty leaves in a library, – aye, to bloom and bear fruit there after their kind annually for the faithful reader, in sympathy with surrounding Nature.”

Thoreau, *Walking* (1862)¹

Preamble

If Henry Thoreau (1817-1862) ever strove to encapsulate the aspirations of his nature-oriented writings, surely these lines from his lecture-essay “Walking” would serve the purpose. His enthusiasm for the subject appears boundless, driven by fascination and curiosity, while he evidently remained anchored in the belief that outward nature has much to teach regarding our inward one. These twin impulses regarding nature – understanding it on its own systemic terms, and as related to what Thoreau identified as an ideally analogous human self – would imbue his writings throughout his career. By turns, and especially in his youth, Thoreau would flow toward the Transcendentalist-Romantic notion of nature as a vehicular aid in assimilating higher laws, with the self and its environment reflecting each other in harmonic fugues of call and response. While remaining amenable to this ‘echo-logical’ orientation, however, Thoreau would also ebb in the direction of what one may recognize as a modern ‘eco-logical’ attitude toward nature. Leaving his anthropocentric moorings, he would then explore his natural

environment as an interrelated system with an integrity and functionality largely independent of civilization and its concerns.²

As is well known, Thoreau sought to become attuned to the various phenomena and cycles of his Concord landscape; its seasons and denizens; climes and migrating visitors. He relied on his regular walks and observations, noting his impressions and companion thoughts in his Journal. But Thoreau also read avidly in tracts of natural history and other sources pertaining to his Massachusetts home and beyond. Walking, reading and writing were intimately intertwined activities to Thoreau, all supporting one another. Significantly, he described the latter two pursuits as appropriately vibrant actions rather than passive accomplishments. His own writing seen in this light had as its prerequisite more or less purposeful sauntering, brought forth as a fruit of valiant labor, and he tended to judge his reading materials by the same standards. “The forcible writer stands bodily behind his words with his experience,” Thoreau declared in his Journal of 1852, adding that “[h]e does not make books out of books, but he has been *there* in person.”³

Thus Thoreau valorized natural history and travel writings evincing their authors’ physical efforts in gaining their knowledge – Linnaeus braving gnats in Lapland; Humboldt sweating in the Amazon; Goethe stretching his legs in Italy – over accounts he deemed desk-bound and self-consciously scholarly. Thoreau found a similar aesthetic animating his beloved classics, with their epic and georgic works depicting strenuous campaigns and assiduous husbandry. This while pastoral examples also found a degree of favor with him in portraying, as he was wont to see it, the just rewards of *otium* upon a preceding *negotium* – a dedicated effort of one sort or other. Good writing would hence ensue upon corporeal exertion, Thoreau argued, and such initial effort would also serve to void one’s style of unnecessary complications of embellishment and indirection. One of the salient ironies in reading Thoreau is of course how this professed aesthetic is only half-heartedly adhered to: his mature style is seldom purple, to be sure, yet it often brims with sophistication in its wealth of figurative language, allusion and double entendre.

In keeping with the returning curves of most walks, and in view of the modest success of Thoreau as a lecturer and travel writer, most of his nature-oriented writings came to concern themselves with his home environs and their ambulatory bounds: Walden Pond and its nearby waters; the Concord, Sudbury and Assabet rivers, their banks and meanders; Fair Haven, Ponkatawset and Nawshawtuct hills; the interspersed fields, meadows, swamps and woodlots. From this limited geography Thoreau crafted lectures and essays on the many local variants of wild apples, on the variegations of autumn foliage, and on the succession of forest trees. His first published book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), launches its narrative from a bend of the Concord river, and of course *Walden* (1854) mines a wealth of Journal materials Thoreau garnered over a decade of walking its perimeters, swimming and fishing and boating its waters, and erecting a house close to its shore.

*

Thoreau remained loyal to his familiar landscape throughout his days, and also turned his back on conventional career choices upon graduating from Harvard in 1837. He did not seek a ministry, a position in law or medicine, nor did he return to his alma mater as a lecturer. Thoreau did try his hand at elementary-school teaching with his older brother John, and made a lukewarm effort to situate himself as a free-lance magazine essayist in New York in the early 1840's, but these initiatives respectively failed and petered out. The "Concord Academy" which John and Henry furthered in 1838 came to a decent start, with its novel notions of 'learning by doing' and regular field trips, but soon folded due to John's worsening tuberculosis (the disease was probably latent in Henry as well). Later, in New York, Thoreau fell ill with what appears to have been a psychosomatic ailment, most likely exacerbated by his well-documented homesickness, rendering him perpetually drowsy. Thoreau returned to Concord in the early 1840's, remaining a bachelor, and he never left the town or the home of his parents and siblings thenceforth, save for a two-year stint at nearby Walden Pond and a few

other limited excursions. He earned his keep variably as a pencil manufacturer, surveyor, and carpenter, occasionally supplementing his own and his immediate family's income by lecturing fees or literary royalties. Thoreau settled into a daily routine of manual work and chores for a few hours, taking walks in roughly equal measure. He then commonly spent his evenings reading, sorting notes and writing in his Journal, whilst developing materials for essays, lectures, and eventually book manuscripts.

That such a cloistered life should lead to more than parochial writings may seem surprising. Yet Thoreau had absorbed the benefits of a broad and solid education in the humanities and natural sciences, and kindled the fire of his literary talent and environmental consciousness in his own fashion. He benefitted from living close to Boston with its cultural amenities, as well as from residing in Concord itself. The Alcott family – as chance would have it – lived near his own, the orphic philosopher Bronson Alcott becoming a friend, and during Thoreau's youthful days Ralph Waldo Emerson as well as Nathaniel Hawthorne moved into the neighborhood with their wives and children. Especially Emerson was to have a decisive impact on Thoreau's development, serving as his mentor upon his return from Harvard.

Emerson's home had become a hub for the contemporary Transcendentalist movement in the mid-1830's, rejecting as this did the dogma of human depravity as characteristic of Calvinism, as well as the focus on institutional authority of Unitarianism, while instead emphasizing the individual's delicate mystical intuition (which Emerson, echoing Coleridge, called 'Reason' as opposed to the quotidian 'Understanding') and immersion in nature as valid paths to spiritual enlightenment. Transcendentalism also sought inspiration from religious literatures other than the Christian, having acknowledged the so-called 'higher criticism' of the Bible by German scholars. These argued that the Biblical texts reflected the historical circumstances in which they were created, so calling their divine infallibility and straightforward interpretation into question. Differing in many particulars, the Transcendentalists shared a belief in enlightened self-culture as the basis of an informed democratic society, while distrusting organized

religion and political parties in general. From 1837 on Thoreau frequently attended the informal Transcendentalist meetings of the so-called Hedge Club at the Emerson's, mostly as a listener and learner. Emerson for his part was impressed by what he saw as Thoreau's original intellect and promise as a writer. He also realized his practical bent and keen knowledge of woods and fields, variably taking Thoreau on as a gardener, tutor, or caretaker of the household when himself away on lecture tours or tending to other engagements. The two formed a bond of friendship built on mutual respect, and while Thoreau would later disappoint Emerson somewhat for his lack of outward ambition, both men would influence each other throughout their lives.

In the mid-1840's Thoreau can be said to have solidified his literary and intellectual career, at least with regard to intent, by erecting and moving into his small house by Walden Pond. Here during 1845 to 1847 he farmed beans, read profusely in classics, chronicles and travelogues, and wrote the better part of his first two books, *A Week* and *Walden*, in consecutive drafts. He also began exploring beyond Concord, traveling in the fall of 1846 to the backwoods of Maine and mount Katahdin. Thoreau's goal beyond the foreseen excitement of the trek itself was to fashion an essay based on his experiences, and he read ambitiously in the available natural and cultural-history literature pertaining to the region in the process.

Points of departure

The essays spanning the present collection concern a number of aesthetic, epistemological and reception-oriented issues raised by the writings of Thoreau, as these developed from the 1840's and on. While the famous 'turn toward nature' in Thoreau's Journal would not occur until around 1850, making it to a greater extent empirically driven, Thoreau's field notes began to take up more space in his daily notations during the mid-to-late 1840's, vying for space with accounts of his readings and speculations on human nature. Much was happening in the wider field of natural sciences at the time, some examples of which – from Thoreau's known consultation or mention – may suffice to convey the fecundity: Charles Lyell had only a dozen-odd years before published the first edition of many of his groundbreaking *Principles of Geology*, explaining earth's stratifications and mountainous structures as the product of eons of volcanic and erosional activity – rather than as the features of a newly sprung and since static globe, presumed by theologians to have been providentially created only a few thousand years earlier. In 1844, Robert Chambers anonymously issued his *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, tokenly arguing for a godly hand in the 'transmutations' found in the fossil record, while backhandedly sanctioning evolution. In 1847 the famous Swiss natural historian Louis Agassiz, eagerly promoted from abroad by Alexander von Humboldt, installed himself in Boston to assume tenure at Harvard, and soon made Thoreau's acquaintance in his quest to gather indigenous materials for his research. During the coming years, Thoreau would send Agassiz scores of botanical and zoological specimens from in and around Concord, including several fish and a live fox. Whilst Agassiz would resist the evolutionary implications of Lyell's and Chambers' research, and later those of Darwin, he was nevertheless convinced of the earth's senescence, as witness his novel, process-oriented investigations of glaciation. He also played a leading role in promulgating Humboldt's amalgam of physical geography, meteorology and biology into a form of empirical holism, as published serially in the German naturalist's vast *Cosmos* (1845-1862) and summarized in other works, several of

which were made available in English soon upon their German publication (and thus read in translation by Thoreau).

In short, Thoreau's years more actively spent establishing himself as a writer coincided with fervent theological debates and a series of scientific breakthroughs, by turns buttressed and challenged by new knowledge from fields as diverse as philology, biology and geology. Ingrained truths were yielding to new theories (and for some, of course, anxieties) while society at large was undergoing rapid economic and demographic change as fuelled by large-scale immigration and industrialization. From this crucible of volatile social and intellectual developments, Thoreau chose to draw free stimulation rather than tether himself to certain factions or schools of thought. He was open to radical new ideas of disruptive evolution, culminating much later in a favorable Journal review of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), but also retained a lingering inclination towards apprehending *natura extensa* – in other words what we may provisionally call external nature, in its environmental, 'out-there' connotations – as harmonious in essence.

Thoreau's written focus on his environs and on his own self was consolidated during the mid-1840's, crystallizing into a number of queries he would return to repeatedly during his remaining years. Among anthropocentric ones were the proper definition and defenses of freedom, as well as the duties and rights of the individual in relation to government and to society at large. Thoreau also reflected on how to portray human character in biography, and over the limits of representation in autobiography. While I touch on the political aspects of Thoreau in passing, my own research as presented in the following essays mostly centers on what could be called the biocentric and egocentric Thoreau. I strive to trace and explain Thoreau's grappling with mutable, partly intertwined concepts of nature, language, and technology, pressed upon him as these arguably were from his finding himself situated in a vortex of modernity, blurring boundaries while twirling older certainties into knots: *How to comprehend, evaluate and convey the natural realm as a self-contained ideal, but also with due attention to its increasing hybridity as transformed by human technologies? Will outward nature taken as a whole present an immanent or*

transcendent order? Which rhetorical tools to wield in portraying it, and what faith to put in their fidelity to the task of translating its truth, whether empirical or spiritual (i.e. immanent or transcendent)? Or, for that matter, to what degree may one trust human language to the challenge of conveying the elusive interiorities of the writing self (i.e. human nature)?

While I am hardly the first to broach these topics, until fairly recently a broad consensus prevailed among Thoreau scholars and commentators that nature *perceived* and nature *portrayed* were easily compatible to Thoreau, notably regarding *natura extensa*. In other words, a tacit assumption reigned to the effect that Thoreau the observer of nature effortlessly segued into Thoreau the limner of the same, with no challenges of craft, whether imagined or actual, to overcome. Therefore one could safely concentrate on and debate probable sources of influence upon Thoreau in his approaching and becoming cognizant of his natural environment – James McIntosh (1974) emphasizing Goethe and Coleridge; Laura Dassow Walls (1995) positing Alexander von Humboldt; Robert Kuhn McGregor (1997) in turn proposing various Hindu scriptures as prime movers.⁴ While these scholars acknowledge Emerson’s likely role as catalyst in Thoreau’s finding his way to one or more of these sources, and his undeniable personal impact upon Thoreau with his own essay “Nature” (1836), they show little concern over how Thoreau would tackle the concomitant problems of portraying for instance the intuitive, mystical, or otherwise supra-empirical inferences made via these influences (assuming for now that they did convince him). How would one find a language apposite to the insights of Reason in Emerson’s metaphysical sense? And how, for that matter, to convey nature’s hybridity, increasingly evident as this was becoming in Thoreau’s time? Alternately, of course, one could from a scholarly vantage abandon the search for potential sources to Thoreau’s conception(s) of nature outright, thereby canceling consideration of Thoreau’s own possible horizon(s) of expectation when it came to the presumed language of nature, and how to translate the same nature (or what remained of it to consider) congenially into text. So Jane Bennett (1994) reads Thoreau’s stances toward *natura extensa* through the lens of Haraway; John Dolis (2005) through Heidegger; while Andrew McMurry (2003) frames and filters them via Latour.⁵

We may summarize the above by saying that Thoreau scholars have tended to converge around an influential opinion penned by John Carlos Rowe (1987), to the effect that while Thoreau – specifically in *Walden* but by implication overall – is found to employ language with consummate skill, “there is remarkably little reflection upon language itself” as Thoreau “scrupulously avoids the problematic” of the medium as such.⁶ Many Thoreau scholars would seemingly still subscribe to such a stance, citing when necessary Thoreau’s inferred confidence in his own poetics, while also maintaining that he generally ‘means what he says’ – his double entendres, paradoxes and rhetorical flourishes then understood as decipherable and ultimately complementary to the matters and arguments at hand.

But there have also been dissenting voices, some of whom see a change in Thoreau’s outlook during the 1850’s, when his Journal-writing took on prominence as a project in its own right and became, as touched upon earlier, more geared toward denoting environmental phenomena as such than on clothing them in figurative language. Sharon Cameron’s work (1985) became a provocative catalyst in this regard, harking back to a widely disseminated reading by Sherman Paul (1958) proposing that Thoreau became increasingly reclusive and withdrawn after the publication of *Walden*.⁷ Cameron argued in like vein that Thoreau’s (implicitly forwardlooking) Journal represented an extreme attempt to assuage “a passion for nature divorced from social meaning,” while *Walden* (conversely understood as retroactive in its views of nature) yielded to the “social” and thus accommodating.⁸ Since then, publications of two late Thoreau manuscripts by Bradley P. Dean – *Faith in a Seed* (1993) and *Wild Fruits* (2000) – have served to mitigate Cameron’s findings somewhat, in that these texts in their extant form reveal substantial reworkings of comparatively ‘bare’ Journal entries as well as useful, reader-oriented introductions by Thoreau.⁹ These publications were soon followed by a study of their ideational content and purposeful literary style by Michael Benjamin Berger (2000), who submitted that Thoreau was committed to roles of both scientist and poet during his last years.¹⁰ More recently Rochelle L. Johnson (2009) has assessed the debate ignited by Cameron, and astutely delineated the change in attitude pertaining to Thoreau in the 1850’s. However

she does this with the reasonable caveat that for Thoreau “understanding nature necessitated recognizing one’s human perspective” regardless of how one chose to depict it.¹¹ His writing and its corollaries of matrices and graphs, then, would remain intentional social acts rather than construed as impersonal and detached recordings of natural phenomena. This view largely accords with my own, as I see Thoreau’s changing stylistics over time as signaling differences in degree rather than kind. Writing, while dexterous in the hands of Thoreau, remains a social activity – an anticipated conversation – no matter how it is realized.

Another scholarly strain reluctant to dismiss Thoreau as linguistically naïve took its cue from a pioneering essay by Walter Benn Michaels (1977), dealing with *Walden*’s contradictions: Walden Pond, to mention one example of the many provided, is variably stated to be bottomless and precisely 102 feet deep by Thoreau’s narrator.¹² Michaels argues that Thoreau, in planting inconsistencies and paradoxes in *Walden*, forces difficult choices upon the reader, specifically as to the text’s significance: the solid bottom one may or may not find will be an outcome at once authorized and repudiated by Thoreau. Michael R. Fischer (1992) followed this line of argument in attempting more unambiguously to defend Thoreau as he appears in *Walden* from deconstructionist and feminist criticisms.¹³ Fischer begins his analysis by acknowledging the myopias of Thoreau’s narrator, employing as the latter does a universalizing “we” which nevertheless excludes women in narrowing down its address to “men,” and furthermore extrapolating from his own depicted experiences as if these were true and relevant to everyone. Against these indictments, Michaels points to Thoreau’s flaunting his situatedness in time and place at Walden Pond, personalizing his project by reminding the reader that it is ultimately “always the first person that is speaking,” and admitting to his limitations in all. This finally places the onus of the text’s significance once again with its reader, who must decide for her- or himself of its value, if any.

My own view of Thoreau as a literary artist concurs with that of Michaels and Fischer, insofar as I choose to see the ‘gaps’ and ‘inconsistencies’ in his published texts in the main as consciously deployed rhetorical effects and challenges vis-à-vis the reader. While there is of course no litmus test available in this re-

gard, I have taken stock of the fact that most of Thoreau's works printed during his lifetime were long in gestation, and can hence be hypothesized to reflect a greater degree of settled authorial intent than, say, a contrasting Journal entry or manuscript variant. Thoreau's well-known partiality for wordplay and his frequently voiced demands on his audiences and readers is also noteworthy in this context. Henry Golemba (1990) has aptly proposed that Thoreau habitually swayed between a "language of facts" whose "meaning was explicit and clear" and a "language of desire" that was "more challenging, more potent, more portentous" – the two modes often combining to form a "wild rhetoric whose meaning always remains elusive and untameable, while its facts provoke readers to interpret, to decode, and thus to domesticate his sentences."¹⁴ Similarly, I see much of Thoreau's force as a writer in *Walden* as emanating not from any exclusive representativity as such adhering to his narrator, but from Thoreau's adamantly insisting on his reader's responsibility of making sense of what he submits. Indeed this standpoint can be traced all the way back to Thoreau's brief tenure as an elementary school teacher in Concord, when he and his brother demanded that their prospective pupils first describe why they wished to be enrolled, then pledge solemnly to give their minds to their studies and not to glance at the efforts of others. This should of course not serve to elide the less palatable aspects of Thoreau's writings, whose misogyny, occasional savagery of image and racial stereotyping are hard to dismiss. Richard Bridgman (1982) was the first to issue a systematic if in sum draconian corrective to the fairly uncritical admiration that Thoreau enjoyed within academia and elsewhere from the 1960's and on.¹⁵ He has since been followed by Gregory S. Jay (1990), Leigh Kirkland (1993) and Louise Westling (1993), who more judiciously discuss the shortcomings inherent to Thoreau's various blinkers, a paternalistic practice of feminizing nature among them.¹⁶

As will become evident from the essays ensuing upon this introduction, I have tried to resist the temptation to yoke either Thoreau's conceptions of nature or language to overriding influences. This I have felt congenial to Thoreau's tendency of working his own way through ideas and concepts, seldom leaning

long on authority, while often intent on clarifying his difference from or dispute with his sources of inspiration. For there were of course inspirations – Thoreau neither thought nor wrote from a tabula rasa. But the available evidence regarding his reading and learning points toward an independence of mind, content to pick up a thought or notion from a source without worrying about fidelity to any larger construct or theme. As the Russian Thoreau scholar Nikita Pokrovsky (1983) argues, “follow[ing] the evolution of Thoreau’s interest for the works of any given philosopher or writer, we mostly see that he retained, with a striking and apparently spontaneous consistency, an originality of approach to whatever he might be reading. Almost never did he follow obediently the logic of the author’s reasoning or argumentation, bringing instead his own order to whatever he read, in accordance with his own theoretical convictions. That was the cause of his fragmentary or mosaic use of the sources. However, negation of the influence of previous philosophy on Thoreau would be just as unacceptable an extreme as exaggeration of that influence.”¹⁷

Thoreau seems, as Pokrovsky asserts, to provide a good example of a writer who resists fawning on influences, treating them mostly as subservient tools rather than ready-made structures to espouse wholesale. Thoreau tries out new ideas alongside older ones, makes forays into speculation while lashing his answers to experiential learning from his immediate environs: building a house; hoeing beans; surveying on assignment; keeping a log of observations on environmental phenomena. Thoreau’s usual compositional method, well defined as a “winnowing” one, was appropriate to this inquisitive, variably self-centered and lococentric outlook.¹⁸ At Harvard Thoreau learnt to contrast subjects prompted by external stimulus (school and university themes, contemporary scientific, religious and political debates) with his own reflections (primarily Journal entries on his thoughts or quotes from his various encounters and readings, and the responses these engendered). From the outset, then, Thoreau’s textual weave was interspersed with distinctly personal threads. His rendered “I” bobs up like an unrestrainable cork among his otherwise often derivative Journal passages from his early, post-college days (1837-1844), and he seldom

departs from this practice in later years, when his originality blooms. Fiction as conventionally understood appears never to have tempted Thoreau, whilst one must keep in mind that he creates a more or less performative first-person perspective in his various writings. The resulting voice and figure mostly reflect but also on occasion deviate from what we know or can suppose of the biographical man from alternate sources. In any case, Thoreau consistently places the personal pronoun at the fore, emphatically situating the author as the narrator and protagonist of his own works, the represented Thoreauvian persona regularly interacting with *natura extensa* amidst a spectrum of other, more intermittent concerns.

In keeping with a 'recycling' literary ethos, Thoreau was inclined to amass Journal notes on various subjects that engaged him, eventually structuring a number of them into lecture notes. These would then be further reworked into published essays, which would in turn be clustered to form a further modified book. The genesis of Thoreau's travelogue *The Maine Woods* (1864) provides a case in point. Based on Journal entries on his expeditions to Maine in 1846, 1853, and 1857, "Ktaadn," "Chesuncook" and "The Allegash and East Branch" were initially organized as lyceum lectures, and thereafter published (save the last of the three) whole or piecemeal in periodicals after further reorganization. Toward the end of his life, Thoreau decided to group the essays together, supplemented by practical appendices on local plants, birds, and animals; furthermore including a list of "Indian Words" along with advice for the necessary "Outfit for an Excursion." While he did not live to see the published book in print, Thoreau left clear indications of a wished-for title, *The Maine Woods*, and entrusted his sister Sophia Thoreau to execute the remaining editorial work based on his instructions (Thoreau was by late 1861 succumbing to tuberculosis and largely bedridden).¹⁹ In their respective ways, Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), *Walden* (1854) and *Cape Cod* (1865) all display this mode of growth, Thoreau grouping Journal entries on his travels and projects such as the Walden Pond sojourn into shorter texts given to friends to read, or delivered at nearby lecture-halls, and thence further developed into longer texts.

Structurally, then, Thoreau's Journal as his base of operations is suitable to approach as vast work-in-progress; a literary and personal as well as relatively impersonal environmental log finding various outlets (readings, lectures, selected printings into essays or books) over time, yet seldom fixed and/or discarded in its details, except of course being frozen as we now know it upon Thoreau's death. There are even indications in Thoreau's later Journal (1860-1862) that he envisioned putting together a comprehensive "Kalendar" of Concord based on years of examinations of natural phenomena.²⁰ By the time of his death Thoreau had come so far as to have devised hundreds of charts and matrices to such effect, but it is anyone's guess when he might have considered these sufficiently complete so as to furnish predictive power for an 'archetypal' local year, and hence as yielding a rationale to publish. Likewise, it is evident from Thoreau's re-organizational activity in the Journal, its annexes and via related, composite manuscripts ("Notes on Fruits", "The Dispersion of Seeds" etc.) that he saw virtually the entire corpus as a potential resource for emerging works.

Theoretical & methodological considerations

Recognizing Thoreau's writings as forming a dynamic whole rather than a series of preordained stages or disparate strands, I have been inspired in approaching them by exponents of the Geneva school of literary criticism. Jean-Pierre Richard, while not a progenitor *sensu stricto*, arguably laid its theoretical groundwork with his plea that the critic should take the entire oeuvre into account in striving to grasp the driving impulses and ambitions of a chosen authorship; a process which properly executed should reveal the work a unified whole.²¹ Richard also argued for an empathetic attitude on the part of the critical reader; in other words that one should begin by reading the work 'passively,' allowing oneself to become 'possessed' (*possédé*) by the authorial voice (in other words by its rendered consciousness, vantage, tone, and so forth). This operation will, Richard reasoned, in the best case generate a phenomenological merger of the authorial and critical subjects, where the critic has striven successfully to recreate the sensuous impressions and worldview of the author as far as possible, within her- or himself. A coalescence of such sort would in turn provide scope for an identification on the part of the critic of the author's guiding concerns or 'themes,' which latter may or may not have been accessible to the 'surface' consciousness of the author at the time of writing. Via such patient analysis also of what Richard variably calls the 'undergrowth' or 'half-overgrown paths' of the corpus in question, the critic may discover its submerged layers of meaning beyond its more obvious concerns. In less exalted terms, one might say that Richard promotes a form of sympathetic close reading which serves to alert the critic to overt as well as subtextual themes in the chosen oeuvre.

Jean Starobinski's study of an earlier iconoclast and lover of nature (or at least of imagined natural states) also became an important if silent influence. Starobinski's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle* (1971), made available through an ambitious English translation and introduction in 1988, seemed to me to complement the earlier theoretical vistas of Starobinski's mentor Richard in valuable ways. Perhaps above all, Starobinski's analysis allowed for Rousseau's

internal incoherence as well as coherence, and argued – in a passage striking with regard to Thoreau – that Rousseau was “unwilling to separate his thought from his person, his theories from his personal destiny.”²² This penchant seemed to dovetail with Thoreau’s resolute outlook in his own work. Starobinski also had a liberating effect regarding the problem of context. Arguing for the necessity of gaining contextual knowledge before tackling one’s chosen work – of philology, of intellectual history and moment, of societal conditions, etc. – Starobinski offered a mode of reading at once alive to the text’s interiority and exteriority; its own integrity (however fragile or fragmented) and indebtedness to ‘everything else’ that pertained at its time of genesis. Of course there could be no objective delimitation as to where such context ceases to be relevant, and in this sense Starobinski’s critic will be doomed to failure in never attaining omniscience. Yet this would seem to be a common human affliction, whose proper response would be humility coupled to perseverance: criticism, as the business of living itself, properly understood as a process of becoming rather than as radiating from stasis.

The purpose of contextualizing should furthermore to Starobinski not be an end unto itself, but optimally serve to clarify the *écart* or *deviation* of one’s chosen work to that of its ruling surroundings; the assumption being that an author’s compulsion to write is sprung from an urge toward change: in her/his own understanding; in the reader’s disposition; in society at large. Whilst this premise of course fails to consider a number of likely submotives – pecuniary gain, fame and status among them – these are subordinate to Starobinski, and reducible via the critic’s choice of object (i.e. one can avoid hacks and opportunistic socialites if one so wishes). In sum, Starobinski’s call for the reading act to combine unquestioning immersion (*confiance*) and inquisitive suspicion (*méfiance*) seemed appropriate in approaching Thoreau. Ideally then, as I understood it, the critical reader should strive to equipoise the roles of defending and prosecuting the work in question, the better to judge it fairly. While I have not explicated Thoreau with these polar terms in open tow, nor strictly followed or attempted to develop the methodology of Richard and Starobinski in the essays which ensue, a Genevan influence remains part of their background. This influence has functioned less as

an applied tool, in other words, than as a mode of reading honing my attention – however limited it has remained – to echoes both intratextual and contextual in Thoreau’s work.

Yet how, to linger on this topic a little longer, is an underlying Genevan approach compatible with the historian Keith Jenkins’ trenchant observation that we now “live within the general condition of *postmodernity*,” not as a matter of choice but of necessity? While denying us options in the larger sense, Jenkins somewhat insidiously allows that we nevertheless “can (and many of us still do) exercise a bit of picking and choosing between the remaining residues of old ‘certaintist’ modernisms (objectivity, disinterestedness, the ‘facts,’ unbiasedness, truth) and rhetorical, ‘postist’ discourses (readings, positionings, perspectives, constructions, verisimilitude) rather than going totally for one or the other.”²³

While I cannot hope to have avoided all ‘certaintist’ pitfalls as regards my own perspective, I will in the following try to elucidate a bit more of my readerly position as I have seen and tried to maintain it. Some of my perspective hinges on my having found an antimodern undercurrent in Thoreau’s writings – not least in *Walden* – which in some senses makes him all too easy to deconstruct. That is, whilst a book researched and written in a spirit of antagonism, such as Richard Bridgman’s *Dark Thoreau* (1982), is apposite in evoking a conflicted writer, it pays little heed to the circumstance that Thoreau often wrote in opposition to the mores and fashions of his contemporary society, and thus found himself questioning not only institutional authority and lawmakers but also fellow Concord villagers and friends. Conflict will stem from driving one’s pen as a stake into contested ground. Bridgman for his part finds in Thoreau an “advocate both of the supreme value of the individual and of the benign glory of nature” yet where “[m]any of Thoreau’s statements and images qualify, undermine, and even directly challenge these ideas” – in sum to Bridgman the effusions of a “deeply pessimistic man” whose attempts to order his observations of what we would here call *natura extensa* did not amount to an exalted Thoreauvian “flower[ing] of truth” but rather to “evasion and blur.”²⁴ This I strongly feel misprizes both Thoreau’s rhetorical proficiency and continued relevance as a socio-cultural crit-

ic, not to mention his novel systematic insights regarding the functions of *natura extensa*, while also downplaying Thoreau's emphasis on his readers' responsibility of sharing in the meaning-making quest.

However before discussing the ramifications of Thoreau's antimodernist streak further, allow me some further remarks on the affinities – after all – between the Geneva school and more recent theory. Comparing some of the latter's enduring tenets to the current state of literary criticism, which following Jenkins is more or less informed by poststructuralist and hence deconstructive theory, there are continuities as well as incompatibilities to note. There seem first of all to be shared opinions regarding the value of close reading; of paying attention to the productions of meaning; and of remaining alive to binary oppositions within the chosen work. In this sense it can be argued that deconstruction is related to and indeed partly sprung from the Geneva school, while turning its methodology resolutely toward underminings rather than unifications or explications – much as J. Hillis Miller encountered Starobinski as a compelling guest lecturer and scholar at Johns Hopkins during his formative years, before profiling himself more radically as a deconstructionist at Yale. It has been well put that “whereas deconstruction unweaves the text in order to reveal the thread of language, the impulse of the Geneva critics goes the other way, attempting to show how language conjures up presence and meaning, even on the verge of madness, solipsism, or silence.”²⁵

Both deconstructionist and Genevan critics would recognize Saussure's classic distinction between signifier (word/sound-pattern) and signified (concept), to the effect that (arbitrary/changing) social conventions rather than (defined/fixed) natural correspondences guide the way language works. Saussure's concomitant thesis that language should be seen as an interdependent system of signs is of equal import. It renders words meaningful only as opposed to each other: distinguished linguistically by what they are not, they are structured by synchronic 'difference' rather than diachronic 'essence.' The upshot of this is a view of language as a flexible, autonomous system, set free from older conceptions of stable referentiality, intrinsic value, or necessary correspondences to a certain

'reality' or other. Etymology and philology should be approached as disciplines which might at best illustrate how language states and linguistic constructs are prone to change, not as instruments toward establishing origins.

While this specific horizon of expectation regarding language, however reasonable to us today, was not available to Thoreau, he did encounter something analogous with the conservative Unitarians of his day. The Unitarians, trailing Locke, held that language was an artificial system, based on transient social agreements that certain sounds convey certain meanings, while its words had no universal or transcendent significance: they must consequently be defined precisely and unambiguously upon every instance of use, in order for effective communication to take place.²⁶ Thoreau for his part vigorously resisted such a simultaneously instrumental and incidental view of language, urging instead with Emerson and other Transcendentalists that it held suggestive, symbolic powers beyond rote referentiality, and in addition that its basic building blocks – syllables and words – could at length be traced back to 'primitive' and finally natural origins.²⁷

There is an oft-expressed desire in Thoreau's writings – as exemplified by the inaugural quote to this introduction – to 'nail words to their primitive senses,' the etymological activity metaphorically described on other occasions as one of digging, burrowing, or diving down, all toward supposedly foundational pivots. Along the way Thoreau found allies in speculative linguists and philologists of his day, such as Richard Trench and Charles V. Kraitsir, who both in turn were openly indebted to Emerson. Trench, in his popular *The Study of Words* (1852), claimed language to be "fossil poetry," adding that "[m]any a single word is itself a concentrated poem, having stores of poetical thought and imagery laid upon it. Examine it, and it will be found to rest on some deep analogy of things natural and things spiritual" – even though "the image may have grown trite and ordinary" in the present.²⁸ Kraitsir (1846) for his part focused on the supposedly natural origins of words by classifying a number of vocalized sounds, finding in them the roots of a primeval, common *ur*-language as spoken before the Fall: "man, who, in [first] speaking, brings the external universe into relation with the spirit within himself; making the one stand for the other, by means of

a sound which symbolizes both.”²⁹ Kraitsir was enthusiastically promoted by the Transcendentalist reformer and educator Elizabeth Peabody, who already in an 1834 review had proposed that primeval-poetic language derives from nature. She published Kraitsir’s first book, entitled *The Significance of the Alphabet*, in 1846 at her own expense, and three years later brought out Thoreau’s controversial “Civil Disobedience” in her short-lived journal *Aesthetic Papers*.³⁰ In 1852 Kraitsir published a lengthier thesis under the aegis of Putnam’s of New York, with the wide-ranging title *Glossology: Being a Treatise on the Nature of Language and on the Language of Nature*, which work Thoreau’s famous thawing sandbank epiphany as described in the “Spring” chapter of *Walden* clearly owes to.

The point to be made here is that these speculative returns to original states of man, language and nature by the Transcendentalists and other 19th-century American and European intellectuals betokened a longing, however ambivalent or partial, to exit history and at least vicariously to enter a mythological realm untainted by modernity. The latter may not strictly speaking have been understood as timeless, but the character of time in such a world would be cyclical rather than linear. Of course few intellectuals envisioned contemporary culture actually halting its ways and returning, prodigal-like, in repentance to simpler ways. But there was clearly a modicum of hope that society could be swayed from its misguided direction more or less, and ideally to the extent that *natura extensa* could swallow, as Emerson once mused, the factory village and the railroad into its perceived larger order, just as it could the beehive and the spider’s geometrical web.³¹ A larger harmony, then, between nature abiding and culture unfolding.

For Thoreau the allure of a mythical Golden Age and the language of myth were of different orders, but they arguably converged to a degree in his attempt to understand and to portray his local natural environment as a seasonally revolving entity. This in turn has consequences for how to approach his writings critically in a fruitful way. Whereas a purely deconstructive analysis would challenge Thoreau’s coterminous attempts to ground language and to endow it with supra-referential pregnancy,³² such a maneuver would succeed at most in policing the boundaries of the strictly linguistic game deconstruction sees at play in texts

– while missing out on considering Thoreau’s larger quest (however practical or quixotic) to find an adequate means of expression for the integrality he divines in the plenum of *natura extensa*. (A circumstance so obvious that it is often overlooked, Thoreau’s interest in his natural environment was *all-encompassing* at a time when natural history was branching out into ever more specialities – zoology for instance into mammalogy, ichthyology, ornithology, and entomology, amongst several others – all the while becoming increasingly insular vis-à-vis each other.) The Genevan approach, allowing for sustained study of an entire corpus and what this may or may not ‘conjure up’ by way of authorial inclinations or obsessions, seems more helpful in this regard.

Yet insofar as one accepts a vital aspect of Thoreau’s enduring interest in *natura extensa* to be one of trying to comprehend a complex – and, to a lesser or greater degree, culturally compromised – signified with as little of preconception as possible, then a movement away from rigorously anthropocentric theory (such as both deconstruction and Genevan probing provide) is in due course motivated. A valuable theoretical complement in this respect can be found in ecocriticism, a young discipline attentive to relations between human beings and their natural environments, and to scientific understandings of *natura extensa* as these have developed over time. Ecocriticism, as formulated by its American founders in the early 1990’s, “negotiates between the human and nonhuman,” with the underlying premise that human culture “is connected to the physical world, affecting it and being affected by it.”³³ One might of course ask what literary texts or indeed any materials pertaining to subjects commonly grouped under the term ‘humanities’ can reasonably hope to play when human culture is so single-mindedly busy, as it has been especially in the Occident during the past twohundred-odd years, with ubiquitous technological developments and industrial transformations of *natura extensa*. The Thoreauvian and Americanist scholar Lawrence Buell has proposed a tentative answer which merits consideration: “If, as environmental philosophers contend, western metaphysics and ethics need revision before we can address today’s environmental problems, then environmental crisis involves a crisis of

the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity's relation to it."³⁴

Reflecting a first phase of ecocriticism fixing its lenses on literary texts, Buell in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995) outlined a four-pronged set of criteria which would at once serve to identify and valorize what he initially titles "nature writing" (the older, generic term) but soon specifies as "environmentally oriented work": "1. *The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.*" "2. *The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.*" "3. *Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.*" "4. *Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.*"³⁵ Most of Thoreau's non-political, free-ranging texts would meet these requirements, and Buell realizes as much in making Thoreau the touchstone for his study. Indeed Buell's subtitle could, as part of an early but nevertheless consolidating ecocritical work, just as well have been suffixed *The Formation of A Green American Canon* — as *Walden* especially has proven a cornerstone for the movement by dint of its crossover appeal as a literary classic and college-course staple in its own right, beyond its 'green' credentials.

While my indebtedness to Buell and ecocriticism in general will become evident in the articles to follow, I should like here to comment a little further on Thoreau's method of setting forth *natura extensa* in his writings. In his Journal of 1851, Thoreau writes: "I do not know where to find in any literature whether ancient or modern — any adequate account of that Nature with which I am acquainted. Mythology comes nearest to it of any."³⁶ A few years earlier, in the spring of 1848 with both *Walden* and *A Week* in draft form, he had opined that "[t]he most comprehensive the most pithy & significant book is the mythology."³⁷ Of course Thoreau did not go on to write anything resembling traditional mythology (except incidentally), but it is interesting to note that this cultural mode fundamentally informed Thoreau's choices of both literary and environmental narrativity. One may point here to the twin temporality at play in the later, post-1850 Journal and its corollaries — and, it should be added, in *A Week's* folding

of a two-week trip into one; as well as in *Walden's* compression of two years and more into a single annum.³⁸ On the one hand Thoreau's reader encounters depictions of linear time and a succession of singular, memorable events, on the other a latently 'mythical' striving for cyclical-typical insight and imprint. The texts present themselves as temporally bound to specifics, while also gesturing toward the timeless in pausing to deal with aggregates and averages accrued from longer periods of observation. This is in keeping with an aesthetic often aspiring to the representational (if not the redemptive); in other words for writings wishing to present truths and insights both individual and collective: "what is true for one is truer still for a thousand."³⁹

The historian Karen Armstrong, along with Mircea Eliade and other scholars of religion, has detected a modern watershed regarding conceptions of myth, namely when they increasingly came to be seen as synonymous with lies:

Since the eighteenth century, we have developed a scientific view of history; we are concerned above all with what actually happened. But in the pre-modern world, when people wrote about the past they were more concerned with what an event had meant. A myth was an event which, in some sense, had happened once, but which also happened all the time. Because of our strictly chronological view of history, we have no word for such an occurrence, but mythology is an art form that points beyond history to what is timeless in human existence, helping us get beyond the chaotic flux of random events, and glimpse the core of reality.⁴⁰

I believe something similar to this insight took hold of Thoreau in his combined role of erudite naturalist, dedicated walker and journaling writer: he wanted not only to comprehend *natura extensa* in its precise functions and discrete events, but also to grasp what he intuited as its deeper, durable truths. In his Journal of the spring of 1848, Thoreau writes (with characteristic disdain for punctuation): "Mythology is ancient history or biography[.] The oldest history still memorable becomes a mythus- It is the fruit which history at last bears- /---/ What is today a diffuse biography—was anciently before printing was discovered- -a short & pithy tradition a century was equal to a thousand years. To day you have the story told at length with all its accompaniments[.] In mythology you have the essential &

memorable parts alone—the you & I the here & there the now & then being omitted—”⁴¹ Thoreau arguably found a *mode of encircling* his grand subject, temporally and spatially congenial to this aspiration, in mythology; it furnished him, we might venture, with a fitting *chronotope* in Mikhail Bakhtin’s sense.⁴² As Claude Lévi-Strauss adds in his *Structural Anthropology* (1963), “what gives the myth [as an instance of a more expansive mythology, *my comm.*] an operational value is that /.../ it explains the present and the past as well as the future.”⁴³ This insight meshes with Thoreau’s habitual exaltation of the here and now, of rejoicingly toeing the line of the present moment and precise place (this plant, in this development stage, in this spot), while ever on the lookout for archetypal experience (what the plant means to the environment, to the observer, and ultimately *sub specie aeternitatis*).

Overview & summary of articles

A guiding premise of the following essays has been that Thoreau's trajectory as a walker and thinker, reader and writer was largely circular, albeit in a valuable sense. While apparently retaining aspects of his early Transcendentalist faith throughout his writing life, in covering his chosen ground unremittingly and with persistent curiosity Thoreau accumulated new knowledge and perspectives to complement, challenge and develop his conceptions of the natural world and of himself.⁴⁴ For instance, as expounded in the first article of the present collection, "Immanence and Transcendence," already Thoreau's early essay "A Winter Walk" (1843) – its generic and derivative aesthetics regardless – displays two at once distinct and exploratory attitudes toward nature. One is transcendental, emphasizing nature's correspondence to higher laws and the human psyche; the other immanent, finding nature also to be systemic in character, or in other words as communicative on its own terms beyond divine or human concerns. Whilst previous scholars have tended to find Thoreau here siding squarely with a variant of Emersonian Transcendentalism, Thoreau's nascent proto-ecological interest is in my reading also present and noteworthy in this early text.

Undeniably, the narrator of "A Winter Walk" interprets several phenomena he encounters while plodding across his snowy landscape (smoke, fire, warmth) in *pars-pro-toto* fashion as metonymic-symbolic repositories of universal, transcendent truth or *cosmos*. We might rephrase this to say that Thoreau in these instances gravitates toward a deductive view of external nature, whereby discrete natural facts are seen to reflect an axiomatically understood higher meaning or order – for example God, Spirit, or Virtue, as variably invoked in "A Winter Walk." Concurrently, and following the logic of correspondences, external nature as a divine vessel imparts spiritual insights to the honestly questing self – that is, into the writer-explorer's own and proper inner nature.

These mutually reinforcing deductive outlooks validate external nature as a vehicle of communication between the divine and the human. Yet while evoking *natura extensa* as akin to a medieval 'book of nature,' in effect benevolently offering

a valid, substitute scripture to the Biblical texts, they also render the same *natura extensa* a tool. Once its purpose as a worldly conduit is fulfilled, one may infer, it should be discarded in favor of one's further striving toward heaven. Insofar as Thoreau realized this presumed transience, however, he defiantly resisted its implications. The Concord landscape remained his muse throughout his writing and thinking career, and, to paraphrase his Journal, he never had enough of her.⁴⁵

Indeed, Thoreau shows himself to have harbored inductive leanings parallel to his deductive ones from early on, and notably he esteems his natural environment also for its own sake in "A Winter Walk." Significantly, his narrator apprehends select phenomena (a wood-chip, a dried-up beech leaf) as pieces toward a better understanding of worldly, immanent truth or *synthesis* by the traces they bear. His famous "fact" which will "one day flower in a truth" in this inquisitive mode no longer springs as a cipher explained from a single observation, but properly ensues over time as an aggregate result: one sprung from the naturalist's doggedness in surveying the same terrain repeatedly, spying it from various angles, logging observations, while mulling over impressions, analogies, deviances, possible patterns.⁴⁶ Much later, when Thoreau had literally covered the territory of his youthful winter foray on innumerable ensuing excursions – and having duly described them in a Journal by then resembling a dense, multilayered palimpsest – he could contribute to emerging ecological science in correctly identifying the relevant natural forces and agents behind tree renewal and migration, in "An Address on the Succession of Forest Trees" (1860).

While I come to argue that Thoreau eventually placed greater value on accumulated observations regarding natural phenomena – so approximating the 'probability' championed by Aristotle regarding character portrayal in the *Poetics*, stressing their proper consistency – than on discrete and spontaneous impressions, this did not entail his abandonment of a belief in transcendent laws. The latter, as I posit in the "Character and Nature" essay toward the end of this collection, could even to some extent be seen as emanating out of the work of summarizing and elucidating the former. Seeking the 'probable' would after all offer an alternative approach toward the 'ideal,' at least so far as the ideal was felt to be

imputed to the natural. By such lights one could confidently await a coalescence of Plato's abstract ideal and Aristotle's empirical average when it came to *natura extensa*: both could after all be said to define a type which may rarely if ever be found fully embodied and developed in a particular specimen, yet nevertheless remain one toward which all others are understood to gravitate or aspire.

Whereas notions of immanence and transcendence could coexist peacefully in his texts, a more vexing problem for Thoreau concerned the parameters of his writing craft. If one should assume his abiding intellectual and spiritual position to be one beckoned by the idea that *natura extensa* harbors divine truths as a form of alternate scripture; that these truths are accessible to earnest and innocent seekers; and furthermore that the said seekers, in answering the Emersonian call to become poets for the young America, could redeem their readers to a virtuous life by faithfully recording their outdoor visions and experiences in poems and prose (I believe this to be a valid summation, at least in outline), then a host of attendant challenges come with it. One may begin by considering the troublesome concept of external nature itself. Far from an original Eden or untouched wilderness, 19th-century Concord and its environs formed a veritable 'middle landscape' in Leo Marx's memorable coinage: a criss-cross of roads and paths, girdled by woodlots, fences, stone hedges and ditches, patched by agricultural fields and by early mid-century straddled by railroad tracks, it was a dynamic area transformed by centuries of cultural and technological activity.

A telling flash of progressing modernity can be noted in Thoreau's corpus already in "A Winter Walk," regardless the essay's overall character of snugly secluded winter pastoral. It occurs when Thoreau's narrator concedes that "[n]o domain of nature is quite closed to man at all times" – whereupon he straps on skates and finds his local river "made pervious to our swift shoes, as if a thousand railroads had been made into it."⁴⁷ There is both exhilaration and suppressed worry in this passage, as the looming query over the character of *natura extensa* is suddenly demonstrated to be tightly bound to the character of technology. Rather than respecting its integrity as a sign or symbol of higher laws, technology unavoidably objectifies and remodels what it encounters in the form of outward

nature. In this sense, the metaphysical accessibility of nature becomes inversely proportional to the degree to which it has been technologically transformed. The ice, we might posit in vicariously joining Thoreau's skater, will yield to a thousand railroads when we traverse its horizontal (or physical) bounds, but in doing so the same ice will lose its transparency to us, become less and less amenable to vertical (or metaphysical) inquiry.

I strive to show Thoreau's ambivalence toward the emerging Boston-Fitchburg railroad in my second essay, "The Advent of American Rail." Employed as a tutor in New York during much of its construction in and around Concord in 1843, Thoreau eagerly sought news of its progression, while also expressing his satisfaction at being spared the sight of the worksites and the influx of Irish laborers in the village. In an earlier college theme essay of 1837, he had touched upon railroad technology as an exemplification of the 'Commercial Spirit' of the day, which he chiefly deplored as driven by an "unmanly love of wealth" but also guardedly admired inasmuch as it spoke of a yearning for freedom, and furthermore – as he put it – betokened a day when humanity would no longer find itself a "slave of matter" and hence more similar to its supposed creator.⁴⁸ By 1843, however, Thoreau's qualified enthusiasm for macro-scale technological innovations had waned. In a review of J.A. Etzler's utopian treatise *The Paradise Within the Reach of All Men without Labour, by Powers of Nature and Machinery* (1842), he made clear that he no longer considered a Promethean metamorphosis of nature desirable: "Every machine /.../ seems a slight outrage against universal laws," he wrote, adding that "[a]lready nature is serving all those uses which science slowly derives on a much higher and grander scale to him that will be served by her."⁴⁹

Yet the railroad transformed Thoreau's Concord landscape and ushered in social changes that in hindsight seem inevitable. For some villagers, novel business opportunities arose in selling farm produce, handicrafts and day labor to urban clusters interconnected by the new tracks; for others the railroad came as a liberation from traditional smallholder farming in offering new and wider prospects out West.⁵⁰ For Thoreau, who largely eschewed conventional enterprise and likewise remained immune to the Westward urge, it nevertheless enabled

efficient travel to Boston and back in a day, allowing him to satisfy his appetite for books and other curated materials at libraries and museums. It also aided him to travel comparatively swiftly to towns where he was engaged to lecture, or, more rarely, to reach such tracts as he wished to explore further on foot (Maine, Cape Cod, Canada, Minnesota). Thoreau was not a Luddite, and while he downplayed the logistical benefits of his railroad travel in his published writings, he in fact made use of the transport fairly regularly. By the early 1850's the railroad had also become such an integral part of life in and around Concord that Thoreau could spontaneously praise its causeway, memorably christened the Deep Cut, for facilitating his walks. At another juncture he could acknowledge its paradoxically aiding the willow, stunted elsewhere by the road's progression, with trackside patches of newly viable soil from which to reassert itself. And despite himself he could also enjoy the elevated views from its tracks.

In sum Thoreau tended to embrace the railroad's pragmatic aspects to some extent in the privacy of his Journal, while more often assailing it as a degenerate symbol of commerce and shallow goals from idealistic vantages in his published writings. This latter, jeremiad-like Thoreauvian attitude has been well explicated by Marx in his analysis of the "Sounds" chapter of Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), describing Thoreau's narrator as mounting a merely rhetorical defense against the railroad's encroachment upon his pastoral tranquility at the pond:⁵¹ hence the title of Marx' seminal work, *The Machine in the Garden* (1964). The putatively unspoiled object of Thoreauvian desire, in other words, is exposed as a chimera: Thoreau's poet being confined to apprehend what once presumably was, but no longer remains, pristine nature.

My next essay, entitled "Tenth Muse Errant," gratefully builds on Marx' interpretation, but it also departs from his and other Thoreauvian scholars' common assumption in one significant, indeed crucial respect – and this departure is prompted by the idealistic premises mentioned above. It concerns Thoreau's gradual and reluctant realization – in my reading of "Sounds" and other primary sources – that the written word is a potent technology in its own right; technology reflecting much more than physical machines and their auxiliaries. Granted

language to Thoreau in an ambitious, higher sense was at the mercy of the Babel syndrome; its welter of tongues often alien to each other; its profusion of nomenclatures and intents no longer fluidly traded. But this state of affairs notwithstanding, the instrumental power of language – and especially of the printed word – could not be gainsaid. As a tool of standardizing and spreading suitably packaged information, engineered language underpinned the technological innovation and burgeoning economies of scale whose factories and infrastructure were everywhere apparent to Thoreau: the tokens of a new industrial age. And all this while his poet somewhat ironically strove to convey rarefied, nascent or otherwise linguistically challenging concepts through the same medium.

Written language, in facing the task of doing justice to *natura extensa*, is then in the Thoreauvian nature-writing context analogically akin to an involuntary railroad obliged to lay *its* chosen tracks across a hitherto living, dynamic, and – at least in an aesthetic sense – endlessly *potential* natural environment (with due respect of the degree to which it has already been compromised culturally). Regardless its lofty ambitions and evident regard for its subject, the resulting Thoreauvian narrative must per definition delimit its objects, structure and order them in a certain progression; in other words it must ‘process its commodities’ in an underlying, purely technical sense. Thus the Marxian machine is not only in the garden, disturbing the natural world and the writer wishing to translate its bounties. It is also, indelibly, *in the text*.

With this realization of technological osmosis, of even the most earnest of writers necessarily becoming a tool of his or her tools, Thoreau’s mission in *Walden* becomes one of awakening to action. He may seek to tell of his own insights as far as these go, employing any number of rhetorical techniques, but harkening to the truths imparted by what is left of *natura extensa* is ultimately, as we are given to understand, at the discretion of the reader’s own willingness to situate him- or herself outdoors; to open her/his senses to such natural surroundings as pertain, and reflect upon what yields in the process. If the pretext of gaining practical contact with things and ideas on one’s own was not acutely felt before reading *Walden*, then a pressing errand of its narrator can be seen as

one of urging the reader toward such individual experience and reflection *post-text*. For there is for Thoreau the writer no recourse to a prelapsarian language which could of- and by itself redeem its addressee, regardless his frequently expressed desire – as exemplified by the quote inaugurating this introductory chapter – to find words *rooted*, *budding* and *bearing fruit* as it were of their own accord; no way he can dig up such fantasized natural words from the ground and passionately *transplant* them to his page, with their supposedly primordial features intact. For the page with its words necessarily forms part of a fallible human sphere: resulting in a cultivated garden bearing the traces of countless generations of horticulturalists and their circumstances, their grafts and interpolations, as opposed to an unmonitored wilderness. This antipodal tension of a language dreamed versatile and transparent versus the culturally and historically marked language actually at hand is one that animates Thoreau creatively, and I showcase some of his attempts to bridge the interval.

My ensuing “Obscurity and Authority” article, the fourth installment of the present collection, refocuses on what language as engaged by Thoreau can after all endeavor to accomplish, albeit subversively. For despite the intrinsically hopeless challenges involved in overcoming entrenched culture and in subduing newfangled, intrusive technology – as revealed by the railroad and its wider symbolism in the preceding essay – the writer’s response does not become one of resignation. In lieu of conceding defeat Thoreau deploys variable strategies of mythologizing the railroad (thus effectively removing it from history) and of imaginatively re-naturalizing its attendant landscape transformations (so down playing its tangible ‘unnatural’ effects as temporary). While it remains debatable whether Thoreau succeeds in meaningfully subduing the railroad and its associated forces by such rhetorical means, in other words by literally trying to *write them off* as matters of topical concern, Thoreau obviously seized the opportunity in *Walden* and elsewhere to use the limitations of language as commonly read and understood to his advantage. While an inability to access untouched nature, to achieve transparency in his accounts, or simply to make unpleasant things go away by force of argument might stoke a measure of frustration in Thoreau’s

writer in “Sounds,” turning the tables to realize the potentials of language as a conduit of expedient obscurity remained open to him.

An indication that Thoreau was aware of and could appreciate such a mode of writing is found already in his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849). In a section on his reading during a pause in the depicted journey, Thoreau praises several Hindu scriptures, prominently the *Laws of Manu*, for their suggestiveness. Manu’s book which “by noble gestures and inclinations renders many words unnecessary”; whose “sentences open, as we read them, unexpensively, and, at first, almost unmeaningly [*sic*], as the petals of a flower,” Thoreau enthuses, and then delivers his coda: “Give me a sentence which no intelligence can understand. There must be a kind of life and palpitation to it, and under its words a kind of blood must circulate forever.”⁵²

Working on successive drafts of *A Week* during his longer stay at Walden Pond, Thoreau repeatedly sought advice from his mentor Emerson. Beyond employing him for practical help, Emerson had taken on Thoreau as his literary protégé, and advanced his writerly vocation by editing and publishing his reviews and essays in the Transcendentalist journal *The Dial* – “Natural History of Massachusetts” (1842) and “A Winter Walk” (1843) among them. Interestingly, Emerson had chided Thoreau for his tendency to employ paradoxes and contradictions in “A Winter Walk” where, he felt, clear-cut alternatives were at hand. Now, in reading *A Week* in draft form several years later, Emerson was made uncomfortable by Thoreau’s insertion of a critique against the *Bhagavad Gita* in his section on Hindu scriptures (the same as contained praise for *The Laws of Manu*). In his Journal of 1848 Emerson commented: “Books are like rainbows to be thankfully received in their first impression & not examined & surveyed by theodolite & chain, as if they were part of the railroad. /---/ I owed, – my friend & I, – owed a magnificent day to the *Bhagavat Geeta*. /---/ Let us not now go back & apply a minute criticism to it, but cherish the venerable oracle.”⁵³

To the extent that Thoreau offered Emerson an analytical, ‘railroad-like’ reading of the *Bhagavad Gita* in his submitted draft of *A Week*, its later, published version mostly gives praise to the *Gita*, only allowing its narrator to frown upon

what he identifies as a questionable promulgation of passivity in facing life's trials and evils. More subtly, however, Thoreau seems to disagree with Emerson regarding literary evocativeness. Whereas Emerson appears disinclined to revisit the *Bhagavad Gita* in a critical mood, implying the risk of losing a favorable first impression, Thoreau for his part praises the *Laws of Manu*-imbued prose "which no intelligence can understand" – adding that it must remain unintelligible in a kind of perennial, suspended animation. In other words its successive readers (which may well be returning, inquisitive ones) must sense, in Thoreau's formulation, that behind or below the ostensible obscurity of the written there resides a durable "kind of life" – an allure and invitation, one might say, to contemplate the elusive words in question ever anew. They must be so skillfully wrought as to have their readers remain confident that a species of eternal life adheres to them, while also retaining an ever-deferred promise that we may grasp their underlying life if only we concentrate enough, or engage our higher mental faculties to a sufficient degree. All this calls for a mode of writing and reading far removed from the instrumental, balancing precariously between the pitfalls of the unutterable and the unintelligible.

As I strive to show in my "Obscurity and Authority" essay, the radical option of purposely writing obliquely is one Thoreau chose to pursue in the "Economy" chapter of *Walden*, notably in launching the subsequently famous passage on the lost hound, bay horse, and turtle-dove. Taking my cue from the rich array of responses this passage has generated over the years, several of which also argue for a specific referentiality at the expense of others, I propose that Thoreau's intent at this juncture in *Walden* is more likely to impress his authority to speak about the trammels of his readers. He does this by endowing his narrative persona's ethos with truthfulness and laudable purpose: claiming to have lost the mentioned creatures and/or that which they might signify, he conscientiously seeks to retrieve his loss in the narrative present. Thoreau's protagonist also signals the necessary cooperation of his fellow travelers (for the nonce his readers), so actively involving them in a search that – whatever it may yield regarding the lost creatures as such – also becomes a larger meaning-making quest.

How did Thoreau arrive at the risky tactic of doing away with perspicuity? This would seem odd in a book whose introductory program calls on “every writer, first or last, [to give] a simple and sincere account of his own life”⁵⁴ It would also seem to jar with established ideals of rhetoric, such as were still taught at Harvard during Thoreau’s student days in the early to mid 1830’s. Upon closer inspection, however, rhetoric reveals itself to have been a subject in transition at Thoreau’s college and elsewhere at the time. Literacy was spreading, the availability of inexpensive printed materials as well, which made the traditional view of written composition as merely a preparatory phase for oratory increasingly untenable. Contemporary rhetorical manuals were written not only for professionals but also for interested amateurs, eager to tap into the rapidly growing literary market as both writers and readers. Partially as a reflection of these broader social trends, the liberal-minded rhetoric professor at Harvard of the time, Edward Tyrell Channing, continued to teach the classics – Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian – but also included later theorists such as George Campbell and Richard Whately in the curriculum. Channing furthermore assigned writing themes that were analysed and graded as literary texts in their own right. In encountering Campbell and Whately’s respective teachings in class, Thoreau would have learnt of the ‘dark side’ of rhetoric. Far from shunning the topic, Campbell and Whately maintain that to better comprehend perspicuity, one must also strive to understand its opposite, obscurity. Saliently regarding prophetic narratives, allegories, parables and enigmas, Campbell and Whately prove prepared, at least in a roundabout way, to sanction the use of deliberate obscurity. If the audience or readers of such literary modes are convinced there is latent meaning to a certain diffuse statement being made, as it were just out of reach, this may suffice to assure them the speaker or writer in question is attempting to communicate a truth apprehended which is nevertheless exceedingly difficult to express. All this while Campbell and Whately both warn of the high stakes involved with placing one’s bet on wilful obscurity – if caught muddling one’s thoughts or spouting nonsense, one’s reputation will suffer, likely devastatingly so.

Channing also shared an inclination with Emerson in promoting what both men saw as the rudiments of a more locus-genuine, American style of expression. They wished themselves and their acolytes to do away with unnecessary padding and mannerism, while seeking new, fresh metaphors from the ground on which they stood: namely, as they saw it, on fertile New-World American loam, rather than on the decay of Europe's Old-World soils. In the sense of rejecting the 'rotten diction' Emerson and Channing saw as emanating from Europe, Thoreau was also, if indirectly, nationalistic and even provincial in his opinion of literary style. In *A Week* he juxtaposes a rejection of embellishment with a plain mode of writing predicated on bodily effort, to the extent that he almost (but not quite) does away with academic learning altogether:

The scholar may be sure that he writes the tougher truth for the calluses on his palms. They give firmness to the sentence. Indeed, the mind never makes a great and successful effort without a corresponding effort of the body. We are often struck by the force and precision of style to which hard-working men, unpracticed in writing, easily attain, when required to make the effort. As if plainness, and vigor, and sincerity, the ornaments of style, were better learned on the farm and in the workshop than in the schools. The sentences written by such rude hands are nervous and tough, like hardened thongs, the sinews of the deer, or the roots of the pine.⁵⁵

This is how Thoreau would characterize his own writing, and he certainly adhered to a corporeal regimen similar to the laboring man's throughout his career. The further thought that immersion in physical work and attendant exposure to a favorable environment would condition the resulting style is also one echoing throughout Thoreau's texts. Indeed one may also note in the passage a half-disguised desire for a world and language of unadorned, sturdy necessity rather than of fanciful whim: one in other words offering congenial nexuses between things organically related, such as roots to a tree, or sinews to animal limbs.

Yet there were nevertheless valuable rewards of learning, earthly as well as spiritual, to be had. Thoreau read voraciously in the classics at college, and was also familiarized with religious treatises such as the Vedic, Eddaic and Bib-

lical texts. From these sources he developed a lifelong interest in mythology and parable, and as a writer did not hesitate to create set-piece myths and parables of his own, especially in attempting to dress his visions, yearnings and ecstasies in words. The hound, bay horse, and turtle-dove passage in *Walden* arguably furnishes elements of both, while as mentioned earlier Thoreau also felt the allure of mythical-cyclical time and space in conveying *natura extensa*. Thus Thoreau was occasionally prepared to bracket his dedication to a rustic aesthetic, in favor of more enigmatic or sublime modes of expression: "I fear chiefly," as he puts it in his festive conclusion to *Walden*, "lest my expression may not be *extra-vagant* enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced." He then muses on attaining a prophetic voice: "I desire to speak somewhere *without* bounds; like a man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments; for I am convinced that I cannot exaggerate enough even to lay the foundation of a true expression."⁵⁶

In the penultimate essay of the present collection, entitled "Character and Nature," I discuss how Thoreau finds human character and environmental nature analogous. More specifically, Thoreau suggests that they relate to each other in both exhibiting dynamic processes or *styles* of being, rather than inert essences. To approach and understand them, Thoreau sets much store in a patient identifying and evaluating of patterns and recurring traits, rather than trusting in a momentary focus on isolated events or phenomena, transitory and/or chance-induced as these same occurrences so often turn out to be. I begin with a consideration of two literary portraits which Thoreau wrote respectively over Sir Walter Raleigh (1843) and Thomas Carlyle (1847), rendering them in order as examples of the commendable "man of action" and, in Thoreau's droll formulation, "the hero, as a literary man."⁵⁷ In weighing Raleigh's and Carlyle's works, Thoreau is less preoccupied with their immediate topics than over how their lives and struggles reflect themselves in their styles, and vice versa. *Style* to Thoreau in this aggregate sense is no longer a choice – as a temporary preference, say, of one rhetorical strategy over another may still be – but a form of necessary expression;

necessary that is to say in reliably bringing the underlying, accumulated character to light: “Nothing goes by luck in composition,” as he argues in his Journal of 1841, “it allows of no trick. The best you can write will be the best you are. Every sentence is the result of a long probation. –The author’s character is read from title page to end – of this he never corrects the proofs – we read it as the essential character of a handwriting without regard to the flourishes.”⁵⁸ But surely the trivial may be filtered out? In other words, moments of repose or other, more or less regular private distractions that pertain to most lives, including writing ones? Yet Thoreau allows of no such intervals or lacunae. *Everything* matters, as he goes on to impress in the very same Journal entry: “How we eat, drink, sleep, and use our desultory hours now in these indifferent days, with no eye to observe, and no occasion to excite us – determines, determines our authority and capacity for the time to come.”

What ensues from this Thoreauvian mode of reasoning is a view of *all writing*, regardless of genre, as autobiographical in the final analysis. In a context where everything matters biographically to some extent, devising a method to describe larger contours and patterns of the life under study (whether one’s own or that of another) assumes the utmost importance, else one lose oneself in a mass of turbulent detail. Thoreau’s answer, closer at hand and more mundane than one might perhaps have foreseen, is to faithfully wade through all available materials, keeping tally of such things as recur and prove noteworthy. He reads everything available to him by Raleigh, and later by Carlyle. This empirical attention, as related to the realm of literary scholarship and the genre of literary portraits, has a seminal precursor in Aristotle. In his surviving *Poetics*, Aristotle emphasizes self-consistency to the dramatic character. S/he must in other words above all be true to him- or herself in order to persuade an audience of verisimilitude – this even to the extent that Aristotle urges inconsistent characters to be portrayed as consistently unpredictable. Make your portrait probable, in other words compatible with expectation, and you will convince.

From this at once encompassing and deterministic premise regarding human psychology and artistic endeavor, I proceed to submit that an analogous

epistemological faith in sleuthing for pattern and recognition (or for *style* in a sense tangential to that of human nature) seems to sustain Thoreau's ambitious cataloging of his landscape during his mature years. As mentioned earlier, Thoreau began reading works of natural history in earnest from the late 1840's onward, and started to compile the first of what would become several hundred lists and charts on every conceivable local seasonal phenomenon, such as the migration cycles of birds and the leafing, flowering, fruiting and seeding of plants. Thoreau evidently sought to discover lawbound process in *natura extensa*, dedicately logging his various field sightings, soundings, and other impressions, in time synthesizing them into predictions when the observations collected and sorted so allowed. Thoreau's probable goal with these gargantuan materials – hinted at now and then in the later Journal, and once mentioned as forming the basis of “my New Testament”⁵⁹ – was, as pointed out earlier, to create a “Kalendar” of Concord and its environs, transcending in scope and ambition the Englishman John Evelyn's famous *Kalendarium Hortense, or Gardener's Almanack* of 1664. The Thoreauvian *Kalendar* would present a yearly cycle with illustrative charts, as a blueprint for naturalists and interested amateurs aiming to be present at (or at least aware of) any number of natural events as these tended to recur in the locality.⁶⁰

The concluding essay of the present collection, “Figuring Henry,” takes as its starting-point another set of illustrative charts: Thoreau's famous alimentary tables in the “Economy” chapter of *Walden*, purporting to accurately list the outlays for his nourishment during eight months of his stay at Walden Pond. I read the submitted expenses alongside his narrator's somewhat surprising and sweeping admission, closely following upon the figures given, that while he did not turn down occasional invitations to dine out, this circumstance should not “in the least affect a comparative statement like this.”⁶¹ In a narrow sense the unquantified meals of course do influence how we read the preceding alimentary tables. But it seems to me more interesting to approach Thoreau's admission as an invitation to ruminate on what autobiographical writing can hope to achieve. What duties does Thoreau have toward his readers, if any, and what may his

readers correspondingly expect from reading him? As a prelude to such questions, I venture a potted history of American autobiography, finding a series of dichotomies between the idiosyncratic and representative; the private and public; the individual and the collective, to both stimulate and discourage its practitioners. Thoreau seems alive to these authorial tensions in *Walden*. He subtly encourages his readers to share them by reflecting upon the many connotations of the word “account” his narrator sets in motion in his book, from the casually everyday over the precise and regulated to the sublime and end-of-day. In an intricate passage linking the wearing of layers of garments to rings in the stem of a vascular plant, Thoreau’s narrator informs the reader that the Latin term for the vital layer of inner bark in the plant is called the *liber*. This in turn ushers in the connotation of *book*, and Thoreau can be understood to offer a metacritical comment on what he finds himself doing in putting pen to paper, and at what cost. To the extent that he arrives at a conclusion, it points toward the necessary belatedness of writing to living. The two are intimately and perennially interconnected, and their embrace can seem as durable as that of land and water, sky and clouds. Thoreau will employ myth, parable and symbol to counter the linearity of time; he will strive, over the course of countless excursions long and short, to describe the archetypal in *natura extensa*, as if to mock the progression of the clock and the lower-case calendar alike. Yet he is nevertheless obliged to work with fallible tools and a dearth of time. All the while tangible effects of technological innovation and industrial investment transform his Concord environs.

As I suggest in closing “Figuring Henry,” the written finally has to take leave of the environment that prompted it, and of the sentient writer having chosen the words to depict it. For there is, despite Thoreau’s views of the inevitability of style when it comes to human character, and by implication that of *natura extensa*, at length also something that escapes it – something, importantly, going on outside the text: life itself, in all its mutability and plasticity. Soon before his meditation on the necessity of style, as first raised in the Journal and later exemplified in the context of Raleigh and Carlyle, Thoreau admits to a conundrum: “I cannot tell you what I am,” he states in his Journal of 1841, “more than a ray of

the summer's sun- What I am-I am- and say not. Being is the great explainer."⁶² This is a complex statement to unwrap, unless of course one take it simply at face value. On an immediate level it functions as a writerly warning to the reader (and, a little more subtly, as Thoreau's caution to himself in taking on the task of self-expression in writing) not to confuse the resulting portrait with the model. That is to say, there will always be breaks and/or intervals between 'being' and 'being explained,' much like the platitude advising us that a 'true interpretation' is an oxymoron. But what are we to make of this in our chosen context when, in a Journal entry of only a couple of days later, Thoreau asserts that style is unavoidable; that the life actually lived will as it were seep through the textual weave to give it its impression, like a cloth dipped in dye? The writer's character will then emanate, as we recall him stating, from his being "read from title page to end – of this he never corrects the proofs." This duality sets up as marked a contrast as the one between an immanent and transcendent view of *natura extensa*, as called up earlier in "A Winter Walk." But can these notions of an all-defeating 'style' and impregnable 'life' credibly coexist? Arguably they can do so only if there is a quiet understanding of a supra-linguistic realm of 'being,' pertaining to the human as well as the environmental, which 'being explained' cannot muster within its own confines; or, that is to say, by following the rules and limitations of spoken or written language. What Thoreau's passage informing us that he cannot give us his "am" impresses is that while his written words are present, his life is not. The writer of *Walden* was in this sense absent already by the late summer of 1854, when the book was published and so, at last, reached the desks and chairs and laps of its readers. From there on it was their responsibility to respond to it, if they so wished, after their circumstances. And so it remains for *Walden's* readers.

“Not without reason did they (our ancestors) call the /.../ Earth mother & Ceres, & think that they who cultivated it led a pious & useful life /.../ But now by means of rail-roads & steamboats & telegraphs the country is denaturalized.”

Thoreau's Journal, February 8, 1854⁶³

Coda

The essays gathered in this anthology all emanate from what an anthropologist would call an emic perspective. That is, as inspired by the give-and-take of Genevan-school *confiance* and *méfiance*, I have unabashedly chosen to see Thoreau's written corpus first and foremost as a culture of its own, whose internal elements and functionings I have striven to map and interpret accordingly. This has not precluded etic awareness or analysis, however – merely put it on hold, for contrasts to appear more vividly when the emic and etic are juxtaposed. Every (self)culture, however insular to its own conviction, has sooner or later to take outside schemes and pressures (or in other words context) into account, regardless whether it wishes to or not. In Thoreau's case, the etic becomes significant when defined as a coeval, external questioning and fissuring of what has here precedingly emerged as his own cluster of premises and beliefs. The larger, materialistic 19th-century American culture Thoreau lived in was to a considerable degree anathema to him, and he positioned himself in opposition to its mores, angered and goaded and frustrated by turns.

Thoreau could be subtle in his critiques, but was seldom if ever circumspect about his fundamental stances. His emic vision in my reading boils down to an inclusive *natura extensa* unvanquished by human interests, and a yearning toward a language that could do both its inherent ('eco-logical') complexity and redemptive ('echo-logical') promise justice. Thoreau came quite some way with his proto-ecological thinking and writing, complementing his early toying with the idea of an immanently structured natural realm with later, exceptionally diligent

field studies, which in turn allowed him to flesh out a viable theory of forest-tree succession. His settled writerly practice of organizing his materials circularly and cyclically helped in this respect, as did his literary understanding of mythology as offering the pith and core of a regular revolution of recurrent, 'timeless' events – natural as well as human.

More difficult to reconcile with Thoreau's vision were the hybrid states of *natura extensa* and the fickleness of language he found pertaining to his time and place. Troubling fluidities, brought on by the culture at large and accelerated by the exponential spread of new technologies, created an aesthetic and epistemological imbroglio which Thoreau was forced to contend with. For he wrote during a period and in a milieu where modernity was inscribing itself in powerful, Hydra-like ways: changing the land physically; imposing new discourses with which to regulate, extract, distribute and dominate its potentials and yields. New markets appeared, but with them not only liberation but a requirement on the part of its actors to become increasingly competitive. Novel, efficient transport and communication means arrived, yet in the wake of their rapidity followed the need to discipline time into hours and minutes (the railroad) and messages into blurbs and jots (the telegraph).

Whilst Thoreau would engage one of the new apparitions critically, he would often find himself inadvertently exposed from the flank or back – such as when he wrote diatribes against the iron horse, intruding upon his pastoral enclave at Walden Pond, only belatedly to realize that his own pen was a mighty trackmaker and transformer in its own right. The locomotive was perhaps the consummate symbol of the 'newness' everywhere apparent, a juggernaut heralding a vaunted future. Thoreau struggled with its ramifications, considering both a "winged horse" and "fiery dragon" to place in the "New Mythology" he saw introduced by its appearance in *Walden*.⁶⁴ This dual image of Thoreau's is probably tangible in origin, reflecting the fact that contemporary railroad consortiums often had mythological creatures and executive magnates painted on the sides of their trains' tender wagons, joined as these were to the locomotive engines proper. If so, the sign would indeed converge with the signified for an enchant-

ed moment, if only in the end to reinforce the bastardization and confusion on display. For the iron horse is a grounded, trackbound *black* horse, whether we take this circumstance as hinted linguistically (*viz.* the anagram *iron/noir*) or as more immediately shown physically (the machine belching noxious charcoal smoke; painted bituminous black). But the iron horse is also, as alluded to by Thoreau, a free-roaming-cum-flying *white* horse, emitting cloudlike plumes of harmless steam, a Pegasus, guardian of poets and once the steed of the hero Bellerophon – the same hero who, as we recall, defeated the dangerous hybrid creature called the *chimera* from Pegasus' back.

Perhaps then the iron horse would carry the key to its own salvation; could be reconceptualized as an inspiring creature of lofty goals? Yet everywhere, as Thoreau would have found, there is contamination, if only one is prepared to look steadfastly for it. Bellerophon in all likelihood did not kill the hybrid by his own hands from the back of Pegasus; scholiasts have tended to arm him with a lead-tipped spear, conveniently melting in the chimera's flaming mouth – a cutting-edge technology if ever there was one. But then already employing a regular horse for one's travels was once an inspired technological innovation. In short, as I argue in my essay "Tenth Muse Errant," Thoreau was hard put to find anything in his surroundings unequivocally natural; anything not influenced in one way or another by human technology. "We have constructed a fate, an *Atropos*, that never turns aside," his narrator says of the locomotive in *Walden*, and goes on to apostrophize its harbingers: "Let that be the name of your engine."⁶⁵

Thoreau could still by turns imaginatively ensconce himself in an idyllic landscape and pen scenes of innocent natural beauty, but the Concord environs of his day – as his recurrent subject – inevitably bore the marks of centuries of preceding natural-cultural cross-breeding, a process hastened in his own time with the arrival of disruptive technologies. One might infer from this that a deconstructive analysis would be salutary to the interpretive problems at hand, literally cutting the Gordian knot to reveal a mass of twisted stumps at Thoreau's feet. If there is no escaping technology, neither is there any recourse to be had in language. Both will at the end of the day be self-referential *tout court*,

and any sustained attempt to breach their bounds will hence end in failure. But while one might subscribe to such a position today, it was not one developed and available in Thoreau's time. Discounting his struggles with technology and language as moot consequently does him a disservice in forming an anachronistic *a priori* conclusion. Ironically, it also risks blurring the circumstance that Thoreau actually approached something akin to proto-deconstructive insights, not by his own volition but in taking on the formidable task in his writing of containing and curtailing technology, and in seeking (as Kant would put it) the noumenon of *natura extensa* as well as his own, felt inner nature. It is certainly the case that my own readerly attention to Thoreau's quandary in these respects has been informed and honed by poststructural theory in general. Yet I have resisted the temptation merely to apply it to Thoreau, bending over his corpus as on a slab; rather, I have striven to inhabit the body of his work as much as possible on its own terms, seeking its nerves and bloodstreams.

As I interpret Thoreau, he was alive to the aesthetic options of perspective and portrayal available to his writing early on – and, perhaps surprisingly with the above in mind, not always inclined to disregard or disapprove of the traces of modernity at hand. In “A Winter Walk,” for instance, during blessed moments the instrumental discourses of modernity and eco-systematic relations of *natura extensa* seem to merge, such as when the narrator brings a desiccated beech leaf figuratively alive by mentally retracing its tracks, “engineer”-like, as he puts it, to its (ap)parent tree. It is well to remember in this context that Thoreau was himself skilled instrumentally: his expertise as a surveyor became sought after in the village; he made accurate soundings of Walden Pond and other waters in the area over the years; and he improved upon the technology of pencil manufacture. Thoreau was, in other words, what was commonly called ‘a practical man’ beyond his own famous designation of himself in an 1853 Journal entry as “a mystic—a transcendentalist—& a natural philosopher to boot.”⁶⁶ This arguably made the ensuing liminal tensions between his language, emergent technology and hybrid nature all the more compelling. He had knowledge of them all, to greater or lesser extent, and was therefore the better placed to sense their interrelations and dependencies.

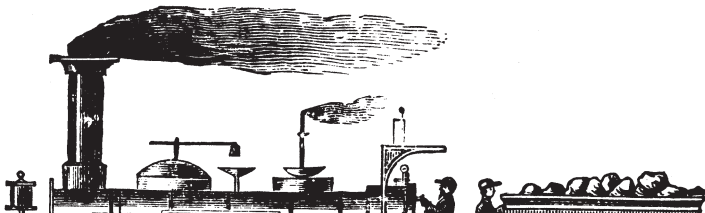
Characteristic of his epistemological attempt to understand what remained to him of the realm of *natura extensa*, Thoreau's practical method during his mature years was cumulative. He walked, observed, took notes, and wrote of his experiences having come home. Thoreau's Journal was his great repository of facts earned, a work from which he was also at pains periodically to devise grids and tables of seasonal and annual import. Thoreau's conception of human character appeared roughly similar: it could best be gleaned by patient observation or reading, as the case allowed. What was essential was that everything mattered to the whole, without distinction. As the environment in this functional sense was an aggregate product of ongoing processes, so too was human character. Both in this sense had styles of being that could be approached and understood as accumulated, lived patterns.

In *Walden*, however, Thoreau appends precise tables of his foodstuffs, only subsequently to deny them being exhaustive of the nutrition of the man behind the narrative persona. He does this by having his protagonist confessing sweepingly to porousness in the tabulations: the larger point arguably being the fallibility of record-keeping as such, and moreover the responsibility of Thoreau's auditors (whoever they may happen to be) to take stock of their own alimentary regimes and lives before prying too far into another's. It also becomes clear, via an evocative passage linking botanical and literary *liber* later in *Walden*, that any autobiographical account so defined will necessarily be incomplete due to its point of cutoff. While this may seem a truism, it nevertheless serves to further underscore that life is ultimately not accessible in its fullness within the confines of chronicles, documents and records such as handwritten pages or printed books will furnish: things past will be left out; styles may change; life inevitably progresses.

Thoreau was animated by an analogous sentiment regarding *natura extensa*, deeper knowledge of which must include direct experience, as he made clear in an 1852 Journal entry:

Access to nature for original observation is secured by one ticket—by one kind of expense—but access to the works of your predecessors by a very different kind of expense—All things tend to cherish the originality of the original. Nature at least takes no pains to introduce him to the works of his predecessors—but only presents him with her own *Opera Omnia*. Is it the lover of nature who has access to all that has been written on the subject of his favorite studies? No; he lives far away from this. It is the lover of books & systems—who know nature chiefly at 2nd hand.⁶⁷

Rather than turn his back on writing for its necessary limitations, however, Thoreau strove repeatedly to enrich it by extending its common bounds. One way was to seek the mythological through the dedicatedly empirical. And just as he understood the communicative power of perspicuous language in mercantile and instrumental contexts, so well promoted and lauded as these were within his contemporary 19th-century American culture, so too did he seem to intuit that language could be employed to evoke higher truths by being wilfully obscure or diffuse – as for instance his own deployment of a trio of enigmatic animals in *Walden* witnesses. Crucially, however, such obscure language could at best *suggest* rather than *deliver* elevated truth, implying a limit to its resonance while yet denying it commodification. What were those animals? What were they meant to signify? Facing such queries from his readers past and present, the outer expanses of Thoreau's writing craft can be said to fold back upon its limitations, while for better or worse leaving them – and us – with a plethora of choice. Will we remain with the pleasures of the text, or perhaps rise to explore the *Opera Omnia* beyond it?



Notes on the primary corpus

The standard scholarly edition of Thoreau's writings is the one launched by Princeton University Press in the mid-1960's. Each volume includes the publishing history of the material in question, along with lists of textual variants and authorial emendations where relevant. To date, the *Princeton Edition* has issued the two books Thoreau saw in print during his lifetime, *A Week* and *Walden*, as well *The Maine Woods* and *Cape Cod* published soon after his death. It has also brought out Thoreau's early essays and miscellanies, his translations and so-called reform papers (or political essays), as well as his excursions (parts of which have traditionally been called his 'natural history essays'). Thoreau's poems still await Princeton's redaction, as do sizeable portions of his correspondence as well as manuscripts grouped under the heading *Notes on Fruits and Seeds* – although the latter, as cited earlier, have been helpfully issued by Bradley P. Dean as *Faith in a Seed* (1993) and *Wild Fruits* (2000) awaiting their appearance in the Princeton progression.

At the present time of writing, the *Princeton Edition* has made available Thoreau's Journal entries to September 1854, which leaves seven years of materials yet to appear under its aegis. A conservative estimate based on Princetons's publishing pace to date, and with due respect of the exacting editorial work involved, would project a complete run in about twenty years' time. With this in mind, the status of Thoreau's Journal (unpublished in its own right during his lifetime) as a scholarly resource is important to consider. Which materials are at one's disposal as quotable sources, and what is their provenance? A severely trimmed selection of Thoreau's Journal was first published by Ticknor & Fields in 1894 for their so-called *Riverside Edition* of Thoreau's writings. The chosen entries were then edited and grouped into seasonal volumes, respectively entitled *Spring*, *Summer*, *Autumn*, and *Winter*. Reflecting an increased interest in Thoreau amongst the reading public, the same publishers then brought out a considerably more comprehensive *Walden Edition* of the writings in 1906, where the Journal materials were allotted fourteen volumes as well as running annotation. While granting

access to many more materials than the 1894 redaction, however, also the 1906 expanded edition ultimately constituted a normalized selection.

According to an estimate by the current editor-in-chief of the *Princeton Edition*, the erstwhile standard *Walden Edition* collects about 60% of Thoreau's Journal of 1837-42; a mere 20% of the 1843-50 period; and roughly 80% from 1850-61 – the entries modified and trimmed conforming to editorial practices and ideals of the day (there are also other materials either consciously omitted or unknown at the time, which do not appear in this edition).⁶⁸ The stated ambition of the *Princeton Edition* is to include all of Thoreau's extant materials, with a minimum of editorial interference. Current practice among Thoreau scholars quoting from the Journal is to cite the relevant Princeton volume when available; when not, recourse is made by tacit agreement to the corresponding *Walden Edition* volume, or to one of its by now several iterations in the *Manuscript* (1906), *AMS Reprint* (1968) or *Peregrine Smith* (1984) versions. What is available at present then is a quotable Journal text running to the fall of 1854 which maintains the spelling and punctuation idiosyncracies of Thoreau, fastidiously including false starts, crossed-out words and passages (where the underlying words can be made out); while for the later Journal one must make recourse to a normalized, quite heavily edited text aiming at more or less straightforward legibility. Of late the Princeton editorial team has uploaded PDF scans of Thoreau's entire manuscript Journal for the joint benefit of scholars and laypersons, but the notorious difficulty of transcribing Thoreau's handwriting unfortunately makes this a tricky source to cite without courting ambiguity.

In sum the scholar must recognize at least in outline how the available Thoreau corpus has been edited to date, 'helping' clarify syntax and sentences (with their attendant impulses and thoughts) in the *Walden Edition* to a degree that may surely influence interpretation. Regarding comprehensiveness even the *Princeton Edition* is hard to judge definite as yet, since it for instance remains to be seen where – or indeed if at all – Thoreau's matrices and charts culled from his Journal entries (potentially momentous as these are to understanding his long-term rationale with the Journal) will be given entry into the edited corpus, much as Thoreau's survey maps similarly await a verdict in this respect.

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Notes

1 Quoted from *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Excursions*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007), p. 208 (185-222). Thoreau's "Walking" was developed and delivered to audiences during the early 1850's, while first published posthumously in 1862.

2 It must be conceded that "nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language," as Raymond Williams pointed out in his classic *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1973), p. 219-224; cf. also the updated corollary article "Nature," pp. 235-239 in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, eds. Tony Bennett et al. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005). What is more, there is to my knowledge no systematic treatment of the word or its connotations in Thoreau, who however very frequently evokes it – variably outer (environmental) and inner (mental) in tenor, shifting also between upper-case and lower-case citings – as a tonic against all manner of perceived ailments of civilization. In a nutshell, one might summarize Thoreau's general attitude over time as one where nature, understood as a realm originally separate from the human, would do well with comparatively less cultural (technological) infusion. This while culture, such as has evolved increasingly on its own terms and largely availed itself of the presumed archaic worry of securing human physical survival, would correspondingly benefit from more of the 'natural'. Gains would specifically ensue upon a better perception of what Thoreau considered nature's 'higher laws,' in turn to counter what he identified as a degenerative cultural self-absorption in society at large. The latter, inbred mentality and behavior could also, driven *in extremis*, involve culture tragically swallowing up what was left of what I call *natura extensa*. - But of course these various concepts imply each other from the outset, while they are notoriously difficult to put to use other than in specific, curtailed contexts and/or well-defined debates. In the following, I will heuristically put 'nature' and 'culture' to argumentative use employing different connotations, most of them admittedly reductive, but the better I hope to tease out Thoreau's tensions over his powers of perception, craft and critique. – Regarding comparative studies: R.G. Collingwood's *The Idea of Nature* (1945; London, Oxford & New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960) remains valuable above all for its astute discussions of conceptions of nature

in antiquity, if admittedly cosmological in focus overall; Thoreau encountered many of the Greek thinkers Collingwood discusses during his college days. This work is well complemented by Clarence J. Glacken's *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (1967; Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: Univ. of California Press, 1976). For the medieval intellectual period and its increased interest in man's specific placement in creation, Arthur Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) remains a standard work, while Olaf Pedersen's *The Book of Nature* (Città del Vaticano: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1992) clarifies the origin and spread of the influential idea of nature as a form of alternate scripture; this work can helpfully be complemented by Stipe Grgas' & Svend Erik Larsen's (eds.) historically focused *The Construction of Nature* (Odense: Odense Univ. Press, 1994); by Lorraine Daston's and Fernando Vidal's (eds.) more recent *The Moral Authority of Nature* (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004); by John Habgood's theologically oriented *The Concept of Nature* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002); and most interestingly by Richard Hardack's recent "Not Altogether Human:" *Pantheism and the Dark Nature of the American Renaissance* (Amherst & Boston: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2012), which proposes links between pantheism, latent racism and a feminizing of nature as a product of its being designated fundamentally 'Other' by Emersonian Transcendentalism. Regarding the wider 'politics of nature,' a number of studies seem to me to stand out: Neil Evernden's *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992) identifies a significant shift in outlook during the Renaissance, when powers previously ascribed to nature were seen to come more and more under human control, a process to Evernden culminating in the 19th century with widespread attitudes of human sovereignty over nature taking root (and against which Thoreau positioned himself). Colonial aspects of this culmination are in turn well portrayed by David Arnold in his *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion* (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), and its patriarchal background and impact by Carolyn Merchant in her *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1980). Kate Soper's *What is Nature? Culture, Politics, and the Non-Human* (Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1995) concerns itself with how the term's viability has become contested among 'nature-endorsing' and 'nature-sceptical' perspectives of late, the latter often poststructurally informed. For discussions

of nature as a purely social construct, see Steven Vogel's *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1996); for its (post) modern hybridity, see William Cronon (ed.), *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995); and for its supposed metaphysical ballast (and hence unhelpfulness to modern environmental concerns), see Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge & London: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007). For discussions of 19th-century conceptions – including Thoreau's – of unadulterated wilderness (as a version of 'pure' nature and more), see Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1956); Peter N. Carroll, *Puritanism and the Wilderness: The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier 1629-1700* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1969); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1973); Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild: Essays* (New York: North Point Press, 1990); and Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1991). Turning from concepts and traits of nature to more or less specific problems of its portrayal, Arthur O. Lovejoy's "'Nature' as Aesthetic Norm" in his *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1948), pp. 69-77, remains a valuable if acerbic touchstone, as does the more generously minded anthology edited by Svend Erik Larsen et al., *Nature: Literature and Its Otherness / La Littérature et son autre* (Odense: Odense Univ. Press, 1997). Lastly, for general overviews and bibliographies pertaining to Thoreau, his mentors and peers in the context of nature concepts and their employment, beyond specific studies cited during the progression of the present work, see Donald Worster's section "The Subversive Science: Thoreau's Romantic Ecology," pp. 57-111 in the author's *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (1977; Cambridge & New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007); Bernard Rosenthal's provocative *City of Nature: Journeys to Nature in the Age of American Romanticism* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1980); Dean David Grodzins' "Nature," p. 132ff. in Wesley T. Mott (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Transcendentalism* (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1992), and Philip F. Gura's "Nature Writing," pp. 408-425 in Joel Myerson et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism* (Oxford & New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).

3 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Journal, Volume 4: 1851-1852*, ed. Leonard N. Neufeldt & Nancy Craig Simmons (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992), p. 326.

4 See, in turn, James McIntosh, *Thoreau as Romantic Naturalist: His Shifting Stance Toward Nature* (Ithaca & London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974); Laura Dassow Walls, *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science* (Madison: The Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1995); and Robert Kuhn McGregor, *A Wider View of the Universe: Henry Thoreau's Study of Nature* (Urbana & Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1997).

5 See Jane Bennett, *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994); John Dolis, *Tracking Thoreau: Double-Crossing Nature and Technology* (Madison & Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2005); and Andrew McMurry, *Environmental Renaissance: Emerson, Thoreau, and the Systems of Nature* (Athens & London: The Univ. of Georgia Press, 2003). I have discussed Dolis' book at some length in my review-essay "Fabricating the Self" in *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, Vol. 34, Nos. 4 (Spring/Fall, 2007), pp. 347-358.

6 See Rowe's "The Being of Language: The Language of Being," rpt. in *Modern Critical Views: Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York & Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1987), pp. 145-171 (147).

7 See Sherman Paul, *The Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration* (Urbana: The Univ. of Illinois Press, 1958).

8 See Cameron's *Writing Nature: Henry Thoreau's Journal* (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 24 & 147.

9 See Henry David Thoreau, *Faith in a Seed: The Dispersion of Seeds and Other Late Natural History Writings*, ed. Bradley P. Dean (Washington, DC & Covelo, CA: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 1993), and *Wild Fruits: Thoreau's Rediscovered Last Manuscript*, ed. Bradley P. Dean (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000).

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13 See Michael R. Fischer, "Walden and the Politics of Contemporary Literary Theory" in *New Essays on Walden*, ed. Robert F. Sayre (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 95-113.

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- 18 See Bradley P. Dean & Ronald Wesley Hoag, "Thoreau's Lectures Before Walden: An Annotated Calendar" in *Studies in the American Renaissance 1995*, pp. 130: 147; 161 (127-228).
- 19 Cf. *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: The Maine Woods*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), "Textual Introduction," pp. 355-404.
- 20 See Kristen Case, "Knowing as Neighboring: Approaching Thoreau's Calendar" in *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 2, no. 1 (2014), pp. 107-129. <http://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed July 12, 2014), and cf. her "Thoreau's Radical Empiricism: The Calendar, Pragmatism, and Science," pp. 187-199 in *Thoreauvian Modernities: Transatlantic Conversations on an American Icon*, ed. François Specq et al. (Athens, GA: The Univ. of Georgia Press, 2013).
- 21 Cf. Richard's *L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1961), in Swedish transl. and introd. by Roland Lysell in *Hermeneutik* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1977), pp. 169-207.
- 22 See Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, transl. Arthur Goldhammer, introd. Robert J. Morrissey (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. xi & xvii-xix.
- 23 Keith Jenkins, *On 'What is History?' From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 6f.

- 24 See Richard Bridgman (op. cit.), pp. ix-x & 286; cf. note 15 above.
- 25 See Evelyne Ender's "Geneva school" in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*, eds. Michael Groden & Martin Kreiswirth (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1994), p. 334 (332-336).
- 26 See Bruce A. Ronda's entry on Charles V. Kraitsir in the *Biographical Dictionary of Transcendentalism*, ed. Wesley T. Mott (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 163 (163f).
- 27 Cf. Emerson's "Nature" (1836), where the author develops his well-known tabulation: "1. Words are signs of natural facts. 2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts. 3. Nature is the symbol of spirit," adding to the present context that "[e]very word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance" (30). Quoted from *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Standard Library Edition: Volume 1: Nature, Addresses, and Lectures*, ed. James Eliot Cabot (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1883).
- 28 Richard Chenevix Trench, *The Study of Words* (Clinton Hall, NY: Redfield, 1852), p. 14.
- 29 Charles V. Kraitsir, *The Significance of the Alphabet* (Boston: E.P. Peabody, 1846), p. 4.
- 30 See Leslie Perrin Wilson, "Elizabeth Peabody: Views of Language and History" in *Concord Magazine* Oct/Nov 1999 (e-publ, URL: <http://www.concordma.com/magazine/octnov99/peabody3.html>, retrieved Sept. 23, 2014, and cf. Bruce A. Ronda (op.cit), note 26 above.
- 31 See, for more on this topic, my section on "Transcendentalism and the 'New America'" in the "Tenth Muse Errant" essay included in the present dissertation.
- 32 Thus breaking several cardinal rules of the deconstructive, critical nous: assuming original connotations of signifiers and signifieds; further positing their reasonably stable co-referentiality over time as signs and their designated objects – at least until sundered by technology/culture; and finally in supposing language to be a tool capable of transcending itself.
- 33 See Cheryll Glotfelty's "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," pp. ix-xxvii (xix), in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty & Harold Fromm (Athens, GA & London: The Univ. of Georgia Press, 1996).

34 Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), p. 2. Buell is citing Freya Mathews from her *The Ecological Self* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), and Neil Evernden from his *The Social Creation of Nature* (op. cit); cf. Buell (op. cit), p. 426, note 2.

35 Buell (op. cit), p. 7f. Cf. note 34 above, and p. 578 under index entry "Nature writing."

36 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Journal, Volume 3: 1848-1851*, ed. Robert Sattelmeyer et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), p. 186. Interestingly, Thoreau tweaked his Journal formulation of seeking "any literature [giving] an adequate account of that Nature with which I am acquainted" to "any poetry which adequately expresses this yearning for the Wild" in his roughly contemporaneous essay "Walking" (delivered as a lecture on several occasions from the spring of 1851 and on, while first published in the June, 1862 *Atlantic Monthly*, soon after Thoreau's death). One may note especially the "Nature" alternating with the more clearly undomesticated "Wild," and how the "experience" of the one in the Journal is changed to a "yearning" for the other in the published essay version. Cf. "Walking" in *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Excursions* (op.cit), p. 209 (185-222), and the editorial headnote, *ibid.* p. 561-570.

37 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Journal, Volume 2: 1842-1848*, ed. Robert Sattelmeyer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), p. 382.

38 Cf. Richard Tuerk's *Central Still: Circle and Sphere in Thoreau's Prose* (The Hague & Paris: Mouton & Co., 1975), which work perceptively discusses circular structures in Thoreau's essays, *A Week*, and *Walden* (while not commenting on the aesthetics of the Journal); furthermore James R. Guthrie's *Above Time: Emerson's and Thoreau's Temporal Revolutions* (Columbia & London: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2001), which study controversially argues that Emerson and Thoreau ultimately found chronological time a purely human construct, with little or no validity in *natura extensa*.

39 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), p. 71.

40 Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (Edinburgh & London: Canongate, 2006), p. 7.

41 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Journal, Volume 2: 1842-1848* (op. cit.), p. 381f.

42 See Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London & New York:

Routledge), pp. 109-118, where the chronotope in rudimentary form connotes "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (109).

43 See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, transl. Claire Jacobson & Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York & London: Basic Books, 1963), p. 209.

44 I have, as will become clear from the ensuing essays and following the lead of several Thoreau scholars, intermittently and somewhat loosely called Thoreau's thinking dialectical: this in the sense that I find him fond of engaging dichotomies only to put them in motion, variably undermining their precepts by humor or diatribe. More neutrally, one might characterize dialectics as a mediation between contradictory points in a debate. I happily agree, then, with Bertell Ollman's sweeping description of the term's provenance: "Dialectics, in one form or another, has existed for as long as there have been human beings on this planet. This is because our lives have always involved important elements of change and interaction; our environment, taken as a whole, has always had a decisive limiting and determining effect on whatever went on inside it; and 'today,' whenever it occurs, always emerges out of what existed yesterday, including the possibilities contained therein, and always leads (and will lead), in the very same way that it has, to what can and will take place tomorrow. In order to maximize the positive effects of these developments on their lives (and to reduce their negative effects), people have always tried to construct concepts and ways of thinking that capture – to the extent that they can understand it /.../– what is actually going on in their world, especially as regards the pervasiveness of change and interaction, the effect of any system on its component parts (including each of us as both a system with parts and as part of other systems), and the interlocking nature of past, present, and future." See Ollman's *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method* (Urbana & Chicago: The Univ. of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 3.

45 "We can never have enough of Nature" (318), in *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Walden* (op. cit.). Thoreau was of course now and then susceptible to other moods, and could express boredom with his parochial confinement in Concord, especially when contemplating travels to other climes (cf. e.g. his Journal entry of 1854, a few months before the publication of *Walden*, where he claims by way of contrast that "[w]e soon get through with Nature. She excites an expectation which she cannot satisfy" [*The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Journal, Volume 8: 1854*, ed. Sandra Harbert

Petrulionis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002), p. 146]. Yet Thoreau's evident commitment to further explore and understand his local environs never abated, as evinces his Journal seen in its entirety.

46 Cf. Thoreau's review-essay "Natural History of Massachusetts" (1842) in *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Excursions* (op. cit.), p. 27 (3-28).

47 Quoted from *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Excursions* (op. cit.) p. 70 (55-77).

48 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Early Essays and Miscellanies*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), p. 116ff.

49 See "Paradise (To Be) Regained" (1842) in *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Reform Papers*, ed. Wendell Glick (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), p. 45 (19-47).

50 William Bronk gives a poignant description of the depopulation of rural New England during the mid-19th-century in his essay "Silence and Henry Thoreau," p. 60f. (57-129). See Bronk's *Vectors and Smoothable Curves: Collected Essays* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985).

51 The late Thoreau scholar and editor Bradley P. Dean kindly responded to a query of mine in the fall of 2000 regarding the frequency of train traffic during Thoreau's stay at the pond. From records Dean found in the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript* of 4 July 1847 (i.e. toward the end of Thoreau's stay at Walden), passenger trains rumbled past the water eighteen times daily, whilst no schedule for freight trains was given. Ref: private email communication, 2000-10-26.

52 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, ed. Carl F. Hovde et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), p. 149 & 151.

53 *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Volume X: 1847-1848*, ed. Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 360.

54 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Walden* (op. cit.), p. 3.

55 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (op. cit.), p. 106. It may be noted that Thoreau inserted this passage near verbatim from an earlier, unpublished lecture entitled "Sir Walter Raleigh" (1843), testifying to its continued relevance to him. See *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Early Essays and Miscellanies* (op. cit.), pp. 178-218 & cf. p. 212f.

56 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Walden* (op. cit.), p. 324.

57 See *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Early Essays and Miscellanies* (op. cit.), p. 200 & 243.

- 58 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Journal, Volume 1: 1837-1848*, ed. Elizabeth Hall Witherell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), p. 276.
- 59 *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau: Journal, Vol. XII: March 2, 1859 – November 30, 1859*, ed. Bradford Torrey (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1906), p. 389.
- 60 Cf. Kristen Case's pertinent research on the *Kalendar*; refs in note 20 above.
- 61 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Walden* (op. cit.), p. 61.
- 62 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Journal, Volume 1: 1837-1848* (op. cit.), p. 273.
- 63 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Journal, Volume 7: 1853-1854*, ed. Nancy Craig Simmons & Ron Thomas (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009), p. 275.
- 64 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Walden* (op. cit.), p. 116.
- 65 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Walden* (op. cit.), p. 118.
- 66 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Journal, Volume 5: 1852-53*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997), p. 469.
- 67 *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau: Journal, Volume 4: 1851-1852* (op. cit.), p. 322.
- 68 Cf. following URL describing the *Princeton Edition* of Thoreau's writings: http://thoreau.library.ucsb.edu/project_history.html, retrieved on September 23, 2014.

ERRATA & SUMMARY IN SWEDISH

Errata: *following the original pagination of the facsimiles appended*

"IMMANENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE IN THOREAU'S 'A WINTER WALK'"

p. 71 §2, line 4: delete "at once"

"HENRY THOREAU AND THE ADVENT OF AMERICAN RAIL"

p. 47 §1, line 1: "antebellum" read: "Antebellum"

p. 49 §1, last line: delete "very"

p. 51 §1, last line: "journal" read: "Journal"

p. 54 §3, line 2: "brings a" read: "brings about a"

p. 57 §3, first line: delete "deeply"

p. 62 §2, line 2: "money" read: "income"

"TENTH MUSE ERRANT: ON THOREAU'S CRISIS OF TECHNOLOGY AND LANGUAGE"

p. 57 §3, line 7: "mounting disturbance" read: "increasing disturbance"

p. 58 §2, line 9: "in Etzler's" read: "to Etzler's"

p. 59 §3, line 7: "biblical" read: "Biblical"

p. 60 §2, last line: "the State" should read: "the oppressive State"

p. 62 §4, line 5: "journal" read: "Journal"

p. 64 §1, line 5-6: "troubling illustration" should read: "troubling symbol", while on following line "coherent symbol" should properly read: "coherent fable"

p. 74 §4, last line: "ornate rhetoric" should read: "intricate rhetoric"

p. 75 §1, line 4: "crave" read: "demand"

p. 76 §3, line 13 from page end: "read it" should be: "read or write it"

- p. 76 §6, line 2 from page end: "biblical" read: "Biblical"
- p. 79 §2, line 4-5: "makes itself known" should read: "makes itself available"
- p. 82 §1, line 8: "may be a hint" read: "may offer a hint"
- p. 83 §4, last 2 lines: "communicate" add: "communicate socially, intra-humanly"
- p. 84 §3, line 2: change "newly-voiced theory" to: "notion"
- p. 86 §2, line 10: "journal" read: "Journal"
- p. 87 §3, last 2 lines: change "are primarily for his own benefit, both financial and spiritual" to: "are for his own financial and spiritual benefit, rather than alimnt"
- p. 88 §3, lines 4-5: delete speculative "This relates directly to a Romantic quest for a key to nature, and"; let the sentence instead begin: "Thoreau recalls this when examining ..."
- p. 91 §2, line 1: change "aggressive text" to: "assertive text"
- p. 93 §3, line 9: "new-fanged" read: "newfangled"
- p. 94 §1, line 2: correct "an leap of faith" to: "a leap of faith"
- p. 94 §4, line 9: "journal" read: "Journal"
- p. 95 §1, line 6: change "'turn aside'" to: "'turn away'"
- p. 101 Note # 42, last 2 lines: to phrase "in his writing" add: "in his writing as a tool of communication"
- p. 103 Note # 55, lines 10-11: correct "exposing" to: "exposes", and "exploring" to: "explores"
- p. 107 Note # 80: "my and" read: "my own and"

"HOUND, BAY HORSE, AND TURTLE-DOVE: OBSCURITY AND AUTHORITY IN THOREAU'S WALDEN"

- p. 232 §5, last line: delete phrase "or evasive"
- p. 241 §2, line 3-4: full reference: Antonio Casado da Rocha, "'Live Thus Deliberately: Authenticity and Narrative Ethics in *Walden*," pp. 305-321 in *The Concord Saunterer: A Journal of Thoreau Studies, New Series, Volume 12/13*, ed. Richard J. Schneider (Concord, Mass: The Thoreau Society, 2004/2005).
- p. 241 §3, line 7-8: "struggled to show" read: "attempted to show"
- p. 247 §4, line 5 from page end: "or as a lowly" read: "and as a lowly"
- p. 248 §2, line 5: "spritual" read: "spiritual"

- p. 251 §3, line 5: "its near plethora" read: "its plethora"
- p. 258 Note # 26, last line: delete phrase: "in Kantian fashion"
- p. 266 Note # 50, line 6: "authority. Thoreau" read: "authority: Thoreau"
- p. 266 Note # 55, line 8: "whereby audience" read: "whereby the audience"

"CHARACTER AND NATURE: TOWARD AN ARISTOTELIAN
UNDERSTANDING OF THOREAU'S LITERARY PORTRAITS AND
ENVIRONMENTAL POETICS"

- p. 136 Note 1, add following full references: Ethel Seybold, *Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1951), and Robert Sattelmeyer, *Thoreau's Reading: A Study in Intellectual History with Bibliographical Catalogue* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988).
- p. 136 Note 3, add following full reference: Dean, Bradley P. & Hoag, Ronald Wesley, "Thoreau's Lectures before Walden: An Annotated Calendar" in *Studies in the American Renaissance 1995*, ed. Joel Myerson (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1995).

Sammanfattning på svenska

Henrik Otterberg, *Alma Natura, Ars Severa. Det skrivna hantverkets utsträckning och gränser hos Henry David Thoreau.*

Den amerikanske naturforskaren, filosofen, samhällsdebattören och författaren Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) levde och verkade under en turbulent epok. Hans lilla hemstad Concord inat landet från Boston nåddes ofta av livliga religiösa och vetenskapliga debatter, smaningom även av kontroverser rörande slaveriet i Södern och den ruvande förbundsstatsfrågan – skulle Unionen lyckas hålla ihop eller komma att söndras? Concord's landskap omvandlades även av järnvägen och telegrafan, teknologier vilka bar löfte om återhämtning efter en period av ekonomisk kris och stagnation. Samtidigt som de fysiska ingreppen var omfattande, ändrade framförallt järnvägens sträckning genom staden och dess utmarker förutsättningarna för dem som valde att stanna kvar i bygden. Thoreau deltog i många av de debatter som följde av utvecklingen och exploateringen, emedan han förblev sin hemtrakt och dess kvarvarande natur trogen.

Föreliggande studie, vilket dess inledande översiktskapitel klargör, fokuserar mindre på politiska aspekter av Thoreaus skrifter, desto mer på vad man kunde kalla den egocentriske och biocentriske författaren: skriftställaren som begrundar epistemologiska frågor kring hur naturen – fattad i sina yttre miljömässiga aspekter liksom i sina inre, mänskligt 'själsliga' konnotationer – kan förstås, och medföljande estetiska spörsmål kring hur man kongenialt kan åskådliggöra och förmera sina rön. Arbetet har inspirerats av den tematiska litteraturkritiken hos den så kallade Genève-skolan, vilken propagerade för en läsningssekvens av medkännande (*confiance*) och ifrågasättande (*méfiance*) av en vald författarens verk, därmed att bättre bli varse dess återkommande ärenden eller 'teman'. Studien drar också nytta av mer sentida, dekonstruktiva synsätt på text och läsande samt ekokritiska perspektiv i sin strävan att närma sig de antropocentriska gränserna för, respektive biocentriska spännvidderna av, språklig representation/återgivning. Löpande genom arbetet (som väsentligen utgörs av sex fristaende artiklar) återfinns ett antal frågeställningar, vilka även antas ha varit centrala för Thoreau: *Hur förstå, värdera och återge naturen såsom idealt hel och*

sammanhållen, men också med vederbörlig uppmärksamhet på dess tilltagande hybriditet såsom omvandlad av mänskliga teknologier? Kommer naturen fattad som en yttre helhet att inbjuda till att förstås som en immanent eller transcendent ordning? Vilka retoriska /språkliga redskap är lämpliga att begagna sig av för att göra naturen rättvisa, och vilken tilltro kan man fästa vid deras förmåga att översätta dess sanning, vare sig nu denna senare fattas empiriskt eller andligt (dvs immanent eller transcendent)? Och omvänt: när man skriver om sig själv, i vilken mån kan man tilltro det mänskliga språket förmågan att förmedla de unddfyende dragen hos det skrivande jaget (dvs den mänskliga naturen)?

Thoreaus på en gång idealistiska och empiriska äskådning grundlades av hans gedigna naturhistoriska beläsenhet, hans underliggande transcendentalism och framförallt av hans trogna vandringar i sitt omgivande landskap, där han under en lang följd av år ansamlade iakttagelser av djur- och växtlivet, vädret och årstidernas växlingar. Avhandlingens andra kapitel frilägger hur en pendling mellan immanenta och transcendent förståelser av en fridfull hemtrakt märks redan i Thoreaus tidiga essä "A Winter Walk" ("En vintervandring"), emedan tidigare forskning tenderat att uppfatta detta tidiga alster som genomgående präglad av en transcendentalistisk hållning. Men då Concord omvandlades av ny teknologi och infrastruktur hade Thoreau alltmer att tampas med ett landskap som hybridiserats av mänsklig kultur – en oroande insikt som till sist påverkade hur Thoreau förstod såväl vidden som begränsningarna hos sitt eget, skrivna hantverk. Detta är väsentligen vad de två efterföljande kapitlen, "Thoreau and the Advent of American Rail" och "Tenth Muse Errant" avhandlar. I den samtida sociala miljön gjorde sig kraftfulla modernitets-diskurser gällande via tekniska nomenklaturer och propaganda – i synnerhet genom de folkligt förankrade, halvt religiösa koncepten om en "Manifest Destiny" och "Commercial Spirit" (ung. "Uppenbar öde" och "Kommersiell anda") hos nationens befolkning. Båda dessa föreställningar fann sitt förkroppsligande i den hotfulla järnhästen i *Walden:s* kapitel om ljudet, "Sounds".

Vilket slags språk hoppades Thoreau kunna uppbeda i detta sammanhang, som kunde lieras med hans övertygelse om fördelarna med en mer naturnära (själv)kultur? Thoreaus berättare i *Walden* tar till nära nog alla retoriska verktyg som finns att få. Men i sitt slutliga misslyckande att betvinga den inneboende kraften hos samtidens omvälvande teknologier söker han inte bara avleda uppmärksamheten från nederlaget, vilket avsteg tidigare läsningar av Thoreau betonat. Han provar även nya, humoristiskt-konkreta grepp för att väcka både sin berättare och sina läsare ur sin förmenta haglöshet och letargi inför det nya. *Walden:s* berättare ställer ut sin skrivpulp, sitt bläckskrin och sin penna för att bokstavligen

insupa den natur ur vilken de ytterst sett är framsprungna; han föreslår vidare återutsättningar och naturaliseringar av tamdjur, samt pläderar kraftfullt för mer av omedelbar, icke-medierad varseblivning hos sig själv och sina läsare. Att direkt erfara vad som återstår av naturen i sina yttre manifestationer, snarare än att lita till beskrivningar av den, blir till en ledstjärna. Här kan man emellertid i min läsning ana begynnelsen av en metakritik av det mänskliga språkets potential. Thoreaus plagsamma insikt, vilken tematiseras som en underström till textens ytplan i *Walden*, kan beskrivas som följer: själva spraket utgör i slutändan också det en invasiv teknologi, som lägger *sina* syllar och räls och vallar i såväl dess talade som skrivna form. Således bär det självt på den kulturella smitta och det förtryck som präglat människans hantering av naturen genom historien.

Avhandlingen diskuterar vidare i kapitlet "Hound, Bay Horse and Turtle-Dove" hur Thoreau i *Walden* trots allt kunde göra anspråk på en röst av tillräcklig auktoritet för att han skulle räknas som en legitim kritiker av livsföringen och framstegen såsom de vuxit fram och kommit att uppfattas under hans samtid. Kapitlet föreslår dunkelheten (*obscuritas*) som en medveten retorisk strategi i *Walden*, vilken kompletterar Thoreaus mer välkända och ofta påtalade stilistiska klarhet (*perspicuitas*). Med hjälp av *obscuritas* kan Thoreaus berättare i bokens inledning etablera ett etos av sannfärdighet och rätträdighet, och detta via ett mytologiskt färgat sökande efter en trio förlorade djur, vars närmare innebörd aldrig klargörs. Trots eller kanske snarare på grund av denna lakun, har djur-stycket genererat en mindre tolkningsindustri i egen rätt sedan *Walden*'s publicering, där merparten av Thoreaus läsare så långt visat sig övertygade om jaktens slutliga referentialitet – det vill säga att den bottnar i en mer eller mindre konkret förlust hos författaren, vars skildrade jag därmed framstår som desto mer beundransvärt i sin strävan att gottgöra skadan.

Studien vänder sig därefter i kapitlet "Character and Nature" till Thoreaus stora ansamling av naturanteckningar under 1850-talet och det tidiga 1860-talet, anteckningar vars digra innehåll väcker frågan om hur Thoreau tänkte sig att ordna detta material framgent. Slående hos dessa senare noteringar är deras relativa frånvaro av utvecklat bildspråk, kulturella hänvisningar, ordlekar och idealistiska utvecklingar, stildrag som tidigare präglat Thoreaus skrifter. Medan frågans svar måste förbli en spekulation, utforskar avhandlingen en analogi till Thoreaus kända attityder gentemot (cyklisk) myt och (kumulativ) mänsklig karaktär, och den avviker sålunda från tidigare tolkningsförsök vilka velat se Thoreaus antecknings skrivande samlat i hans självbetitlade "Journal" genom åren som en alltmer asocial aktivitet i dess ringaktning av konventionell litterär utsmyckning. Snarare vill föreliggande studie se samlingen av Thoreauska noteringar över en myriad naturfenomen – vilka

periodvis även ordnades till matriser och tabeller – som förstadier till en i högsta grad social produkt: en arketypisk kalender över Concord (utifrån svensk horisont kan en analogi sökas i en väsentligen utökad och förutsägelse-bemängd bondepraktika). Vad gäller den mänskliga karaktären närmar sig Thoreau också en empirisk definition: då karaktären dans av allt den utsätts för och väljer att företa sig, gäller det för den som studerar den att söka vaska fram genomgående drag ur en så stor mängd material och rön som möjligt – ingenting är för trivialt för att begrundas och att påverka, anser Thoreau.

Avhandlingens sista kapitel, betitlat "Figuring Henry", vänder sitt intresse från Thoreaus anteckningsböcker och deras förmodade strävan efter ett sammansatt natur- och karaktärsbegrepp, för att istället sysselsätta sig med hans självporträtt såsom detta framträder i *Walden*. Vad kunde hans läsare vänta sig av självexponeringen i boken? En uttömmande bikt; ett frälsande, alternativt evangelium; eller kanske hellre en maning att läsaren måtte rannsaka sig själv? En intressant omständighet vad gäller bokens första kapitel är att författaren å ena sidan där bifogar detaljerade uppställningar över sina matutgifter för en längre period, medan han å den andra plötsligt tillstår att mer eller mindre regelbundna tillskott kommit från middagsinbjudningar av olika slag (utan att dessas omfattning närmare beskrivs). Kapitlet tar sin utgångspunkt från denna öppet tillkännagivna diskrepans, oskyldig som den kan tyckas, och spårar därefter de många konnotationer av engelskans "account" (sv. ung. "redogörelse", "redovisning") som aktualiseras i *Walden*. Slutligen närläses ett stycke där Thoreau liknar bärandet av klädeslager vid barkringar hos ett träd, där läsaren fas att förstå att den latinska (liksom överförda engelska) termen för det levande skiktet inre bark kallas *liber*: ett lager som inte kan friläggas utan att trädet dör. Detta i sin tur aktualiserar konnotationen *bok*, och Thoreau ger med detta i min läsning en metakritisk kommentar kring självbiografins villkor, dess gagn och kostnader. I den mån han skänker någon konklusion, pekar denna mot skrivandets nödvändiga senkommenhet gentemot det levda, framspringande livet. Här som annorstädes utforskar Thoreau synbarligen gränsdragningar och öppenheter hos spraket och kommunikationen överlag. Han avslöjar en märkbar vakenhet inför sina valda språkliga redskap, samtidigt som han uppenbarligen litar till läsarens omdöme rörande vad dessa kan tänkas åstadkomma.

