

Fathoming the Depths of Thoreauvian Time



Alexandra Manglis

Linacre College

University of Oxford

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Hilary 2013

Acknowledgements

Beginnings are important, even when they feel far away from where you've ended up. In thinking about beginnings, then, I would start my acknowledgements by thanking my family for shaping the groundwork of my critical abilities that eventually evolved and led me to completing a D.Phil at the University of Oxford. My mother, Hebe, who instilled in me at a very young age my love for reading all types of literature; my father, Pericles, who always told me not to let my studies get in the way of my education (it took me years to find out that he was paraphrasing Mark Twain); my brother, Constantinos, who demanded a critical mind throughout our time growing up together; and my sister, Katie, the trailblazer who broadened my sense of academic and occupational possibilities from a very young age. As the youngest of my family, my intellectual growth began with them, and I am very grateful for how they have all helped foster it in me.

The project itself had a number of beginnings which felt like false-starts, but now, retrospectively, were an essential part of its evolution. My long-standing supervisor, Ron Bush, was the first person to have confidence in my ability to figure out the path of the thesis on my own, for which I am grateful. The arrival of Lloyd Pratt at Oxford a year and a half ago and his appointment as joint supervisor was the catalyst to my project's completion. The thesis's fruition owes much to his knowledge in the field, his ability to see the strong parts of my thesis when I could not, and his extraordinarily valuable advice to begin yoga as a way of combatting thesis blues. The strengths of my thesis owe much to his encouraging voice, for which I am incredibly grateful.

Finding a peer to listen to you talk about your thesis and who then proceeds to express an interest in it is not an easy task. Much of the way I began to think about the texts in my thesis owes a lot to long, spirited, conversations with Konstantin Sofianos over many beers and cigarettes. Those conversations are already the bits of Oxford I miss the most. I am thankful to Anna Farkas and Sarah Bennett who, always a couple of years ahead of me, provided me with much-needed advice on and guidance through the intricate paths of Oxford's academia, up to the very last minutes before submission. I am equally thankful to Stephen Ross and Ed Sugden, who have been unstinting in their support of my work through the most difficult times.

The trick to remaining grounded in academia is, apparently, maintaining friendships outside of it. It is telling then, that most of my close friendships in England were outside of the English Faculty, if not outside the university all together. I am extraordinarily grateful to my friends who have helped keep

me grounded throughout the long process, not least Bec, Poly, and Phil who, apart from sending words of encouragement, were proof reading my thesis and helping me typeset up to the very the last minute. Similarly, a big thank you to Elena, Katina, Alexi, Adam, Orestis, and Jo. Their unfailing encouragement and matter-of-fact belief that I would finish the thesis was incredibly valuable to me. Most importantly though, they are all the people who make me laugh the most. Without them, life would be very grim indeed. I love them dearly for it.

And last, of course, I want to thank Ayiannis. From that first depressing long-distance phone-call from Oxford to Cyprus five and a half years ago, to his look of concern this morning when he woke up to find me still working, he has been here, with me, every step of the way. He has provided perspective simply by being an integral part of my life, and thus making me realize that beginnings and endings are certainly not dictated by academic projects, but rather, by whom our lives are intertwined with. I am grateful that my life continues to be entangled with his.

15th April, 2013

Abstract

This thesis endeavors to engage in contemporary Thoreauvian scholarship by providing an original reading of Thoreau's works using a critical framework based on Wai Chee Dimock's concept of "deep time." As such, it argues that Thoreau's infamous embrace of political and rhetorical dissent takes shape in his writings most strongly in his construction of time-frames that break with or stand against his contemporaries' own use, sense, and measuring of time in antebellum New England. Focusing on two aspects of Henry David Thoreau's work, the thesis argues firstly that *Walden's* resistance to familiar, sequential understandings of time manifests in myth, wherein time and history are shaped holistically rather than sequentially. Secondly, it posits that Thoreau's excursion narratives resist the dominant recordings of history of his time by forming alternative historiographies within their structures, accommodating otherwise silent or ignored historical elements, at the expense of otherwise smooth, uninterrupted narratives. Having thus established Thoreau's temporal structures, the thesis goes on to look at Annie Dillard and Susan Howe in order to trace out Thoreau's previously unacknowledged formation of temporal structures in his texts as a genealogy that emerges in late twentieth-century American literature. Consequently, the thesis provides an alternative reading of Thoreau that moves toward a rethinking of his location in nineteenth-century America and its twentieth-century literature.

Contents

Introduction	1
1 Walking into History	23
2 Travel Narrative as Myth	47
3 Perennial Newness as Mythology	73
4 The Narrator's Act of Seeing	83
5 Violent Histories	107
6 Hallucinating the Alien Terrain	135
7 Annie Dillard's Reanimation of Myth	155
8 Susan Howe's Interruption of History	181
Conclusion	207
Bibliography	213

Texts that are inertly of their time stay there: those which brush up unstintingly against historical constraints are the ones we keep with us, generation after generation.

—Edward Said

1

Introduction

Henry David Thoreau's infamous embrace of political and rhetorical dissent takes shape in his writings most strongly in his construction of time-frames that break with or stand against his contemporaries' own use, sense, and measuring of time in antebellum New England. This thesis traces out and articulates these varying chronographies in Thoreau's better and lesser known works, seeking to understand them as histories shaped against the emergence of an ever-more regularized United States and the increasingly standardized historiographies and time-constructs that emerged with it. Well aware of how industrialization, modernization, and the unfolding of a new country and government was affecting the measurement and perception of time and historical chronology Thoreau turns to the laws of geology and astronomy to configure alternative temporal structures that strain against the emerging concerns about time. This thesis focuses on two particular variations of time-constructs that Thoreau establishes in his work and then goes on to look at two recent adaptations of Thoreau's alternative time-constructs in the works of Annie Dillard and Susan Howe, tracing out a potentially new tradition of Thoreauvian writing that has thus far remained unexplored.

The bulk of this thesis focuses on *Walden's* mythological garb as the location for an uncommon vision of time, stretched out and beyond the regularized

versions of time in nineteenth-century New England. Revisiting the idea of *Walden* as a mythological narrative, the thesis considers how the Thoreauvian myth is fundamentally a restructuring of the temporal and spatial formations found in the actual world *Walden*'s narrator consistently acknowledges and disregards. The most evident temporal restructuring is, as has been well documented, the reformulating of *Walden* into a one-year narrative out of a two-year long experience. The immediate effect is that *Walden* seems to be a seasonal book, though, as Lawrence Buell notes, the seasonal temporal unfolding is not consistent, with summer taking up about two thirds of the book.¹ Buell recognizes this simultaneous compression and elongation of time as a Thoreauvian practice of temporal manipulation, so that *Walden* gives the effect of being both in a still moment and in a progressive one. This effect of simultaneous diachronicity and synchronicity is key to *Walden*'s mythopoeia.

Thinking through *Walden*'s first chapter, "Economy," as a critical overview of his fellow townsmen's relationship with time as wasteful or alienating, I posit that the rest of *Walden*'s narrative constructs a temporal alternative that Thoreau identifies as mythology.² This temporal alternative to his contemporaries' perception of time is bound to the location of Walden Pond yet nonetheless uses that location to center multiple threads of global historical accounts, either in the forms of ancient fables, of historically accurate discovery narrative, or even of geological and astronomical measurements of time on planetary or galactic scales. The result is a reconfiguration of how time is shaped, so that seemingly anachronistic dates and chronographies are drawn together, read vertically as the horizontal layers of a sedimentary rock, or holistically as the circular life-lines of a tree stump. As myth holds these multiple threads

¹Lawrence Buell. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995). 242.

²When quoting from Thoreau's work I reference the work or essay and the chapter (if needed) in roman numerals and paragraph number in arabic numerals. While I have included editions in the bibliography of this thesis I have used multiple sources for all these texts, ranging from online, to ebooks, to various hard copies, that I found it easier to keep track of quotes through this method; a method which I first saw used by Stanley Cavell in *The Senses of Walden*. In the case of *Walden* in particular, I refer twice in the whole thesis to a specific edition by Walter Harding in order to reference one of Harding's annotations. Thoreau, Henry David *Walden: An annotated edition*. Ed., Walter Harding. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995.)

in one place, time's otherwise foremost characteristic, that of progression from past to future, is diminished. Consequently *Walden* becomes a world that sits apart from the sequential movement of time experienced by Thoreau's fellow Concordians. Thoreau's understanding of mythology as the literature of a pioneering nation in a "heroic age" (exemplified in ancient Greek or Roman myth) also offers an alternative vision of America's place in the world, locating it in the tradition of global mythologies, rather than as separate from or overshadowed by the Old World.³ As he writes in "Walking," "The West is preparing to add its fable to those of the East" (50).⁴ The construction of myth for Thoreau thus achieves two ends: On the one hand it resists standard or regularized forms of time that dominated the everyday way of living in nineteenth-century New England and on the other hand, it makes the "West" a legitimate cultural forebear alongside the ancient myths of Greece, India, China, or Rome.

Meanwhile, this thesis looks to Thoreau's earlier publications, "Ktaadn," "A Walk to Wachusett" and *A Week on The Concord and Merrimack Rivers* for his second alternative historical formation which also strains against dominant conceptions of New England history.⁵ In these texts I find that Thoreau's

³I use "American" here as the Academy might when speaking of the American Literature Association. I am well aware, however, of the difficulties of the word's definition and its exclusive connotations which do not include Central or South American countries. I have tried, wherever possible, to refer to Thoreau's country of residence as the United States of America, though larger ideological references, such as "American" literature, or Thoreau as an "American" writer, meaning literature or a writer from the United States, have been harder to avoid. They are admittedly loaded terms, but unfortunately also useful as short-cut terms when thinking about the U.S.A's literary canon.

⁴"Walking" is hereafter referred to as "W" in in-text citations. All arabic numerals refer to paragraph numbers.

⁵I have been fairly vigilant about working on texts that were, if not published in Thoreau's time, then ready for publication by the time of his death. While pioneering critical work by Sharon Cameron and others has definitely proved that Thoreau's unpublished work, not least his journal, is of equal significance to the Thoreauvian critic as his published books and essays, my aim was less to ignore the unpublished work as it was to be consistent in my choice of emphasis. Thus I chose to focus on essays and books that have undergone multiple drafts and which were finalized before being sent for publication. These "finalized" texts avail themselves to close readings without the further critical and aesthetic complications close readings of unpublished texts could risk. It is for this reason that I read "Ktaadn" as the autonomous essay that came out in 1845, rather than as part of the posthumously published *The Maine Woods* which includes the two unfinished essays "Chesuncook" and "The Allegash and the East Branch." All quotations lifted from "Ktaadn," "A Walk to Wachusett," and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* are referred to in-text by paragraph number of the essay or book chapter, where "Ktaadn" is "Ktaadn," "A Walk to Wachusett" is "A Walk" and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* is *A Week*.

emphasis is more historiographical than mythographical, as he attempts to include unrecorded events in his excursion narratives that take him through a variety of otherwise well-documented locations: events that cannot be or have not been articulated in the rigid structures of the hegemonic historiography of his time. The thesis considers how the excursion narratives are consistently disrupted by what I call “violent histories”: dimensions of violent historical events that manifest as long-reaching trauma or silence that can only be articulated as intrusions on or interruptions in the otherwise smooth-sailing excursions undertaken by Thoreau and his various companions. These excursion narratives thus become recordings of unrecorded histories, often flouting the nationalist agendas of his era’s historiographies by acknowledging traumas that otherwise undermined the historical accounts that sentimentalized the strength and explorative prowess of white colonialism.

By identifying two distinctly different time-constructs in Thoreau’s work, this thesis argues for a nuanced reading of Thoreau that accommodates a dimension to his writing that has been otherwise overlooked in the field. While my reading of his myth and its temporal relationship with modernity resonates with recent work on Thoreau, not least the excellent collection of essays recently published in an edition edited by eminent Thoreauvian scholars Francois Specq, Laura Dassow Walls and Michel Granger, little has been done so far in the way of reading Thoreau’s work as a challenge to the emerging nation’s historiography in antebellum New England.⁶ The reason, I would argue, for the academy’s understated interest in Thoreau and historiography lies in the current dominant critical discourse of Thoreauvian studies, which is still growing around the innovative critical studies on Thoreau initiated by Walls and Buell in the mid-90s. Critics like Meredith L. McGill and Hadley Leach, as I will argue, are amongst the few in recent years to initiate an alternative critical frame-work with which to read Thoreau. By incorporating them into my own critical framework, this thesis has managed to open up and explore questions of Thoreau’s works as recoveries of silenced histories and revisit the idea

⁶Specq, Francois, Walls, Laura Dassow and Granger, Michel eds., *Thoreauvian Modernities: Transatlantic Conversations on an American Icon*. (Athens: U Georgia P, 2013.)

of Thoreauvian violence as an important part of his aesthetics and narrative structures. So far, this area of study in Thoreau seems relatively untouched.

Most of the contributors to *Thoreauvian Modernities*, for example, either directly draw on, or circle around, Walls's fundamental re-configuration of Thoreau's holistic vision of the universe as a primarily Humboldtian one; one that she identifies as "empirical holism" in her book *Seeing New Worlds*.⁷ For Walls, empirical holism differs from the "rationalist holist view," "which uses 'the whole' as an architectonic idea [that] precedes the parts and derives the manifold from its own identity."⁸ Rather, empirical holism "knows no way of beginning other than by considering the parts, the elements of a material universe which is conceived as preexisting...The parts, not the whole, are antecedent." The combination of all these parts, some less convenient than others, makes an empirical whole that is "reflexive, necessarily indeterminate, and open ended; no 'totality' is possible." Similarly, the indispensable work by Lawrence Buell on Thoreau began the crucial investigation into Thoreau's literature as reveling in a holistic mass of aesthetic, structural, generic, and philosophical contradictions, which in turn has had a huge effect on Thoreauvian criticism over the past two decades.⁹ My own work on the shape of Thoreau's myth is in indirect conversation with Walls and Buell, as I read Thoreauvian myth as made up of conflicting parts, thus emerging as reflexive and indeterminate in its holism.¹⁰ Furthermore, more recent work by American literary critics like Wai Chee Dimock, Paul Giles, and Philip Fisher has made it possible to continue this deliberately non-teleologically framed criticism instigated by Walls and Buell into even more productive readings of Thoreau, as his literature and holistic view of the universe becomes more clearly understood in terms

⁷Walls, Laura Dassow. *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century National Science*. (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1995.)

⁸Walls, 84.

⁹Buell, Lawrence, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.) See in particular Chapter 5, "The Aesthetics of Relinquishment."

¹⁰See also Michael Benjamin Berger's work on Thoreau's synoptic vision which similarly understands Thoreau's literary constructions in "The Dispersion Of Seeds" as "a model of how to engage in science, and how to dissent from it, without repressing or sacrificing our humanity in all its dimensions, a home for all our faculties to inhabit." Berger, Michael Benjamin, *Thoreau's Late Career and the Dispersion of Seeds: the Saunterer's Synoptic Vision* (Rochester: Camden House, 2000.)

of transnationalism, deep time, large-scaled history and geography, and in the context of an emerging modernity.¹¹ My own work on Thoreau and myth also relies heavily on a number of these American literary scholars, as I trace out further down.

McGill and Leach arrive at Thoreau from another critical angle, though certainly not unaware of the predominant critical field surrounding Thoreau. It is through their work on Thoreau's use of the commonplace as a form of narrative interruption that I build my own argument for Thoreau's writing of an alternative historiography. Where the majority of the scholarship focuses on the antebellum moment and impending modernity in Thoreau's literature as a catalyst for the changes both the author and American literature have to face, Leach and McGill consider Thoreau's structural tropes in the light of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century perspectives, found quoted in Thoreau's commonplace book. Leach, who mines Thoreau's essay "A Walk in Wachusetts" for an aphoristic practice that she pinpoints back to Francis Bacon, undertakes a slow close reading of the essay alongside the inclusion of a Bacon passage quoted in the commonplace book, and considers Thoreau's use of the aphorism as it was undertaken in 1625 by Bacon to make the reader "remake the self such that it is oriented toward an unrecognizable future."¹² She continues her line of inquiry by considering how the insertion of the aphorism works in "A Walk," drawing on the question of textual location in commonplace books as a way of figuring out how aphoristic practice in Thoreau's essays evidences his "interest in cultivating forms of expression that suspend our propensity to read analogically." Leach's essay ends by considering how Thoreau's early use of the aphorism anticipates "Thoreau's eventual advocacy of a natural world defined by continuous creation, and not revelatory apprehension," tying her essay in with the critical frameworks set up by Walls and others. However, by

¹¹Paul Giles, for example, in his most recent book, firmly locates all antebellum American writers into all of these new frameworks: "Antebellum American authors do not so much ground their work upon native soil as situate it on a highly charged and fraught boundary between past and present, circumference and displacement, and the challenge each individual writer faces is in mapping out a discrete location, in finding a space from which to speak." See: Giles, Paul, *The Global Remapping of American Literature*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011), 107.

¹²Leach, Hadley. "Thoreau's Aphoristic Form." *Arizona Quarterly*, 68.3 (Autumn 2012), 20.

looking to Thoreau's early work and considering the commonplace book as a source of disruption in Thoreau's narrative structures, Leach draws attention to Thoreau's acknowledgement of historical records within his work. It is McGill, however, who boldly connects Thoreau's use of commonplace excerpts in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* to "writ[ing] a history that recognizes both nature's and his fellow man's indifference to history, to explore modes of cultural survival that are fragmentary, incomplete, and that occur despite human disregard for the past."¹³ McGill's stronger theoretical argument that grounds itself in early American literary theory written on commonplace books as locations of memory-building and alternative, often unnoticed, historical recordings, demonstrates how Thoreau's introduction of commonplace quotations in his narrative work as "modes of temporal discontinuity," dislocating the seemingly local *A Week* from any real sense of place and providing a discontinuous history. In the narrative's dislocations and disruptions, argues McGill, arrive muted objects of violent histories, relics of dead men, almost forgotten. "Thoreau takes pleasure *not* in imagining aesthetic unity, or even the relationship of severed part to missing whole, but in contemplating the moment at which the art-object fractures: "Its beauty is at the same time its strength," he argues, "and it breaks with a lustre," writes McGill, emphatically. Thus, through these essays by McGill and Leach, this thesis outlines an extraordinary vision of time in Thoreau's work that relates disrupted narratives to disrupted histories, embraced by Thoreau and written as challenges to dominant historiographies that ignore the silent and unrecorded voices. Equally intriguing to this thesis's project is the discovery of Susan Howe's poem, *Thorow*, as engaging in a very similar practice, only a hundred and fifty years later. Thus, the thesis's interest in Thoreau's "violent histories" suggests also that herein might lie a Thoreauvian genealogy in contemporary American literature that could open up more literary lines of enquiry than of those the field is already aware.

¹³McGill, Meredith. "Common Places: Poetry, Illocality, and Temporal Dislocation in Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*." *American Literary History*. 19.2 (2007), 357-374.

Before teasing out the major differences of the two lines of temporal structuring in Thoreau's work in detail here, I want to look at how these two engagements with the rewriting of history are similarly formed, even as they offer themselves to different narrative structures. Myth is most strongly present in *Walden's* seasonal structure while historiography emerges in *A Week's* and "Ktaadn's" linear travel-narrative structures. Yet both constitute alternative forms of time that Thoreau represents as always positioned *apart* from a standardized time-frame that is measured by clocks, the punctuality of trains, or even the economy of labor. Throughout my thesis I use Wai Chee Dimock's reading of "standard" to describe the familiar form of history and time. It is a perception of time arrived upon at the advent of modernity, "a spatialized image: [where] time here looks a bit like a measure tape, with fixed segments, fixed unit lengths, each assignable to a number...The guiding spirit is serial numbers, doubling ... as chronological dates. On the strength of these days, the ancient and modern can be certified to be worlds apart, never to be in contact."¹⁴ Standard time, then, is to do with a perception or a way of measuring it that has become so habitual in Western thinking that it is difficult for the modernized Western world to conceive of a chronotype with a different ontology. This kind of standard time is understood as primarily linear both in the way it progresses and in the way it is measured. Significantly, the standardization of time is also a "silent hegemony" that is most often tied up with the hegemony of a nation-state.¹⁵ Nations' use of modernity's standard time as a method of organizing industry, schools, stock markets and history, means that diverting from standard time, or disrupting it, can constitute "one of the most powerful challenges to the sovereignty of the state."¹⁶ Thus, Thoreau's time-constructs, ignoring the stringency of the standard form, often assimilating multiple chronologies and formations of historical record, are forms of resistance to "the chronological

¹⁴Dimock, Wai Chee. *Through Other Continents; American Literature Across Deep Time*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006), 2. Thoreau's lifetime was slightly before the full establishment of manifestation of a "standard" time as described by Dimock. Therefore I take care to think of Thoreau's writings as in conversation with the standardization of time the slow formulation of a standard time that had begun but hadn't yet been fully established as it would be after the Civil War.

¹⁵Dimock, 127.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 129.

progression of the nation” and even “the chronological succession of sanctified texts.”¹⁷ Both Thoreau’s mythology and his historiography challenge the chronological norms of his nation.

Thoreau disrupts a dominant chronology firstly by re-conceiving the shape of time. Much like he famously plumbs the depths of Walden Pond to discover its elusive bottom, Thoreau also measures time vertically, as though he is mining, as every layer of soil reveals another aeon.

I sit now on a stump whose rings number centuries of growth. If I look around I see that the soil is composed of the remains of just such stumps, ancestors to this. The earth is covered with mould. I thrust this stick many aeons deep into its surface, and with my heel make a deeper furrow than the elements have ploughed here for a thousand years. *A Week*, III

Time is represented in multiple forms in this brief passage, all relevant to Thoreau’s own use of it. Firstly it takes its most familiar form as a span accurately measured by years: centuries and a thousand years. Even the word “aeon”, more commonly meaning an indefinitely long amount of time, is a familiar signifier for a geological time-span of a billion years. Dimock calls this kind of time “numerical time” where time is “seen as quantifiable,” “unidirectional,” and measured in objective unit lengths.¹⁸ Looking a little like a measuring tape that holds two poles of set distance apart, numerical time is made up of preset days, months, years, and centuries. The terms that Thoreau uses, comfortingly understood by the accustomed concept of years, are understood as a serial passing of time from a moment in the past leading to the moment where Thoreau finds himself “here” sitting on the stump. But in the passage this version of numerical time is closely intertwined with the uncommon measurements found in Nature. The tree rings immediately provide a different shaping of time, where it is viewed as a spreading out of concentric circles. Not only does each ring mark a widening of the trunk’s diameter, it could also potentially be marking a growth in height, showing how trees contain time as growth on two different axes. Dendriform time appears throughout Thoreau’s

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁸*Ibid.* 113.

work, as we will see in the chapters that follow, but in this particular passage Thoreau goes on to emphasize time-formations beyond the tree-contained type. The soil's life-span can be measured in the passing generations of trees, their growth of width and height now piling on depth to the soil with their remains. Thoreau has shifted time's shape into one of depth and layers as we are told that "the earth," one layer, "is covered with mould," another layer of loose soil that is fertile and rich, made up of dead insects, leaves, plants, and trees. The layers thus made clear to us, Thoreau drives his stick downwards, "aeons deep," so that the stick usurps the serial measuring tape, and measures time perpendicularly, in its layers. Presenting time in so many different forms, Thoreau shows how open time is to reformulation as the set units of length, years and centuries, become insignificant against the dendriform and planetary time. Escaping the standardization of time, Thoreau's works challenge the very structure of the United States' territorial regime.

Both of Thoreau's deviations from standardizing time, the mythological and the historiographical, also converge on the matter of the protagonist in his narratives. In bringing attention to the protagonist as distinctly separate from the author, this thesis further differentiates itself from the tendency, found especially in what Leach calls "occasional books" on Thoreau, to conflate the narrator's voice as coming with or from Henry David Thoreau who lived and breathed in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ The conflation of authorial voice and narrative voice impedes constructive readings of Thoreau's works in terms of their narrative structures. By understanding the protagonist as not just separate from the author, but as a careful construction by the author to serve as an instrument of structural transformation within the narrative, this thesis can delve into more promising close readings that evolve into resilient accounts

¹⁹By "occasional books" Leach means those books on Thoreau that arrange and anthologize his works by arbitrary themes: "misleading, in the way that they make representative moments in Thoreau's notoriously contradictory writing that may not in fact be representative, thus suggesting to the reader an immediate accessibility to the determinate meaning of the texts from which such anthologies draw their material." A particular amusing example of this kind of anthologizing from recent years is Mott, Wesley T. ed., *Bonds of Affection: Thoreau on Dogs and Cats*, (Amherst: U Massachusetts P: 2005). Its title is more or less self explanatory.

of Thoreau's dissent taking shape in his writings through the construction of uncommon time-frames.

In *Walden*, as I will show, the narrator becomes fully in control of the mythological world he constructs out of the Walden Pond landscape. In the excursion narratives, however, the irruptions of violent histories, while often prompted by the narrator, often end up disrupting the narrator's own actions or thoughts. The passage above, while clearly about time, is figured against the shape of the protagonist, the infamous "I" of Thoreau's accounts. He is the one sitting on the tree stump, looking at and pointing out what the soil is made of, and forcing his stick and heel into the earth to measure and make his mark on time. The protagonists of Thoreau's narratives are always figured as powerful agents, interacting strongly with their landscapes and with how those landscapes are presented to the reader. Almost all the information in the accounts is mediated through their voices, as can be seen above. The narrative is directed by where the narrator chooses to sit, look, and interact. Straight after the above passage the narrator writes that

If I listen, I hear the peep of frogs which is older than the slime of Egypt, and the distant drumming of a partridge on a log, as if it were the pulse-beat of the summer air.

Through him we not only know what to see but what to listen to and he draws our attention to the significance of each noise and sight, consequently able to magnify and reduce scales of noise and distance as he wishes. The narrator *makes* the sound of the frogs older than the fertile "slime of Egypt" that was deposited by the Nile every time it flooded the banks. He actively turns the sound of a drumming partridge into the "pulse-beat of the summer air." Both these actions are impossible to understand as credible transformations, unless we consider that time can be re-conceived. If time can be seen holistically, in its entirety of events, then frog peeps can be found before the geological formations of soil by an ancient river and the sound of a partridge can motivate the movement of air. In other words, causation of the regular kind is no longer at play here. And importantly, it is the narrator who has veered that form of causation off course.

In Thoreau's myth the protagonist takes on the role of a traveler, a hero, and a poet. The three guises are linked in Thoreau's understanding of mythological tradition. Travel narrative's tendency to exult the traveler as the hero of the tale coupled with the tradition of mythological heroes traveling in their adventures mean that Thoreau's mythological narrator can be seen alongside such illustrious figures as Columbus and Odysseus, imbuing him with a historical and mythological significance. The presence of a traveler is important as he is able to discover the new worlds, thus justifying the re-conceptualized time-frames that brings about a new world. The hero signifies that Thoreau is writing in America's "heroic age"; an important period for any nation in which its mythology can be written.²⁰ Finally, though, the narrator figures as a poet. The poet is especially significant to Thoreau who believes that it is only the poet or artist who is capable of giving expression to myth:

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,—ay, to bloom and bear fruit there, after their kind, annually; for the faithful reader, in sympathy with surrounding Nature. "W," 49

The relationship between poet and words expressed in this passage articulate how important it is to Thoreau that Nature and the Wild are given voice. He writes that such a literature is so uncommon that only "mythology comes near to it." Myth, in other words, is the literary expression of Nature. The poet's ability to speak for Nature, and write poetry out of Nature as loyally and openly as possible, means that he can tap into its equally extraordinary relationship with time, that we saw the protagonist observe further up. Dendriform and planetary time are very much manifestations of Nature's time-frames. Thus, the protagonists of Thoreau's accounts are responsible for not just directing

²⁰See "W" 33.

the gaze of the reader, but also for restructuring the world through Nature's cues.

In the excursion narratives, however, the irruptions of violent histories disrupt the narrator's agency, furthering the question of Thoreau's historiography as usurpations of authoritative and dominant voices. In these cases the protagonist loses his agency and loses his ability as a poet to effectively "impress" the landscape "into his service." The reason for this is partially because the politics of including violent histories in Thoreau's chronographies are different to the politics of his mythography. Where mythography's agenda requires a strong narrator to create an alternate world that is not bound to the existing one, Thoreau's historiography aims to undermine and unsettle the authority of dominant historical records which rely strongly on the voice of the historian and his authoritative *text*. As such, when violent histories interrupt the dominant figure in Thoreau's account, either by affecting his thought, his actions, or even his words, we are reminded of violent histories' formidable force and the importance of its acknowledgement in historical records, even if that means allowing it to manifest as a deep disruption. Consider this, the continuation of the passage I quoted earlier depicting the narrator sitting on a tree stump:

When we dig up the soil from a thousand feet below the surface, we call it new, and the plants which spring from it; and when our vision pierced deeper into space, and detects a remoter star, we call that new also. The place where we sit is called Hudson,—once it was Nottingham,—once —

In this passage, which marks the end of a section in *A Week*, there is no proper resolution. The narrator's words and historical recording of where he sits are interrupted, as though the history of his location has been pushed out from under him. While there is no inclusion of a violent history in this passage as such, what does take place is a clashing of two formations of history, where the galactic formation, manifested by the remote star deep into space, renders the colonial history of the location's territorial naming and bordering meaningless. The moment the narrator takes on a historian's voice that attempts to provide a New England history through the recounting of colonial encampments, the text is shut down. The disruption of the narrator's voice at this moment is key

to Thoreau's vision of New England historiography, which places more value on silence than on the historically limited recordings of white-settler history that were dominating the antebellum North East.

Thus, while Thoreau pursues two different types of temporal challenges to the hegemony of his nation's chronological progression and recording of it, his main conceptualization of time as apart from a standard time and able to contain multiple histories synchronically exists in both his versions. Where they differ lies in the difference of what they are challenging which in turn affects the agency of the protagonist and the overall narrative shape that contains these alternative versions of time.

The thesis's interrogation of time in Thoreau's work employs the recent critical work on theories of deep time by Dimock, of queerness in literature that sits beside history by Kathryn Bond Stockton, of solid and liquid modernity by Zygmunt Bauman, and of newness in American literature as a product of accelerating industrialization by Philip Fisher, amongst others.²¹ While these critics vary from each other in their focus and field, they are all thinking, in one form or another, about the relationship between time and culture. Dimock visits American literature from Margaret Fuller to Wilson Harris, employing her re-conception of time as non-standard as a reading tool, thus discovering that reading time differently does not just open up the texts' agendas differently to previous scholarship's readings, but also relocates American literature as a global phenomenon; "what we called "American" literature is quite often a shorthand, a simplified name for a much more complex tangle of relations. Rather than being a discrete entity, it is better seen as a crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures."²² She calls this interaction of connective tissues that bind America to the rest of the world's cultures and chronologies "deep time." Dimock's understanding of a long, multi-threaded global history

²¹Stockton, Kathryn Bond. *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. (Durham: Duke UP, 2009); Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); Fisher, Philip. *Still the New World: American Literature in a Culture of Creative Destruction*. (USA: Harvard UP, 2000.)

²²Dimock, 3.

has allowed me to consider Thoreau's own conceptualization of the globe and history in his works, while also considering how his renowned myth-making is actually less an ahistorical construct than a manifestation of deep time in action. Similarly, Dimock's readings of literature that deviate from standard time-frames as politically motivated against the dominant time-constructs of the Western world has been key to my understanding of Thoreau's works as challenges to temporal norms.

Concerned with the long-held idea of ahistoricism in Thoreau's work, I find Stockton's thinking of literary forms that are located "beside History," growing sideways in arrested development, a particular helpful visual when working out where Thoreau's unusual concept of time fits in the standard progression of history. Her understanding of how literature can hold itself next to History where time is, if not put entirely on hold, then certainly vastly decelerated, constructively reframes questions of Thoreau's literary relationship to the past and future. In particular, Stockton's concept of sideways growth, understood as a lingering and hovering over a literary location without being affected by temporal progression, thus allowing for a deepening and growing outwards of ideas, symbols, and metaphors, resonates deeply with Thoreau's own formations of a temporal progression as shaped by trees or planet, measured in multi-directional expanse rather than in serial, consecutive units. Stockton is thus key to my visual understanding of Thoreau's concept and structuring of a deep and layered shape of time.

Similarly Fisher provides a new way of thinking about newness in American literature that has less to do with a masterful shrugging off of the Past in the spirit of an idealized Jeffersonian republic but rather considers how the young Republic came into being at the cusp of an accelerating industrialization. In other words, the formation of the United States coincided with the beginning of modernity: an era that sprang into an ever-accelerating industry that replaced "old" with "new" as fast as possible, so that the constant pushing of technological advancement makes relatively new discoveries quickly obsolete, observed in a visual of train tracks replaced with airplane tracks in the sky. Fisher thus rewrites the concept of the "new" that was lauded by American literary critics

of the 1950s and 1960s as a romantic ideology that symbolized America's great arrival, instead understanding it as an (often unconscious) mimicking of time's frantic movement through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Fisher's framework is vital to my understanding of Thoreau's constant brag of originality as deeply affected by modernity's arrival and its own brag about the new. Moreover, in conjunction with Stockton's thoughts of arrested development, I consider how Thoreau's deceleration of temporal progression is actually a literary resistance to the ever-accelerating time-frame Fisher describes in his book.

Finally Bauman's own work on modernity highlights and gives a larger contextual shape to the other critics I adapt for the purposes of this thesis. Bauman's consideration of how the now familiar concepts of history and time came into being at the start of modernity is vital to the thesis's argument that Thoreau's time-constructs resist emerging modernization. Bauman's emphasis on how the modernization of time, through the advent of the motorized vehicle, changed it to how we know it today, into its standardized form: "Indeed, modernity is, apart from anything else, perhaps more than anything else, *the history of time*: modernity is the time when time has a history."²³ Once this distinction has been made (and Dimock makes it too, albeit more obliquely), Thoreau's time-constructs can be more clearly understood as deviations from the standardization of time, and thus, as challenges to the emergence of modernity's version of time and time keeping.²⁴

On a broader scale, the conglomeration of the theoretical methods described above provides an interesting framework within which the work by F. O. Matthiessen, R.W. B. Lewis, Sherman Paul, and Reginald L Cook is ac-

²³Bauman, 110.

²⁴By thinking about Thoreau through these critics, this thesis ends up striving to sit in the good company of recent publications that have enriched the new "temporal turn" in literary studies. For anyone interested in looking at deeper, more intricate explorations of temporality in literature the following books are key points of reference: Allen, Thomas, *Republic in Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P), 2008; Luciano, Dana, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America*. (New York: New York UP, 2007); Pratt, Lloyd, *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2010); Traub, Valerie, "The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies," *PMLA*. 128.1 (2013), 21-39.

tively (if implicitly) revisited without the ideologies of Fredrick Turner's frontier romanticism or American exceptionalism constraining the literary exercise of understanding the nineteenth-century myth. While my attention to historiography in the middle section of the thesis is less relevant to the mid-century scholarship that spent most of its attention on Thoreau's central work, *Walden*, the thesis's alternate concentration on Thoreau's myth resonates with the concerns of mid-century Thoreauvian scholarship. Lewis's reading of *Walden* in *The American Adam* is prefaced by an analysis of how the Past was considered a burden to the nineteenth-century writer and orator in an age where America was tumbling forward into a new, exciting, and expanding industry heralded by the train, the increase in exports of domestic products, and multiple miles of post road.²⁵ The novel experience required "a manifesto of liberation from the past, followed by the demand for independent literature." Thoreau, observes Lewis, was unimpressed with the "miles of post roads", "millions of tons of domestic export" and the more general "diversion of energies to material expansion and of the enthusiastic arithmetic by which expansion was constantly being measured." Thus Lewis reads *Walden* as a new world, wrenched from both the Past and the "Saint Vitus dance" of his nation, providing a "cure" for his countrymen: "the total renunciation of the traditional, the conventional, the socially acceptable, the well-worn paths of conduct, and the total immersion in nature." Lewis's reading of *Walden* as resisting the current industrialized state of America and its arithmetic method of measuring value is curiously close to the argument that this thesis posits. Moreover, Lewis's claim that *Walden* denounces conventions and the socially acceptable has considerable overlap with this thesis's claim that Thoreau's works challenge its nation's norms. By considering that Thoreau resists these norms by applying a different construction of time to *Walden*, Lewis's 1960s conclusion *is* disempowered, but his fundamental questions and methodology nonetheless prove to be just as relevant to today's reading of Thoreau as they were then.

Further similarities between this thesis and the mid-century critics can be found when comparing how nearly all of these critics see *Walden* as a sepa-

²⁵Lewis, R.W.B., *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*. (Chicago: Chicago UP), 1955.

rate world from the real one Thoreau experienced. Sherman Paul writes that “the original Walden experience had become a symbol, an experiment, an action, that [Thoreau] could use to bind together the many things he had to say...” while Cook wrote that an “imaginative reader” could search the depths of *Walden* for the dark, ancient, spiritual reality beyond the “homely, circumstantial, and actual record.”²⁶ This thesis’s argument that the protagonist of *Walden* is separate from the author who experienced Walden certainly takes root in these pioneering critical studies of Thoreau’s texts working on two levels, rather than just reading them as straight autobiographical accounts. Rooted in Matthiessen’s innovative reading of *Walden* as a carefully *crafted* book, thus calling attention to its literary value and structure beyond its importance as an account of an experience in Nature, this thesis continues to read *Walden* as a “new” world that differs from the actual one Thoreau the author resided in. Recognizing the crafted world as separate from the real world certainly perpetuated the idea of Thoreau’s ahistoricity, but in this case, the idea of dual worlds sitting next to each other resonates strongly with Stockton’s idea of literature “beside History” rather than apart from it, further articulated by her reading that these literary worlds “ghost” the Histories they sit next to. In other words, the work undertaken by the New Critics on Thoreau proves to anticipate, in many ways, the new readings I undertake in my thesis. This begs the bigger critical questions, which this thesis does not have the space to answer, of whether it might be time to return to these critics in the current phase of American literary criticism and whether some slight alterations to their own critical tools could render them useful to future interrogations in the field.

This thesis brings the two schools of thought together most clearly in its disentanglement of the idea of “newness” in Thoreau’s work. For Lewis, Cook, Sherman, and even Matthiessen, “new” is to be without history. For contemporary scholars, “new” is understood as that which replaces the old, and as such, is always under threat of being replaced itself. In other words, the former’s reading of “new” is ahistorical and the latter’s reading of “new” is in the framework of a capitalist time. While these two understandings of “new”

²⁶Both Paul’s and Cook’s essays are in: Glick, Wendell, ed. *The Recognition of Henry David Thoreau*. (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1969).

might seem irrevocably conflicting, it is my contention that Thoreau's myth actually yokes these two camps' readings together in worthwhile ways. I consider that Thoreau's construction of myth engages in a frame-breaking technique, replacing the dominant structures of time and space with his own structures, just as outlined by Fisher's model of replacement in the frantic progression of a technologically advancing era. Having replaced the old with the new, though, Thoreau ensures that his narrative structure cannot be replaced itself, thus prompting the sense of being outside of history, as it deftly outmaneuvers history's progressive impact. I turn to the protagonist's agency, as performed by his act of seeing, as the rhetorical method of this curious construction of a narrative emerging out of history before settling beside it. The narrator's ability to draw multiple historical moments and multiple geographical locations out one place or object through his act of seeing, most notably exemplified in his transformation of Walden Pond into a place of deep time, results, I argue, in a reformulation of time's *shape*. The mid-century critics understand this shape as ahistorical as it does not follow regular chronological progression. In lieu of the theoretical scholarship of Dimock and of other "temporally turned" scholars, though, my thesis understands this shape as an alternative to regular chronological progression, but steeped in history. As such, it is Thoreau's alternative shape of time which we can read as new, thus coming into agreement with both the mid-century critics and current literary scholars.

This thesis is split into eight full chapters that are most easily understood when split into three sections. The first section constitutes the first four chapters, which focus on the structure of Thoreauvian myth and the significance of myth-making. The second section, made up of chapters five and six, explores Thoreau's excursion narratives and their role of recording violent histories. Meanwhile, the final two chapters form the third section of the thesis where a brief look is taken at how Thoreau's time-constructs are adapted in more recent works by Annie Dillard and Susan Howe, thus considering a new line of Thoreauvian genealogy.

The first four chapters consider in detail the different technical and structural methods undertaken to make the *Walden* myth. “Walking into History” begins by reading Thoreau’s posthumous essay “Walking” as his manifesto that calls for America’s need to create its own mythology to take its place in the global history of myths. The chapter articulates “Walking”’s manifesto and reads particular sections as instances of myth-making, providing a holistic view of Thoreau’s mythology in theory and in practice. It then moves on to consider why the act of walking is significant to myth production, drawing on Bauman’s theory of bipedal movement as emblematic of pre-modern time formations. Finally, through Michael Taussig’s anthropological perspective, the chapter moves on to understanding how myth can provide resistance to the encroachment of modernity and capitalism. This first chapter does a lot of the broader theoretical work necessary for the following three chapters, which go on to look at Thoreau’s myth-making in more technical detail. The chapter on travel narrative reads *Walden* as adapting the basic tropes and structural outline of the travel-narrative genre as a rhetorical method to introduce Thoreau’s protagonist as an authoritative travel figure and to emphasize the travel-narrative’s trope of discovering a new world, which allows Thoreau to create a new world in a ostensibly non-fictional narrative. Having thus explored how travel-narrative structures are utilized to prime the narrator’s presence and myth-making prowess in *Walden*, the following chapter considers how the narrative is consequently structured to hover next to History and engage in sideways growth. In this chapter on perennial newness, the thesis focuses on Thoreau’s idiosyncratic shaping of time and his way of bringing multiple moments of history into the present moment at Walden Pond without being overthrown by the acceleration of shifting narratives in the external world. Finally the chapter on Thoreau’s act of seeing considers how concepts of discovery and myth-creation are intentionally conflated in *Walden* in the form of seeing. Focusing more clearly on the Thoreauvian protagonist, the chapter explores how his agency is most often expressed through his ability to see landscapes differently to how they might regularly appear, thus “discovering” myth through renewed vision. The protagonist’s act of seeing, much like his

act walking, thus becomes a clear method of myth-making, albeit if is under the guise of myth-discovery.

In “Violent Histories” and “Hallucinating the Alien Terrain” I focus on two different examples of Thoreau inserting unrecorded historical happenings in his excursion narratives, “A Walk,” *A Week*, and “Ktaadn.” While both chapters deal with interruptions to the narratives, “Violent Histories” focuses on the affect captivity narratives have on Thoreau’s works when he includes the seventeenth-century captivity stories of Mary Rowlandson and Hannah Dustan. The violence contained by their accounts coupled with the oppressive removal of their agency, either as captives, or as authoritative voices, comes through in Thoreau’s excursion narratives as abrupt disruptions of his protagonist’s otherwise peaceful journeys through New England. His protagonist loses his agency as the trauma, and the silencing of their trauma unsettles the temporal structures of his narratives. Similarly in “Hallucinating the Alien Terrain” I explore how an unexpected encounter with the planet as “alien” in the midst of a straight forward excursion through the Maine Woods collapses the protagonist’s carefully structured historiography throughout the narrative, resulting in a failure on the part of the protagonist himself to imagine a history so enormously scaled that Earth could be considered an alien planet. He is left unable to fully reconstruct the time-frames he had been constructing throughout “Ktaadn” till the encounter, incapacitated by the alien history.

Finally, having looked in some detail at how Thoreau utilizes time constructs as ways of resisting and challenging his nation’s chronological progress and challenging its account of it, I consider how Annie Dillard and Susan Howe use similar models in their works, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and *Thorow* respectively, to challenge dominant narratives of their periods. Dillard’s *Pilgrim* is less aggressive in its challenge than Thoreau’s and Howe’s work but her narrative reanimates Thoreau’s myth-making in a post-war moment where the United States’ sense of its place in global history was changing. As such Thoreau’s myth becomes a useful literary source of expression and Dillard turns to it as a way of reconsidered where and how the American myth can be re-appropriated in the early 1970s. Howe, however, draws from Thoreau’s historiographical

challenge, to uncover and recover the violent history of Lake George in her extraordinarily avant-garde poetry that manifests historical collapse not just in content but also in the visual effect of her poem, as the poem culminates in two pages of unevenly distributed words overlapping each other, with no interest in the conformity of the regularly printed page and margins. Her adaptation of Thoreau's time-construct manifest visually, if surreptitiously, as her poem celebrates in constant and consistent disruption of itself, of hegemonic historical narratives, and even of standard printing procedures. Howe picks up on a Thoreauvian genealogy of violence expressed in temporal disruption rarely found in other contemporary writers often coupled with Thoreau, prompting the larger question on whether the genealogy is there but is as yet unnoticed by wider critical work.

...you can't see anything from a car; you've to get out of the goddamned contraption and walk, better yet crawl, on hands and knees, over the sandstone and through the thornbush and cactus.

— Edward Abbey

2

Walking into History

When first giving his lecture, entitled “The Wild,” in April of 1851, Thoreau began by apologizing for “speaking to them tonight on any other subject than the Fugitive Slave Law” – a topic on everyone’s mind following the recent Boston arrest of Thomas Sims, a fugitive slave, and his consequent deportation to Georgia.¹ Thoreau was aware that the subject-matter of his essay was bordering on the self-indulgent. His 1851 apology remains inherent in the posthumously published version of the lecture, entitled “Walking.”²

¹Harding, Walter. *The Days of Henry David Thoreau*. (New York: Dover, 1982), 341.

²Thoreau’s essay, “Walking” was formed out of two different lectures he gave in the early 1850’s. It was then reworked into the text we know today and published in 1862, making it one of Thoreau’s posthumous publications. The version of “Walking” we are familiar with is a text written to be read, much like *Walden* is. Thoreau’s carefully wrought texts, the ones he worked on for years before publishing them, tend to be his most complexly composed. Put differently, an essay like “Walking” gives itself to a different kind of reading and interpretation than an essay like “Slavery in Massachusetts” does. This should come as no surprise since the intentions of the two texts are quite different, especially in their final forms. The one was deliberately prepared for a posthumous publication in the *Atlantic Monthly*, a journal with a tradition of publishing American letters, while the other was written for an abolitionist rally, to express distress and anger at the State. There is an immediacy, an (admittedly constructed) wrath in “Slavery” that has little time to mellow between its form as a lecture and its form as a published text. Besides, “Slavery”’s urgent message required relatively fast publication as it needed to reach a wider audience as quickly as possible. “Walking,” however, was made out of Thoreau’s more popular lectures on the Wild, and no doubt Thoreau had no need to publish a lecture he was able to keep recycling for monetary purposes. By thinking about the same lecture for ten-odd years and eventually rewriting it for a literary journal, Thoreau has left us with a finely crafted

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil, – to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister, and the school-committee, and every one of you will take care of that. (“W,” 1)³

In this opening paragraph Thoreau quickly removes himself from the social and political obligations he usually feels the need to respond to.⁴ For once, he turns those obligations over to the reader. We are thus alerted to “Walking”’s agenda from early on. This essay, Thoreau tells us, will isolate itself from the problems of history and civilization, and instead indulge in an “extreme statement,” in a hypothetical, or, as I will argue, a mythological situation.

The first section of the essay is, in this scene, a deliberate clearing of space, a walking out of America’s civilizations and into America’s Wild. Thoreau goes on to explain the importance of walking, of sauntering, and the time and dedication it takes to “go forth on the shortest walk...in the spirit of undying adventure” (3). He then wrestles with aspects of culture, like the village, the cross-legged mechanics and shopkeepers, and the women who are stuck indoors all day, and consciously walks away from these distractions. “It sometimes happens that I cannot easily shake off the village...and I am not where my body is,—I am out of my senses,” writes Thoreau of walking in the woods. But as the essay continues, Thoreau walks and puts himself at a distance, becoming a surveyor of the village: “Man and his affairs, church and state and school, trade and commerce, and manufacturers and agriculture, even politics, the most alarming of them all,—I am pleased to see how little space they occupy in the landscape. I pass from it as from a bean-field into the forest and it is forgotten.” Removing himself from the pressures of society, or what he calls

version of “Walking” that demands patient and dedicated reading to negotiate its euphoric symbolisms, biblical metaphors, and mythological tropes.

³All references to “Walking” are included in the main body of the text, using paragraph numbers instead of page numbers.

⁴Nonetheless the fugitive slave law does make an appearance, if only as an absence, toward the end of the essay, in an idealized vision of a cockerel’s life: “Where he [the bird] lives no fugitive slave laws are passed.”

“worldly engagements,” Thoreau turns to his walk through Nature, “as the old poets and prophets” did.

Having placed enough distance between himself and the village, the essay “Walking” becomes Thoreau’s literary manifesto. In it he appeals for an American mythology: he envisions a literature “as old as mankind... the sublimest recreation of the intellect.” He transforms the act of walking itself into a mythological action, where the walker becomes an heroic figure and the land walked toward a western haven of nature and myth. And at the heart of the literary transformations of the vernacular into the celestial, lies Thoreau’s vision of America: a nation on the cusp of great philosophical and literary achievement. The walker himself looks at a “panorama of the Mississippi” after steeping himself in the history and tradition of a panorama of the Rhine, and notices that unlike the Rhine, “the foundations of the castles were yet to be laid” in Ohio and Missouri. So, concludes Thoreau, with considerable excitement, America is in the process of creating its own heroic condition: “*this was the heroic age itself.*” In “Walking” we find the famous, antebellum, New England literary trope in its most explicit form: America is New and unmarred from history and civilization. America’s newness makes it ripe for the construction of myth, Thoreau explains. Its un-exhausted soil and still-flourishing wilderness mean that the natural circumstances are ideal for the reaping of myth, just as they were in Greece and Rome during Homer and Virgil’s time. “Walking” thus culminates in a dazzling vision of America as an intrepid, pioneering nation, comparable to Elysium, while the setting sun in the West turns into a powerful symbol of progress, casting long shadows toward the Old World.

For Thoreau, mythology is key to a nation’s origins as it is the first literature a nation creates. It emerges from Nature, as opposed to culture, predating civilization but also anticipating the nation’s heroic era. In the middle of “Walking,” Thoreau explicitly sets out his demand for an American mythology:

Mythology comes nearer to it [a literature which expresses the Wild] than anything. How much more fertile a Nature, at least, has Grecian mythology its root in than English literature! Mythology is the crop which the Old World bore before its soil was exhausted, before the fancy and imagination were affected with blight; and which it

still bears, wherever its pristine vigor is unabated. All other literatures endure only as the elms which overshadow our houses; but this is like the great dragon-tree of the Western Isles, as old as mankind, and, whether that does or not, will endure as long; for the decay of other literature makes the soil in which it thrives.

The West is preparing to add its fable to those of the East. The valleys of the Ganges, the Nile, and the Rhine, having yielded their crop, it remains to be seen what the valleys of the Amazon, the Plate, the Orinoco, the St Lawrence, and the Mississippi will produce. Perchance, when, in the course of ages, American liberty has become a fiction of the past,—as it is to some extent a fiction of the present,—the poets of the world will be inspired by American mythology.

The variety of tenses in this short passage indicate the temporal complexity of Thoreau's vision. Mythology exists in *two* tenses: it is both the literature that emerges *before* the literal and metaphorical over cultivation of a civilization's resources *and* the literature that continues on in the present perfect, "still" "unabated." The omnipresence of mythology marks it as a literature that sits just outside of a standard temporal progression and that simultaneously gives to and takes from the literatures that are part of that standard.⁵ Thus the curious nature of Thoreau's envisioned mythology means it will actually thrive on future literature, always claiming its role as originator through the decay of the literature it has anticipated. And this is why it does not "overshadow our houses," for it is always fertile, never static or decaying. Mythology, literature of the Wild, suggests Thoreau, is always active in its role as originator.

By calling for a literature that will "transcend the order of time and development," an order that might well asphyxiate or over structure other forms of literature, Thoreau depicts mythology as always fertilizing a diachronic progres-

⁵I use Wai Chee Dimock's adjective "standard" to describe the familiar form of history and time. It is a perception of time arrived upon at the advent of modernity, "a spatialized image: [where] time here looks a bit like a measure tape, with fixed segments, fixed unit lengths, each assignable to a number...The guiding spirit is serial numbers, doubling ... as chronological dates. On the strength of these days, the ancient and modern can be certified to be worlds apart, never to be in contact" (2). Standard time or history then, is to do with a perception or a way of measuring it that has become so habitual in Western thinking that it is difficult for the Western world to conceive of a chronotype with a different ontology. Dimock, Wai Chee, *Through Other Continents; American Literature Across Deep Time*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006.)

sion of literature, which at the same time resides in a place of synchronicity.⁶ His use of the dragon-tree simile to explain mythology's relationship to other literatures is particularly helpful. The dragon-tree, like mythology, is "as old as mankind;" its size is not diminished by the tall elm trees, like other literatures, that "overshadow our houses," suggesting that the constructed abodes of humans are paltry in comparison to mankind's history of existence. As the elms die, the dragon-tree prospers in the soil made out of their decay. If the houses and elms figure as different orders of time and development, the house perhaps counting for one generation of humans and the elms as, say, ten generations, then the dragon-tree holds a much longer life-span and thus perspective of time. As such, in comparison with the elms and the houses it seems to be extraordinarily slow moving, as it experiences an alternative span of development and history to the other trees and buildings. Moreover, due to its continuous activity, its ability to expand and flourish, mythology is a place of growth, even though it sits, as Kathryn Bond Stockton would say, "beside History." Thus, this ever-existing literature undergoes an evolution which differs from the kind of growth standard historical progression readers might otherwise be familiar with. It is, to use a Thoreau-friendly metaphor, a mushroom growth, or as Stockton describes it, a sideways growth.

Sideways growth, explains Stockton, can be a refusal to "grow up" in the strict conditions and traditions laid down by society. Emerson famously lamented Thoreau's refusal to grow up, writing regretfully in his eulogy for his friend that "instead of engineering for all America, he was the captain of the huckleberry party." Thoreau's adamant lack of ambition in the eyes of his contemporaries had no doubt to do with his own rethinking around new ways

⁶This is not unlike Giorgio Agamben's idea of pure language in *Infancy and History*. Drawing upon texts by Benveniste, who shows the semiotic (synchronic) as something that is recognized (signs), and the semantic (diachronic) as something that is understood (discourse), Agamben is quick to prove that though they may seem mutually exclusive, the semantic draws from the semiotic in its every utterance: "The semantic does not exist except in its momentary emergence from the semiotic in the instance of discourse, whose elements, once uttered, fall back into pure language, which reassembles them in its mute dictionary of signs" (56). Thus, Agamben claims that pure language is not actually lost, nor merely left behind as a trace in Babel language, rather it is always present, as something from which the semantic, or diachronic emerges every time the latter is used.

of growing. Stockton describes this sideways growth as an arrested development, both of which often result in queerness. Leaving the queer aspect aside for the purposes explored in this project, Thoreau's mythology, sitting beside history, avails itself to the idea of an arrested development: a type of growth which lingers, purposefully suspends time, and lengthens durations.⁷ While time "hang[s] suspended," "meaning is moving and growing," exemplified by Picasso's cubism and Gertrude Stein's syntactical repetition, writes Stockton. The results are texts that create new time frames, giving space for meaning to fatten and for symbols to deepen. Thoreau's mythology works within this odd, suspended time frame that constantly elides the regular process of history but nonetheless stands by it. "Amalgamates synchronies and glazed complexities not beside the point," writes Stockton, "the simplest fact remains that whatever hasn't been put into History ... is, by definition, strictly beside it."

While "Walking" is mostly concerned with calling for a literature of the Wild, or anticipating it, Thoreau does attempt to create the actual mythology in several passages. The walker is one of the few able to uncover mythology, see it, and understand it. Toward the end of his essay, Thoreau begins to describe how this mythology sits next to the real, natural environment the walker finds himself in.

The walker in the familiar fields which stretch around my native town sometimes finds himself in another land than is described in their owners' deeds, as it were in some far-away field on the confines

⁷Stockton, 25. There is probably a fair argument to be made that Thoreau *is* queer. (I am reminded of Perry Miller's assertion that Thoreau "is no pietistic exhorter. So does not preach imperviousness. He is aware of the world about him. He tells us just how he fought for his emancipation. So nothing is to be gained by discounting him as an individualist born in a happier time which could tolerate his queerness.") Indeed, considering that Stockton's argument is that queer (in the broadest sense) children are often located beside History, using her argument here to uncovers Thoreau's relationship with time and history certainly indicates that Thoreau's conscious attempts to create narratives that sit next to History make his narratives and narrators queer too. There is not enough space in this thesis to fully think through this intriguing line of enquiry though. A starting point no doubt would be the two excellent essays by Michael Warner: "Thoreau's Bottom." *Raritan: A Quarterly Review*. 11.3 (1992), 53-79; and "Walden's Erotic Economy." *Comparative American identities: race, sex, and nationality in the modern text*. Ed. Hortense J. Spillers. (New York: Routledge). 1991.

of actual Concord, where her jurisdiction ceases and the idea which the word Concord suggests ceases to be suggested. 71

In this short passage above, Thoreau moves into a fictional landscape that ignores title deeds and human-made boundaries (official borders). Not only does Thoreau loosen up the geography of his hometown, but by doing so he also loosens up the meaning of his hometown's name, making it pale against the new, mythological land the walker has discovered. "The world with which we are commonly acquainted leaves no trace," writes Thoreau, "and it will have no anniversary." Before the reader's eyes, Concord turns into a ghostly apparition, when only a few sentences earlier the literary landscape had been the location that hovered ghost-like next to America. We witness his creation of myth as he makes the literary landscape usurp the actual one. "Literature is the home of nonstandard space and time," writes Wai Chee Dimock, as though speaking directly to Thoreau's vision of a new American literature. "Against the official borders of the nation and against the fixed intervals of the clock, what flourishes here is irregular duration and extension, some extending for thousands of years or thousands of miles, each occasioned by a different tie and varying with that tie, and each loosening up the chronology and geography of the nation."⁸ Bearing Dimock's articulation of irregular borders and time-frames in mind as key characteristics of literature, we can begin to understand from the above passage how explicit Thoreau is in his desire to refute regular or standardizing time-frames and geographical scales in favor of mythology.

The tension of ghostliness between Thoreau's mythological landscapes and actual landscape culminates in Thoreau's description of "some ancient and altogether admirable and shining family" living in an invisible house on the real Spaulding Farm (72). The family "recline on sunbeams," are not disturbed by "the farmer's cart-path which leads directly through their hall;" in fact they have "never heard of Spaulding, and do not know that he is their neighbor."

⁸Dimock's term "deep time," indicates a wider, transcontinental connotation than the specific way which Stockton views History. Dimock's coinage challenges the otherwise entrenched notion of American literature forming itself out of a history which begins in 1776. Her book suggests that understanding literature in America's relatively young political history elides the greater, global history and culture which directly and indirectly effects the production of America's literature. Dimock, 4.

In their idealized lifestyle there is “no noise of labor,” “there are no politics,” their “coat of arms is simply lichen” and “their attics [are] in the tops of the trees” that grow through their house. They barely make any noise though the walker suspects he hears both “the sounds of suppressed hilarity” and “the finest imaginable sweet musical hum...which perchance was the sound of their thinking.” Sure enough, in this laborless, mythological household the family have time to think deeply: “they [have] no idle thoughts, and no one without could see their work, for their industry was not as in knots and excrescences embayed.”

The cohabitation of Spaulding with the ancient family turns both farm and fable into the ghost of the other. Spaulding cannot see them at all, yet they also live completely unaware of his whistling “as he [drives] his team through the house.” His whistling becomes like Thoreau’s earlier mention of American liberty, which will soon turn into a “fiction of the past”: a temporary sound that has a short life-span. The fable though, the ancient, shining family, exist on a longer time span, unable to be inconvenienced by the social, political, or industrial structures that have only recently been laid down. In their nonstandard time-frame, then, the fabled family can indulge in long, deep thinking. Not only that, but their lives are entirely wrapped up in the nature that surrounds them. Spaulding traverses nature for the sake of his occupation, but the family actually *live* the nature. Thoreau describes the height of the trees, the contents of Spaulding’s meadow (cranberries), and the glowing of the sun, only in relation to the family’s environment, as though nature is directly interlinked to the fable. The ghostly garden, suggests Stockton in an analysis of the 1994 film *The Hanging Garden* “is aesthetically moving and a treasure trove of metaphors for flowering and growth – though not a growing up” (22). Similarly, the harmonious pastoral life of the fabled family makes for a prime setting for metaphor, deep thought, and flowering. Mythology and all its temporal and metaphorical complexities can thrive there. The family live much like the dragon-tree, beside the labor-informed progression of time that is familiar to a working man like Spaulding, suggesting that they will outlive Spaulding and his bordered farm. Thoreau’s real strength in this passage is making this

fabled family more tangible than Spaulding himself, once again usurping the actual for the mythological.

Thoreau loses sight of them though, when he finishes describing the fable: “But I find it difficult to remember them. They fade irrevocably out of my mind even now while I speak and endeavor to recall them, and recollect myself. It is only after a long and serious effort to recollect my best thoughts that I become again aware of their cohabitancy” (73). There is an element of the performative in Thoreau’s phrasing of his fable’s tangibility, but it emphasizes the difficulty of creating mythology. It is a “now-you-see-it now-you-don’t affair,” as we will later see Annie Dillard describe it: a glimpse out of the corner of the walker’s eye that requires real concentration, the collection of one’s “best thoughts,” to codify into text. Writing about ghosts, Thoreau suggests, is necessary, but not easy:

But it sometimes happens [on my walks] that I cannot easily shake off the village. The thought of some work will run in my head, and I am not where my body is,—I am out of my senses. In my walks I would fain return to my senses. What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods? 13

Thoreau’s struggle with the village and its “worldly engagements” often follows him into nature. In this passage he describes the difficulty of taking himself out of the village’s concerns and into the present moment and the woods. And just like the mythological family slip out of Thoreau’s mind when he is not focussed, so does the present moment of nature. In this way myth and nature occupy similar temporal spaces: a space Thoreau defines by presence. The present moment stretches out into forever, after all, never impeded by chronology or the passing of time, unaffected by events and crises, an ideal temporal environment for mythology. “We cannot afford not to live in the present,” writes Thoreau a little further on, as though there is a price to be paid for living in progressive time. The price, of course, is his senses. Without his senses, without awareness of the present moment, he cannot begin to observe and experience myth. Thus presence and nature are crucial for Thoreau’s myth creation or else the fables he has witnessed fade out of his mind.

Indeed what becomes clearer in “Walking,” (and is then further clarified in *Walden* as we shall see), is that myth is made by the narrator of Thoreau’s works. The narrator is the key agent, the poet-philosopher, who is able to point out the mythological family in Spaulding’s farm or see the ghostly landscape that supplants Concord. Moreover, the narrator must undergo a process, a conscious walking away from the village, in order to gain his ability to see, uncover, and encourage myth’s appearance against the backdrop of the regular world he usually walks through. Myth creation is the ever-vague “business” Thoreau seeks out in the woods. “Walking” ends with a final walk in a meadow, at “the source of a small brook,” where Thoreau and his companion look across a meadow. There he constructs an all consuming mythological universe, far larger than ghostly Concords or tree-top folklore.

...the sun at last, just before setting, after a cold gray day, reached a clear stratum in the horizon, and the softest brightest morning sunlight fell on the dry grass and on the stems of the trees in the opposite horizon and on the leaves of the shrub-oaks on the hill-side, while our shadows stretched long over the meadow eastward, as if we were the only motes in its beams. It was such a light as we could not have imagined a moment before, and the air was so warm and serene that nothing was wanting to make a paradise of that meadow. When we reflected that this was not a solitary phenomenon, never to happen again, but that it would happen forever and ever an infinite number of evenings, and cheer and reassure the latest child that walked there, it was more glorious still. 78

Thoreau’s business becomes clear in this, his essay’s final walk. Concord, the village, the hunters, the farmers, America itself, fall away under the light of the setting sun, which transforms into a symbolic morning light, marking a point of beginning and origin. Solar time, implies Thoreau, has shifted in this meadow. Thus, in this reversed sunlight, the meadow itself transforms from a cold, gray, dry location into a warm, serene, paradise. Nor is it just time and nature that have shifted, but also scale. The meadow, a source of a small brook, expands into a larger-than-life planet, where Thoreau and his companion become the *only* motes, specks of dust, in the sun beams. East and west are hugged together by the strata of horizons, in other words, by as far as the eye can see, so that borders, geographic and constructed, are rendered meaningless. In the sunlit

meadow the two men witness a paradoxical moment of infinity, an experience that will repeat itself endlessly regardless of civilization's chronology. It is a carefully crafted moment of myth, located, it would seem, outside of history, but it is nonetheless found beside the actual meadow: it is the sunshine, the light, Thoreau's eyes, that change the meadow. In the act of seeing differently Thoreau breaks with reality, he offers a different version of America where the continent becomes temporary, borderless, stretching from eastern horizon to western horizon. "The West is preparing to add its fables to those of the East," writes Thoreau (50). By creating myth, Thoreau suggests, America can finally locate itself in the world as part of a cultural tradition of myth-makers, in the ranks of the ancient Greeks, Romans, Vikings, Indians and Chinese.⁹ With mythology growing through America like the dragon-tree of the Western Isles, the country can be seen in a global context. Consequently it will take its place in planetary history.

Planetary history's timeframe far surpasses anthropocentric timeframes. It is most easily understood as the expanses of time opened up by astronomy and geology. This scaling of time and size makes human history brief and humans minute. Such vast longitudes and latitudes though mark the boundaries of mythology's habitat. The sciences of the nineteenth century, writes Dimock,

revealed not only the dumbfounding largeness of the universe but also the dumbfounding smallness of human beings. Astronomy and geology were especially merciless in disabusing us of any illusion of grandeur. The former, discovering in the cosmos distances measured by billions of light years, and the latter, discovering on our planet itself a long record of prehistoric fossils, made it clear that the universe as a whole and even our own planet is operating on a time frame grossly asymmetrical to the human life span.¹⁰

Thoreau, who refers to Darwin, Humboldt, geologists, geographers, and astronomers in "Walking," creates mythology, a literature on an extraordinarily different time-frame and scale to the standardized ones his townsmen live in, partly in response to the newly discovered scientific knowledge of antebellum

⁹These are but a few of the cultures Thoreau regularly pulls mythological references from throughout his works.

¹⁰Dimock, 54.

America. Thus his response to scale enlargement is to focus on a peculiar present moment that does not ignore history, but digs deep into the planet, expands up toward the heavens, and brings the world into a new overwhelming spatial and temporal perspective. He expands the strata of the landscapes as they can be seen with the naked eye and instead considers them on planetary or galactic scales as he did in the final passage of “Walking,” examined above. Indeed, throughout “Walking” Thoreau gestures to the newly enlarged world – from the panoramas he visits of the Rhine and the Mississippi which afford him unbroken views of entire natural regions, to discovering a view of new mountains and unusual, star-like flowers having climbed a tall tree. “The geologist has discovered,” writes Thoreau, burrowing into the planet’s soil, “that the figures of serpents, griffins, flying dragons and other fanciful embellishments of heraldry, have their prototypes in the forms of fossil species which were extinct before man was created, and hence “indicate a faint and shadowy knowledge of a previous state of organic existence” (51). Thoreau merges myth with geological history here: half truths mix with human fancy, origins located in the recorded history of geology provide evidence for made-up fables. “Faint and shadowy knowledge” ghosts actual fact so that myth and planetary history sit intimately close to each other: both claiming the fossils as part of their history. For one, Thoreau lingers over the fossils, as Stockton describes the hanging garden beside History, rather than moving directly and speedily away from it. He does not necessarily seek the forensic knowledge the fossils have to give. “My desire for knowledge is intermittent;” says Thoreau, “but my desire to bathe my head in atmospheres unknown to my feet is perennial and constant.” “Desire for knowledge” against “desire to bathe my head” makes a clear distinction between striving toward something and a loitering around an idea. Thoreau lingers in the horizontal and vertical breadths of nature, not overwhelmed or frightened of the expanses he has discovered, but eager to slow down his own growth against the fast, chronologically insignificant growth of his fellow countrymen: “...we are so early weaned from [Nature’s] breast to society, to that culture which is exclusively an interaction of man on man,—a sort of breeding in and in, which produces at most a merely English nobility, a

civilization destined to have a speedy limit” (58).

The time frame of planetary history becomes the ideal temporal location for a literature that requires being in a lingering moment beside a history undergoing standardization. Thoreau, Concord’s notorious idler, about whom his aunt loudly complained “I wish he could find something better to do than walking off every now and then,” embraces the new horizons, lateral and longitudinal, provided by the new and exciting sciences of his time. In them he sees an opportunity for a kind of literature that can “transcend the order of time and development,” but which remains always next to, overseeing, the sequential development of mankind. This is Thoreau’s mythology.

Thoreau’s choice to use the act of walking as the rhetorical topic of his literary manifesto is an apt one. Walking’s own inherent pacing means that it resists the acceleration of speed that was prominent in the nineteenth century’s modern time-frame.¹¹ By attending to his choice of walking, we can begin to understand both the chronotype Thoreau is disavowing in his call for an American mythology and the chronotype he is interested in pursuing. Walking becomes Thoreau’s most deeply subversive act in the face of modernity’s historical narrative, allowing him to create an alternative history that runs apart from the narrative experienced by his compatriots. In some ways it seems contradictory to suggest that Thoreau is refusing the modern time-frame while embracing his century’s new scientific understandings of time, as the two are indubitably correlated. However, I want to argue that Thoreau uses this anachronistic method of movement in combination with contemporary epistemological discoveries to reinvent mythology’s temporal landscape in the otherwise frantic time-frame of his century.

A useful point of reference at this juncture is Zygmunt Bauman’s work on time’s history relationship with modernity.¹² Modernity, for Bauman, begins with the advent of the motorized vehicle that forever changes the relationship between time and space, so that time becomes the ever-evolving tool with which to conquer space, rather than the fixed motion controlled by the breadth

¹¹And which continues to be prominent in the twenty-first century.

¹²Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2000.)

of space and the limited ability of human or animal legs. Time's history, meanwhile, can begin to exist the moment time has variability.

Once the distance passed in a unit of time came to be dependent on technology, on artificial means of transportation, all extant, inherited limits to the speed of movement could be in principle transgressed. Only the sky (or, as it transpired later, the speed of light) was not the limit, and modernity was one continuous, unstoppable and fast acceleration effort to reach it.¹³

In other words, as time's ability to change and evolve replaced its previous stability (its *premodern* ontology) it began to build narrative around itself, and with narrative came historical progression. There are, no doubt, other inventions that changed perception of time, or time's relationship with the world. Dimock notes how the mechanical clock brought about a wholly different measurement of time that is key to her description of time's standardization. The dissemination of written travel narratives describing year-long expeditions in foreign lands, as I will argue later, led to entire re-evaluations of the globe's vastness, liberating space from the confines of a perceived fallen paradise. But Bauman's interest in time's eventual evolution to a tool used to conquer space, rather than its previous existence as something confined by space, is significant to Thoreau's own reformulations of space and time in his books.

Thoreau's insistence on walking everywhere embraces the innate limitation of bipedal transport, which means that his travels cannot reach great physical distances. As such he enforces time's premodern form, encouraging the egalitarian relationship between time and space. His texts can in this sense be read as romantic throw-backs to a premodern time, as though he is ignoring the significance of the times he is living in. No wonder, then, that Thoreau is accused of (or lauded for his) ahistoricity. He won't even recognize *time's* history. Having established however, that Thoreau's relationship with history, his placement of myth *beside* history, does not necessarily relegate his texts to ahistorical contexts, while also discovering that Thoreau's sense of history is based on a planetary scale of time rather than a human one, it would seem that

¹³Bauman, 9.

Thoreau's refusal of modern time must be less a refusal of history, and more a refusal of modernity's version of it.

Thoreau's process of refusal emerges in his other works as a deeply political act. Consider the following passage from Thoreau's most famous political text, "Civil Disobedience:"

I meet this American government, or its representative, the State government, directly, and face to face, once a year no more in the person of its tax-gatherer; this is the only mode in which a man situated as I am necessarily meets it; and it then says distinctly, Recognize me; and the simplest, the most effectual, and, in the present posture of affairs, the indispensablest mode of treating with it on this head, of expressing your little satisfaction with and love for it, is to deny it then. "CD," 21

In this passage Thoreau shows how one of his most radical acts is his refusal to recognize the State's local authority figure. In *Walden* he talks about ownership of land and muses that a poet who has wandered a farmer's property has, unbeknownst to the farmer, "put [the] farm in rhyme, the most admirable kind of invisible fence, has fairly impounded it, milked it, skimmed it, and got all the cream" (*W*, II, 3). In "Walking," as previously noted, the ancient mythological family do not recognize the existence of Spaulding, nor do they know that their home rests within his farm. In all these cases, one trope becomes clear: refusing the existence of a structural power, or denying the structure's power alone, is Thoreau's most fervent act of revolt – "When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished" ("CD," 22).

Similarly then, Thoreau's act of walking refuses allegiance to modernity's form of travel and its subsequent effect on time and history. A deeply subversive and political act, walking creates its own historical narratives which refuse to recognize the power structures constructed by modernity, be they in the form of State and government, or in the form of territorial boundaries, or in the form of historical record. Like so much of Thoreau's work, walking is another form of re-evaluation. It forces narrative to follow a set of events that would otherwise be considered insignificant, not allowing for a historical record of winners.

Modernity's effect on time, by all accounts, seems to be a re-distribution of power. Bauman argues that the advent of time's history changes power dynamics and hierarchies. Societies began to conquer lands faster, in competition with one another over the speed of claiming new territories, where "control it, map it and supervise it," became the priority of powerful nations and peoples.¹⁴

One could say that the difference between the strong and the weak is the difference between a territory shaped in the image of the map - closely guarded and tightly controlled - and a territory open to intrusion, to redrawing of boundaries and recharting the maps.¹⁵

The faster someone could map out a new space and border it, the sooner it could become theirs. In Thoreau's time, where the migration west was still palpable in the shape of the railroad, the Mexican war raged south of the border, and new states were still being added to the union, expansionism and territorial disputes were hard to ignore, even in the small well-settled towns of New England. The figures now positioned in modernity's history were the conquerors. Walking though, a territorially futile act since its ability to cross space is still very much controlled by space, maps without conquest, immediately ducking out of historical record. Its relationship with space is decidedly different to that of conquest, territory cannot be "shaped in the image of the map." When walking along Cape Cod's enormous shore-line Thoreau writes of his contented view of the landscape: "There I had got the Cape under me, as much as if I were riding it bare-backed. It was not as on the map, or seen from the stage-coach; but there I found it all out of doors, huge and real, Cape Cod! as it cannot be represented on a map, color it as you will; the thing itself, than which there is nothing more like it, no truer picture or account;" (*CC*, IV, 8).¹⁶ Thoreau's disdain for map-views or views from moving vehicles could not be clearer in this accolade for his shore-walk experience.¹⁷ Cape Cod's shape is "huge and real," unable to be constrained by map lines or colors.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁶All in-text citations for *Cape Cod* are referred to as *CC* where roman numeral is used to indicate chapter number and arabic numeral is used to indicate paragraph number.

¹⁷For an alternative reading of Thoreau's geographical and cartographical vision see Abrams, Robert E. *Landscape and ideology in American renaissance literature: topographies of skepticism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 41-55.

Walking allows him to visit a space in its irreplicable form, without man-made scaling or man-engineered perception. The question of the strong versus the weak, as explained by Bauman, becomes moot when land experienced bipedally does not take men's boundaries into account. Indeed the shore's figurative transformation into a steed further emphasizes the natural movement: in this case quadrupedally even. The wildness of the ride, with the rider seated bare-backed, suggests that the narrator can move easily out of human-led roads and map routes, unlike the stage-coach which must stick to set courses. As far as the walked-into space is concerned, time only exists as the history of its geology, rather than as the history that has been measured and scaled by man. And while walking may not *create* this seemingly retrograde time-space relationship, it allows the bipedal individual to *tap into* that relationship and, in Thoreau's case, utilize it for the construction of myth.

Walking, then, is an antiestablishment performance. It can, with its disregard for territorial boundaries as explicated in maps and its disregard for standard time as exemplified by the regularized stage-coach, unhinge the very idea of nationhood. Most importantly perhaps, it doesn't offer an alternative historical *narrative* as such, one that could perhaps be assimilated into a pluralistic historical record; rather it offers an alternative chronotype; it unfolds a different "shape of time."¹⁸ Thoreau challenges the regularized form of history and its advocate, the historian, in this passage from "Life Without Principle."

All summer, and far into the autumn, perchance, you unconsciously went by the newspapers and the news, and now you find it was because the morning and the evening were full of news to you. Your walks were full of incidents. You attended, not to the affairs of Europe, but to your own affairs in Massachusetts fields. If you chance to live and move and have your being in that thin stratum in which the events that make the news transpire,—thinner than the paper on which it is printed,—then these things will fill the world for you; but if you soar above or dive below that plane, you cannot remember nor be reminded of them. Really to see the sun rise or go down every day, so to relate ourselves to a universal fact, would preserve us sane forever. Nations! What are nations? Tartars, and Huns, and Chinamen! Like insects they swarm. The historian strives to make them memorable. "LWP," 10.

¹⁸Dimock, 130

The newspapers are markers of the history Thoreau is uninterested in.¹⁹ They bring news of nations, and probably of nations' rise and fall, as borders and boundaries move against each other in his global reality. Groups of peoples, societies and conquerors are likened to insects, their actions as understandable as those of a swarm. But the walk, claims Thoreau in this forceful passage, can shape events, news, and incidents in a way that broadens and deepens a person's understanding of what history or the present moment can actually be. The events related in newspapers are nothing but a single stratum in a multilayered expanse of experience, whereas walking digs deep and opens wide to a multiple-strata'd history. In other words, walking takes you into deep time, where establishments like nations and historians, figures of authority, mean close to nothing. "Deviation from the national timetable," writes Dimock, "challenges...the sequence of of events dictated by a territorial regime... The effect...is to generate a temporal bond at odds with the chronological progression of the nations....What results is a kind of serial unpredictability, the unexpected contact between points of time numerically fall apart."²⁰ Indeed, Thoreau's essay doesn't just mention what this newly discovered chronology, deep and wide, looks like in comparison to the flimsy, unidirectional chronotype followed by his compatriots. Thoreau enacts the formation of deep time in the essay itself, bringing "long durations of [other] cultures into the short chronology of the United States" by quoting the spirit of Loda from *Ossian* straight after his appraisal of walking:²¹ "I look down from my height on nations, / And they become ashes before me;— / Calm is my dwelling in the clouds; / Pleasant are the great fields of my rest." Loda's subsequent defeat by Fingal, a no doubt figurative action representing Fingal's rejection of paganism, is less the point of the quotation than Loda's actual presence in Thoreau's text beside historians, newspapers, Tartars, Huns, and Chinamen. Here is a figure of mythology older than Ossian himself, dating back to an ancient oral history,

¹⁹In "A Walk to Wachussets" Thoreau expresses his dismay when, coming upon a small as yet unnamed village in the middle of nature, the townsmen are proud to give him his own local newspaper to catch up on the events of the day, "as if the greatest charm the country offered to the traveller was the facility of communication to the town" (8).

²⁰Dimock, 113.

²¹*Ibid.*, 3

a possible manifestation of Odin, flickering both in a theological heaven and on Earth. He is not just a figure in McPherson's series of myths, but a figure who represents myths long past. He is anachronistic even in Fingal's time. Loda carries the weight of histories as old as mankind while sitting next to modernity's more familiar form of historical progression. From Loda's bird's eye view, territorial boundaries crumble into ashes. The act of walking, the act that takes the reader into Loda's quote in "Life Without Principle," shatters sequential chronological progression, and by doing so, re-imagines space. To nurture myth, Thoreau wrenches out parts of the past and places them adjacent to similarly wrenched out parts of the present, as he does with newspapers and Loda. As Dimock notes while reading Robert Lowell, when two segments of time are mashed together into a conjunctive whole, each now alienated from their "synchronic neighbors," the two dates repel each other, causing a friction in the text itself.²² Placed together, regularly measured time can make no sense of itself. Consequently, Thoreau denies the dominant power hierarchies of his time and place in the very composition of his texts.

In order to understand walking, the embrace of deep-time, and myth-making as challenges to modernity's measurements of time and to power structures of the State, one must, if only briefly, remember the context of cultural dissent out of which Thoreau was bred. Thoreau lived in a time and environment where defiant opinions, opposition, and politically progressive movements were flourishing. The proximity of the Civil War created tensions throughout antebellum America, and New England was no exception. It had become the financially prosperous hub of movements for world peace, humanitarian rights for prisoners, the womens rights campaign, and abolitionism. These movements, though often voices of radical dissent against their current federal government, were nonetheless voices rooted in American ideals of equality, democracy, and freedom. The passing of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850) and the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) exacerbated the existing tensions between the pro-slavery groups and the abolitionists, leading to extreme gestures from the abolitionists, not

²²*Ibid.* 134.

least represented by William Lloyd Garrison's burning of the Constitution at the meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society on July 4th 1854. Such an anarchic, "unpatriotic" gesture was paradoxically made to protest the un-Americanness of supporting slavery. Thus, even opposition, unknowingly or not, was wrapped in an American ideal, suggesting an American tradition of dissent. To take it a step further, as Sacvan Bercovitch puts it, "American liberalism privileged dissent." The American liberalism Bercovitch refers to is never more exemplified than in the Transcendentalists. The tolerance and encouragement of dissenting views within the group is clearly found in the vastly different personalities that made it up, "a cluster of discontents," and in the motivation for the groups formation, "united only by the ferocity of their rejections." Thoreau's own rejections, however, occasionally ended up being even more militant than both the abolitionists and the Transcendentalists. While Thoreau attended the aforementioned rally and read his essay "Slavery in Massachusetts" there, his later lecture, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," not only supported Captain John Brown's armed (and, according to most observers, somewhat ludicrous) revolt but also engaged in an attack on Garrison's own newspaper, *The Liberator*, for not doing enough to support the Captain. By opposing the opposition, Thoreau followed the American liberal tradition of dissent, but Thoreau's ubiquitous practice of rejection often left him in a one-man camp, rather than part of a greater movement. The core of his literature, as we can see, also lay in the practice of defiance so that, as the tense atmosphere culminated in the antebellum North, Thoreau's construction of mythology was heavily intertwined with a politics of refusal, to the point that the texts themselves have been accused of resisting reading.

At the same time, as Paul Giles suggests, the sense of "America," before 1865, or even the sense of the "United States of America," was still "as uncertain, as provisional, as its cartography."²³ It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that "America was metamorphosed from a series of local economies into an imposing continental edifice." The dissonance that crowded

²³Giles, Paul. "The Deterritorialization of American Literature," in *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*. Eds., Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), 40-61.

the thoughts and discussions of antebellum New England's intellectuals and radicals was very much a part and parcel of the early republic's attempt to identify and structure itself into a conceptual whole. The culture of dissent was partly a reaction to this movement of America shaping itself, as though the geographical and jurisdictional lines of the country, still tentative, readily allowed for voices of both extreme conservatism and radical liberalism to reign as the concept of America struggled for its solidity. Within this conceptual and geographical discord though, the shape of America was nonetheless beginning to be drawn, through its structures of sovereignty, its desire for territory, the advent of industrialization, and the solidifying of modernity.

Having thus understood the culture of dissent that Thoreau lived in and the looming threat of America's potential shape, and having recognized that walking and myth-making are, in part, performative refusals of standard time's emerging sovereignty which are then reenacted in the text itself, a question begs: why should Thoreau call for a mythology, dragon-tree-like or not, that is formulated by a culture of dissent? Or put another way, what is the advantage of an American mythology that defies its own country's structures of authority? That answer lies, unusually perhaps, in Michael Taussig's work on precapitalist societies' myth-making as a reaction to the development of industrial capitalism, as described in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*. In the tin mines of highland Bolivia, writes Taussig, the devil of the local myths "signifies a response to the change in the fundamental meaning of society as that meaning registers in precapitalist consciousness." That change of meaning is caused by the commodification of labor and the slow but certain proletarianization of the peasant work force. People's time becomes valued only as far as it is filled with labor that can be bought and paid for. Even individual time, in other words, becomes measured and standardized by monetary criteria. A precapitalist society's perspective of a man who allows himself to be measured in blocks of industrial time becomes translated into a contract with the devil.

The sense of real evil in the myths that Taussig analyzes is not to be found in Thoreau's mythology. This is most probably because explicit attention to the problem of class divide, and the shift from peasant to proletariat in cap-

italism's early years, is completely lacking in Thoreau's work.²⁴ Nonetheless, Thoreau's long chapter on "Economy" in *Walden* layers on the disdain for men tied up in the capitalist necessities of labor and their fascination with making money rather than simply making, while his act of walking, apart from its use as a time-space conduit, is a direct refusal of engaging in an occupation that leads to the more usual means of production. His construction of a different chronotype against time's standardization is similarly a straightforward refusal of modernity, its fascination with conquering and territory, and the measure of capitalist market exchange. Indeed, Taussig recognizes that craftsmen, referencing Gabriel Garcia Marquez and John Ruskin, similarly create magical or romanticized fictions (as the proletariat might) against the advent of industrialized capitalism into their homes, part and parcel of the "legacy of ideology through the ages that has assailed market exchange as something *unnatural* – a social form that undermines the basis of social unity."²⁵ In other words, Thoreau's own myth construction is a rebellious act against an infringement of a social structure he upholds. The increasingly stringent measurements, be they financial or temporal, restricted people's labor, time, and territories and threatened not only to usurp a more natural order consisting of planetary time, use-value, and geological measures of space, but to persuade people that the new measurements *were* the natural order. Thoreau's myth can thus be read as a defense of an alternative value system.

The magic of production and the production of magic [or myth] are inseparable in these circumstances. This is not testimony to the force of tradition or the glorious mythology and ritual of the unadulterated and precapitalist past. Rather, it is the creative response to an enormously deep-seated conflict between use-value and exchange-value orientations. The magic of use-value production draws out, magnifies, and counteracts the magic of exchange-value practices.²⁶

²⁴Thoreau's penchant for individualism rather than solidarity with the working class was perhaps the greatest criticism the Marxist critics of the Depression era had for Thoreau. Granville Hicks says as much in his *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War*.

²⁵Taussig, 700 (my emphasis).

²⁶*Ibid.*, 531

Taussig seems to take the battle of creativity against capitalism for granted. And in Thoreau's case, perhaps it would make sense to do so. It is helpful in this instance to recall Thoreau's words in "Walking's" long passage calling for an American mythology: "Perchance, when, in the course of ages, American liberty has become a fiction of the past,—as it is to some extent a fiction of the present,—the poets of the world will be inspired by American mythology." By calling American liberty, one of the more strongly formed concepts of America in antebellum New England, a fiction, Thoreau equalizes the values liberty and myth, placing them on equal ground. The sentence suggests that the conflict between mythology and American liberty is actually a conflict between two fictions, while myth's ability to outlive liberty further suggests that myth's resilience against time and geographical boundaries makes it the more valuable fiction of the two, or perhaps, the more *natural*.

Myth's presence in Thoreau's texts, its constant appearance against the regular history and events of his time, (which, even when set aside, are always acknowledged), maps out a landscape larger than America's actual cartography. When ghosting reality, Thoreau's myth ends up becoming the more palpable location of his text, its time-frame overshadowing the actual events and places of New England. It "counter-acts" the standard chronotypes, the boundaries of people's farms, the names of the towns, the pace and work ethic of the townsmen, even the presence of humanity on the planet. Thoreau's myth, made in and out of a moment where all of America is as yet unsettled but close to settling, is a manifestation of a cultural resistance to an impending change. "I felt that *this was the heroic age itself*" he writes of this moment, comparing walkers to knights, as though a battle has begun.

Live at home like a traveler.

—HDT, letter, Jan 1st 1859

3

Travel Narrative as Myth

Thoreau often draws from the travel narrative genre in his works. “A Yankee in Canada,” *A Week on The Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, the essays in *The Maine Woods* and the essays in *Cape Cod*, chronicle journeys to those eponymous places which often afford him moments of sublime discovery. Indeed, Thoreau was an avid reader of travel-writing. In his conclusion to *Walden* he employs one of his idiosyncratic travel metaphors: “Is not our own interior white on the chart?” he asks, referring to the empty spaces on world maps waiting to be discovered and recorded (*W*, XVIII, 2). Those empty spaces were the subject of numerous travel works in the nineteenth century.¹ “Be rather the Mungo Park, the Lewis and Clarke and Frobister, of your own streams and oceans...” continues Thoreau, consciously referencing explorers of unknown countries, “...be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought.” The more popular scientific travel narrative of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, including works by Franklin, Charles Darwin, Mungo Park, and Ida Pfeiffer, are often referenced by Thoreau in a way that includes his own writings within

¹See Christie for a full list of travel literature in Thoreau’s library. Christie, Christie, John Aldrich *Thoreau as World Traveler*. (New York, Columbia University Press, 1965), 313-333.

the travel-writing tradition.² Thoreau's references to Park, Lewis and Clarke, Frobister, et al., bring forth a powerful tradition of change through exploration. When these explorers discovered new land, the world changed its understanding of itself. By invoking them, Thoreau implies that his travel narrative will perpetuate a similar change.³

Though Thoreau's chosen destinations are rarely unexplored or unsurveyed by previous adventurers, tradesmen, or settlers, Thoreau nonetheless claims discovery of the unfound in each of his writings. Thoreau's moments of discovery usually follow a rigorous detailing of the region's history of white human settlement, before turning to a description of a nature that escapes the history of Western civilization's involvement. These are the moments of sublime or celestial contact, seemingly untouched by the men who came before him. And it is Thoreau's newly imposed view of the previously-traversed landscapes that transforms them into newly-framed mythological landscapes. Thus Thoreau uses travel narrative to give an aesthetic effect of discovering myth in locations that had seemed otherwise every-day. In this way he conflates the construction of myth with the discovery of myth, giving myth-construction an aesthetic or rhetorical flourish so that even the making of myth itself becomes as legendary an act as Columbus's discoveries, or Cook's.

If we consider the collected essays that make up *Cape Cod* we see how Thoreau uses travel-narrative and discovery to create myth out of a more regularized form of history. Thoreau and his companion are determined to walk

²Darwin, Charles. *Voyage of a Naturalist round the World*. (New York, 1846.); Park, Mungo. *The Life and Travels of Mungo Park; with an Account of His Death from the Journal of Isaaco, the Substance of Later Discoveries Relative to His Lamented Fate, and the Termination of the Niger*. (New York, 1840 and 1842.); Pfeiffer, Ida. *A Lady's Voyage round the World: A Selected Trans. from the German by Mrs Percy Sinnett*. (New York, 1852.) All the above texts can be found in Thoreau's bibliography of travel works (as provided by Christie) and were published before *Walden*.

³Consider Laura Dassow Walls brief recounting of how important the travel narrative was to myriads of nineteenth-century American writers: "One could even venture that Thoreau's era was defined by the expedition, starting with Columbus; accelerating with the Spanish conquests; continuing with the Spanish explorations up the Pacific Coast from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska, the French traders and missionaries across Canada and scientific explorers across the South Pacific and Egypt, the British measuring India, the journeys to North America to discover, and claim, a continent. In these voyages, nature, discourse, and nation were fused, and the resulting empires reached just as far as (and no farther than) the collections and archives of scientific explorers." *Thoreauvian Modernities*, 23.

up Cape Cod by the western coastline, from Nauset Bay to Provincetown. In order to reach the beach, they must walk through the inland plains of Nauset, which Thoreau describes through quoting and recounting old accounts of the area that describe Nauset's settler history. Avoiding travel through the villages in the plain, Thoreau nonetheless gives his readers "a little in the history of Eastham," a nearby town, describing the arrival of the Pilgrims, their interactions with the Native Americans, the changing hands of land, the arrival of the first ministers and reverends, and small anecdotes that occurred in the varying parishes. Through the (sometimes laborious) detailing of the landscape's social history, Thoreau "make[s] the reader realize how wide and peculiar that plain was, and how long it took to traverse it" (*CC*, 43). Citing facts from the late 1600s and writing his essays in 1855, Thoreau inserts two hundred years or so of Nauset history into the Nauset landscape in order for his readers to understand the peculiarity of the landscape and the length of time it took to cross it. The weight of recorded history, Thoreau suggests, affects the very time-scale and geographic complexity of the environment he travels through. By considering history as an accumulation of layers, Thoreau turns them into physical obstacles for the travelers or textual obstacles for the reader, emphasizing the richness of a seemingly otherwise plain landscape. When he reaches the beach, though, the border between land and enormous ocean, the history of people before him dissolves into untraceable ghostliness and instead nature's vastness and history overwhelms the landscape. "We were traversing a desert," writes Thoreau, "with the view of an autumnal landscape of extraordinary brilliancy, a sort of Promised Land... the solitude was that of the ocean and the desert combined. A thousand men could not have seriously interrupted it, but would have been lost in the vastness of the scenery, as their footsteps in the sand." The beach becomes a desert, and the vastness of desert and ocean immediately isolate Thoreau and his companion into a solitude. More than just isolating the two men, though, Thoreau claims that the vastness of the environment could isolate a thousand men, that the presence of settlers and men here wouldn't make so much as a mark, in direct contrast to the plains of Nauset. In this moment the discovery of "a sort of Promised Land" indicates the construction

of myth as the travelers' history and mapping of Cape Cod fall away to reveal a meeting of desert and ocean larger than the whole of Cape Cod. Thoreau's arrival at, and consequent view of, the beach marks the rhetorical discovery of Thoreauvian myth; rife with hyperbole ("traversing a desert," "a thousand men,"), outside of recorded history's chronology yet contained by the larger planetary time-scale of desert and ocean.

The evolution of travel-narrative into myth is key to Thoreau's writing. Laura Dassow Walls considers in some detail how Thoreau was influenced by the genre and went on to make it his own, arguing that it was the scientific expedition formation of the travel-narrative which influenced him the most to undertake an endangering expedition of the self that struggles with the shifting scales of history and the sense of the global brought about by travel.

Thoreau modeled his travel repertoire not on the middle-class leisure activity of tourism but, putting on what he called his bad-weather clothes (*A Yankee in Canada*, II, 7), on the rough-and-ready explorers who sought not self-cultivation but knowledge of the exterior unknown that, upon their returns from their various errands to various wildernesses, they could share with the world. Thoreau deliberately extends the genre of the scientific expedition to compel an inner exploration in tandem with the outer: as he asked in *Walden* (after reading the five large volumes narrating the Wilkes Expedition of 1838-42), "What does Africa, what does the West stand for? Is not our own interior white on the chart?" (*W*, XVIII, 2). In the genre Thoreau is crafting, travel is a condition for thinking; that is, one must travel in the world in order to travel in the mind. In his classic study of Thoreau and travel writing, John Aldrich Christie noted that, for Thoreau, "geographic exploration became his most consistently used symbol for philosophic search" (265). True, except that for Thoreau exploration was more than just a "symbol," even as he insisted all nature must be as well as mean: as Thoreau asked in his first book (also a travel narrative), "Is not nature, rightly read, that of which she is commonly taken to be the symbol merely?" (*A Week*, 382). So one must actually, really move. And movement, mobility, does not merely give access to a tourist's refined aesthetic sensibility. Thoreau means something risky, endangering, like the "sweet edge" of the scimitar when sun glimmers off both its sides (*W*, II, 19), like the scimitar edge of a windswept beach, that sweet edge between life and death where one must face the fact of ones

own mortal body cast up by the waves and reigning over the shore.⁴

The romantic image Walls puts forward as Thoreau's culmination of the travel genre in his work may not be exactly what this chapter has in mind to investigate, but it certainly resonates to some degree with the myth I am interested in pursuing, that similarly seems to sit in two places at the same time, if not more, constantly endangering and engendering its own existence. In that sense, I read *myth* as the object of conflict, rather than self. Nonetheless, Walls's acute reading of the genre's heritage in Thoreau's work assists this chapter in working out the lines of evolution from travel-narrative to *Walden*. Indeed, travel narrative is one of the few genres that can easily lead Thoreau into myth, or into landscapes on different time and geographic scales. Travel narrative's tradition as a catalyst for changing world perspectives and views, not least for changing understandings of space and time, makes it ideal for Thoreau's journey into the world of myth. Its tradition as a catalyst is never more apparent than in Columbus's letters in the sixteenth century.⁵ Columbus marked the beginning of the Renaissance period, where knowledge of a new place was no longer assimilated to a static World Truth held by Christian Europe, but, rather, Columbus was allowed to provide knowledge of new places as a form of enlightenment. Columbus' letters, explains Spengemann, show how violently the view of the world shifted in the discovery of America:

As the disorderly facts break through Columbus's elegantly simple view of the world, suggesting the existence of a totally unknown continent, a flood of unwelcome yet subtly exhilarating consequences threaten to pour through the crumbling walls of his belief. If this is a new continent, then the earth is not as small as he had supposed. What is more, if new worlds remain to be discovered, then history may not be entering its last phase [the Apocalypse]. Another civilization may have to rise and fall as history makes its way westward around the globe to the beginning and the end.⁶

⁴*Thoreauvian Modernities*, 21-22.

⁵For a historical account of the travel narrative's emergence and evolution see: Spengemann, William C. *The Adventurous Muse: the poetics of American fiction, 1789-1900*, (New Haven: Yale U Press, 1977); Stout, Janis P. *The journey narrative in American literature : patterns and departures*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983.); and Blanton, Casey. *Travel writing: The Self and the World*. (New York: Routledge, 2002.)

⁶Spengemann, 23.

Columbus's discovery of America shook a Western worldview of certainty by introducing a large geographic scale of the unknown. Travel narrative, especially travel narrative to and about America, implied discovery of the unfound, of new large landscapes, and of a history to come which was as yet incomprehensible. "The history of New World travel-writing," continues Spengemann, "from Columbus to Wood is the history both of a changing world and of men's changing ideas about their place in it."⁷ Travel-writing, then, becomes an ideal generic structure for Thoreau's purposes of discovery and the creation of American myth. It expands the world, offers new perceptions of time-frames and embraces the unknown or uncertainty. Thoreau's arrival at Cape Cod's long beach, after reading the accounts of Cape Cod's known and recorded history, reenacts Columbus's arrival to America after leaving the Christian, known and recorded history of Europe. In this, the newly discovered (which is to say, created) world of myth, Thoreau finds an expanded world, a vast time-frame where settlers can leave no mark, and which, in his awe and hyperbole, cannot be understood by existing knowledge.⁸

The relatively recent discovery of America, according to European standards, meant that its colonial-based history would always include it as its first event. Nineteenth-century America's literature however, would come to draw from it often, embracing the traveler and explorer as the height of the Romanticized Individual Man. Mary Louise Pratt notes that Alexander von Humboldt was partly responsible for the re-triggering of this American imagination and fantasy of "new world" discovery, as he cut a Romantic figure himself, and turned to Columbus in his own writings to imagine and effect a new understanding of the planet:

Three hundred years later that Edenic fantasy [found in Columbus's writings] resurges in Humboldt's renewed first contact. Even the

⁷*Ibid.*, 26. Spengemann's focus on New World travel-writing results in some over-generalized statements like this one, which, while useful to my greater argument in terms of the travel-narrative genre, don't adhere to my understanding of Thoreau's interest in travel-narrative before and beyond New World travel writing.

⁸For a more in-depth reading of *Cape Cod* and Thoreau's complicated relationship with travel writing see Lowney, John. "Thoreau's Cape Cod: The Unsettling Art of the Wrecker." *American Literature*, 64.2 (1992): 239-254.

label “New Continent” is revived, as if three centuries of European colonization have never happened or made no difference. What held for Columbus held again for Humboldt: the state of primal nature is brought into being as a state in relation to the prospect of transformative intervention from Europe.⁹

Pratt’s understanding of Humboldt’s new vision as similar to Columbus’s vision of ravenous imperialism is intriguing. I would argue that through Humboldt’s writing and re-introducing of Columbus into antebellum America’s consciousness, what came across most strongly was the prospect of the country’s transformation from outside forces in general. This idea of America as malleable became key to writers wishing to fictionalize and transform America in their books. Melville, Poe, Twain, et al. all partake in this fictionalization, the literary rewriting of America, using the explorers’ written discoveries of America, from its East coast to its West, as one of their more forceful tropes. America’s vastness and relatively small population made it often feel unknowable and that idea of unknowability fed American literature with the potential for adventures and discoveries. More than just drawn to the ideological appeal of travel writing, late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American literature also embraced travel writing’s shift in focus from plain descriptive travel-log to the subjective experience of the narrator. As Spengemann notes, as American travel writing realized its inability to *know* America, the writer’s experience of the account took priority:

In medieval travel writing, the historical, material world had significance only insofar as it illustrates the eternal, spiritual design; and the narrative itself serves primarily to reaffirm that design in the mind of a reader who already knows it. With Columbus, the historical world takes on unprecedented significance, for the eternal design must now be sought through it. In this situation, the written document assumes the new task of explaining the traveler’s conclusions about his experience to an audience that does not already know them.¹⁰

In other words, the traveler himself becomes the source of new knowledge and so he or she gains important status and authority. Travelers were viewed with

⁹Pratt, Mary Louise, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 124.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 65.

not a little prestige, as spokesmen for the unknown, after all, “the conditions of exotic travel dictated that [such] individuals would be privileged as sources of knowledge.”¹¹ Furthermore, the importance of scientific endeavor and the ever growing interest in the greater world that was slowly becoming more accessible made these personalized travel narratives a source of both adventure and education for their readers. Their journeys of discovery were usually funded by some form of aristocracy and upon their return they were asked to publish their journals in order to inform the wider world of their findings. Thus, the newly found authority of writing travel-narrative, even in a fictionalized form, appealed to the nineteenth-century American writers, as they found a unique way of authorizing American literature, a literature that could hold no authority of previous canonicity like their European counterparts could.

Both Thoreau and Edgar Allan Poe use routine travel-narrative openings to begin their books, *Walden* and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, respectively, and by doing so immediately authorize their books’ narrators as sources of knowledge. *Pym* is a useful example of an early nineteenth-century work that appropriates travel narrative for literary purposes.¹² Poe’s story follows a young Arthur Gordon Pym on a horrific and adventurous boat journey to the South Pole where all manner of incredible things happen, including uprisings, disease, murders and cannibalism. The novel begins with Pym’s return to America and the questions put to him by men of a high social class about his journey:

Upon my return to the United States a few months ago, after the extraordinary series of adventure in the South Seas and elsewhere, of which an account is given in the following pages, accident threw me into the society of several gentlemen in Richmond, Va., who felt deep interest in all matters relating to the regions I had visited,

¹¹Greenfield, Bruce. *Narrating discovery: the romantic explorer in American literature, 1790-1855*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 11.

¹²In fact, Spengemann marks the emergence of Romanticism in America as the same point in time in which the travel narrative is turned into fiction. Spengemann finds that Poe’s *Pym* is “perhaps the first truly American novel, one derived straight from the travel narrative and dedicated both to the explorer’s belief that individual experience is the only source of truth and to the Romantic artist’s belief that of all individual experiences artistic creation is the most revealing.” Spengemann, 138-139.

and who were constantly urging it upon me, as a duty, to give my narrative to the public.¹³

In Poe's opening chapter we are faced with a traveler who has found patronage in the "society of several gentleman." The fictional patrons and their request of Mr. Pym that he give an account of his exotic journey provide a neat structure for a story in which Poe can place Pym in a position of authority and prestige, a position occupied by explorers. Poe's introduction is almost identical to introductions to real travel narratives. In Mungo Park's introduction to *Travels of Mungo Park*:

The following Journal, drawn up from original minutes and notices made at the proper moment, and preserved with great difficulty, is now offered to the Public by the direction of my noble and honourable employers, the Members of the African Association...Immediately after my return from Africa, the Acting Committee of the Association, taking notice of the time it would require to prepare an account in detail, as it now appears, and being desirous of gratifying, as speedily as possible, the curiosity which many of the Members were pleased to express concerning my discoveries, determined that an epitome, or abridgement [sic] of my travels, should be forthwith prepared from such materials and oral communications as I could furnish.¹⁴

Park was sent to Africa by his noble employers, whereas the fictional Pym "accidentally" runs across patrons upon his return. Nonetheless the existence of the patrons provides the occasion for the travel narrative. The patrons also provide an immediacy in Park's introduction that Poe replicates in his fictionalized travel narrative: Noting the Members' curiosity as a matter of urgency that he had to address, Park was, "immediately after [his] return," forced to bring the account into publication as quickly as possible. Similarly Pym, "upon [his] return," was constantly pressed to write about his journey, "as a duty." Not only do high-society gentlemen provide authenticity for Poe's tale, but also their urgent request for the story's publication gives Poe the pretext Pym needs to tell his story; the gentlemen's avid interest in the journey make

¹³Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket and related tales*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.)

¹⁴Park, Mungo. *Travels of Mungo Park*. Ed. Ronald Miller. (London: Dent, 1954.) xviii.

the journey itself worth telling. As we shall see, Thoreau adapts this rhetorical technique of introducing a travel narrative in *Walden*.

In Park's introduction, and Poe's adaptation of it, two important travel-narrative tropes come to light that appear in *Walden* too. The first is the narrator's mention of his immediate return. The second is the demand from an outside source to recount the journey he has just undertaken. "The most compelling America literature" writes Wayne Franklin, "has at its verbal center figures whose prime act is departure."¹⁵ The immediacy of the traveler's return in the narrative's introduction implicates the narrators in the prime act that Franklin is drawn to – the act of departure. Using this distinctive trope of departure found in travel narrative in his novel, Poe places *Pym* in the tradition of travelers before him, so that Pym's departure resonates with other great voyages of discovery. Furthermore, by marking himself as a traveler who has just returned from the exotic South Seas, Pym endows himself with the authority of a knowledge gained and experience undergone unknown to his audience. And by beginning his narrative with the urging of an upper-class audience to tell them all that is unknown, Pym marks the social value of his knowledge.

Thoreau's introduction to *Walden* follows a similar format to Park's and Poe's.¹⁶ *Walden*'s first paragraph marks Thoreau's return from his solitary experience:

When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only. I lived there two years and two months. At present I am a sojourner in civilized life again. *W*, I, 1

Though the word "return" is not explicit in Thoreau's opening line, he nonetheless informs the reader that he was in the woods and has now returned to civ-

¹⁵Franklin, Wayne. *Discoverers, explorers, settlers: the diligent writers of early America*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), 183.

¹⁶For more on how Thoreau adopts other generic structures and forms of rhetoric see Henry Golemba who recognizes an entire smorgasbord of rhetorical modes in the first five paragraphs of *Walden*. In particular he reads the first paragraph as a riff off of William Bradford's historical accounts. "Unreading Thoreau." *American Literature*, 60.3 (1988): 385-401. Also See Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, Appendix.

alized life – if only for the present moment. The mention of the present gives the narrator a sense of uncertain location, as though he might up and leave again at any moment. Yet Thoreau’s woods are far less enticing than Pym’s “extraordinary series of adventures in the South Seas,” forewarning the reader that this book of travel narrative, *Walden*, does not promise the exotic thrills of other narratives, especially fictionalized ones. *Walden* thus announces itself as a decidedly quotidian form of travel narrative.¹⁷ Yet despite the proximity of Thoreau’s destination, by opening his book with his return, he implies the travel narrator’s promise of bringing new knowledge to his readers. In his second sentence he introduces the “patrons” who press him for an account of his journey.

I should not obtrude my affairs so much on the notice of my readers if very particular inquiries had not been made by my townsmen concerning my mode of life. I, 2

In this sentence Thoreau embraces the travel narrative, as its structure allows him to tell his tale as though it has been asked of him.¹⁸ The questions provide a rhetorical pretext for the writing of *Walden*.¹⁹ Unlike the fictional Pym though, the patrons asking Thoreau to give account of his travels are not patrons; they have been replaced by the townsmen of Concord. *Walden* thus becomes a text that eschews any kind of oligarchic patronage and comes down to more common footing, stressing the “everyman” style of the tale that follows. Furthermore, by emphasizing the demotic, Thoreau begins his story avoiding all sense of the exotic or fantastic. Already, *Walden* has established itself as a book without drama, and thus, without a traditional adventure narrative. So begins an adaptation of travel narrative that already promises an unusual journey, unlike those written by others before him.

¹⁷By doing so Thoreau picks up on a Wordsworthian tradition of vagrancy as his method of adapting travel narrative, while Pym’s eventual arrival at the South Pole, met by an ambiguously celestial figure is far more redolent of Shelley’s and Coleridge’s form of Romanticism.

¹⁸And indeed it had been asked of him, as, upon his return from Walden Pond, Thoreau was asked to give lectures on his time there.

¹⁹See Rossi, William ed., Thoreau, H.D. *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*. (New York: Norton, 1992.)

The effect of patronage, and in particular, the not-unusual method of a ghost-writer who assisted the traveler in writing up his or her account at the bequest of the patrons also makes for an intriguing dimension on authorship in works like Poe's or Thoreau's that are adapting and appropriating the travel narrative and, consequently, the traveler narrator's voice. Mungo Park explains that he gave his notes and journal to one of his patrons to write up properly.

A memoir, thus supplied and improved was accordingly drawn up in two parts by members of the Association... the first consisting of a narrative, in abstract, of my travels, by Bryan Edwards, Esq...Mr. Edwards has kindly permitted me to incorporate, as occasion offered, the whole of his narrative into different parts of my work.²⁰

In the actual case of Park, the acknowledgement of another writer has the affect of underscoring Park's authenticity. For by presenting himself as not being by nature a man of letters, he figures himself as a man of action and adventure. Pym's acknowledgement of another writer has less to do with Pym's capability as a writer, and more to do with the telling of the story:

He [Mr. Poe, one of those gentlemen in Virginia]...proposed that I should allow him to draw up, in his own words, a narrative of the earlier portion of my adventures, from facts afforded by myself, publishing it in the "Southern Messenger" *under the garb of fiction*. To this, perceiving no objection, I consented, stipulating only that my real name should be retained. Two numbers of the pretended fiction appeared, consequently, in the "Messenger" for January and February...²¹

Significantly, Poe takes the idea of a ghost-writer and manipulates it for his own uses. By suggesting that the Mr. Poe of the story is a writer who has fictionalized a real account, the name of Mr. Poe on the outside cover of the book enforces the thought that the story of Arthur Gordon Pym is in fact a real one. The ambiguity of authorship in this case is used by Poe to blur the boundaries of fact and fiction. After all, the events that are about to be narrated are utterly incredible, and in the ghost writing of travel narrative Poe

²⁰Park, xviii.

²¹Pym, 3

finds a structure that can lend the incredible fictional credibility.²² Thus Pym's voice becomes more authoritative than Poe's.

The narrator of *Walden*, though, undergoes a reverse authorization in comparison to Poe and Pym. Thoreau the author makes no attempt to distinguish between the narrator's voice and his own, blurring the boundaries of fact and literary re-creation.

In most books, the *I*, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience.

By embracing the "I" prevalent in the travel genre, Thoreau turns *Walden* into a sincere account given by an expert. However, there are two "I"s in the book: Thoreau, the "I" who lived in the woods between 1845 and 1847 and there wrote "the bulk" of "the following pages" in the form of daily journal entries; and Thoreau, the author, who proceeded to write and rewrite the entries into a book that was published seven years later in 1854. The former is the main voice of the text, "the narrator of *Walden*...a witness to a truly new world which the speaker alone has visited, from which he has just returned."²³ His carefully cultivated voice gives *Walden* its sense of intimacy and its authority. The persona brings immediacy to the text – notice how Lewis reads *Walden* as a world the speaker has "just returned" from. The latter Thoreau, meanwhile, holds a hidden authorial presence. The two Thoreau's are easier to pull apart in "Walking" than in *Walden*, as the two voices are more distinct. On the one hand we have the author, Thoreau, who is the didactic voice telling the reader how America needs mythology: "The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness if the preservation of the world" ("W", 35); And on the other hand we have the protagonist, who appears in the moments where mythology is created under

²²Much like Mary Shelley uses the structure of correspondence between siblings to frame her own incredible tale in *Frankenstein*.

²³Lewis, R.W.B., *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*. (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1955), 21.

the guise of discovery, often in the act of walking, observing, or even climbing a tree: “I found my account in climbing a tree once... I was well paid for it, for I discovered new mountains in the horizon” (75). Thoreau’s protagonist features as the hero of most of Thoreau’s narratives. He encapsulates the poet-philosopher Thoreau calls for: “a poet who could impress the winds and streams into his service, to speak for him” (73). The ultimate power of this poet-protagonist, as we shall see, is that he is the one who is able to turn a regular view of the environment into a myth, able to shift time-spans and geographical locations as he wishes in order to create the world that ghosts the one framed by the familiar structures of time and space.

The first part of *Walden* thus works, amongst other things, as a gradual introduction to the protagonist, gearing up to his entrance in the narrative. Considering that “the bulk” of most travel narratives is a series of detailed journal entries, Thoreau’s literary rewritings of his own entries already, in the most practical terms, tell us that *Walden* is a literary rewriting of his travel-log. The tricky handling of rewriting his own voice into the text results in a Thoreauvian persona who is difficult to extricate from Thoreau the author. By bringing the two voices so closely together, Thoreau ensures that *Walden* comes across as a truthful narrative, an actual journey just like Mungo Park’s. Much like Poe’s authorization of Pym lends (albeit a fictional) credibility to the narrator, Thoreau the writer authorizes Thoreau the travel narrator, making the metaphysical journey that follows all the more credible. Most importantly though, the respect and fascination given to travelers in the nineteenth century also make Thoreau’s protagonist the modern equivalent of a hero. Heroes and poets, Thoreau tells us, “are the children of Aurora,” awake “to a poetic or divine life” (*W* II, 14). Travelers feature as the heroes and poets in antebellum America, thus travelers can be the protagonists of myths.²⁴ In other words,

²⁴Pratt writes that Humboldt’s apotheosis was in no small part due to the period in which he wrote. “In part we have Romantic ideology to thank for the towering scale to which the figure of Humboldt is drawn in nineteenth-century historiography. More than any other writer discussed in this book [on travel], Humboldt existed and exists not as a traveler or a travel writer, but as a Man and a Life, in a way that became possible only in the era of the Individual. Humboldt produced himself as such [in his writings] (113).” Pratt’s analysis of Humboldt’s image, not as mere traveler, but as “Man,” instigated both by him and by his era does much to help us understand how writers on antebellum America began to see how they could write their travelers as the self-acknowledged heroes of their accounts.

Thoreau needs a traveler for the narration of *Walden* in order to begin his myth creation.

Thus Thoreau loosely uses the conventional travel narrative structure while at the same time making a number of deliberate genre errors. For, while *Walden* is structured in the manner of a traveler's tale, a quest, from which the hero has returned in order to tell his fellow countrymen at home what new world he has discovered, Thoreau does not provide an accurate travel log that traces his day-to-day progress at Walden Pond. The place he has gone to is barely two miles from Concord - a town settled by the British in 1635 - and is in no way unknown or especially new.²⁵ Nor has he been funded by anyone. "New World" becomes "new perception and way of living," "countrymen" become neighbors, and long distances covered become journeys of understanding and learning. The smallness of the voyage will, in fact, allow for enormity in ideas. By embracing the tricks, tropes, and forms of travel narrative, Thoreau sets up a book that promises to deliver an adventure about the unexplored and an heroic protagonist brimming with new knowledge. Travel writing's long-standing relationship with time and space, always offering new variations of history and new geographical locations, and its strong protagonist who through his or her own experiences changes society's understanding of the globe, make it an ideal genre for Thoreau's creation of "New World" mythology.

"Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in," we are told by *Walden*'s protagonist toward the end of the second chapter, "Where I Lived and What I Lived For": a chapter that serves as an introduction to the details of how he occupied himself at Walden Pond. The protagonist's location next to Time informs the reader that the narrative hero lives beside chronology. By sitting next to time and by fishing in it, utilizing it, the protagonist can construct a literature that sits just outside of a linear temporal progression and yet is always keenly aware of the passing of time. Returning once again to the dragon-tree analogy, Thoreau's

²⁵See also Hawthorne, Nathaniel *The American Notebooks*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), 190. Hawthorne gives a full description of the Irish settlement around the railroad not half a mile away from Thoreau's house, thus negating Thoreau's statement that he lived "a mile from any neighbor."

protagonist's relationship to the stream of Time is similar to that of the dragon-tree that sits apart and beside the elms and the houses in "Walking." Just as the dragon-tree sustains itself from the soil made of the decay of others, so does the protagonist sustain himself by fishing from the stream beside him. While the protagonist is certainly interacting with a fast-paced, progressive time, crucially he is not immersed in it. By locating himself beside it he locates himself in a similar time-frame as the dragon-tree. Here in *Walden*, the reader is told, the protagonist stands beside History, and will experience a new space and time-frame, one that will no doubt become the home of mythology. Thus, in one sentence, Thoreau announces *Walden* as mythology and the narrator as its myth-creator.

Before arriving at the stream of time, however, the narrator first must deal with Concord before he moves out into the woods, just like the narrator in "Walking" must walk past and out of the village before he can begin his communion with nature. In other words the traveler must first survey the familiar time-frames and geography of a nineteenth-century New England town in order to reconfigure those parameters in the woods. Myth, therefore, does not fully begin, in fact, until well into *Walden's* second chapter. Indeed, according to Leonard Neufeldt "Economy" was initially paginated separately from the rest of the book, suggesting that Thoreau saw it as an elaborate preface to the tale that comes later.²⁶ Both "Economy" and "Where I Lived and What I Lived For" set up the story of living in the woods that fully begins in "Reading."

"Economy" marks both the location of and motivation for Thoreau's departure from the village of Concord. Few travel narratives include such a lengthy description of their place of departure, but Thoreau's distance of travel from Concord to Walden is so short that the lengthy comparison he achieves in drawing between the shallow, paltry lives of Concordsmen with the life he obtains at Walden creates a large expanse that makes up for physical distance. Indeed while the actual spaces between Concord and Walden remain small, "Economy" challenges and rearranges what readers or fellow townsmen might understand traveling to be. In other words, the first chapter of *Walden* is a

²⁶Neufeldt, Leonard. "The Wild Apple Tree." (Ph.D. diss. Urbana, 1966), 156.

fastidious response to the spatial and temporal boundaries to which Thoreau's fellow townsmen are accustomed and as such serves as a critique of the socio-economic landscape Thoreau wishes to abandon for Walden Pond.

Thoreau's overall criticism of those around him lies mainly in how they live and their blindness to their folly. From the carnivorous-preaching farmer who cannot see that his oxen's strength comes only from vegetables, through to the men who overly concern themselves with fashion and clothes, to the man who has labored thirty years to buy a house that is too large, Thoreau considers that they have lost their values to a deep web of financial enslavement. Men and women alike, according to the protagonist, have not only lost their desire to live an uncommon mode of living, but have also lost their ability to find it: "...it appears as if men had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other. Yet they honestly think there is no choice left. But alert and healthy natures remember that the sun rose clear. It is never too late to give up our prejudices" (I, 10). The implication of an uncommon way of living that will contain clarity, no prejudices, and alertness anticipates of course the life that Thoreau chooses when he arrives at Walden Pond. How to achieve an uncommon life is less clear-cut. The answer lies first and foremost in a re-understanding of time.

Thoreau comments throughout "Economy" on the dangers of misunderstood time. People's emphasis on past and future, finds Thoreau, harm the way they end up living. Here are a few of his criticisms: "[T]he laboring man has not leisure for true integrity day by day... He has no time to be anything but a machine"; "Think... of the ladies of the land weaving toilet cushions against the last day...As if you could kill time without injuring eternity"; "Age is no better, hardly so well, qualified for an instructor as youth"; "[I speak] mainly to the mass of men who are discontented, and idly complaining of the hardness of their lot or of the times"; "It may be guessed that I reduce almost the whole advantage of holding... superfluous property as a fund in store against the future, so far as the individual is concerned, mainly to the defraying of funeral expenses. But perhaps a man is not required to bury himself"; "It would be well, perhaps, if we were to spend more of our days and nights without

any obstruction between us and the celestial bodies” (I: 6, 8, 10, 21, 41, 43). In these sentences Thoreau sees humans’ relationship with time as a burdensome one. Their way of spending time (and with the word “spend” Thoreau easily brings in an economic aspect to how time is utilized) as a method of saving their money, or their understanding of time as something that must be filled with hard labor, ultimately leads to a futile life. It is a time-frame that oppresses humanity rather than releasing it, one that is dictatorially managed by an economic market that demands constant production, and one that looks only toward the potential of future happiness without ever reaching it. “This spending of the best part of one’s life earning money in order to enjoy a questionable liberty during the least valuable part of it reminds me of the Englishman who went to India to make a fortune first, in order that he might return to England and live the life of a poet. He should have gone up garret at once” (I, 73). “At once” are the key words in this sentence. By criticizing man’s habit of working toward a “questionable liberty,” Thoreau begins to show us in “Economy” how important “at once” is. “Now” seems to be the main call of *Walden*. The present moment is the only potential place for action. Meanwhile the past, represented often in Thoreau’s writings by age or elders, provides only baggage, leaving the present moment weighted down: “I look upon England today as an old gentleman who is traveling with a great deal of baggage, trumpery which has accumulated from long housekeeping, which he has not the courage to burn; great trunk, little trunk, bandbox, and bundle. Throw away the first three at least” (I, 86). Thus two actions must take place in order to achieve the moment of “now.” Firstly the future must not demand so much of the present’s time, and secondly the past must be shucked off.

“Economy” then, well known for its severe criticism of Thoreau’s townsmen and their way of living, is above all a criticism of how the townsmen spend their time and their relationship to history and futurity. By criticizing Concordians and offering a new formation of time the narrator firmly establishes his own temporal and spatial position in regards to his townsmen. Firstly, his determination to move to the woods strengthens his position as a writer within a canon of travel writing, yet his call for a vastly different time-scale, and his resolve to

discover the present moment, emphasize his actual vocation as a myth-maker. In other words, while the protagonist's journey to the woods begins as a consciously soft echo of travel narrators before him, it is eventually more firmly reflected by the fable of the Kouroo artist's entrance into the forest. Thus, "Economy" sets up the narrator's journey from a standard time-frame to the time-frame of mythology and anticipates the narrator's subtle transformation from traveler to poet. (The actual transformation occurs in "Where I Lived," through a bathing ritual which I shall look at further on). As with "Walking," the transformative journey into myth can only happen in nature, and more specifically, in *Walden's* case, the woods. "Economy," then, becomes the epitome of what the narrator must leave behind to attain myth. The town's paltry investments in fashion, complicated houses and shelter, luxuries, even its desire for cooperation and family, are shunned by the narrator for the solitary life that can only be achieved by travelers, heroes, and poets.

Perhaps most important though, is Thoreau's adamantness to *include* a chapter like "Economy" in *Walden*. It is a long, complicated, and often dry chapter which more often than not veers into tangents, anecdotes, and tirades (albeit Thoreauvian tirades) against the economically struggling Irish, the well-off farmers, the idea of philanthropy or charity, and the general small-mindedness of his fellow villagers. These criticisms serve as markers of the social landscape Thoreau departs from. They are also the markers that will dissolve, or be left behind when he finally enters the mythological moment. Thus the distance traveled, though barely an actual two miles, transforms into a metaphorical world of distance.

Leaving behind the shackles found in "Economy," Thoreau claims, will lead to a less common type of living. "In any weather, at any hour of the day or night," goes one of his more famous passages, "I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line" (I, 22). Improving the nick of time, for Thoreau, is to live in it, in that moment that must be caught quickly before it slips by. And then begins the greatest balancing act of *Walden*, which is to remain in the present moment,

to toe the line. Here “toe the line” transforms from an act of conformity to an act of discipline. For by staying, albeit anxiously, in the present moment, a whole different world will open up. In this way the reader understands that *Walden’s* travel narrative relays Thoreau’s journey to the present and what he discovers there. At the end of the book the importance of Thoreau’s journey is allegorized into the story of the artist in the city of Kouroo who also travels into another time-scale. The image of the notched stick returns, this time in the artist’s hands as a staff, and with it or through it the artist enters a realm outside of his history and creates the purest art imaginable:

There was an artist in the city of Kouroo who was disposed to strive after perfection. One day it came into his mind to make a staff. Having considered that in an imperfect work time is an ingredient, but into a perfect work time does not enter, he said to himself, It shall be perfect in all respects, though I should do nothing else in my life. He proceeded instantly to the forest for wood, being resolved that it should not be made of unsuitable material; and as he searched for and rejected stick after stick, his friends gradually deserted him, for they grew old in their works and died, but he grew not older by a moment. His singleness of purpose and resolution, and his elevated piety, endowed him, without his knowledge, with perennial youth. As he made no compromise with Time, Time kept out of his way, and only sighed at a distance because he could not overcome him. Before he had found a stock in all respects suitable the city of Kouroo was a hoary ruin, and he sat on one of its mounds to peel the stick. Before he had given it the proper shape the dynasty of the Candahars was at an end, and with the point of the stick he wrote the name of the last of that race in the sand, and then resumed his work. By the time he had smoothed and polished the staff Kalpa was no longer the pole-star;²⁷ and ere he had put on the ferule and the head adorned with precious stones, Brahma had awoken and slumbered many times.²⁸ But why do I stay to mention these things? When the finishing stroke was put to his work, it suddenly expanded before the eyes of the astonished artist into the fairest of all the creations of Brahma. He had made a new system in making a staff, a world with full and fair proportions; in which, though the old cities and dynasties had passed away, fairer

²⁷“In Hindu literature, Kalpa is not a star but a long period of time, cited specifically by some authors as 4,354,560,000 years. The Hindus also knew that over a great period of time the pole star changed.” Harding, *Annotated Walden*, 318.

²⁸“A day of Brahma supposedly lasted two billion, one hundred and sixty million years, at the end of which he slept.” *Ibid.*

and more glorious ones had taken their places. And now he saw by the heap of shavings still fresh at his feet, that, for him and his work, the former lapse of time had been an illusion, and that no more time had elapsed than is required for a single scintillation from the brain of Brahma to fall on and inflame the tinder of a mortal brain. The material was pure, and his art was pure; how could the result be other than wonderful? (XVIII, 11)

In this passage Thoreau summarizes and clarifies the entirety of the Walden experiment. The Kouroo artist is *Walden's* protagonist, Thoreau the traveler. The staff he seeks to create is the book, *Walden*, that the reader holds in her hands. In other words, the artist's staff becomes the equivalent of Thoreau's idealized mythology. In order to undergo its creation, its creator must "toe a line" with single-mindedness and devotion. The result of such single-mindedness is a purity of quest that ignores or refuses time. The artist recognizes that time usually interferes with perfect work, just as Thoreau points out in the phrases quoted above, and so simply does not take time into account. Time is present, however, if only "at a distance" sighing, simply unable to touch the artist, just like *Walden's* protagonist sits next to the progression of time as a fisherman does by a river. The stick, tracing "the name of the last of that race in the sand" works much like the fisherman's fishing-line, occasionally dropping into progressive time, acknowledging it, before returning to the river bank, next to it. Thus, standard time no longer controls the environment and circumstances of the artist, rather the artist dictates the *a priori* of his landscape and existence, choosing when to recognize Time's existence. In this location, beside the progression of time, the artist is able to create a perfect staff (or a perfect book). Achieving perfection cannot happen within the pressures of time. And when the "finishing stroke" of the perfect staff is completed, it gives birth to "a world with full and fair proportions; in which, though the old cities and dynasties had passed away, fairer and more glorious ones had taken their places." Through the making of the staff the artist makes "a new system." Past falls away, the long expanse of time that passed the artist by while he worked falls away, an entirely new time-scale is put into place. Thoreau is not necessarily clear on how the new time scale will work. In "Economy" he writes that "[we] should live in all the ages of the world in an hour; ay, in all

the worlds of the ages. History, Poetry, Mythology! — I know of no reading of another's experience so startling and informing as this would be" (I, 13). Thus the reader can deduce that the new time-frame, though seemingly wrapped in an hour is filled with all of the times of all the ages and cultures. Consequently we arrive back at the idea of Thoreau's new sense of time as slowed down, scaled on enormous measurements, deep, and layered. Yet Thoreau's boast for this new reconfiguration of time is that by living in it our world will be fuller, fairer, and more glorious than the one we currently inhabit. Once again the reader is drawn into Thoreau's mythological universe, located forever in the present moment, accumulating history like a pond accumulates water; measured in depth, not in longevity.

The artist of Kouroo reminds us that the protagonist of *Walden* is probably undertaking a similar task: that of re-drawing the world into mythology. After all, *Walden* is centered around the protagonist's inhabitation of Walden Pond for a year.²⁹ Despite the protagonist's explicit departure from the village of Concord, the physical traveling he then undertakes is minimal. Indeed, he comes across as a stubbornly stationary traveler who does not care for miles walked or the passing of sequential time but seeks only to be alert in the moment. Moreover, his ability to travel without covering geographic space or through sequential chronology is, after all, necessary for the creation of a literature which situates itself beside history.

To fully arrive as a myth-maker, though, Thoreau must undergo a ritual that enables him to arrive into the new world and also transforms him from self-exiled Concordian to poet, or myth-maker. The ritual occurs in "Where I Lived," where the narrator is fully placed at Walden Pond and puts him in contact with other traditions of mythology, figuring him as equal to ancient Greek myth-makers (II, 7). "Where I Lived" is almost as introductory as

²⁹In 1844 "Ralph Waldo Emerson had purchased some land on the shores of Walden Pond....[O]n March 5, 1845, Ellery Channing wrote Thoreau from New York City and suggested that he go out to Walden Pond, there build himself a hut, and begin the grand process of devouring himself alive. Thoreau took the hint and, after obtaining permission from Emerson, went out to the pond late in March of 1845 and began to chop down those arrowy pines." Harding, Walter, *The Days of Henry David Thoreau*. (New York: Dover, 1982.)179-180.

“Economy” though. Where “Economy” sets the scene of and reasons for departure, “Where I Lived” sets the scene of the action. According to Harding, the first five paragraphs of the chapter (bar the fourth) “were first published in *Sartain’s Union Magazine* (XI, 1852, 127)...”³⁰ These paragraphs work as a philosophical introduction to the act of dwelling as Thoreau chooses his seat of surveillance, leading into the actual taking up of abode in the woods on the 4th of July, 1845. The move into his (unfinished) house marks a beginning – a fresh start on which Thoreau dwells for much of this chapter. Just as “Economy” describes all the clutter of the town life, “Where I Lived” is the discarding of the clutter, “in order precisely, to bring into being the natural man.”³¹ This new beginning is first implied in the sixth paragraph; a sentence originally also published as the book’s epigraph: “The present was my next experiment of this kind, which I purpose to describe more at length, for convenience putting the experience of two years into one. As I have said, I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.” With this explanation, Thoreau begins his stay at Walden Pond, using the familiar images of a rooster and dawn. His experiment is not hermitage or withdrawal, but *the present*. He is not interested in writing an ode to dejection, which suggests a looking to the past, but rather to crow like the cockerel in “Walking.” By taking on the role of the rooster, Thoreau will become a man without worldly engagements, unaffected by politics, and his crowing proposes to bring other people back to their senses, into the present moment. Thus Thoreau explains the book’s task; to begin, to return to an original moment and in doing so, *Walden* will become myth. Morning, rooster, and waking becomes the most significant images of *Walden*: they indicate new beginnings, the opportunity for new sights, and the dawning of new worlds.³² Thoreau’s conflation of the present with the morning is an important one to the temporal set-up of his myth. His insistence on

³⁰Harding, *Annotated Walden*, 79.

³¹Lewis, R.W.B. *The American Adam: innocence, tragedy, and tradition in the nineteenth century*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1955.)

³²For a thorough account of Thoreau’s use of morning and dawn throughout *Walden* and its various allegorical implications see Broderick, C. John “Imagery in *Walden*.” *University of Texas, Studies in English* 33 (1954): 80-89.

presence confirms my argument that Thoreau prefers to arrest time in order to linger over it as explained above by Stockton. The perpetual present moment is precisely this arrest in action. In other words the present is not ahistorical because it acknowledges the past and even the future, but in its arrested form it can have sideways growth, allowing all of history to run in to it. Thus the narrator who is in it can observe all the histories and chronographies, easily restructuring them in this place of arrested development.

Meanwhile, figures of morning and dawning are more clearly to do with a state of mind that the narrator must invoke in order to be a myth-maker. With dawn comes the emergence of the poet-traveler ready for the experience of Walden and for discovery. Just before Thoreau's most famous line, and most direct reply to a rhetorical question, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately," he writes that every morning "I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and of the best things which I did." This morning ritual serves as the narrative entrance of the poet where the "I" emerges unburdened from the baggage of Concord and ready to place himself firmly into nature and the present. Thoreau uses images from the Bible, and of royalty and heroism in his expounding of the ritual. The passage, in other words, is rife with fable, drawing deep from the annals of myth history. By doing so he is included in the tradition of myths throughout the world. "The West is preparing to add its fable to those of the East," writes Thoreau in "Walking," and in this passage *Walden's* protagonist essentially heralds himself as the ambassador of the West, turning to those who came before him.

They say that characters were engraven on the bathing tub of King Tching-thang to this effect: "Renew thyself completely each day; do it again, and again, and forever again." I can understand that. Morning brings back the heroic ages. I was as much affected by the faint hum of a mosquito making its invisible and unimaginable tour through my apartment at earliest dawn, when I was sitting with door and windows open, as I could be by any trumpet that ever sang of fame. It was Homer's requiem; itself an Iliad and Odyssey in the air, singing its own wrath and wanderings. There was something cosmical about it; a standing advertisement, till forbidden, of the everlasting vigor and fertility of the world. II, 13

Thoreau's passage on his morning bath, laced as it is with references to Greek mythology, Chinese philosophy, and heroes, brings a wide span of literature and history into his moment of "equal simplicity." It enacts Thoreau's earlier appeal that "we should live in all the ages of the world in an hour; ay, in all the worlds of the ages" (I, 13). Firstly Walden Pond becomes ghosted by the image of Confucius's bathtub. The scales and shapes of the bath and the pond merge, one over the other, and the Chinese characters engraved on the bath end up floating around Walden. By superimposing the image of the bathtub on top of the pond, Thoreau emphasizes the tightness of the pond's shape and its limits; the limits become key to its temporary, albeit daily, use as a bath for rejuvenation. And by bringing the age of Confucius into the same age of Thoreau and Walden Pond, a blurring of chronologies begins to take place. Meanwhile, the characters, translated as words of renewal (or so "they say;"), but otherwise illegible in the American landscape, begins the blurring of geographic boundaries. "Morning brings back the heroic ages," continues Thoreau, as the vague outlines of mythology start to take shape in his book. Thoreau brings all the ages together in the moment of renewal, finding Homeric qualities in an event as small as a mosquito's buzz. The passage culminates in a symphony of noises: the fanfare made by mosquito, the trumpet, the requiem, and ancient chorus all chime together. The fanfare heralds the "everlasting vigor and fertility of the world," and, most importantly, it heralds the arrival of the hero.

The daily bathing ritual is also a way for the hero to wake up. Alertness, the opening up of the eyes, is key to Thoreau's journey to the pure present moment. Thoreau links the heightened awareness that comes in the morning to the moment of waking up: "The morning, which is the most memorable season of the day, is the awakening hour. Then there is the least somnolence in us; and for an hour, at least, some part of us awakes which slumbers all the rest of the day and night." Thoreau then goes on to write that "all poets and heroes, like Memnon, are the children of Aurora, and emit their music at sunrise," suggesting that in the morning poets and heroes are at their most productive, most able, and most creative. The narrator's ritual then, locates him next to

the poet and heroes, like Memnon. The reader therefore cannot but anticipate a quest in the pages that will follow. Most importantly, as the morning ushers in these poets and heroes, something else takes place. The poets and heroes begin to hold morning in themselves. “Morning” writes Thoreau, “is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me.” Thus, the action of waking becomes internalized and morning becomes a state of being, which, when coupled with an arrested present, becomes an everlasting state of being, part of toeing the line. Dawn becomes more than just a rooster crowing or a daily bath, but a way of perception. The result is a poet or hero in a constant state of expectation, ripe for the heady act of discovery.

“Where I Lived” ends with the protagonist primed for the discovery of whatever myths Walden Pond might have ready to offer.

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

The protagonist clearly shows the direction of his journey. Now he is in the present moment he will burrow – move downwards, following the depth of Walden Pond. Downwards suggests a discovery of deep geological history, a layering of histories one on top of the other, just like Confucius’s tub was layered on top of Walden Pond. By ending the second chapter with the word “mine,” the narrator emphasizes the shape of the myth that is about to be created. By looking down into the depth of the land and of the pond for discoveries, the travel narrative does not progress linearly as one might expect. Now that *Walden* has been located next to time, arrested in a present moment, the discoveries must now take place down and through the multiple layers of history that have collected through the planet, all brought together, centered, at Walden Pond.

4

Perennial Newness as Mythology

Much like the second half of “Walking,” *Walden* as a whole strives to sit in a moment of perennial newness – a condition I have earlier identified as Stockton’s idea of arrested development. The act of seeing, Thoreau’s revised form of discovery, is instrumental to bringing about the unusual occupation of geography and time one finds in *Walden*’s world; a place beside time but not unconnected to it. When the narrator takes a seat, or *sedes*, in the opening paragraph of “Where I Lived,” it may seem to be a hermit-like, nature-filled seat. Yet Thoreau’s insistent use of his role as surveyor in the passage, verbally manifested through his usage of sight-orientated words like “eyes,” “survey,” “discovered,” “see the spring,” and “lay out land,” means that the society he might seem to be shunning is actually never that far off. In fact, the “country seat” the protagonist takes up, while at a distance from the world of the village, a seat which participates in unusual temporal spans (“I did live [there], for an hour, a summer and a winter life; saw how I could let the years run off”), intentionally recognizes and acknowledges real places, like Hollowell place, the farms around him, or the village a little further down. Just as these locations work as geographic markers of society, so do his descriptions of economic transactions regarding land possession between himself and farmers work as reminders of industrial negotiations planted solidly in a regular, capitalist time-frame.

Thoreau halts these transactions before they are actualized, choosing a poet's imagination-led relationship to land over actual possession. By acknowledging regular time and space only to refuse it, Thoreau creates a tension between the poet's mythical constructions and the regular constructions of time and space followed by his fellow countrymen. This tension is key to myth's ability to sit alongside linear time – simultaneously acknowledging it and refusing it.

The cold-war critics, working in F.O. Matthiessen's wake, recognize *Walden's* world as outside of time, or ahistorical. Their analyses touches on Thoreau's refusal of his countrymen's temporal constructions but doesn't necessarily allow for the equally important acknowledgement. The critics' varying readings of Thoreau as a primitivist, an advocate for the prelapsarian, or indeed the creator of American indigenes, certainly point to academia's awareness of Thoreau's unusual relationship with time. In 1941, F.O. Matthiessen understood Thoreau's literary style as the transformation of the American vernacular into an indigenous voice, distinct from Lowell's or Longfellow's. He applauded Thoreau's ability to demonstrate "that the function of the artist in society is always to renew the primitive experience of the race."¹ In 1955, R.W.B. Lewis called *Walden's* narrator a "visionary hero" who "demonstrates his freedom in the liberation of others." And Reginald L. Cook, in admiring Thoreau's use of the "ancient, ritualistic, and hieratic," concluded that Thoreau's literature works on "the level of the pre-historic," where fables' origins are found. In short, critics found Thoreau's participation in creating original literature key to the antebellum idea of America as new, separate from its turbulent past. *Glick, 57*. "America," wrote Lewis, "in the hopeful creed, had no past, but only a present and future." *Lewis, 34*. Thus, Lewis identifies the lack of past in Thoreau's writing, Cook recognizes that the time span in *Walden* embraces the prehistoric and shuns the recent past, and Matthiessen pinpoints Thoreau's desire to renew an indigenous literature. What ends up limiting their readings is their misunderstanding of how Thoreau makes use of time in *Walden*, in other words how he makes a different type of time, and how that effects the idea of perennial newness.

¹Matthiessen, F.O., *American renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. (London: Oxford UP, 1968).

By the end of the twentieth century, critics like Philip Fisher were reframing the question of newness in nineteenth-century American literature that had been broached by the cold-war critics and re-considering concepts of temporal progression. Acknowledging the sense of originality and newness in texts by Melville, Hawthorne, Emerson, or Twain, Fisher provides a more nuanced understanding of the sense which he doesn't read as an American Adamness. He finds that the United States's relative young history coincided with precisely the age of fast technological change which undid previous technological invention as quickly as it proceeded to its new invention. "The acceleration of frame-making and frame-breaking because of technology, occurring within a country still thinly settled, offered a unique line of sight for philosophical reflection, and created ideas and parables for the explanation or imagination of this new condition," writes Fisher.² Fast-paced technology, coupled (and more often than not entangled) with the emergence of a frantic, always-evolving, capitalist marketplace, resulted in a cultural landscape that could only be navigated by every new generation, not by the elders. By appreciating Fisher's point, Thoreau's anti-gerontic remarks about older people's inability to teach him anything suddenly gain a valid context, while his refusal of England's literary canon reads as historically consistent with the cultural movement of his fellow countrymen and countrywomen. Fisher shows how American literature's rejection of the past is an unavoidable byproduct of its cultural context.

Fisher's view is helpful to understanding how acknowledgement of the current status quo is key to its refusal – a point that went somewhat unnoticed in the 1960s academy. Yet Fisher insists on an ever-moving acknowledgement and refusal, where the cold-war critics alight on Thoreau's sense of infinite presence. It would seem impossible to reconcile these two equally valid readings of the American Renaissance in a book like *Walden*. The newness pinpointed by Fisher is inextricably caught up in the frenetic socio-economic time-frame that Thoreau finds prevalent in his community but which, as the 1960s critics point out, he deliberately avoids. So Thoreau in fact sits somewhere between the cold-war era academics understanding of newness (outside of time) and

²Fisher, Philip. *Still the New World: American Literature in a Culture of Creative Destruction*. (USA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 4-5.

late-twentieth century understanding's of newness (very much in time, it's just capitalist time). After all, on the one hand his love for the prehistoric, for fossils, for old myth, and for the primal, so clearly pointed out by the cold-war critics, does not discard the past, or engage in its creative destruction. On the other hand, he clearly discards the generations before him, discards nostalgia for and elegiac celebration of European culture, looking only to the Western frontier and to the newness of the present moment, participating in the philosophy of American literature that Fisher describes as "a clear stake in newness itself that overwhelmed the party of nostalgia, delay, opposition, and elegiac celebration of a vanishing or vanished past in favor of a rush to the future."³ Yet in actual fact, Thoreau participates in this all-American philosophy only to balk at rushing into the future. While his art of seeing engages in temporal and geographical reformulation, destruction of old frames of perception and the creation of new frames of perception, Thoreau then pauses and *remains* in the new moment's emergence. His perpetual act of seeing creates a newness in arrested development. By understanding the cold-war critics and late-20th century critics as looking at the same coin from two different sides, I would argue that Thoreau *is* constructing myth (as disagreeable as that word or concept might be to contemporary criticism) as identified by Lewis et al through an intricate imaginative rhetoric that bases itself on the frame making/frame breaking accelerant found in a thriving nineteenth-century American society as intelligently described by Fisher. *Walden*, surprisingly then, brings the two opposite camps together.

In the beginning of *Walden*, Thoreau recounts a story of a Native American who had woven a number of baskets and went into Concord to sell them. Thinking that since he had made them it would follow automatically that Concordians would buy them, the Native American was surprised to find that no one was interested. "He had not discovered," writes Thoreau, "that it was necessary for him to make it worth the other's while to buy them..." Turning the story to describe his own "basket making," Thoreau continues: "...instead of studying how to make it worth men's while to buy my baskets, I stud-

³*Ibid.*, 4.

ied rather how to avoid the necessity of selling them” (*W*, I, 31). By opting out of the market, Thoreau then is also opting out of the constant change in demand, the never-ending newness of the marketplace. He goes so far as to take on the initial pattern of frame-breaking and frame-making, but ultimately, *Walden*’s concerns with toeing the line and with perennial mornings mean that the protagonist is always teetering on that moment of newness before the future arrives to sweep it away. Thoreau acknowledges the market and then radically disavows it in favor of another form of marketing – one that cannot be destroyed by the next seller or consumer. Thus his baskets remain unsold but unchanged, protected from the ever-changing demands of a socio-economic time-frame.

As I have pointed out earlier, Thoreau’s time-frame, what he lauds as “presence,” is not a place of stasis. His euphemistic baskets are not made in some kind of prelapsarian time-frame. Rather, he embraces a deep time, or a planetary time, described by Dimock as bound by a larger sense of history that is more accurately understood through the geological and archeological studies of the world. The enormity of such a temporal span nullifies the ever-accelerating pace of Thoreau’s day-to-day environment. To explain by comparison, Fisher shows how the method of frame-making and frame-breaking of technology is tangibly witnessed in the criss-crossing of train-tracks’ replacement by the criss-crossing of airplanes. The replacement of one kind of technology with another more advanced technology is even more telling in Fisher’s example than he perhaps realizes – for it is also a fast mode of transport being replaced with an *even faster* mode. Thoreau turns the frame-breaking method on its head by simply replacing a fast mode of time with a slower mode. In other words, he embraces the method of frame-breaking and frame-making as noticed by Fisher in other nineteenth-century texts, but doesn’t follow through with a faster, more advanced solution. After all, the construction of myth needs a different temporal environment to the one in which standard progression takes place.

Thoreau’s description of Walden Pond in “The Pond in Winter,” engages in the replacement of fast-paced industry with mythological strata. For a little

over a fortnight he tells us, he sees “a hundred men” swarming over the pond, carving out large chunks of ice to ship across the world; Ice harvesting being a major industry in New England in the nineteenth century (XVI, 19). The pond becomes, for sixteen days, the center of a global market, taken over by business and economy. Its location in this labor-fueled time frame is marked by the value of its pure ice. “[T]he sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well,” writes Thoreau with some pride (XVI, 20). The actual frame-breaking/frame-making motif that should follow the image of the pond being harvested should be the threat of the popular rise in artificial ice manufacturing in the second half of the nineteenth century, which would soon render the natural ice harvesters’ trade obsolete. However, Thoreau does not acknowledge the real looming change in the ice manufacturing industry. Instead he replaces their lines of trade with genealogies of myth. Tracking out the longitudes and latitudes of Walden’s ice shipments, Thoreau the poet then draws those lines back to the pond, as though the whole world is physically located at the shores of Walden Pond. “I lay down the book,” he tells us, (ambiguous as to whether the book is the one he is writing and which he is uninterested in selling,)

...and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the servant of the Bramin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well.

The natural ice harvesters are thus transformed into vessels of deep time, bringing, through their industry, a world of mythology to Walden. The real men, “with teams and horses and apparently all the implements of farming,” fade away into servants of philosophers from far off lands, drawing water for the subsistence of spiritual thought. Walden Pond and the Ganges become superimposed, “the pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.” The long distances traveled by the ice itself shrink to the short walk of men walking from their temples or their place of rest to their local source of water. The emergence of the temple and the Ganges make the working men

fade into the un-real, mythology now competing for the new moment, unthreatened by artificial ice manufacturing or changes in technology. Walden Pond's water then travels into temporal and geographic dimensions beyond the ability of ice-harvesters and tradesmen:

With favoring winds it is wafted past the site of the fabulous islands of Atlantis and the Hesperides, makes the periplus of Hanno, and, floating by Ternate and Tidore and the mouth of the Persian Gulf, melts in the tropic gales of the Indian seas, and is landed in ports of which Alexander only heard the names.

The latitudes and longitudes are now traced out by fables and legends. The deeply sunk city of Atlantis and the mythological Hesperides island found on the world's western corner stretch back into Hanno's explorative location, West Africa in 480 BC, before traveling east to the Ternate and Tidore, islands referenced in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Legends, travels, myths, and poetry are brought together in half-real and half-unreal space and time-frames, but the constellation of Thoreau's en-fabled ports suggest not only a new geographic world, but a new temporal world, which consequently no longer lies under the threat of standard time and the market and technology that rages through it.

In essence Thoreau has created the ghostly garden of Stockton's description. As he fleshes out his unreal world across Walden Pond, it is the workers, industry, and traders of his actual nineteenth-century landscape who fade into fiction, his myth gaining a stronger, more palpable presence than what he has witnessed with his own eyes. "I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol," writes Thoreau, as though it is the very existence of Walden that allows him to spin out his myth. After all, Walden Pond (and White Pond) he tells us, "are too pure to have a market value" (IX, 34). It is in part the purity of Walden's water that allows it to transcend from the ostensible baseness of the trade that surrounds it. Mostly though, it is the poet who creates the shift from dry discovery narrative to myth.

The significant shift from travel or discovery narrative to myth is never clearer than in "The Pond In the Winter." Where *Walden* opens, as I pointed out above, with answers to questions in a rhetorical mode lifted from generic

travel narrative introductions, “The Pond in the Winter” opens with those questions collapsing:

After a still winter night I awoke with the impression that some question had been put to me, which I had been endeavoring in vain to answer in my sleep, as what – how – when – where? But there was dawning Nature, in whom all creatures live, looking in at my broad windows with serene and satisfied face, and no question on *her* lips.

In this passage Thoreau firmly puts an end to the travel narrative format he had been toying with earlier in his book. The now familiar images of dawning and awakening, no longer brought about through long bathing rituals, leave the questions of his townsmen behind and their value system described in “Economy” a vague memory. Nature replaces the social context found in *Walden’s* opening chapter, and the protagonist walks through his day as though in a dream, holding an axe, a pail, and a divining rod “in search of water.” Time still exists, described in figures like the “young pines” and winter’s “three month” habitation on the plan, but it is a different chronotype from the fast-paced time of Concord. It is a planetary time, rooted in nature’s growth and in Earth’s cycle round the sun. Standing by the iced-over pond, Thoreau “open[s] a window under my feet, where, kneeling to drink, I look down into the quiet parlor of the fishes...[the pond’s] bright sanded floor the same as in summer... Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads.” Winter and summer become divided by a thin layer of ice. By colliding the seasons Thoreau’s draws otherworldly lines again, englobing the pond in a celestial expanse understood as ‘heaven’ and follows a time-frame that follows the growth of trees and the passing of seasons. The preamble of “Economy” is no longer needed here as the transformation from actual world to mythological world takes place rapidly and easily. The presence of Thoreau the poet or myth-maker is irrefutable.

Arresting his new found world in the other-worldly constraints of myth, Thoreau can move deep down, through the unsettled history of undulating change, till he finds a solid bottom, constantly allegorically described in his search for *Walden’s* depth.

Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through Church and State, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality, and say, This is, and no mistake; (II, 19)

Reality, in this passage, seems to be the beginning of mankind, a kind of truth embodied in hard geological structures. Everything else above it comes across as sedimentary and unreliable. Burrowing to the first *a priori* will allow him to plant the seed of his dragon-tree like literature. Mythology's need to be both outside of the now standardized, hectic, temporal progression and simultaneously giving to and taking from the literatures which are part of that standard means that Thoreau must find a hard bottom upon which to begin his synchronic creation, otherwise it is destined to become obsolete against the passage of time. *Walden* then, enacts settlement, in the hardest to find depths of the world's history, making the un-real the gauge of reality.

One reason Walden makes such strenuous reading is that every moment, or so one often feels, is made to seem the ultimate moment; every object is the transfiguration of itself; nothing, however small, is small.

— Lawrence Buell

5

The Narrator's Act of Seeing

Once comfortably seated at Walden Pond, the narrator can undertake his most impressive act, that of seeing. Seeing, throughout Thoreau's work, works either, in its most powerful explosion, as a direct alterer of reality or, in its more subtle guise, as an anticipator of myth creation. Seeing is the protagonist's imaginative feat that replaces the familiar landscape and time-frames of Walden Pond, as experienced by Henry David Thoreau in 1845, with the myth that sits beside History, as created in *Walden*.¹ It is, in other words, the clearest manifestation

¹Transformation of a priori through an imaginative feat is certainly not uncommon in nineteenth-century American literature. For example, imagination is used to create a new value system in Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, as pointed out by Fisher. Sawyer's entrepreneurial way of whitewashing a fence turns a chore into an act of play, as he manages to persuade his friends to not only do it for him, but pay him for the experience of doing it. His net-profit may, to the objective reader, seem like rubbish (a kite, a dead rat, a piece of glass, a dog collar, orange peel etc.) but in his bartering system they take on value: "Tom was literally rolling in wealth," writes Twain. Tom Sawyer's actions of finding new ways of perceiving familiar things, writes Fisher, are not reflective of some kind of romantic aesthetic, rather they are reflective of living in "a fast-changing world." They speak of/for America's unsettled, almost frantic, capitalist and technology-driven culture. Thus Fisher indicates how the "new," in the nineteenth-century, was something always undergoing change and always under threat of getting old. Anticipating how and where the change would happen would make future values more potent than present values (e.g. figuring out where the rail tracks would get laid directly effected the value of the land surrounding it before the train station was even built). The cultural landscape is always on the cusp of being creatively destructed. As Fisher explains, "...all that now exists is equally half-real, half-unreal because it exists under the threat that it might soon become obsolete or be discarded." Mark Twain. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Chapter II. Fisher, 11, 13.

of the protagonist's agency, placing himself firmly at the transformative center of *Walden*. It marks the protagonist's indisputable location as the originator of the myth that unfolds from and around him. Throughout *Walden* he speaks of sitting or taking up residence on a piece of land and, from there, watching how that land is lifted out of the possession of the farmer it technically belongs to. Stanley Cavell writes that

Thoreau goes to extravagant lengths... to show that this being seated or residence is part, as the word says, of possessing the landscape that radiated from him, and the farms and the trees and, in short, everything within the dozen miles on every side of where, sitting, he is living; the country is taking its origin in him.²

Cavell's discerning observation that Thoreau locates himself as the central figure of his landscape through taking (even momentary) residence in it resonates with this chapter's contention that the protagonist is key to the creation of the world made up in *Walden*. Thoreau the narrator, by seating himself, watches (as Cavell has noted) "the landscape radiat[ing] from me accordingly," (*W*, II, 1). His imagination, seems to be protagonist's boastful claim, needs but an afternoon to re-conceptualize a field into an extension of his mind, and watch it pass through all the seasons and ages to come in one flickering moment. The narrator is thus able to take up residence beside standard time and place. His stance there oversees the full construction of another world, steeped in a deep layering of alternative histories.

I read Thoreau's act of seeing not as a single or momentary action that forces immediate change, but as an intricate process closely tied up with walking, the perpetuation of travel narrative's trope of discovery, and the technique of frame-breaking and frame-making. In other words I read Thoreau's technique of seeing as one of the more subversive acts undertaken by his protagonist, which challenges the sovereign ruling of his country and its territorial boundaries, while also engaging in the creation of deep time through the outright refusal of impending standardized time-frames and of the established chronological understandings of history. In this sense, seeing is a multifaceted action

²Cavell, Stanley. *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism*. (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1998), 21.

with multiple cause and effects: it places previously unnoticed strata on the landscape, usurping traditional territorial boundaries, so that the landscape is morphed into an alternative world ripe for exploration; it re-evaluates the historical significance of objects and landscapes under its scrutiny, drawing through and out of them alternative temporal structures than the ones they initially find themselves in; it forcefully reframes the protagonist's own sense of location and temporal being, compelling him to discover a new way of locating himself. Most intriguingly, perhaps, is that once we realize how much transformative work seeing does, it also becomes clear that seeing is essentially the protagonist's *writing* of myth into existence. Where the artist of Kouroo makes myth as a by product of carving his stick, focused solely on the job at hand, the narrator of *Walden* utilizes his sight deliberately to create the complex, multilayered, mythological world of Walden that will sit next to the neighboring reality of a man's retreat to Walden Pond.

A curious consequence of the narrator's seeing though, is that the narrator's own presence in the myth must eventually also be written into the mythological structure of the text. By the end of this chapter, then, I explore how seeing results in the narrator's own doubleness as simultaneously originator *and* object of the myth he ends up creating. Barbara Johnson marks this curious dual existence of agent and vulnerable object of the myth as the cause of *Walden's* "level shifting": that sense of *slippage* that has often be read in *Walden* as obscurity, which comes from the text's circuitous passages and consistent undermining of one a priori by another. Considering the fertile readings of *Walden* by Johnson and Walter Benn Michaels, I thus end the chapter by proposing that it is *seeing* and its revision of landscape and time that results in the *Walden's* characteristic of being constantly at odds with itself. Ultimately, I conclude by understanding that the level-shifting caused by seeing is key to myth's survival next to the threat of unidirectional progression of time and history that Thoreau is so keen to resist.

In his annotated edition of *Walden*, Harding writes that "[i]t was a habit of [Thoreau]'s to bend over and peer at the landscape through his legs, providing

a novel view.”³ Harding points this out at a moment in “The Ponds” where Thoreau writes that “[w]hen you invert your head, [the surface of the pond] looks like a thread of fine gossamer stretched across the valley...separating one stratum of the atmosphere from another” (*W*, IX,18). These curious games of seeing in Thoreau’s works are often brought to the attention of the reader, so that the protagonist’s seeing is emphasized and made a point of. By drawing attention to the narrator in the act of seeing, we become more aware of the protagonist’s agency in the construction of myth. Sure enough, after the narrator inverts his head, a description of the pond upside down follows, where the sunlight in the east reflects just as brightly in the pond’s surface in the west, smooth as glass, inhabited by water nymphs. Dividing two strata of atmospheres by “molten glass cooled but not congealed,” the narrator creates a small otherworldly globe of pond and hills, each equally reflected by the other. A whole new bubble of a world is creating out of the small seeing game. A little later the protagonist is in a boat on the pond. Looking down into the water he loses gravity: “I seemed to be floating through the air as in a balloon, and [the fish’s] swimming impressed me as a kind of flight or hovering....their fins, like sails, set all around them.” The circularity of the pond and its reflection of the sky now make an air balloon, as water turns to air, swimming to flying, and fins to sails. The narrator deliberately loses sense of his real location, turning water into sky through the gentle act of looking into the pond’s surface. In a more dramatic scene in *Cape Cod*, the narrator looks for shells and pebbles on a beach known for its shipwrecks, instead discovers antique coins, falls helter-skelter into “the annals of this voracious beach!” unrecorded by history, and then turns the beach into “a sea-monster with open jaws, more terrible than Scylla and Charybdis” (*CC*, VIII, 21). Once again, it is the act of seeing, this time focused on the search for shells and pebbles, which transforms the object of sight from a regular beach to a “voracious” one, deep with history, and then finally into a mythical creature. The act of seeing, usually practiced in some small, everyday way, makes myth out of whatever the seer turns his eyes to.

³Harding, 182.

One of the first things that seeing does in its transformation of the landscape and environment it is focused on is remove their familiar aspects. Put otherwise, the narrator's act of seeing often introduces a deep uncertainty to his geographical location that can manifest as a simple removal of grounding, or the reversal of water and sky. The removal of crucial aspects of orientation result in a loss of the familiar world, and bring the narrator and the reader into an unfamiliar one. Seeing, then, provides a useful way of perpetuating the momentum of a travel-narrative: if a travel-narrative's main driving force is the protagonist's discovery of a new world and his return to account for that new world, then by pushing the bottoms out of the familiar worlds, the narrator creates new ones that require exploring. By undermining the familiar and whisking the reader into unfamiliar territory, the travel narrative still has purpose and the traveler still has a world to discover. Therefore, while the protagonist's act of seeing's introduction of the uncertain into the landscape might seem to be a curious act of self-inflicted disorientation, it actually re-locates him in the narrative, newly imbued with the authority of the traveler.

Consequently, the travel narrative does not have to rely on a change in place or time. Walden Pond, writes Thoreau, "is itself unchanged...; all the change is in me" (*W*, IX, 23). *Walden* thus relies on the narrator's act of seeing, not just in order to discover a new location that is myth-friendly, but to also write the myth out. The following passage show how intricately tied the act of seeing is with the travel-narrative structure that lies somewhat abstracted in *Walden*.

In our most trivial walks, we are constantly, though unconsciously, steering like pilots by certain well known beacons and headlands, and if we go beyond our usual course we still carry in our minds the bearing of some neighboring cape; and not till we are completely lost, or turned around — for a man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost — do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of nature. Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations. (VIII, 2)

In this short, insightful passage, Thoreau employs a voyaging metaphor where "trivial walks" become journeys around capes and headlands, and where the

walkers becomes expert helmsmen familiar with their surroundings. By invoking these tropes of travel, the reader is shown how the seeming smallness of the journey will end up being larger than might be initially expected. Already the possibility of scale enlargement is anticipated. In order for the travel and discovery to take place, orientation, knowledge, and certainty must be lost. Only then can the familiar become unfamiliar and a new appreciation for the “vastness and strangeness of nature” come into fruition. Thoreau is ardently thinking about discovery and to begin discovery, a loss or absence must be acknowledged so that there is something *to* discover; either a loss of bearings or a loss of knowledge. In order to discover the new unfamiliar world, in other words, in order for the protagonist to undertake a journey of discovery, he must first undergo the loss of his world. The author perpetuates travel-narrative then when he inserts the necessary constraints through unconventional methods, creating unknowability in the known through the narrator's seeing game of shutting his eyes and spinning around. This small preparation prepares the narrator to discover something vast and strange, to encounter the unknown. It is an instance where the author reveals how his text can construct a genre within itself despite seemingly hostile circumstances. To put it differently, *Walden's* narrator creates (and is transparent about his process of creation) the sine qua non unknowability within the text, since the conventionally unknown geographical factors of a traditional travel-narrative are unavailable. Seeing reinforces the travel-narrative structure. And in doing so, it reinforces the heroic guise of the protagonist, ready to discover new worlds.

The narrator's sight as a removal of the familiar in a landscape, and thus challenging territorial boundaries is most powerfully put into play in *Walden's* “Where I Lived,” where Thoreau undermines the entire solidity of America, thus rethinking the whole world and America's place in it. Or to think of it as Walter Benn Michaels does, Thoreau relocates the hard bottoms of fact so that they become hard to find.⁴ Trying to find solid ground in *Walden* results in the reader feeling much like the horse-riding traveller in Thoreau's “Conclusion:” the traveller and his horse sink into a bog having asked the local

⁴Walter Benn Michaels. “*Walden's* False Bottoms.” *Glyph: Johns Hopkins Textual Studies* 1: (1977) 405-421.

boy if the swamp had a hard bottom rather than asking how deep the swamp's hard bottom was. The reason hard bottoms are hard to find in Thoreau's passages is because the narrator goes *out of his way* to undermine the solidity of his location, going as far as to turn America from continent land to insular land. He fractures a landscape which was otherwise familiar or recognizable – even to the reader who has never visited it. Standing on the top of a hill, the protagonist describes the view as he takes it in from all sides:

When I looked across the pond from this peak toward the Sudbury meadows, which in time of flood I distinguished elevated perhaps by a mirage in their seething valley, like a coin in a basin, all the earth beyond the pond appeared like a thin crust insulated and floated even by this small sheet of intervening water, and I was reminded that this on which I dwelt was but *dry land*. *W*, II, 10

In this passage we can see how the narrator's act of seeing changes the very placement of the view and of the earth beneath the viewer's feet. Thus, the narrator engages in a game of seeing where he goes beyond the actual reality of the view before him. Certain circumstances must be right for the change in perception to take place. He must be on a peak to have a bird's eye view, he must be looking across the pond towards the meadows, which in turn must be flooded, in order to see how the land between the two bodies of water looks like an island rather than seeing the water as contained by the land. The forceful change of the limits on the landscape results in the inversion of the masses of land and water. By playing with sight in such a way, it is the protagonist who alters the reality of his own situation. By changing the very landscape around him through the act of seeing he makes a journey from one world to another. The result of seeing is that "I was reminded that this on which I dwelt was but *dry land*." Thus, it is not just the view that changed, but the hill-top on which he is standing, and the entire world on which he lives. The land becomes "not continent, but insular." In other words, even the land on which he stands has lost its power of solidity and thus of certainty. Unspoken a notion though it is, the connotation of such perception undermines the entire solidity of America as a continent. Thoreau's act of seeing works as a force for undermining what are ostensibly the most solid of geological facts. Real bottoms fall out into

mythical worlds. Thus it becomes clear that the narrator's act of seeing is necessary to Thoreau's mythological construction. It is the activity by the poet/hero which constructs new frames of landscape, at the very least, as it is both a form of reinvention and a method of discovery. The narrator sees the world differently and then begins to construct the new world around this newly found sight. As such, seeing is realized as the hugely imaginative act that it is, engaging in an enormous scale of frame-breaking; undermining entire continents through games of perceptions. Not unlike the moment where the narrator rides Cape Cod's beach "barebacked" instead of looking at it from a map or a travel coach only to find it enormous and otherworldly, by looking at the Sudbury meadows anew and forcing the land into insularity, *Walden's* narrator uses sight (instead of walking) to pose a threat to the sovereignty of the United States of America. Geological borders are removed, and in doing so, the protagonist challenges the outlines of the country itself. In the above passage, the narrator uses the act of seeing to reconfigure an entire geological landscape. His powers of transformation thus prove to be immense.

Seeing as a form of myth-making is never clearer than in the fourth chapter of *Walden*, "Sounds," which reads like an elaborate conjuring act instigated by the narrator where multiple versions of time and space overlay one another. In the previous chapter I observed how the text undergoes a frame-breaking frame-making process to create myth. Here, I want to suggest that the act of seeing introduces a multitude of time frames out of one object or scene, thus creating a multi-layered history, "deep time," that is specific to the construction of myth's temporality as seen beside History. In "Sounds", which goes out of its way to explain the narrator's seemingly exaggerated remarks "that my life itself... was a drama of many scenes and without end," he constructs the legend-like Iron Horse out of the trains that regularly pass by his house (*W*, IV, 4). *Atropos*, as the protagonist names his mythological creation, looms over the pastoral imagery otherwise located in *Walden* and grows larger than Earth itself as it moves with "planetary motion." All the while, behind the imagery of the iron horse, stands the narrator, building up the train into immeasurable scales

before shrinking it to the significance of a cart. While playing with the size of his myth though, the narrator stretches myth's limits out even wider than we have previously seen, allowing for multiple terrains and chronographies to coexist in one image. The result is that Thoreau's myth becomes deep enough to encapsulate different threads of history and geography within the ephemeral location of Walden Pond. Deep time, then, emulates the depth of the pond itself.

Before the appearance of the Iron Horse, "Sounds" opens with the narrator demanding sight from the reader before moving into an irregular time-frame. "What is a course of history or philosophy, or poetry... or the best society, or the most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen?" he asks, placing seeing on par with other scholastic achievements (*W*, IV, 1). "Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer? Read your fate, see what is before you, and walk on into futurity," he continues in one of his more famous lines. Seeing here coupled with another of Thoreau's favorite actions, walking, implies that it is the first step into the renewed continuous moment. Following this taunt-like encouragement of the reader, the narrator announces that he lived at Walden Pond doing nothing, and enjoyed the passing of time "from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie." His dream state knows nothing but the sounds of nature. Time loses occupational value: "[The seasons] were far better than any work of the hands have been. They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance." The seeing in the previous paragraph brings the narrator into a location where time works differently. "My days were not days of the week, bearing the stamp of any heathen deity, nor were they minced into hours and fretted by the ticking of the clock; for I lived like the Puri Indians, of whom it is said that 'for yesterday, today, and tomorrow they have only one word' " (*W*, IV, 2). In the background of Thoreau's description lie faint images of travellers. He is awakened from his dream-state of time only by the sunset "or the noise of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway." Meanwhile his quote describing the Puri Indians' concept of time comes directly from Pfeiffer's travel book *A Lady's Voyage Round the World*. This fairly loud call for seeing,

followed by a shift in time-frame, all with the echo of travel, indicate that a discovery is about to take place in *Walden*, one where the world will be altered.

Sure enough, Thoreau engages in a small alteration of perception, almost a practice run on something more everyday and familiar before moving onto the train. He describes how cleaning his house requires that he must empty it of the few furnishings he owns, so he moves his “household effects out on the grass, making a little pile like a gypsy’s pack,” where he observes that they “seemed glad to get out themselves.”

It was worth the while to see the sun shine on these things, and hear the free wind blow on them; so much more interesting most familiar object look out of doors than in the house. A bird sits on the next bough, life-everlasting grows under the table, and blackberry vines run round its legs; pine cones, chestnut burs and strawberry leaves are strewn about. It looked as if this was the way these forms came to be transferred to our furniture, to tables, chairs, and bedsteads - because they once stood in their midst.

Changing the familiar environment of everyday household objects by simply moving them from inside to outside is one of those simple alterations of perception, much like the inverting of one’s head, or looking out from a hill. It is an enforced reframing. Nature embraces the man-made objects, with the sun, wind, birds, and plants immediately taking them into their environment. The vines that appear immediately around the table legs and the life-everlasting which *grows* under it suggest that the moment the table appeared on the natural ground it had always been there. The whole sentence describing the bird and the plants is in the present tense, emphasizing the objects’ permanent present moment in nature. But then the narrator ducks out of the present moment and watches the vines and leaves turn into furniture carvings, as the table records a romantic pastoral moment now long past. The forced change to perception brings out echoes of images different to those the reader might have expected to see. The table seems to exist in multiple worlds and multiple tenses in the same moment, where growth and wooden carving, the stagnant recording of a moment in wood against the moment in movement, the inanimate table leg taking root in the ground, all these images come against and within each other.

These shifts in tenses and time, the flickering of the pastoral paradise from natural present to carved out memory, indicate the beginning of a Thoreauvian game: a game of undermining, where two or more chronographies and images are juxtaposed in one location, so that they seem to undermine each other in that same moment. The man-made versus the natural sit uneasily against one another even as they are in an embrace. The emphasis is consistently shifted as first the furniture becomes the focus, then the nature around it, then the furniture again, as it take places in nature, then nature's embrace of it, and finally nature solidified into furniture. It is the protagonist's sight that moves the images against each other as multiple objects are seen. Indeed, these intricate changes of tense and imagery, where ideals and stories are often put against one another through the protagonist's act of seeing are key to Thoreau's kind of myth. As seeing provides one perspective of reality layered over another sometimes in the form of ghosting (as noted in Chapter 1), or an undermining of solidity (as noted above), the tendency of contradiction also manifests itself in rhetoric, giving Thoreau's myth a sense of fragility or permeability, as though it stands up through and out of contradiction, rather than in spite of it. Indeed, just a few sentences after seeing plants as permanent wooden carvings, Thoreau describes nature's fracturing as buds grow too quickly "tax[ing] their weak joints," eventually breaking under the weight of wild bees, and he hears "a fresh and tender bough suddenly fall like a fan to the ground...broken off by its own weight." An important trick has been mastered through these multiple and contradictory visions of plants and boughs in the space of two paragraphs: it is a frame-making and frame-breaking made in perpetuation. In other words, the act of seeing engages in that same frame breaking schematic Fisher has described, where technological advancement nullifies a new invention as fast as a newer one is produced. Only, in the case of Thoreau's furniture sitting outside, the protagonist's act of seeing watches the man-made and nature in a continuous cycle of usurping one another, so that the frame-breaking and frame-making is continuous but dialectical, not progressive. Strangely then, as the table enjoys a mythological transformation through the narrator's act of seeing, we conclude that myth can also contain the process of frame-breaking

and frame-making within itself, only without one image or time-frame winning over another. The result of an internal-undermining literature, one that is perpetually dropping out its bottoms, but not in progression, is a literature that becomes immune to the threat of another literature coming and replacing it through a progressive frame-breaking frame-making mechanism. Instead it would absorb the literature that tries to usurp it, and simply place it in a synchronic formation of usurpation. By being bound solely by its own methods of self-destruction, which it regularly enacts as a constant internal conflict of multiple images, locations, and histories, it becomes unavailable to the frame making/frame breaking *accelerant* found in nineteenth-century American society. In other words, it is myth, for it is unavailable to the standardized progress of industrialization and modernity. As such, Thoreauvian myth mimics the process of constant undermining and replacing of the *a priori* but does so on its own terms, and in its own time-frame. It is the complicated act of seeing performed by the narrator that shapes all these competing histories and geographies into a deep time which is immune to the regular undermining or replacement of foundations and *a priori*.

In the previous chapter I argued that Thoreau replaces frantic, linear time with a slower pace in order to accommodate myth's generic requirements consequently locating it beside regular historical progression. Time's and space's rescaling in "The Pond in the Winter" enacts a frame-breaking technique now familiar to us where myth materializes over a real socio-economic happening at Walden Pond. In "Sounds" though, a more complicated form of myth emerges, where multiple states of time and environment vie against one another as world after world is undermined and replaced. The result is an intricate layering of histories and fable, a manifestation of "deep time" that looks like the cross-section of a sedimentary rock. Myth, in this form, encapsulates multitudes of historical and fictional threads, allowing them to coexist even as they rival one another for validity. As has been seen in this chapter so far, the narrator must first locate himself firmly in the act of seeing before enacting such a tremendous transformation. Thus, we find him seated and watching the train from afar:

I watch the passage of the morning cars with the same feeling that I do the rising of the sun, which is hardly more regular. Their train of clouds stretching far behind and rising higher and higher, going to heaven while the cars are going to Boston, conceals the sun for a minute and casts my distant field into the shade, a celestial train beside which the petty train of cars which hugs the earth is but the barb of the spear.

The location of the narrator as seer is set the moment he tells us that he is watching the passage of the train. Positioned in his location of agency then, the narrator goes on to describe the train in a familiar mythological form, where the mythical train ghosts the real one. The “celestial train” is a direct product of the “petty train,” made up of its smoke puffs that rise up regularly, mimicking the actual train cars. The smokey cars move both horizontally and vertically, created in the horizontal movement of the real train, but simultaneously floating up, in a visual not dissimilar to the dragon-tree’s growth – both vertical and horizontal. However, the petty cars are also large enough to “hug the earth.” Moreover Thoreau equates the train with the sun, both in its regularity and in its potential power for world-shifting. Thoreau’s love of the rising sun has been well documented; particularly its significance as a transformative device that can bring man into a mythical world. Thus his comparison elevates the engine-run symbol of modernity to a divine position usually only held by faculties of nature, as the celestial train momentarily blocks the sun. Sun, ghostly, celestial train, and real train, co-exist in this passage, one hiding behind the other, if only for a few moments, each tied up in the image of the other. The contradicting images, as described above in the table passage, also come into play here.

In the Iron Horse section of “Sounds” many of the now familiar tropes and transformations take place as expected. The train is first located in a regular temporal (“for the last half-hour I have heard the rattle of railroad cars”) and spatial (“the Fitchburg Railroad touched the pond a hundred rods south of where I live”) context. As it comes closer to Thoreau, the train’s “whistle penetrates my wood... sounding like the scream of a hawk,” quickly displacing the “hawks circling around my clearing” which had appeared only moments earlier. The sound of the men on the freight trains calling to keep the track

clear is then “heard sometimes through the circles of two towns,” thus enlarging the train’s spatial scope. Then, “all the Indian huckleberry hills are stripped, all the cranberry meadows are raked into the city,” so that the train whips through nature and the city in one movement, closing the separation between the two. Before we know it the train of cars are “moving off with planetary motion — or rather, like a comet,” likened to a “travelling demigod” “unfolding its masses to the light,” and turns into an iron horse with a “snort like thunder, shaking the earth with his feet, and breathing fire and smoke from his nostrils.” The conjuring of myth is complete as Thoreau lauds man’s incredible invention, which on its own merits makes him believe that “the earth had got a race now worthy to inhabit it.”

However, the Iron Horse myth doesn’t end there as it is rife with both rhetorical and conceptual contradictions that overlap one another. “Up comes the cotton, down goes the woven cloth; up comes the silk, down goes the woolen;” writes the narrator, witnessing the trains’ occupation of taking and replacing one trade with another as nineteenth-century fashions change according to season and trends. As his description of the train and its miscellaneous cargo continues, layers upon layers of places and dates are piled on to the cars that he watches passing by, imprinted concretely on the image of the car holding torn sails, “more legible and interesting now than if they should be wrought into paper and printed books....proof sheets which need no correction” of the history and times they have gone through. Trade items arrive from around the world (the Philippines, Vermont, Maine, England, France, Spain, and the Orient are but a few of the geographic regions mentioned) each holding their own history, production and story, travel together horizontally over the planet. “While these things go up,” repeats the narrator, “other things come down,” after having described the conglomeration of cultures, as though they are all battling each other for exposure or significance.

At the same time the train engages in time-travel, as Thoreau describes the present moment as “this morning of the Great Snow,” a reference to Cotton Mather’s recording of the historic snowstorm in 1717. Having gone back over a hundred years, Thoreau hears “the muffled tone of [the freight train workers’]

engine bell from out of the fog bank of their chilled breath, which announces that the cars *are coming*, without long delay, notwithstanding the veto of a New England northeast snow-storm.” Through impossible ages and impossible weather conditions, the protagonist’s train continues to move forward, its “plowmen covered with snow and rime,” visually transformed into winter creatures, where “rime” works twice, once to enforce the image of frost and once to anticipate the reference to Robert Burns’s poems a few words later. The train’s plough blade is not “turning down... daisies and the nests of field mice,” as the plough blades did in Burns’s century, rather it turns down “boulders of the Sierra Nevada.” And while it is unclear as to which Sierra Nevada range Thoreau might be referring to here (either California’s or Spain’s) it doesn’t really matter as these boulders, he tells us, “occupy an outside place in the universe.” The narrator’s reference to Burns, without even using quotation marks, and the coy allusion to Burns’ well known use of rhyme, serves to emphasize the dated nature of the romantic poet. By comparing the train’s plough blade with that of eighteenth-century England’s, the narrator seeks to minimize the threats against, and thus the power of resistance upheld in, Burns’s literature. The only real danger in the eighteenth century may have been the Great Snow, a natural phenomenon, but even that threat can be overcome by this newly manmade product of technology. The mythologized train can in fact plough rocks in other dimensions. Thus when Thoreau’s train takes its place beside history, other literatures “endure only as the elms which overshadow our houses” (“Walking”) and natural events, even when drawn out into centuries, pose it no threat.

To argue that Thoreau’s technique of magnification and collapse of scale and distance is key to his myth-making in *Walden* isn’t to suggest anything new.⁵ What I am tracing here instead is how this well-known technique is a *result* of the protagonist locating mythology in a different time-frame to standard history’s through the act of seeing, as opposed to the technique being a catalyst for myth’s construction. The moment myth occupies an alternative,

⁵Lawrence Buell. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U Press, 1995, 305.

sideways-growing world that also assimilates and adapts generic and structural rules found in ever-accelerating pace of nineteenth-century literature and society, scale and distances of familiar objects become distorted, as do their temporal and spatial relationships to each other. All ages become a conglomeration of ages layered on top of one another while the significance of each event fluctuates, from an over-glorified ant fight to the downgraded image of Homer's *Iliad* lying unread in Thoreau's hut. The narrator's eyes guide us through all these magnifications and reductions, writing the myth and its ever shifting layers into existence.

Behind the myth-making is the omnipresent myth maker: the fictional Thoreau. The "I" of Thoreau's narratives tend to change personality and character depending on the main thrust of the text. In "Wild Apples" he takes on the persona of a "slightly dotty wild apple enthusiast," in "The Succession of Forest Trees" he is a serious agriculturalist, and he is the eponymous yank in "The Yankee in Canada."⁶ Each persona matches the angle of each text, where the persona underscores the narrative purpose. In "Wild Apples" the earnest apple enthusiast swiftly brings the reader to his side, thus making the political and social arguments of the essay more accessible as the narrator ends up warning his fellow townsmen of wilderness's gradual extinction. The serious agriculturalist is set up to speak at an agricultural conference, and it is probably no coincidence that the scientific tone of the narrator and his content is what makes "The Succession of Forest Trees" the most oft referred to Thoreau text in biology journals to this day. Meanwhile, in "The Yankee in Canada" Thoreau enjoys playing the part of a wide-eyed tourist. *Walden's* protagonist is, as I have suggested earlier, a character based on Thoreau during the two years he lived at Walden Pond. In "Solitude," the chapter in which the protagonist focuses on himself most, he admits to his location next to the actual experience of Thoreau's stay at Walden Pond. "With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense," he tells the reader (V, 7). "By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and

⁶See Buell, *Environmental Imagination*, 106.

bad, go by us like a torrent.” Thus one person is split into two: “I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another.” It isn’t clear in this passage whether the narrator is the so-called “spectator” or the protagonist of “the play of... life... a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination,” or whether it is the author. Nonetheless, it becomes clearer in other passages of *Walden* that the narrator is, a poet, a hero, a traveller, and a myth-maker, much like the artist of Kouroo. His purpose in *Walden* is to construct the myth, the neighboring reality to the actual experience Thoreau had in 1845.

In “Solitude,” the narrator goes out of his way to complicate himself: “I may be either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it. I *may* be affected by a theatrical exhibition; on the other hand, I *may not* be affected by an actual event which appears to concern me much more.” In other words he will dip in and out of the story he is constructing, sometimes taking part in it, sometimes authorizing it. The protagonist enacts the dipping in and out prominently in “Sounds;” his presence as a seer particularly strong. A few examples of the narrator seeing in “Sounds” are the following: “...as I sat at my window... I heard a fresh and tender bough suddenly fall like a fan to the ground;” “As I sit at my window this summer afternoon, hawks are circling about my clearing;” “I watch the passage of the morning cars;” “I see these men everyday go about their business;” “Warned by the whizzing sound, I look up from my book.” By locating the narrator in all these acts of seeing, often by a window looking out at a view, the narrator is positioned for myth-making. The result of the narrator’s presence in the Iron Horse passage emphasizes the narrator’s prowess as myth-conjurer, drawing attention to how he controls the threads and strata of the world as he constructs it around him. After all, it is the act of seeing which performs the transformation, and since the narrator is so indubitably placed as the one seeing, it follows that he is the one performing the change that the reader is witnessing. The protagonist ends up eclipsing the author, his constructed world overshadowing the world the author lives in. But after all that is Thoreau’s goal – for the myth-maker to “ma[k]e a new system

in making a staff, a world with full and fair proportions; in which, though the old cities and dynasties had passed away, fairer and more glorious ones had taken their places," like the Kouroo artist. Consequently *Walden* is the telling of the unnamed protagonist's making of myth, which is in itself a mythological tale. Once the reader recognizes the protagonist's fictional nature it clarifies his position as simultaneously both the story maker and part of the story's subject.

Johnson similarly notes Thoreau's presence in, or cross-over into the figurative landscape he constructs in *Walden*. Johnson arrives at this conclusion from a different direction though; through her search for the source of what she identifies as the text's rhetorical obscurity.

The perverse complexity of *Walden's* rhetoric is intimately related to the fact that it is never possible to be sure what the rhetorical status of any given image is. And this is because what Thoreau has done in moving to Walden Pond is to move himself, literally, into the world of his own figurative language. The literal woods, pond, and bean field still assume the same classical guises in which they have always appeared [guises found in texts "from the New Testament to Aesop and Swedenborg"], but they are suddenly readable in addition as the non-figurative ground of a naturalist's account of life in the woods. The ground has shifted, but the figures are still figures...

Walden is obscure, therefore, to the extent that Thoreau has *literally* crossed over into the very parable he is writing, where *reality itself* has become a catachresis, both ground and figure at once...⁷

Johnson recognizes *Walden* as an alternative construction of reality, which she describes as a catachresis, a place where reality has become "a figure of abuse." To my mind catachresis in Johnson's sense is very close to myth. Catachresis, writes Johnson, is "a figurative substitute for nothing that ever could be literal." If the narrator is part of the story's subject, it follows that he becomes a catachresis of himself too. In other words, the narrator is subject to the magnification and collapse of scale technique enacted throughout *Walden*. One of the earliest reviews of Thoreau's work picked up on the narrator's enlargement and shrinkage, albeit not viewing the trick favorably. In 1849, when

⁷Barbara Johnson *A World of Difference*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1987), 49-56. Hereafter referred to as Johnson.

reviewing *A Week*, James Russell Lowell wrote: “We think that Mr. Thoreau, like most solitary men, exaggerates the importance of his own thoughts. The “I” occasionally stretches up tall as Pompey’s pillar over a somewhat flat and sandy expanse.”⁸ No doubt Lowell meant for the comment to be critical, reading the “I” as Henry David Thoreau, the writer and friend of Emerson who lived in Concord.⁹ Despite the negative connotations Lowell may have meant to impart though, his observation that the “I” “occasionally stretches up tall as Pompey’s pillar” is an acute one. In fact, whenever the protagonist moves away from his watchful position, and moves himself into the foreground of what he is describing, he becomes magnified just like other objects and distances he turns his attention to. At the end of the Iron Horse passage the “I” becomes so large it eclipses the train itself. As the last of the train cars pass by filled with “a pastoral valley” of cows, sheep, and oxen, the narrator watches “your pastoral life whirled past and away.” It is the train’s final word, firmly overcoming any sense of pastoral mythology *Walden* might hold. But then the protagonist locates himself at the train tracks themselves, no longer sitting in his house and just looking, in danger of getting hit by the cars: “...the bell rings, and I must get off the track and let the cars go by;” There follows a short verse on the train track, “What’s the railroad to me?” which diminishes the size of what the reader has just witnessed, and suddenly “I cross it like a cart-path in the woods,” the narrator announces. He stretches himself so large that the train track is not just the regular size that the reader is familiar with, but becomes a cart-path in comparison to the narrator’s size.¹⁰ In an earlier example, he describes how he greets the train workers who “bow to me as to

⁸“Review of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack River*” *Spectator* 22 13th October, 1849. *Emerson and Thoreau: The Contemporary Reviews* ed. Joel Myerson. New York: Cambridge U Press, 1992. 349. Hereafter referred to as *Contemporary Reviews*.

⁹Mixing up Thoreau the actual man with Thoreau the protagonist or even Thoreau the author was a problem contemporary reviewers of Thoreau’s often came up against. Henry James Sr. recognized this himself when commenting on Thoreau’s books: “I have honestly tried to read them but owing, I suppose, to prejudice derived from personal contact with him, their wit always seemed more or less spoiled, to my taste, by intention, and even their sagacity seemed painfully aggressive and alarming; so I relinquished my task without any edifying result.” *Contemporary Reviews* 159-160.

¹⁰By the end of the chapter the cart-path dwindles into nothing, as the protagonist claims he lives in complete wilderness, with “no gate—no front-yard—and no path to the civilized world.” In direct contradiction with his earlier assertion that the train’s causeway links him to society.

an old acquaintance, they pass me so often.” The narrator, now present at the railroad, acknowledges this greeting of familiarity, explaining that “I too would fain to be a track-repairer somewhere in the orbit of the earth.” Out of his seeing-position and into the myth’s foreground, the narrator again looms larger than the train, larger than the earth, fixing its orbit in space around the sun. The physical body of *Walden’s* “I” fluctuates with the rest of the mythological landscape.

Consequently the narrator occupies two spaces in *Walden*. On the one hand he is the seer through which alternative histories can come together in one location, and on the other hand he, the “I,” is subject to the effect of being *in* the space which houses multiple histories and landscapes. He is, as quoted above, “either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it.” Paradoxically, the “I” of the narrator who can be magnified and reduced, is being “seen” by the narrator who is sitting at the window. Thus the act of seeing becomes an intricate visual exercise, self reflexive, so that the mythographer becomes absorbed into his own myth too. He is not the only character in *Walden* who has this kind of double existence. In “Solitude” he tells the reader of two companions who occasionally visit him “in the long winter evenings” (V, 12). The first is an “old settler and original proprietor” “thought to be dead,” “who is reported to have dug Walden Pond, and stoned it, and fringed it with pine woods.” The second is “an elderly dame....invisible to most persons, in whose odorous herb garden I love to stroll sometimes.”¹¹ The old settler has been read as Pan by Harding and others, while Kenneth Walter Cameron claims that he is Hawthorne’s Gray Champion. The elderly dame, on the other hand, seems to be universally acknowledged as Mother Nature.¹² The question of whom the two characters symbolize is unimportant to the thesis at hand, but it is significant that they are always recognized as *mythological* figures. They are characters who live in different time-frames to the regular time-frames occupied by most of *Walden’s* everyday characters: John Smith the Irish farmer, Alex Therien the French-Canadian woodcutter, et al. Both the settler and the dame regale the narrator with tales. The settler “tells me

¹¹Unfortunately, I don’t think Thoreau is employing any kind of sexual euphemism here.

¹²See Harding’s *Annotated*, 134.

stories of old time and of new eternity,” while the dame has a memory that “runs back farther than mythology, and she can tell me the original of every fable.” Their lives began centuries before most and will continue beyond the lives of their own children. In regards to myth’s unusual historical time-frame, they are mythological figures. And so for the narrator to keep company with them he too must be a mythological character. The seeing narrator thus writes himself into a mythological figure by locating him next to such illustrious figures of lore.

Barbara Johnson reads *Walden* as a text that emerges out of contradictory rhetorical modes. On the one hand is the literal and on the other hand is the figurative, and as the two modes rival one another, extraordinarily difficult prose emerges where analogies undercut one another and spin off into wildly contradictory images, leaving the reader at a loss to what is going on. Johnson describes the rhetoric as “level-shifting” and pinpoints the move of the author from his literal reality into his figurative reality as the cause of these ever-shifting analogies. I would take Johnson’s argument a step further and suggest that it is the protagonist’s act of seeing that causes these shifts, as he engages in fluctuating the levels that Johnson reads as constantly shifting, or that Michaels reads as “false bottoms.” Indeed, Michaels reminds us to be careful of constrained readings when approaching *Walden*. “The central problem of reading *Walden*,” he writes, “is the persistence of our own attempts to identify and understand its unity, to dispel our nervousness by resolving or at least containing the contradictions which create it... but... resolution need not be inevitable... we need not read to make ourselves more comfortable.” In a similar vein, Stanley Cavell and Barbara Johnson also embrace the discomfort of reading *Walden*, concerned almost entirely with the philosophical or aesthetic significance of Thoreau’s circuitous and antithetical passages, instead of seeking to unify them into a greater thesis analyzing Thoreau’s meaning. Embracing these critics’ reading of level-shifting and tension in *Walden*, I am able to fully read Thoreau’s mythological texts as teetering constantly against the threat of destruction, even while they challenge the chronological progression and territorial borders of the modern nation-state. What makes readers

of Thoreau “nervous and wretched,” in the words of Emerson, is witnessing *Walden*'s balancing act as it swerves from one history and location to another, deliberately perpetuated by the narrator's act of seeing, to create a myth that can stand aside from modernity's version of history. My analysis above understands level-shifting in *Walden* as an effect of the rivaling alternate histories that the narrator plays with to build his air-born castle of mythology. In other words, it is the alternative temporal shaping of *Walden* which causes the obscurity so often commented upon by Thoreauvian scholars. And the text's ability to claim itself as an alternative reality, mythology, comes through the volatility it has adopted generically from travel narrative's uncertainty and structurally from the frenetic accelerant of nineteenth-century time. Thus the textual space into which Thoreau moves himself is as autonomous as the actual Walden Pond precisely because of its uncertainties and self-undermining nature. Mythology's ground must always be shifting in order to balance itself against the movement of linear history.

Towards the end of “Former Inhabitants; and Winter Guests,” the protagonist is sitting in his hut with a philosopher (identified as Bronson Alcott, or in my reading, as a ghosted Alcott) and the old settler.

There we worked, revising mythology, rounding a fable here and there, and building castles in the air for which earth offered no worthy foundation... Ah! such discourse we had....it expanded and racked my little house; I should not dare to say how many pounds' weight there was above the atmospheric pressure on every circular inch; it opened its seams so that they had to be calked with much dulness thereafter to stop the consequent leak; — but I had enough of that kind of oakum already picked. (XIV, 22)

The image here is a not unlike Shakespeare's three witches conjuring spells into existence. The narrator openly displays his myth-making abilities and the weight and realness of the myths he creates with his companions literally pulls his physical world apart. The castle grows *wider* than the house. There is a sense here, that Thoreau's myth-making is a dangerous occupation, that if he is not careful, his compression of multiple times and places in one world can rip up the actual cabin. But ultimately the hut stays together, and even in the tremor of precariousness, myth holds itself together.

“I delight to come to my bearings,” says the narrator in the concluding chapter, “...not to live in this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century, but stand or sit thoughtfully while it goes by” (*W*, XVIII, 14). The protagonist confirms once again his location beside the progressing history of his century, standing or sitting thoughtfully, no doubt watching it as he watched the train go by. Drawing from the bustling society of industrial revolution, politics, war, slavery, and trade, that he sees, the narrator makes myth, a fiction that grows sideways, always engaged with the diachronic time-frame of his countrymen but also always apart from it.

Only every distortion is adequate.

—Rachel Blau DuPlessis

6

Violent Histories

Thoreau's act of seeing and his construction of a myth that folds multiple cultures and histories into itself while sitting next to the progression of a standardized and modernized history, is a well-honed tightrope performance. Even when it feels like the myth might slip, the shifting of bottoms, which Michaels accuses of making the reader feel nervous, stabilizes myth against the tide of modernity's acceleration. After all, this myth looks after its own self-destruction, rendering it practically immune to the shifts and changes of cartography, industrialization, modernity, and capitalism. Thoreau's myth has ended up as a malleable fortress, not just a little like his famous air-bound castles. It manages to stand unaffected by the consequences of America's imminent futurity through methods of counteractive resistance, methods reiterated and echoed in Thoreau's political texts "Civil Disobedience" and "Life Without Principle." Myth, as exemplified by the world made by the artist of Kouroo, is above all a holistic form of literature. By this I mean that Thoreau's myth constitutes an entirely "new system," "a world with full and fair proportions" that replaces Kouroo, or the equivalent of, even as it acknowledges it. Myth is firmly "beside History" then, watching it, interacting with it, but significantly *apart* from it. In this chapter I look at an alternative narrative structure that Thoreau uses, which similarly resists hegemonic forms of history as his myth-construction

does, but does so instead in the form of historiography, rather than in the form of mythography. I will turn my attention to two of his more “straight” narrative accounts, specifically “A Walk to Wachusetts” and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, to trace out how Thoreau’s excursion narratives, that is, narratives that are set up as short, leisurely trips to or through local points of natural interest, engage in rewritings of local happenings that have otherwise been unrecorded in official historical accounts. I understand these local happenings not as *events* as such, but rather as ignored aspects or effects of local historical events that *have* been recorded. By delving into the unrecorded parts of recorded history, these narrative structures cannot be framed “beside History” as they are in intimate conversation with the standard progression of the past as laid out by the authoritative historiographies of his time.

The shape of Thoreau’s excursion narratives are key to their ability to unearth unrecorded histories. *Walden* is framed by an arrested or increasingly decelerated development, as such the stationary location of the traveler is key to the holistic myth-making that occurs in that book. The pond works as an apt figuring of time measured in depth rather than progression. Even when multiple dislocated moments of history are yoked together, as in the ice-trade passage, the pond emblematically centers and locates the layers of narratives and landscapes within its enclosed boundary while its resemblance to or ghosting of Confucius’ bathing tub, for example, re-emphasizes the ritualistic importance of its circular circumference to myth-making. Thoreau’s myth, despite the way it hovers above, below, and beside Walden Pond, uses the pond and its circumference as its figurative lodestone, never completely losing its tie to the pond’s firm location. Thoreau’s straight forward travel narratives, though, the outings which depart from Concord (or near by), then reach the location usually named in the text’s title, and end with the return to Concord are structured entirely differently to *Walden*. Firstly they are not moored to a specific location, not even to the journeys’ ostensible destinations. The emphasis is rather on the journey, or on the movement through locations. The linearity of the travel, structured quite firmly by the calendrical time of passing days and nights, means that Thoreau’s habit of placing a displaced historical moment,

as he does in his mythographies, will cause a disjointed structure in these excursion narratives, or will work as an interruption to the narrative, rather than a ghosting of worlds as it does in *Walden*. Consequently every time a new landscape or historical moment is introduced into the narrative that focuses on linear travel, the protagonist is dislocated from the local context in which the excursion takes place. Unlike *Walden*, then, in Thoreau's "straight" travel narratives both the narrator and the reader often find themselves in unfamiliar territory or in historical moments that are manifestly fractured from the narrative's expected shape.

Indeed, both Meredith McGill and Hadley Leach argue that Thoreau revels in the illocality of his texts, addressing *A Week* and "A Walk" respectively.¹ It is worth looking at these two critics' claim for illocality in Thoreau's works, since he is so often championed as the master of the local in his writings. Henry James' famous dismissal of Thoreau – "he was worse than provincial – he was parochial" – has reverberated throughout Thoreauvian critical history, either as an accurate description or as a point of proving the groundlessness of aversion to parochial writing.² Thoreau's parochiality itself has rarely been denied. However, McGill and Leach shrewdly turn to technical methods employed by Thoreau as evidence for the texts' suspensions from the locale and the historical context that their content alleges they inhabit. Both critics are interested in the sporadic insertion of anachronistic texts within the narratives themselves that result in disjointing the plot lines. Leach focuses on Thoreau's infamous aphorisms, while McGill looks at the quotations of poetry that often come straight out of Thoreau's commonplace book of quotes. Leach describes aphorisms as "illocal statements that arrest the narrative momentum" and "pull[] the reader out of the mimetic experience narrated by the text, thereby drawing attention to the account's constructedness." Arguing against the aphorism as a hard sentence that resolves conflict within the text, Leach writes that "the Thoreauvian aphorism remains open by disaligning the terms it draws together,"

¹McGill, Meredith. "Common Places: Poetry, Illocality, and Temporal Dislocation in Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*." in *American Literary History*. Leach, Hadley. "Thoreau's Aphoristic Form." *Arizona Quarterly*, 68.3 (Autumn 2012)

²James, Henry. *Hawthorne*. (London: Macmillan, 1879), 96-97.

effectively enacting disruption through its rhetoric of paradox that flies in the face of the more conventional transcendentalist techniques like Emersonian correspondence, working “as an obstruction to transparent apprehension.” Leach’s article focuses most clearly on this early usage of Thoreauvian aphorism as a technique that fully anticipates Thoreau’s method of delay; that is “Thoreau’s eventual advocacy of a natural world defined by continuous creation.” Leach’s work may seem tangential to the interrogations I am undertaking in this thesis, but her reading of Thoreauvian aphorism as a method of enacting “continuous creation,” echoes my own understanding of Thoreau’s construction of myth in his later works; the layering of multiples worlds undergoing continuous change. Leach’s argument is also important here as it reminds us that while Thoreau’s ideologies and resistant sensibilities worked in and against his contemporary culture and context, his technique and philosophies were similarly working in and against his contemporaries’ ideas of translating landscape and history into literature. Finally, her close reading of the Thoreauvian aphorism is most helpful to the concerns of this chapter when she reads it as key to the expression of Thoreau’s unconventional views of natural landscape in “A Walk” as constantly at odds with itself. I would continue this line of enquiry and consider how the disjointed narrative, created through the constant “irruptions” of aphorisms which emphasize the unresolvedness of the narrator’s environment, might allow for historical accounts that don’t fit into the shape of Thoreau’s mythopoeia. I ask whether, in fact, disjointed excursion narratives contain more hazardous types of history than the far-ranging myth of *Walden*.

The answer to this line of questioning comes through more clearly in McGill’s work, which sees *A Week* as “resolutely committed to the illocality of place, a commitment ... forged by and modeled on the abstraction of the commonplace.” For McGill, locality is directly correlated to a particular moment in time. In other words, the environmental location of a recorded moment in time is key to one’s understanding of the moment, or vice-versa. Therefore the removal of one automatically brings about the removal of the other. The insertion of contextless excerpts of poetry in *A Week*, she argues, contributes formally to the text’s illocal commitment. But where Leach locates Thoreau’s

motivation for the insertion of irruptive texts in the early stages of the well-studied ideological separation between Thoreau and Emerson, McGill reads the disruption of linearity as motivated by Thoreau's desire for historical recovery.³

Thoreau is interested in indifference to the past as well as in the work of historical recovery; his narrative registers both the violence of New England's history and the inevitability of its erasure. This cannot be done in linear fashion. It requires the temporal disruption introduced by poetic fragments that are never fully incorporated into the narrative.

McGill's proposal that the disconnected narrative structure of *A Week* is a necessary modification that accommodates for the recovery of a violent history begins to answer the questions I have posed above about what kind of histories these disjointed narratives might be able to contain. Indeed, while varying locations and histories rival against one another in Thoreau's mythological constructions there seems to be little in the way of including *violent* histories. The little violence that does appear in the works that I've considered is usually mediated by contemplation, as suggested by Larry Reynolds.⁴ In *Walden*, for example, the narrator expresses his desire to catch a woodchuck: "I felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for that wildness which he represented" (*W*). Ultimately, Reynolds argues, this desire for violence and destruction is mediated by Thoreau's philosophical understanding of death's role in nature and its importance to creativity – an important tenet of the *Bhagavad Gita*, a text Thoreau returned to many times in his life.⁵ Similarly, in *Walden*, when the three men are making myth in Thoreau's cabin, the little house threatens to explode, but doesn't, because the narrator has enough "oakum" to "caulk" the damage. In other words, he won't let an explosion happen, for he controls the situation. Thoreau takes care in these works to prevent violent moments from fatally interrupting his text. So much for violent moments then. But what of

³See Porte, Joel *Emerson and Thoreau : Transcendentalists in Conflict*. (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1966); and Sattelmeyer, Robert. When He Became My Enemy: Emerson and Thoreau, 1948-49. *New England Quarterly* 62: (1989) 187204.

⁴Reynolds, Larry. *Righteous Violence: Revolution, Slavery and the American Renaissance*. (University Georgia Press, 2011), 112-31.

⁵See Dimock, 5-10?, for Thoreau's relationship to the *Bhagavad Gita*.

violent histories in all the layers of histories Thoreau scrupulously draws in and through Walden Pond? They barely appear, manifesting as nothing more than left over remnants, as when the narrator momentarily finds Native American arrowheads as he hoes his bean field or hears the sound of far-away gunfire celebrating a military victory from years past (*W*, VII, 3). Many readings of violence in Thoreau, as exemplified by Richard Slotkin and Reynolds, are keen to show how Thoreau tempers his violence, mostly through internalized poetic and intellectual pursuits that balance a contemplative approach against the tradition of violence that he is tapping into. However, Thoreau's mitigation of violence occurrences is less here the focus of my interest than those instances when violence goes unassuaged, for those are the instances where we discover Thoreau's interrupted narratives. Most significantly, when violent histories are included in Thoreau's modified travel narratives of multi-historical threads, mythopoeia becomes impossible. In fact, mythopoeia does not seem to be the desired end result at all. Thus, by thinking about McGill's reading of Thoreau's interrupted and illocal narratives as a registering of violent histories, I will explore how violence figures as unrecorded history and consider how its inclusion results in a historiographical structure in Thoreau's excursion narratives that challenges more standardized historical accounts.

Violent history's threat is, of course, a temporal one. In Thoreau's oeuvre, violence appears in many forms and contexts. A shipwreck in *Cape Cod*, a house about to burst open in *Walden*, a captivity escape that involves scalping, and an alien wilderness that disrupts "Ktaadn": all threaten or engage in acts of destruction. Moreover, work undertaken by the aforementioned critics traces violence in Thoreau's writings from sources as varied as captivity narratives and Native American "savagery," to the *Bhagavad Gita* and the anti-slavery movement, to the violence of colonial wars and the later violent erasure of history itself. All of these alternating traditions of violence and instances of violence thread through Thoreau's work, not to mention the violence that he sometimes felt toward his government, set out most clearly in his Journal when he writes "my thoughts are murder to the state — I endeavor in vain to observe Nature — my thoughts involuntarily go plotting against the state — I am

calculating how many miscreants each honest man can dispose of — I trust that all just men will conspire” (*J* 16 June 1854). These varying forms of violence show that how it figures as a multidimensional feature in Thoreau’s work. It can range from the lighting of an explosive fuse against a pro-slavery government in 1854, to the enormity of an “enraged Atlantic Ocean” “nibbling voraciously at the continent,” changing the shapes of islands on a completely different landscape, its violence planetary and continuous (“SM” and *CC*, 22). Violence’s broad scope of activity and its ability to be so specifically varied alerts us to how it can occupy multiple locations and time spans. Intriguingly then, violence’s first characteristic becomes abundantly clear: violence inhabits similarly non-standard historical and geographical frameworks as myth does. Consequently, even when violence is ostensibly contained by date and location, it can still seep through these restrictions, in the forms of trauma (as seen in Mary Rowlandson’s sleepless nights) or even by its ability to inhabit primal or pre-human history. Violence’s inhabitation of prehuman history is clearest when it appears as a nonverbal force. The only reason Hannah Dustan is holding on to ten bloody scalps during her escape, in Thoreau’s version of her narrative, is to provide evidence of her account, “fearing that her story would not be believed” (*A Week*, “Thursday”). Only the nonverbal, the silent, product of her violent actions will give her story credibility. Her words are perceived as useless. Violence’s capacity to exist outside of thought (and thus to break it), to exist outside of the verbal, and to express a historical period that predates humanity make it a formidable force with not a few similarities to myth’s own ability to traverse beyond standard time. The main difference between myth and violence though is that myth is situated firmly beside history, whereas violence is found *in* a specific historical narrative and then seeps out of it in the form of trauma, silence, or interruption. Moreover, in Thoreau’s writings, violence is not something that his protagonist makes, rather it is something he uncovers and tries to give voice to. While myth is ostensibly “discovered” by the poet-hero of *Walden*, it is also clear that the discovery is written as a travel-narrative flourishing that barely conceals the protagonist as the direct agent of mythopoeia. Violence, though, is not created by the traveler

in Thoreau's excursion narratives. If anything, when he confronts it, it usually renders him speechless. Thoreau lets violence get in the way of his stories.

In "A Walk" and *A Week*, violent histories don't just emerge as objects or sounds that faintly resonate with past wars or battles. They appear as *particular* histories, pinned into the texts by fixed dates, upheld by specific historical recordings from journals and diaries. The two most prominent accounts are the narrative by Mary Rowlandson and the story of Hannah Dustan: the two best known captivity narratives of America's seventeenth century. Their appearances in Thoreau's excursion narratives unequivocally introduce New England's violent histories into the broken linearity of the texts. They appear as solid ghosts from the past, occupying the same landscapes that the protagonists are traversing, Rowlandson in her moment of being taken captive during Philip's War and Dustan in her moment of escape from captivity, ten bloody scalps in hand. In Rowlandson's case, the protagonists are surprised to find no trace of her experience in the landscape before them, while the narrator in *A Week* writes Dustan's story into an apple tree, which he then references throughout his own narrative. The violent histories are both caught up (and not caught up, as is the nature of Thoreau's antithetical technique) in the natural landscapes journeyed through by the varying protagonists, but they, even in their ghosted forms, are reversals of the travel-narrative structures undertaken by Thoreau. Rowlandson and Dustan never went to the woods to live deliberately; they were forced into the unknown wilderness Thoreau so often admires, and the driving factor of their narrative plot-lines is how they managed to return home, rather than where they managed to end up. Landscape, to Rowlandson and Dustan, represents nothing more than an overpowering alien terrain that must be surmounted and escaped from rather than included in their world-view or seen as through a romantic Transcendentalist eye of correspondence. Moreover, the violence of their narratives is not just manifested in the wilderness of their terrain, but also in their captivity, in the violent actions of their captors, and in their own violent actions (the last particularly in Dustan's case). Taken in a larger context, Rowlandson's capture reminds readers of "the violence of the

colonial struggle with Native Americans” through the mention of King Philip’s war, and the threat of the two women’s stories disappearing suggests a more insidious type of violence: “the disturbing erasure of all but fragments of this history.”⁶ Of all the genres that Thoreau has adapted or included in his essays and books, the captivity narrative is the most risky of them all, flying against all his preferred methods of structure and understandings of history, nature, and time. A captivity narrative could potentially unravel an entire Thoreauvian myth, as it can, through the reverberations of its violence in the form of trauma or silence, rupture multiple historical layers. As myth contains multiple layers of history, violent histories cannot be comfortably contained in it. So it comes as no surprise that the violence of Dustan’s and Rowlandson’s histories can only be accommodated in Thoreau’s linear excursion narratives, since these excursion narratives are already structurally available for interruption as explicated by Leach and McGill. The presence of captivity narrative, I will show, further enhances the disrupted literary shape that Thoreau creates to include the more disconcerting areas of history and space.

Given Thoreau’s fascination with travel-narratives, reading captivity narratives must have come as a shock. Where the travel narrative embraces the unknown, the captivity narrative shirks away from it. While the protagonist of the travel narrative is a firm authoritative figure, the captivity narrative’s protagonist’s voice is muffled by the authority of Puritan theocracy. And where the travel narrative’s main voice responds to the curious questions of his peers or patrons, the captivity narrative’s voice was often used by a preacher to dictate moral propriety to his flock. Moreover, Thoreau’s travel narrative method in *Walden* of tracing out an anthropocentric, western civilization as embodied by Concord before willfully abandoning it directly contrasts the captivity narrative’s unceremonious wrenching of the protagonist out of that civilization. The captivity narratives Thoreau references follow the passage of the protagonists’ moves from small New England towns to wilderness, but they are not framed as leisurely excursions; they are abductions that occur as violations

⁶McGill, 370.

against the women's (already limited) autonomy.⁷ In other words, what is so unsettling about Thoreau's inclusion of captivity narratives in his texts is that they can be read as warped, darker, more violent versions of travel-narratives. As such they stand as direct points of both correlation and opposition to the narrative structures in which they are embedded. By referencing the historical narratives of Rowlandson and Dustan, then, Thoreau is not just placing a dislocated temporal moment next to the narrator's own present moment, he is also placing a dark, unsettling travel narrative next to the seemingly "straight" travel narratives of his excursion accounts. The result is an unrest in Thoreau's texts themselves, a moment of unsettlement that lacks cohesiveness and openly threatens to tear Thoreau's own account apart.

In "A Walk," Mary Rowlandson appears briefly toward the end of the essay. Her presence is perhaps inevitable, considering her own historical presence on Wachusett, which was the location at which the negotiations to have her released from captivity began. The protagonist laments early on that "Rome imposes her story still upon this late generation. The very children in the school we had that morning passed had gone through her wars, and recited her alarms, ere they had heard of the wars of neighboring Lancaster" ("WW," 5). They later come into Lancaster itself on their way back from Wachusett. Deeply involved in their reading of Virgil throughout their excursion, they are nonetheless surprised to find that there is no trace of Rowlandson's story in the "green meadows of Lancaster...the scene of Mrs. Rowlandson's capture" (15). Instead they are taken in by nature's "almost classical appearance," reminding the reader that the ghost of Rome's history makes "the roving eye still rest[] inevitably upon her hills," rather than allowing the viewer to see a more recent history that actually took place in those very hills. Rome, says the

⁷Michelle Burnham argues convincingly and in agreement with other scholars that in some ways Rowlandson's captivity was also an experience of female emancipation as Rowlandson handled her own currency and saw Native American women in positions of power and property. Women who eventually escaped from captivity in the wilderness often returned to their familiar form of captivity as domestic wives. Burnham, Michelle. *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange on American Literature 1682-1861*. (Hanover: Dartmouth UP, 1997), 39. See also Mitchell Robert Breitweiser. *American Puritanism and the Defense of Mourning: : Religion, Grief, and Ethnology in Mary White Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative*. (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1990).

narrator, “makes the past remote.” Thus the protagonists, struggling against a landscape that they want to read as classical, Roman, or Virgil-like, instead force themselves to remember that they are standing in the location of Rowlandson’s capture. The very location in fact where her “brother-in-law...fell down dead” and was then stripped by the attackers; where her nephew was knocked on the head after having his arm broken; where her own child was shot through the bowels and hand, thus beginning its own drawn out death; and where her sister was shot dead.⁸ “Twelve people were killed that day, writes Rowlandson, “some shot, some stabbed with their spears, some knocked down with...hatchets...lying in their blood...all of them stripped naked.” Invoking Rowlandson doesn’t just generate the pure horror of her violent departure as a ghost of the “level prairies” spread out in front of the travelers; it also brings forth a flurry of names of both white and Native American historical figures, locally known for the violence they committed and the wars they engaged in: Philip, Paugus, Standish, Church, and Lovell. The land, before almost classical, is now seen in the light of its real history and the sun struggles against New England’s “dark ages:” “[W]e find we had not thought the sun shone in those days, or that men lived in broad daylight then,” says the narrator. The real, violent history of Lancaster halts the romanticized imagining of nature; it stops the overwriting of Lancaster with classical histories that have no local connection to the landscape.

Thus imagination halts in the face of local history’s darkness: “Indian wars...were the dark ages of New England...They must have fought in the shade of their own dusky deeds.” No longer in green meadows, the men find themselves “plodding along the dusty roads,” their “thoughts became as dusty as they.” While the environment has changed abruptly, the subtle verbal change from “dusky deeds” to “dusty roads” suggests that the violence of the dark ages has permeated into the travelers’ present moment. Thoughts become influenced by the dustiness (and by the duskiness) of the roads. And now that they are no longer walking, but “plodding,”

⁸Rowlandson, Introduction.

...all thought indeed stopped, thinking broke down, or proceeded only in a sort of rhythmical cadence of the confused material of thought, and we found ourselves mechanically repeating some familiar measure which timed with our tread. "WW" 16

Walking, elsewhere in Thoreau a saunter that leads to the imaginative transformation of the landscape, has been turned into plodding and with it thought doesn't just stop, but breaks down. The plodding tread of the travelers is emulated in their minds, as they end up dealing with broken thought by repeating the same stanza of poetry as they walk. Here the ghost of Rowlandson's narrative has disabled the normally empowering act of walking. After all, how can walking work as a response to nineteenth-century modernity when it takes place in a landscape where walking has historically been a pure feat of survival? "One hill was so steep that I was fain to creep upon my knees," writes Rowlandson, "and to hold by the twigs and bushes to keep myself from falling backward. My head also was so light that I usually reeled as I went;" Rowlandson's walking was never leisurely, it was forced; her ascent to Wachusett is marked out as an especially grueling and wearisome experience.⁹ For all its New England locality, Rowlandson's story of captivity is very much about her repeated dislocation from every New England locality she is taken to and from. The ghost of Rowlandson's difficult relationship with walking disempowers the protagonists' own walk and consequently their capacity for imaginative thought.

It is not just the difficulty of Rowlandson's walking that undermines the protagonist's own walk to Wachusett. The purpose of Rowlandson's walk as continued enforced displacement further complicates Thoreau's formation of time in "A Walk." After all, each day that brings about another walking expedition during Rowlandson's captivity becomes the marker for her chapters. "[F]or Rowlandson," writes Slotkin, "...time is marked not in temporal days but in 'Removes'" or, continues Anette Kolodny, "relocations from one Indian encampment to another."¹⁰ Each chapter marks a removal from one

⁹Rowlandson, "Thirteenth Remove."

¹⁰Slotkin, Richard, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1973.); Kolodny, Annette, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*. (Chapel Hill: U North

location to another through the now-terrifying act of walking. The narrative structure sits provocatively against Thoreau's own calendrical tendencies but also harmonizes with his use of pre-modern structures of space and time as tied together by bipedal movement. Each "removal" in Rowlandson's narrative is an unsettling, each walking excursion a renewed abduction from one unfamiliar location to another. Thus Rowlandson cannot use walking as a rhetorical method for the discovery of new chronotypes and new worlds. Walking is enforced on her and consequently new chronotypes and new worlds are enforced on her too. Rowlandson has no agency in her own narrative. Thus her presence in "A Walk" jars against the protagonists' capacity to see Rome in the Massachusetts mountain ranges. Instead new landscapes or new ways of spending time manifest as violent threats to Rowlandson's self and she finds herself clinging more loyally than ever to structures of time and place from her previous existence: "The next day was Sabbath," she writes as early as the "Third Remove." "I then remembered how careless I had been of God's holy time; how many Sabbaths I had lost and misspent." The suggestion is that her captivity is her punishment for not abiding by God's time when she lived in a society that worked by it. Time measured by Sabbaths becomes an important marker that Rowlandson can hold onto against the terror of her "removes."

For Rowlandson, new worlds are not liberatingly different perspectives or counteractive imaginings against modernized ideas of territory. Consequently wilderness cannot be a place of the sublime; it is the burial ground of her recently deceased child, it is "vast and desolate," unwelcoming and a constant reminder of her captivity. Against all of Thoreau's playful ways of seeing and changing worlds through his narrator's power of sight, consider in this passage how Rowlandson experiences her own version of seeing.

A squaw moved [the branch] down again, at which I looked up, and she threw a handful of ashes in mine eyes. I thought I should have been quite blinded, and have never seen more, but lying down, the water run out of my eyes, and carried the dirt with it, that by the morning I recovered my sight again. Yet upon this, and the like occasions, I hope it is not too much to say with Job, "Have pity upon me, O ye my Friends, for the Hand of the Lord has touched

me.” And here I cannot but remember how many times sitting in their wigwams, and musing on things past, I should suddenly leap up and run out, as if I had been at home, forgetting where I was, and what my condition was; but when I was without, and saw nothing but wilderness, and woods, and a company of barbarous heathens, my mind quickly returned to me, which made me think of that, spoken concerning Sampson, who said, “I will go out and shake myself as at other times, but he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.” About this time I began to think that all my hopes of restoration would come to nothing. I thought of the English army, and hoped for their coming, and being taken by them, but that failed.¹¹

In this passage sight almost succeeds in breaking Rowlandson’s hope, in complete opposition to Thoreau’s own use of sight. Ash is thrown into her eyes, blinding her, making her unable to see. Yet upon regaining her vision Rowlandson recalls how horrific sight has actually been to her, as it constantly reminds her that she is not where she imagines to be. Sight doesn’t work as a way to tap into imaginative construction but as a way to destroy her imagination, return her mind, and bring her face to face with the harshness of reality. At the end of her narrative she laments that “when others are sleeping mine eyes are weeping,” from the memories of what she has seen. The trauma of the unfamiliar worlds and acts she was either forced to look upon or which were forced out of her sight continues well into her life after captivity, as if her loss of agency to see what she wanted when she wanted has been the most significant violation she has suffered.

Consequently, when Thoreau finally brings up a local, relatively recent history from the land he is walking on, rather than threading in multiple global histories into that land, he has to reckon with a history that makes his position as agent deeply unsettled. The violence of Rowlandson’s captivity deeply darkens and incapacitates the acts of walking and of seeing, even undermining the structure of travel narrative. It is no wonder, then, that her presence in “A Walk” should interrupt the protagonists’ thoughts and concentration. But after all, if we recall Leach’s argument that it is already a disjointed narrative, broken thoughts and narratives become purposeful points of interruption. A

¹¹Rowlandson, “Thirteenth Remove.”

narrative structure that embraces irruptions in its linearity can easily accommodate the irruption of a violent history. More importantly, perhaps, the violent histories themselves are broken narratives. As Burnham points out, a huge gap between Rowlandson and her captors is depicted when a Native American laughs just as she begins to cry in front of them for the first time; when she observes and describes Algonquin ceremonies while finding them meaningless; and when she finds herself involved in the act of exchange, which threatens the “typological economy of equivalence.”¹² “Transgression erupts in Rowlandson’s captivity narrative,” writes Burnham, “precisely where the logic of Puritanism breaks down.” The constant unease in Rowlandson’s narrative, the well-documented tension between humanizing her captors and objectifying them as savages, makes her own story difficult, an unsettled view of a hostile unknown that forces her to learn how to live and think differently to her cultural norm. “I can remember the time when I used to sleep quietly without workings in my thoughts, whole nights together, but now it is other ways with me,” writes Rowlandson at the end of her narrative. The violence of her experience still interrupts her own thinking, her experience turned into a trauma. By invoking Rowlandson it is as though Thoreau has embraced the trauma of her history, allowing it to break his protagonists’ thoughts, if only momentarily. The interruption of a violent history, complete with the trauma and brokenness it contains, he seems to be saying, can be accommodated here.

Thoreau’s inclusions of violent histories as an egalitarian listing of Native American warriors and colonial generals, along with mentioning Rowlandson, indicate that Thoreau is uncovering a particular line of historiographical enquiry. This line, I would argue, with its open acknowledgement of violence, runs against the dominant historiographies, captivity narratives, and war stories that other writers and historians were forming in antebellum New England. The captivity narrative in particular had shifted from its original position as a story told transatlantically – that is, written to the colonial homestead of Britain – and in antebellum American had become a story told to the young Republic. The rise of the sentimental novel, as Burnham explains, assisted in

¹²Burnham, 36-37.

slanting the emphasis of captivity narratives where the protagonists became reflections of martyred nationals struggling against the violence of the indigenous people.

[T]he ambivalent trope of captivity, which provided a rhetoric in which sentimental nationalism cloaked the practice of imperialist aggression, continued to be a site through which U.S national identity and power were figured.¹³

In Thoreau's list of historical figures national identity and power are blurred. The figures are named purely as actors in the land's violent histories; their significance lies in the darkness of their contexts and deeds. Thoreau's emphasis on a New England historiography that is defined by its violence rather than by the needs of a contemporary agenda indicates a desire for a historical record that openly acknowledges its traumas and fractures. As such, Thoreau's method of including local, recent history in "A Walk" works as a recovering of an ignored dimension of prevailing nineteenth-century historiography. The result of that inclusion is an anti-nationalist retelling of history which considers how the unspoken trauma of a seventeenth-century narrative like Rowlandson's can disrupt a seemingly innocuous walk in the 1840s.

In *A Week*, Thoreau includes a multitude of New England historical events that are almost all of a violent nature. They are specified by the dates of their occurrence and often given bulk by the inclusion of passages lifted out from journals, letters, and historical records regarding the event that Thoreau is describing. These fragments of historical records include a fisherman's shopping list from 1805, the witnessing of the Penacooks' conversion to Christianity in 1674, the nursery tale of Lovewell's death while fighting at Pequawket in 1725, a letter written in 1625 by John Hogkins, a Penacook, asking the governor for guns and ammunition to protect himself against the Mohawks, and the story of Hannah Dustan's escape from captivity a hundred and forty-two years earlier. Unlike the commonplace poetry excerpts scattered throughout *A Week* uncredited and contextless, the historical accounts are provided with author names

¹³Burnham, 91.

where possible and the dates of their creation, sometimes down to the day of the week, are also present. More than just providing names, as he did in “A Walk,” Thoreau provides voices from the past, ranging from Daniel Gookin, a seventeenth-century “expert” on Native Americans, to Hogkins’ barely literate letter requesting guns. These clearly authored fragments don’t rival one another for the same locations as the multiple threads of histories do in *Walden*. They are treated *as* fragments, engaged as part of *A Week*’s disrupted narrative. By being positioned in disjointed linearity, the fragments that give historical accounts that are themselves fractured times (irruptions of violent moments) pose no threat to *A Week*’s narrative structure.

Silence also heavily features against the multitude of fragmented historical voices in *A Week*. Thoreau comes to the end of his first book considering the futility of his literary production: “It were vain for me to endeavor to interrupt the Silence. She cannot be done into English.” At first this seems to directly challenge the beginning of *A Week* and its careful attention to the changing names of his local rivers and the importance of names, of words in fact, as markers of their uses to the generations of people who have lived by them. The entire utterance of *A Week* seems to collapse against this statement about Silence’s power, but ultimately, the acknowledgement of Silence suggests that *A Week* is keen to record Silence’s existence, even as an absence of humanity: “A man may run on confidently for a time, thinking he has her under his thumb, and shall one day exhaust her, but he too must at last be silent.” The immediate point of biographical reference to the silence that follows death is naturally the death of Thoreau’s brother, John, the man upon whom the protagonist’s companion is based and with whom Thoreau traveled the Concord and Merrimack rivers in real life. His untimely death by lockjaw must have not only been a violent one to witness, but then, when it was over, manifested itself in Thoreau as false but physical symptoms of the same disease. The trauma of John Thoreau’s death interrupted Henry’s life on the most physical and violent level. For weeks after his brother’s death, both before and after his own psychosomatic illness, Thoreau was notably silent.¹⁴ And much like

¹⁴Harding, *The Days* 134-136.

Rowlandson, John's death plagued Thoreau years later with restless nights of sleep. Even in the Silence of *A Week* then, a specific, local, and personal history can be found. The violence of the history, the trauma, spreads out of the specific into the silence that surrounds it, "so vast is the disproportion of the told to the untold." And in fact, what becomes clearer about *A Week*'s structure upon closer interrogation, is that the dispersed fragments of history are positioned in the fractures of the narrative structure so that the silent parts of their violence, the parts that keep the individuals involved in those histories awake at night, are also accommodated.

The story of Hannah Dustan is a particularly important one for Thoreau to include in his book then. Her story is one of the few recorded histories in his narrative that doesn't have a material memento from the story itself to give it evidence or proof. The reason is practical enough: Dustan's own account of her escape is but briefly alluded to in a private letter she wrote decades after her story became publicized through Cotton Mather's authoritative version of it.¹⁵ Her voice is decidedly absent from the account, unlike Rowlandson's. Intriguingly, though, Dustan's captivity narrative differs from Rowlandson's not just because the captive's own voice is muted, but also because her escape is not negotiated through colonial agents and Native American leaders. Rather, soon after her capture and the brutal death of her newborn, its "brains dashed out against an apple tree," she and her two companions, the twelve-year-old boy Samuel Lennardson and her nurse, Mary Neff, kill and scalp almost all

¹⁵Mather included Dustan's story in three of his publications between the years 1697 and 1702. It first appeared in *Humiliations Follow'd With Deliverances*. (Boston: B. Green & J. Allen, 1697.) Then in *Decennium Luctuosum: an history of remarkable occurrences in the long war which New England hath had with the Indian savages*. (Boston: B. Green & J. Allen, 1699.) And finally in *Magnalia Christi Americana: or the Ecclesiastical History of NewEngland*. (London: T. Parkhurst, 1702.) *Magnalia* the most likely "original" source of Thoreau's story, was republished in the 1820s by the Reverend Thomas Robbins to unexpected success, despite its poor sales in 1702, going on to a second printing by 1853. "Robbins speculated, accurately," writes Sacvan Bercovitch, "that the interested centered not so much in the church history as in the general fascination with the growth of America." Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976), 87 led to the inclusion of Dustan's story "in an immense variety of published materials: childrens books, virtually every major history of the United States, Indian histories, histories of women, magazines, biographical compendiums of famous Americans or famous women, travelers guidebooks, gazetteers, and 'cyclopedias' of general information." Barbara Cutter, 14. By the time Thoreau went on to include it in *A Week* he had no doubt read and heard a dozen different versions of Dustan's story.

of their captors in the middle of the night before escaping back to Haverhill down the Merrimack river. The way violence occupies Dustan's story without her own voice or a witness's voice makes Dustan's story heavy with an unexpressed violence in a way that neither Rowlandson's story is, nor any of the other violent histories Thoreau sees fit to include in his book. Moreover, unlike Rowlandson's account that is practically forgotten by the landscape the protagonists traverse in "A Walk," Thoreau makes a point of pinpointing the trauma of Dustan's experience in an apple tree that bears fruit for generations after Dustan's escape. The apple-tree goes on to appear throughout *A Week*, one of the few elements that sits comfortably in the range of the histories included in Thoreau's narrative.

The argument goes that Dustan was not allowed to give a first-person narrative account of her escape precisely because of the violence of her actions. Critics like Burnham, Lorryne Carroll, and Barbara Cutter explain how Dustan's unusually brutal killing of ten of her captors, six of whom were children, prohibited the "I" in her narrative for fear of upsetting the socially and religiously acceptable role and virtue of women in the seventeenth century. Mather's exculpatory explanation for Dustan's un-womanlike actions, was to emphasize Dustan's role as a mother who had lost her child in an equally violent way and to underscore the captives' fear that the next day, they had been told, they were to run the gauntlet: an act of punishment that may have been construed by the captives as certain death, but would have more likely been a non-fatal, if fierce, beating. Carroll articulates the importance of Mather's explication in seventeenth-century New England.

...[T]he woman's silence is necessary for the male authority figure to construct the "true" and "useful" narrative, especially when the woman's actions are so egregious within her social milieu that another truth must be constructed...Her experiences may ground the lesson at hand ("peculiar Efficacy") but they must remain firmly in male interpretive control ("and Authority"). Especially when the woman's experience is too painful, too unacceptable, or too disruptive, it challenges, for example, prevailing gender norms, and a concerned male authority must intervene to police the narrative's

potential exorbitance.¹⁶

The problem with Dustan's story is that it was too violent for her gender and therefore her voice was not allowed to relate it. As such, Dustan's figure, forced into a third-person narrative by Mather, is more easily re-appropriated by historians and story tellers than Rowlandson is throughout the nineteenth century. Her muteness allows authors to interpret and reinterpret her location, her violence, her reasoning, and her motivation as they see fit. Indeed, Dustan appears in as varied interpretations as Hawthorne's scathing retelling of her tale as a "bloody old hag" who should have "drowned in crossing the Contocook river" to three commemorative statues, one of them twenty-five-feet tall, in the state of New Hampshire.¹⁷ As Carroll puts it,

[e]ach Duston reviser/impersonator interpreted Duston's captivity for his own historical project, and each struggled to reframe and contain her actions within contemporary gender regimes. Silent, Duston's figure continues to escape.¹⁸

In some ways, then, Dustan is the perfect character for Thoreau's complicated vision of violent history in the form of silence. She encapsulates not only the violence of captivity, but also the unusual violence of her escape, and, most significantly, the violent silencing of her voice by historiographers against the multitude of articulations in the other histories Thoreau includes.

The availability of Dustan's story thus provides more scope for Thoreau to construct a literary structure which embodies nonverbal histories. While her narrative certainly does avail itself to Thoreau's own interpretation of gender regimes which I will get to later, the immediate historical value of her silent figure is evidence that when Thoreau uses it "literature taps into preverbal layers of consciousness; it has input from narratives generated by other bodily register."¹⁹ Dustan's own story cannot be transmitted to the authorities without the "still bleeding scalps of ten aborigines" she and her companions have

¹⁶Lorrayne Carroll. *Rhetorical Drag : Gender Impersonation, Captivity, and the Writing of History*. Kent: Kent State UP, 2007. 59.

¹⁷Hawthorne, Nathaniel, "The Dustan Family" *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* 2: (1836) 396.

¹⁸Carroll, 108

¹⁹Dimock, 162

bagged for evidence of the veracity of their tale. In Thoreau's interpretation, Dustan's violent actions are a nonverbal technique of story-telling. He does not put down the scalping of her captors as motivated by a mother's vengeance as John Greenleaf Whittier does, nor does he condemn it as Hawthorne does. In fact Thoreau gives a lot of attention to the scalping process, embellishing the tale himself by writing that Dustan instructs Sam to find out from one of their captors how one goes about killing and scalping somebody. " 'Strike 'em there,' " replies the man in the only clearly marked piece of speech in the story, "placing his finger on his temple, and he also showed him how to take off the scalp." Dustan seems to be a strategic woman in Thoreau's rendering of her story, and well aware of the importance of the memento to prove a historical record. Only in her situation she has no Gookin to bear witness to her deeds. Dustan is thus mute before even Cotton Marther prohibits her from giving her own voice to her account. She has no verbal authority in recounting the tale to the satisfaction of her society's authorities, so the act of violence essentially becomes a substitute for a male, authoritative witness. Even in Thoreau's version of the story she is mostly silent, any words she may have said are merely alluded to as when she wakes up Neff and Sam to begin their slaughter and subsequent escape. Her only source of authority, the only way her story can be believed, is from the act of scalping. "The talent of composition is very dangerous," writes Thoreau a little later, "the striking out the heart of life at a blow, as the Indian takes off a scalp." In a very literal way Dustan's own composition is the taking off of a scalp. Verbal means of communication are after all not available to her so she must resort to the nonverbal.

Just as the three companions head down stream in a canoe, scalps in hand, they stop occupying 1697, and they move seamlessly into Thoreau's present moment. "Early this morning this deed was performed," *A Week's* narrator informs us, "and now, perchance, these tired women and this boy, their clothes stained with blood, and their minds racked with alternate resolution and fear, are making a hasty meal of parched corn and moose-meat, while their canoe glides under these pine roots whose stumps are still standing on the bank." Dustan, Neff, and Sam thus come to occupy the same space as the protago-

nists of *A Week* who are also in a boat floating down the Merrimack River. It is as though the violence of their deed has catapulted them through time so that they are now passing the same pine roots as the narrator and his companion, the blood-stained clothes a marker of the deed's recentness. At the same time, Thoreau's idiosyncratic play with tenses challenges how the story can be told. As Carroll puts it, "the language of the Duston passage passes through many different tenses and verb forms in an attempt to escape the formal aspects of conventional historiography."²⁰ Thus Thoreau brings Dustan and her companions right up close to the protagonists; the two boats ghosting one another so that their commonality lies in their location and time zone, which in turn emphasizes their different motivations and ways of seeing the world. The narrator describes the marvels of spring that Dustan and her companions pass through in their canoe: the melting ice, the forest animals emerging on the river bank, the sound of birds flying above. "but they do not observe these things, or they speedily forget them," says the protagonist, a figure who conversely does take pride in observing these things and not forgetting them. The escapees also pass remnants of Native America history, old wigwams and graves, "the only traces of man" but which can only be read as a threatening reminders of their captives. Alternatively, the traces are of "a fabulous wild man to us," the narrator and his companion. Meanwhile nature is seen by Dustan, Neff, and Sam as "a drear and howling wilderness" whereas to "to the Indian a home, adapted to his nature, and cheerful as the smile of the Great Spirit." Dustan's captivity narrative is clearly at odds with *A Week's* protagonists' own travel narrative. While they might ghost each other in time and place, it is difficult for the narrator to reconcile Dustan's seventeenth-century worldview of nature and Native Americans against his romantic nineteenth-century view. Dustan's narrative feels anachronistic even in its motivation (curiously unlike the more classic histories that Thoreau includes in his works). Where the fleeing captives are anxious, scared, and desperate to keep moving, the two nineteenth-century men loiter easily in their boat, looking for a suitable place to camp for the night. Thus even though Thoreau employs his usual technique of shifting past

²⁰Carroll, 213.

and present into one multilayered moment where the tenses in his texts move decidedly into the present, the bloodied figures of Dustan's story cannot harmonize with *A Week's* protagonists' travel narrative, causing a rift between the two accounts.

As though to settle the tension, Thoreau turns to the nameless historian to tell the end result of Dustan's escape, as she has now floated out of sight. "According to the historian," we are told, "they escaped as by a miracle all roving bands of Indians, and reached their homes in safety, with their trophies, for which the General Court paid them fifty pounds." The historian sees their escape as a miracle, in contrast with the narrator's version of the story where the three captives are depicted as resourceful and determined. The scalps too are modified into less violent objects. The historian's voice is quickly replaced though by the narrator-as-story-teller again, who adds another ending to Dustan's tale: "The family of Hannah Dustan all assembled alive once more, except the infant whose brains were dashed out against the apple-tree, and there have been many who in later times have lived to say that they had eaten of the fruit of that apple-tree." Thoreau brings the violence back into the story easily, as though to remind the reader of the real unspoken tropes that hold Dustan's tale together. It is the silent actions that reverberate through history, the visceral image of infant brains tying into the fruit of a tree over generations.

"This seems a long while ago, and yet it happened since Milton wrote his *Paradise Lost*," the narrator tells us immediately following the image of the long-lived apple tree, and thus immediately bringing to mind Eve's consumption of fruit and the subsequent beginning of linear human history, albeit an allegorical beginning. Indeed it seems as though Dustan's story lets Thoreau move into a female version of history, a maternalistic history that might seem old fashioned today but which nonetheless directly challenges the dominant, verbally based, linear historiography of his time. He describe the history of the world as a series of sixty women, the eldest being Eve, to his own mother: "And yet the lives of but sixty old women, such as live under the hill, say of a century each, strung together, are sufficient to reach over the whole ground," he writes considering how the maternal line writes out humankind's history,

“It will not take a very great-granddaughter of [Eve]’s to be in at the death of Time.” The lineage of women as a measurement of time seems to bring Dustan’s story closer to his present moment, as all of time is marked out by a mere sixty humans. This cyclical, (re)generational view of history is not an untypical one when considered in terms of the female body. Julia Kristeva describes how female agency creates a temporality traditionally viewed as cyclical, as in the case of women’s capacity for gestation and life-giving, where female time is understood as biological, closely tied up with nature’s time, rhythmic and repetitive.²¹ It can lead to the experience of time as cosmic, writes Kristeva, vertiginous, or as pure ecstasy. If we were to think of it in Thoreau’s words, cyclical time might well be considered a sublime form of temporality. The genealogy of women thus provides Thoreau with an alternative historiography, generated by Dustan’s silence.

But it is the apple-tree, that appears most distinctly in Dustan’s tale, that seems to be the real interruptor of linear time in *A Week*. The apple-tree manifests twice more after the telling of Dustan’s escape, not explicitly as the same tree, but its similar nonverbal and female relationship to history and memory is unmistakable.²² Its constant existence as a marker of temporality throughout the ages, from 1697 through 1785, 1818 and to the present moment of the protagonists’ narrative, suggests that this apple tree occupies or engages with a different form of temporality. Indeed Kristeva goes on to identify a more complicated and advanced version of cyclical time, what she calls “monumental temporality,” that might be useful in understanding Thoreau’s omni-temporal tree:

All-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space, this temporality reminds one of Kronos in Hesiod’s mythology, the incestuous son whose massive presence covered all of Gea in order to separate her from Ouranos, the father. Or one is reminded of the various myths of resurrection which, in all religious beliefs, perpetuate the vestige of an anterior or concomitant maternal cult, right up to its most recent elaboration, Christianity, in which the body of the Virgin Mother does not die but moves from one spatiality to another within

²¹Kristeva, Julia. *Womens Time*. *Signs* 7, 1: (1981) 1335.

²²Thoreau went looking for Dustan’s apple-tree in 1850 and found that it had been cut down. *J*, 3, 64.

the same time via dormition (according to the Orthodox faith) or via assumption (the Catholic faith).²³

Kristeva's intriguing understanding of female temporality, analogized strictly through spatial examples, suggests that women seem to be able to be agents of a chronotype as solid and as three dimensional as space. Perhaps it is telling then that Thoreau's version of monumental temporality must manifest as a spatial object, that of an apple-tree, that can appear in multiple locations throughout history, as though following its own rule of temporality..

The tree emerges again in "Friday," the chapter following that which recounts Dustan's narrative. Continuing on the Merrimack River, the protagonists find themselves on the shores of Tyngsborough. "According to the record of an old inhabitant... now dead, whose farm we were now gliding past, one of the greatest freshets on this river took place in October, 1785, and its height was marked by a nail driven into an apple-tree behind his house," the narrator informs us with his usual eye for detail. The nail marks an unusual flooding height, it being well over seventeen feet of the current river height observed by the narrator. The apple-tree had become an important marker in other words, for the potential of a devastating flood. The tree works as a reminder or historical warning to the generations who would settle in the area later. "Before the Lowell and Nashua railroad was built, the engineer made inquiries of the inhabitants along the banks as to how high they had known the river to rise," we are told, so that oral history seems to be of some significance to the technicians and scientists of the world. However,

[w]hen he came to this house he was conducted to the apple-tree, and as the nail was not then visible, the lady of the house placed her hand on the trunk where she said that she remembered the nail to have been from her childhood. In the mean while the old man put his arm inside the tree, which was hollow, and felt the point of the nail sticking through, and it was exactly opposite to her hand. The spot is now plainly marked by a notch in the bark. But as no one else remembered the river to have risen so high as this, the engineer disregarded this statement, and I learn that there has since been a freshet which rose within nine inches of the rails at Biscuit Brook,

²³Kristeva. 17

and such a freshet as that of 1785 would have covered the railroad two feet deep.

Once again then, the female voice is stripped of authority while the nail in the apple-tree is disregarded. Nature's marker of history, related through a female memory, remains the truer historical record though, as the engineer and railroad users will, seems to be the implicit warning, eventually find out. The old lady and the apple-tree aren't *beside History* in the way that the dragon-tree is in "Walking," but they *are* offering a different historiography, one that recognizes that acts of violence or natural destruction can travel through and above linear writings of time. It is the silent voices that come through most strongly in Thoreau's book then, for it seems that it is only in the silence that violent histories or unusual temporal anomalies, especially ones involved in female agency, can be given their full expression.

Silence and violence are openly included in *A Week* as significant expressions of nonverbal histories. Linear time, writes Kristeva "is [also] that of language considered as the enunciation of sentences (noun + verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending), and that this time rests on its own stumbling block, which is also the stumbling block of that enunciation – death." Death suggests a defined beginning and ending, which is much the way linear narratives or linear histories are structured. The openly fractured linear narrative of *A Week* though seems to take death in its stride, taking into consideration where, historically, the repercussions or trauma of death or destruction go. In other words death, especially John Thoreau's death, does not end up providing ending, so much as it does lingering trauma, so *A Week* considers what other temporal options might be available to its narrative structure. Similarly, if "ending" in its linear rendering is no longer a valid point of time-keeping, "beginning" also loses its significance. "Our cognitive apparatus is an afterthought within the ecology of the planet. Human language must cede its primacy to scripts made by other species in the plenitude of their nonverbal lives," writes Dimock.²⁴ Language then must also be prefaced by the nonverbal if a non-linear temporality is to

²⁴Dimock, 160.

be embraced. Thoreau seems to come to this conclusion himself at the end of his book:

Who has not hearkened to Her [Silence's] infinite din? She is Truth's speaking-trumpet, the sole oracle, the true Delphi and Dodona, which kings and courtiers would do well to consult, nor will they be balked by an ambiguous answer. For through Her all revelations have been made, and just in proportion as men have consulted her oracle within, they have obtained a clear insight, and their age has been marked as an enlightened one. But as often as they have gone gadding abroad to a strange Delphi and her mad priestess, their age has been dark and leaden. Such were garrulous and noisy eras, which no longer yield any sound, but the Grecian or silent and melodious era is ever sounding and resounding in the ears of men.

Thoreau's embrace of silence close to the end of his ostensible travel narrative underscores the limitations of a linear narrative and the importance of interruptions to the construction of a more holistic historiography. Looking beyond language for expressions of history, and consequently looking beyond traditional linear time to find alternative temporalities that can shape his narrative, Thoreau's *A Week* rethinks what history might look like when the unutterable is given exposure. When the protagonists return to Concord in *A Week*'s final sentence, they "leap[] gladly on shore" and fasten their boat "to the wild apple-tree, whose stem still bore the mark which its chain had worn in the chafing of the spring freshets." Even as the travel narrative ends, the tying of the boat to the apple-tree firmly reminds the reader of realms of non-written history. The tree, making its final appearance, holds in itself "monumental temporality," and it is no mistake that the protagonists' boat, more likely to follow a linear temporality, ends up fastened to it.

*Of all the bewildering things about a new country,
the absence of human landmarks is one of the most
depressing and disheartening.*

—Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*

7

Hallucinating the Alien Terrain

Lawrence Buell has noted, in a rather pleasing image, that Thoreau “positively riots in the hallucination of the displaced terrain.”¹ Picking up the phrase from Robert Lawson-Peebles, who in turn re-tuned it from the art critic Harold Rosenberg, Buell uses the theory behind “hallucinating the displaced terrain” to understand how and why protagonists, from the non-fictional Mary Rowlandson to Willa Cather’s Norwegian Alexandra, hallucinate or imagine an Old World landscape in place of the actual American landscape before them. For Lawson-Peebles and Rosenberg, the dangers of such a hallucination are strongly apparent when the Redcoats attempted and failed in their battle against the Native Americans in the Pennsylvania wilderness as they tried doing battle as though on European ground. The displaced terrain that they hallucinate ends only in their destruction, and similarly, Lawson-Peebles argues, “the more that American writers struggled to assert a unique American culture the more they were trapped in the hallucination of displaced terrain.”² Buell finds the hallucination less catastrophic than his fellow critics do. In *O Pioneers!*, writes

¹Buell, Lawrence. “Ecoglobalist Affects: The Emergence of U.S. Environmental Imagination on a Planetary Scale.” in *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, eds., Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), 227-248.

²Lawson-Peebles, Robert, *Landscape and written expression in revolutionary America: the World Turned Upside Down*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 45.

Buell, a “significant revisionist move...is the novel’s insistence that diasporic land-memory can actually solidify place-connectedness in a strange new world as well as the old.” There is no sense of entrapment in Cather’s novel, argues Buell; if anything, the hallucination can, in some instances, constructively bring two places together in one space. The result is a globalist effect, where, just as Dimock has argued, American literature proves itself to be “a crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures.”³ In this context, Thoreau’s technique of writing multi-layered landscapes, cultures, and histories into his works, appears to revel in hallucinations of multiple displaced terrains. In doing so, Thoreau “betray[s] consciousness of the fact that Concord’s environment was indissolubly connected with the rest of the world and defin[es] himself not as a local character but as a local cosmopolitan.”⁴ Displaced terrains, then, do not have to be destructive tropes in American literature, but can be globally empowering ones.

Buell’s reading of Thoreau as a local cosmopolitan is, in some ways, similar to the readings of Thoreauvian mythology I have undertaken earlier. We both agree that Thoreau is engaging in a remeasuring of space that allows him to imagine a version of the world and of place different to that which lay directly before him. One landscape ghosting another and another is a radical re-imagining of a small local landscape into a multilayered one against the evolving unidirectional shape of the United States.⁵ But a text like “Ktaadn” does not easily afford the protagonist the cosmopolitan label. There are, as will be seen, moments of mythical construction within it, but it is an ultimately fractured

³Dimock, 3.

⁴*Shades of the Planet*, 239. Buell gives a nod to Tom Lutz and his work on cosmopolitanism in *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004.) Lutz’s chapter “Cosmopolitanism” (49-58) gives an overview of how the word has been used since the 1960s, noting that his own understanding of the term embraces “the multiplicity of meaning and the array of cultural possibilities [it evokes]” arguing that “American literary culture...lives and thrives at the crossroads where aesthetics and politics meet.”

⁵A reminder is needed here of the meaning of the verb “ghosting” as employed by Stockton, 17. Stockton articulates it as events of the past, and future haunting the present moment in the garden in the film *The Hanging Garden*. Not only are these ghostly past events real though, the potential alternative outcomes of them also appear as ghosts, all lingering over each other, so that the garden holds multiple narratives in the present moment.

text, irreconcilably disrupted, leaving the narrator dislocated from any familiar landscape or historical narrative, rendering him as a failed cosmopolite. Instead of finding himself connected to the whole world, the protagonist ends up finding himself connected to nothing at all. I would suggest that it is because the protagonist ends up hallucinating an alien terrain rather than a displaced one, and this causes a deep fracturing both in the time-construct the protagonist tries to put together in “Ktaadn” and in the protagonist’s ability to construct it.

The moment of unsettlement in “Ktaadn” has been covered numerous times by critics. The essay reads as a performative tour through a local American history coupled with occasional moments of myth-making, only to be disrupted by an unfamiliar and threatening encounter with Nature which we rarely, if ever, glimpse in Thoreau’s later works. This encounter turns Thoreau’s constructions of history and myth on their head, as language appears to fail him. The unnerving experience that Thoreau undergoes, and the consequent collapse of language, results in an uncomfortable reformulation of history and American wilderness, which he is not fully able to reconcile so that the narrative is ruptured, falling apart into a re-visualized understanding of language, history and space, bordering on the avant-garde. Indeed, in describing his experience, Thoreau’s polished language breaks apart, and within that breakage, Thoreau’s constructions of history and myth, of settlement and the wild, collapse into tropes that are different and less structured to those found in his later works.⁶ While Thoreau hallucinates displaced terrains throughout the essay, mostly seeing white colonial terrains in wilderness landscapes, the explosive interruption in “Ktaadn” reads more like the emergence of an alien terrain, vast, stellar, and terrifying. This alien terrain also seems to come against the protagonist as a form of violence, deeply disrupting his narrative progression

⁶Adams and Ross state that after that encounter “Thoreau would never again let himself be isolated in a natural setting as threatening as the wastelands of Katahdin’s summit,” though they suspect the experience marked the beginning of Thoreau’s career in myth-creation. Strangely, Adams and Ross don’t seem to notice that the wastelands are not on Katahdin’s summit, and that in fact the protagonist does not manage to reach the mountain’s summit at all. Adams, Stephen and Ross, Donald *Revising Mythologies: The Composition of Thoreau’s Major Works*. (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1988) 75, 66.

and fracturing his own ability to connect with himself, others and his environment. This is another form of violent history, only this one looms on a scale much larger than those I explored in the previous chapter.

The scale that we witness in “Ktaadn” verges on the galactic, where Earth is seen in its alien form, as part of a galaxy. Dimock writes that “[t]he feebleness of the human mind was, in some sense, the central discovery of the nineteenth century.”⁷ With the growing understanding of astronomy and geology, it became clear to nineteenth-century writers “that the universe as a whole, and even our own planet is operating on a time-frame grossly asymmetrical to the human life span.” With the acquisition of this knowledge, argues Dimock,

...there is no way of reconciling the gulf between the space and time we have at our command and the space and time we need in order to understand the full range of cause and effect. There is no way of reconciling the gulf between the capacity of the human brain and the staggering accumulation of data that needs to be processed.

Dimock uses Emerson’s 1833 lecture, “The Relation of Man to the Globe,” to show the difficulties America’s literati faced with their new-found knowledge. Both globe and man lose their celestial place and consequently their sense of exceptionalism against the wider universe. Emerson “was not discouraged” by this realization, finding instead an equality of all things that in turn could liberate humankind. Thoreau, though, ever the practitioner to Emerson’s theoretician, comes face to face with planetary history (as opposed to just reading about it in Pierre Simon Laplace et al.) and is unable, by the end of the essay, to reconcile the experience into the neat mythology he constructs in *Walden*. Consequently he must find a different narrative structure in which to include it: one that can accommodate disruption; and a different protagonist to experience it: one who can lose his agency. In this way we can witness a uncommon happening in “Ktaadn”: a breaking through of stellar time in an otherwise carefully constructed historical narrative. Dimock’s primary focus in the deep time phenomenon, as understood above and throughout her book, is within a framework of global *human* history, since she is mostly concerned with written records or visual material. Yet, while broadening history to “our long sojourn

⁷Dimock, 54

on this planet,” Dimock does delve into an even deeper layer of history: a planetary history. She expresses her interest in “the shape of literature against history and the habitat of the human species, *against the “deep time” of the planet Earth, as described by...geology and astronomy.*”⁸ Consequently when I use terms like stellar or galactic time, I am pointing to scale formations of such magnitude that planet Earth is understood as a relative small body in a solar system, bringing forth ideas of time-frames so large that they disregard human time-frames entirely. Thus what emerges in Thoreau’s early text is a very real sense of an alien, antihuman formation, that assails the protagonist’s individualism and his agency as a human, albeit a poet and traveler, to really speak of or for history.⁹

“Ktaadn” is an account of Thoreau’s first trip to Mount Katahdin in September of 1846, a trip taken and then written about during his stay at Walden Pond. It begins as a straight-forward travel account, recording a journey Thoreau undertook in the company of his cousin, George Thatcher, and eventually guided by Maine woods’ locals, George McCauslin (Uncle George) and Thomas Fowler (Tom). The purpose of the journey was for Thatcher to look at lumber properties, while Thoreau wished to see the woods and climb the peak of Katahdin, known in Native American myth as the highest peak, protected by Pamola, a bird-spirit hostile to humans. Thoreau references previous accounts written on journeys to Mt Katahdin, placing his own record as part of that tradition (“Ktaadn” 2). Yet, like many of Thoreau’s writings, “Ktaadn” assumes the shape of a travel guide and shifts, toward the end of the essay, from travel account to myth. The essay’s structural transformation though is foiled upon the moment after Thoreau descends Katahdin, where Thoreau’s experience of nature at its most unsettled unravels the travel account, the language it is written in, and the space and history of the journey.

Once again it is important to differentiate between the protagonist and the author of “Ktaadn,” an essay published in 1848 which underwent many drafts before Thoreau saw fit to send it off for publication. Based, as usual, on a

⁸Dimock, 6 (my emphasis).

⁹For more on time as antihuman see Dimock, 58.

real life journey Thoreau had taken two years earlier, the narrative itself stars a protagonist who is writing an account of the Maine Woods ostensibly for future tourists: “I will give the names and distances, for the benefit of future tourists,” says the narrator (“K,” 46). The narrator, as tour-guide provides the excuse to rattle out the name of every stream, lake, road, and city, thus establishing the narrative’s close relationship with the white colonial historiography of the region. The tour-guide persona also sets up the protagonist’s guise of “scout” empowering him as a source of knowledge and as the important agent of discovery. Both the white colonial history and the narrator’s agency are rudely removed upon his pivotal encounter with the unnameable form of nature. Consequently the protagonist who loses himself when encountering nature at its most threatening is placed there by the author, Thoreau, to create a historiographical narrative ripe for interruption, thus rendering colonial history ineffective against the bewildering force of galactic time.

The landscape and history the protagonists traverse begin as solid, at times tedious, aspects of Thoreau’s essay. By beginning with the date of departure, describing the approximate number of miles needed to be covered, giving the specifics of the transportation mode, and providing the names of all the places the travelers eventually pass through, Thoreau uses these details as stable reference points, albeit in the guise of an enthusiastic, pedantic, traveler:

From [the west branch of the Penobscot], which is about one hundred miles by the river above Bangor, thirty miles from the Houlton military road, and five miles beyond the last log hut, I proposed to make excursions to mount Ktaadn, the second highest mountain in New England, about thirty miles distant, and to some of the lakes of the Penobscot, either alone or with such company as I might pick up there. 3

In this early passage, Thoreau introduces Katahdin’s location and his relation to its location. By placing the mountain in topographical context, by mapping its position, Mount Katahdin seems far away, so the proposed journey comes across as an admirable one, but at the same time the mountain does not seem unreachable. Notice firstly how the place of departure is located through the signs of (white) civilization: the river near the city of Bangor, the military

road, and the “last log hut,” a mere five miles away. The place of departure is thus framed as the last bastion of civilization, while Mt Katahdin lies not only thirty miles distant from it, but also stands at a great height in relation to it. The journey sounds exciting, as though it will traverse outside of civilization toward an unknown. Yet the technicality of the language, the approximations of measurements, the familiar and named locations, which provide the context of the journey, all serve to create a sense of confidence and authority in the protagonist’s tone. There would be no adventure if the traveler did not venture beyond the boundaries of civilization, but at the same time by giving Katahdin’s location amidst these markers of civilization the adventure is made more manageable.

What I describe as markers of civilization are usually indications in the text of human history and/or human settlement within nature. As we will see, Thoreau uses these markers as neat juxtapositions between nature and myth. The markers indicate a history of human settlement within the wild environment that also serves to somewhat tame the wilderness, or to present the wilderness always in relation to the humans who have traversed through it, thus making it a less intimidating journey. Varied examples of settlement against the wild include the “remarkable” beauty of the Houlton military road, where “the germs of one or two villages just beginning to expand” lie, but which finds its beauty in the thickness of the forest surrounding it, where, if one takes “but a step” into it, one arrives straight into the “grim untrodden wilderness.” Nonetheless, the grim wilderness, decides Thoreau, “grew there to grace the passage of the Houlton teams” (“Ktaadn,” 9). Nature and civilization are harmonious in this instance, despite the encroaching villages and the “untrodden” wilderness. A little later, following an “obscure trail,” Thoreau believes he and his companion have come across “a wholly uninhabited wilderness,” where they walk buoyantly, listening to the birds singing and the running of the river. However, three miles on though they come across a “rude wooden railroad” and “more than a hundred acres of heavy timber, which had just been felled and burnt over” (15–17). These reminders of civilization, the train and the lumber industry, connect Thoreau to the biggest cities on the east coast, New

York and Boston, and people's needs for fuel and timber. The vast wilderness witnessed only three miles earlier has been muffled out by the logging industry, an industry constantly in the back of Thoreau's mind since his companion, his cousin George, has taken on the journey into the wild as a lumberer, not a tourist. A little later, the journeying men reach an annually used loggers' camp, which Thoreau describes "as completely in the woods as a fungus at the foot of a pine in a swamp," made up of "very proper forest houses, the stems of the trees collected together and piled up around a man to keep out wind and rain, – made of living green logs, hanging with moss and lichen, and with the curls and fringes of the yellow-birch bark, and dripping with resin, fresh and moist, and redolent of swampy odors, with that sort of vigor and perennialness even about them that toadstools suggest." No longer just juxtaposing nature with civilization, the narrator begins to view them as melded together, an idealized relationship between humans and the wild. Much like the military road graced by the evergreen trees of nature, the protagonist describes the loggers' camp as harmonious with the surrounding nature, likening it to fungus and toadstools, in keeping with the temperament of the forest. The narrator's eagerness to suggest a collaboration between nature and civilization, where forests grow to complement military roads and loggers' camps grow naturally in forests as though they were mushrooms, works as an effort to balance the expanding unknown wilderness surrounding him, and the horror of nature's destruction by and for mankind. It is a delicate balance to maintain, one that appears and disappears in "Ktaadn," as each step of the journey takes Thoreau alternatively into the wild and toward civilization's encroachment.

By negotiating the seemingly contradictory forces of nature and human industry into an image of collaborative synthesis, the narrator spins out an idealistic symbiotic life (found later in Alex Therien in *Walden*) in his essay. Indeed, with the boundaries of civilization so firmly established, with the markers made so recognizable, nature, when finally ventured into, can take on the role of escape, beauty, and relief from the civilization, a version of what Leo Marx might consider "middle ground," where the wild is made human-friendly.¹⁰ In other

¹⁰Leo Marx. *The Machine and the Garden*. (Oxford UP, 1967.)

words, while the wild is set up as an alternative to settlement it is not unfamiliar nor unwelcoming to the humans traveling through it. This becomes clear when Thoreau and his companions leave “the last human habitation of any kind,” a camp “exactly twenty-nine miles from Mattawamkeag Point,” with no trail but the river and the lakes to take them to Katahdin, thirty miles away, a description of the moon-lit boat ride across the North Twin Lake ensues. The description, while romantic and honorific of nature’s beauty, consistently uses markers of civilization as points of comparison and description, thus creating a wilderness closely intertwined with humankind.

This is a noble sheet of water, where one may get the impression which a new country and a “lake of the woods” are fitted to create. There was the smoke of no log-hut nor camp...still less was any lover of nature or musing traveller watching our batteau from the distant hills; not even the Indian hunter... No face welcomed us but the fine fantastic sprays of free and happy evergreen trees waving one above another in their ancient home. At first the red clouds hung over the western shore as gorgeously as if over a city, and the lake lay open to the light with even a civilized aspect, as if expecting trade and commerce, and towns and villas... The shores rose gently to ranges of low hills covered with forests; and though, in fact, the most valuable white pine timber, even about this lake, had been culled out, this would never have been suspected by the voyager.

The first sentence of this passage suggests that Thoreau is about to move into a description of nature in a pastoral, ahistorical manner. But the idea that here might lie a “new country,” “noble” and not even yet created is pushed aside by the word “impression.” And while the lake is at first described as beautiful in its lack of settlement, it only reaches grandness at the possibility of trade and commerce connecting it to a national or global cosmos. In fact, this is not virginal nature at all, for the loggers have culled the timber that is of “value.” Even though the travelers have left the last human settlement behind, their first view of nature without obvious signs of settlement, continues to be thought about in terms of trade, globalization, and markets. The historiography of “Ktaadn” thus becomes clearer as the protagonists continue their journey, consistently depicted as a location deep with a history of affable relationship between man and the wild.

Indeed as the journey continues, it becomes surprising how colonial in tone the narrator's descriptions become. The wild becomes a challenge to be overcome as Thoreau spends long passages praising the boatsmen who skillfully manage the difficult rapids: "I could not sufficiently admire the skill and coolness with which they performed this feat, never speaking to each other. The bowman, not looking behind, but knowing exactly what the other is about, works as if he worked alone"; and the lumberjacks who "learn to walk on floating logs as city boys on sidewalks" (43). The essay, clearly named "Ktaadn," almost seems to shirk from the wild it had aspired to explore, keener to explore humans' handling of it, and almost relieved to discover traces of settlement as the travelers go deeper into seemingly untrodden nature: "But it was always startling to discover so plain a trail of civilized man there. I remember that I was strangely affected, when we were returning, by the sight of a ring-bolt well drilled into a rock, and fastened with lead, at the head of this solitary Ambejijis Lake." The narrator is comforted by these markers of the man-made, of human intervention in the wild. While they are startling they are also affecting, pulling on Thoreau's own sense of being and place. Frederick Garber argues that Thoreau "looked nervously for instances of the human or the domesticated, dwelling on them and turning them over and around as though reluctant to let them go by."¹¹ And while I find there to be little nervousness in the descriptions, I agree that the human objects work as emotional affirmations of the narrator's own location in human history and settlement. The tension pinpointed by Garber, or what I have identified as a curious over use of human markers in the traversed wilderness, emphasize the time-construct Thoreau wishes to create in "Ktaadn." His protagonist is entirely wrapped up in a long history of explorers and loggers that came before him, to the extent that the wild's history itself becomes measured by settlement history, unable to escape the marks men have made on its rocks or trees. By humanizing the wilderness by insisting on viewing it through a generational time-span of men who have explored it, the protagonist unwittingly sets himself up for a fall in the impending encounter with galactic time.

¹¹Garber, Frederick. ()

The protagonist continues the journey by locating himself clearly in the human history of Katahdin and the Maine woods. He most clearly expresses his desire to leave an indicator of his own journey when he comes across a brick. Entering deeper into the wilderness, led by Uncle George away from logging areas and finally towards the mountain, Thoreau becomes sensitive to the smallest of man-made objects, the last remnants of civilization, as though they offer refuge from the untrodden wilderness they are teetering towards:

Here was the site of an old logger's camp, remembered by McCauslin, now overgrown with weeds and bushes. In the midst of a dense underwood we noticed a whole brick, on a rock, in a small run, clean and red and square as in a brick-yard, which had been brought thus far formerly for tamping. Some of us afterward regretted that we had not carried this on with us to the top of the mountain, *to be left there for our mark. It would certainly have been a simple evidence of civilized man.* McCauslin said, that large wooden crosses, made of oak, still sound, were sometimes found standing in this wilderness, which were set up by the first Catholic missionaries who came through to the Kennebec. (My emphasis)

This passage exemplifies the role of history and settlement in Thoreau's early essay. The logger's camp, overrun by plants, is left as a historical marker of an even longer human history than so far explored. The brick, meanwhile, "clean," "red," and "square," momentarily transforms the dense underwood into a brick-yard – the image of city and civilization flickering briefly over nature.¹² The brick is explicitly framed as a marker to be taken to the top of the mountain to provide evidence of the humans' journey through the wild. Moreover, the brick's industrial nature marks a certain part of human history; it has the potential to indicate a specific time span for the next explorer to examine. It continues to enforce the very particular white history the narrator has been emphasizing throughout "Ktaadn", adding to the oak crosses left by "the first Catholic missionaries," the oldest settlement history thus far referenced. Just as Thoreau's account is located in the tradition of the accounts of those who went to Katahdin before him, so would the brick continue the historical narrative of civilization's encounters with the wilderness surrounding Katahdin.

¹²An image which anticipates Wallace Stevens' poem, "Anecdote of a Jar."

Once we realize that Thoreau's wilderness is consistently located through markers of settlement's history throughout the essay, we also begin to understand how and why the wilderness takes the romantic, mythological, or pastoral shape that then arrives in "Ktaadn". With so much emphasis on a human understanding of history, the protagonist creates a mythological experience of nature that is controlled by his presence and sight, much like the protagonist of *Walden*. Soon after the discovery of the brick, Thoreau and his companions decide to set up camp near the river they have been traversing, and go fishing for their supper. The act of fishing connects to fishermen who have been there before them (the men use "birch-poles which some party of Indians, or white hunters, had left on the shore"), thus reminding the reader of human agency and ingenuity in the face of nature, while the stream takes on a rich life of its own, perfect and unadulterated. The stream is teeming with white chivin, silvery roaches, and trout, "the finest specimen I have ever seen," falling "in a perfect shower" around them, "glisten[ing] like the fairest of flowers, the product of primitive rivers," leaving the men barely able to comprehend "that these jewels should have swam away in the Aboljacknagesic water for so long, so many dark ages." The fish seem to have come from a realm unknown to man, primitive and dark, beyond human understanding of history and the wild. Quickly, the narrator turns the fish into aspects of mythology:

...These bright fluviatile flowers, seen of Indians only, made beautiful, the Lord only knows why, to swim there! I could understand better, for this, the truth of mythology, the fables of Proteus, and all those beautiful sea-monsters,—how all history, indeed, put to a terrestrial use, is mere history; but put to a celestial, is mythology always.

Robert Richardson describes the above passage as Thoreau's description of "the history of nature, the organic unfolding of things," arguing that the "master concept of evolution....was, for Thoreau and many of his contemporaries, best expressed via the image of transformation or metamorphosis," where "metamorphosis expressed itself most characteristically in myth."¹³ Richardson's

¹³Richardson, Robert D. *Henry Thoreau : A Life of the Mind*. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986)

argument that myth is an expression of nature's history is compelling and it locates Thoreau's use of myth within a historical structure, as though it is literature's way of expressing the history of nature, otherwise incomprehensible. In my reading of this passage, however, I see the formation of myth as carefully constructed through a very human-orientated and history. The abundance of nature, unaffected by humans, is nonetheless in a harmonious relationship with the protagonist, and nature and the figure of the human enter a timeless, or celestial moment together. His experience is described synchronically, remaining in the primitive, or always already new, moment. Perfecting this mythological moment, the narrator becomes, if briefly, myth-maker.

The transformation of the quotidian event of fishing into myth relies on the protagonist's imagery and use of language. He tells us that later that evening he dreams of the fishing again,

...and, when at length I awoke, it seemed a fable that this painted fish swam there so near my couch, and rose to our hooks the last evening, and I doubted if I had not dreamed it all. So I arose before dawn to test its truth, while my companions were still sleeping. There stood Ktaadn with distinct and cloudless outline in the moonlight; and the rippling of the rapids was the only sound to break the stillness. Standing on the shore, I once more cast my line into the stream, and found the dream to be real and the fable true. The speckled trout and silvery roach, like flying-fish, sped swiftly through the moonlight air, describing bright arcs on the dark side of Ktaadn, until moonlight, now fading into daylight, brought satiety to my mind, and the minds of my companions, who had joined me.

The narrator thus shifts from dream into fable, his description laden with unusual lighting from the moon, enforcing the idea of the celestial. The fish become unreal, "painted," "describing bright arcs" against "the dark side of Ktaadn." The act of fishing, the protagonist's own agency, thus pushes the wild into myth. The narrator's figure, "standing on the shore, I once more cast my line into the stream," is still present, controlling the myth even as it is written into it, while the shore becomes the edge of wilderness' beauty, and the fishing line turns into an allegory for writing, pointing to the passage's craftsmanship – to the myth's creation. The fish do not seem to have been caught, but come up of their own accord, illuminating the way to the mountain that stands darkly

behind them. The narrator weaves a mythological moment that breaks gently with the rising of the sun and the arrival of his companions. It is strongly reminiscent of moments in “Walking” and *Walden* where the protagonist, like the artist of Kouroo, draws his own world through a simple act of making a staff, or in this case, casting a line. His experience is wondrous, transcendent, unearthly. Yet at the same time it is crafted; that is, created by the narrator in order to make myth. Richardson is right when he states that for Thoreau “myth is... a clue to some significance in nature...and the significance myth uncovers is far more important than the myth itself.” But Thoreau’s search for significance in nature, a significance that he believes lies next to civilization, while clad in the form of mythology, will ultimately fail by the end of his journey, as he encounters a far more shocking experience of the wild, which is less easily transformed by language into myth.

Thoreau’s use of myth continues in his account of his journey, often strongest at moments where he is left alone, taking on a protagonist’s role which he parallels to Prometheus and even Milton’s Satan, as he climbs up Mount Katahdin.¹⁴ While Nature takes on cruel, unwelcoming characteristics during Thoreau’s ascent, it is anthropomorphized into a mythological god, angry at the mere mortal who dares to climb beyond his station. Thoreau relishes the mist that covers the mountain’s peak, suggesting that “the tops of mountains are among the unfinished parts of the globe, whither it is a slight insult to the gods to climb and pry into their secrets... Pomola is always angry with those who climb to the summit of Ktaadn.” The mountain’s floor, then, is unsuitable for humans but suitable for gods, and thus “relentlessly drive[s humans] hence to where [Nature] is kind.” In other words, the wild is split into two: the human-friendly plains, and the elitist, god-inhabiting mountains. The wild here is finally understood in an older human history than just a colonialist one as the narrator draws from Native American mythology to consider an older tracing of human history. Nonetheless, the mountain top is still framed in a human perception of it. This dualistic understanding of the wild essentially re-affirms the double-

¹⁴See Richardson for a complete reading of Thoreau’s use of Promethean myth in “Ktaadn.” Thoreau, Richardson tells us, translated the tale of Prometheus in 1847.

ness found in Thoreau's juxtaposition of history and myth: one is human, the other is celestial. Yet both exist in relation to each another.

The break in Thoreau's neat encapsulation of humans' relationship with nature arrives after Thoreau has descended the mountain, Katahdin, and, with his companions, enters the Burnt Lands: a natural clearing "burnt by lightning, perchance" that feels to Thoreau as the most uninhabited place of Nature he has ever encountered. Overwhelmed by the otherness of Nature's power, no longer able to reach for a familiar or man-made object, Thoreau loses all sense of self, attempting to regain connection with the familiar:

I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one,—*that* my body might,—but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries!—Think of our life in nature,—daily to be showed matter, to come in contact with it,—rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense!* *Contact! Contact! Who* are we? *where* are we?

The passage's power comes in part from its structural collapse. Where the previous pages of meticulous writing account for every detail of the group's journey through Maine, slipping, as if often the case with Thoreau, either into the mundane or into brief philosophical tangents, this passage arrives unable to complete sentences, unable to make sense of its own expression as it loses all sense of familiarity. As the narrator finds his own body, his "matter," to be strange to him, he becomes terrified of his own physical self ("I stand in awe of my body.... I fear bodies") and then does not even feel as though he belongs to himself, pushed out by a Titan he cannot comprehend ("What is this Titan that has possession of me?"), a Titan he had glimpsed earlier as he ascended the difficult peak of Katahdin ("[the scenery] was vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits"). But by this time the sentences have become disjointed, not clearly connected to one another. "*—that* my body might" jars against the phrases preceding and following it, while the plea to "Think of our life in nature" can only be responded to in random images, "rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks!" before attempting to come back into palpability, "the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense!*" The images cannot be truly realized, as

the narrator's loss of body means loss of expression, so that in that moment he is left asking for contact, trying to orient himself and the rest of humanity by asking questions that might provide context for the self to regain itself in. The potency of the protagonist's existential crisis in his encounter with the wild cannot be ignored, as it expresses itself in the self's own language. It marks a collapse, a failure, of language to communicate the experience of unfamiliarity and otherness.

Why has language failed the protagonist so spectacularly? Because he has been momentarily thrown out of human history, and finds himself in an alien planetary deep time. In the sentences leading up to Thoreau's outburst, mythical references all but disappear from the text, and instead he reaches to science for comprehension of the moment and for the language which might express it.

I looked with awe at the ground I trod on, to see what the Powers had made there, the form and fashion and material of their work. This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. Here was no man's garden, but the unhand-selled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste-land. It was the fresh and natural surface of the planet Earth....It was Matter, vast, terrific,—not [man's] Mother Earth....it was a specimen of what God saw fit to make this world. What is it to be admitted to a museum, to see a myriad of particular things, compared with being shown some star's surface, some hard matter in its home! 70-71

Thoreau's reference to "Powers" and his use of Milton's "Chaos and old Night" do point to the celestial tropes we've read earlier in the essay, and his brief mention of God's creation confirm Thoreau's spiritual leanings. But in this passage, which culminates in the ipseical crisis noted above, Thoreau moves out of his immediate environment, seeing Earth as a globe or planet, not answerable to human naming or language, but part of a universe, alien in a real, literal sense. "Chaos and old Night" become descriptive of the cosmos beyond Earth, and of a time-span beyond human consciousness. Importantly, Thoreau does not encounter this planetary history in a museum where it is organized and detailed to enable learning. Rather he encounters deep time in its rawest form, enormous, on its true scale, and disinterested in the human. Thus "[t]he feebleness of the human mind" emerges, disorientated and linguistically incapable,

unable to make physical or intellectual connections. The narrator effectively hallucinates the alien terrain and is thus robbed of all his agency.

Yet, while we are left reeling from the drama of his experience, Thoreau moves the narrator straight into the next paragraph and straight back into his role of scout: “Ere long we recognized some rocks and other features in the landscape which we had purposely impressed on our memories, and quickening our pace, by two o’clock we reached the batteau,” resonating with a passage early on in “Ktaadn” that describes a visit to a batteau manufactory in Old-town. In a curious reversal, the protagonists must use nature’s markers to make their way back to their human lives. Thankfully, it is their memory of nature that helps them, as they begin to regain some of their agency. Thus they are able to move on with their journey. Nonetheless, the transition is a swift and unexpected one, leaving the Titanic scenery firmly behind them. It is not till the journey ends that the narrator returns to reflecting on the wilderness through which he has passed.

Upon encountering Louis Neptune, the Native American who had promised to lead him to Katahdin but did not appear and was replaced by Uncle George, the protagonists sees the local man as rude, degraded in his apparent hangover and in the loss of his “race,” indistinguishable from the poorest city-men, completely shorn of Thoreau’s initial romantic description of him. With history spread out for him, it is as though Thoreau can no longer mythologize Native American life, which had previously been read as preceding history, because it preceded white colonialism and participated in the creation of myth around America’s nature. Neptune is now described as crude, no longer holding the key to the ascent of Katahdin and to the appeasement of Pomola. A marked shift has occurred: the narrator’s projection of the city onto Neptune shows us how the narrator no longer idealizes contemporary Native American culture and instead locates it within a less romanticized version of human history. It is as though the antihuman time-frame he has encountered has placed a different perspective on the relationship between humans and nature. The relationship of industry with nature now seems degrading as the city the narrator sees emanating from Neptune is nothing more than litter in its streets while the Native

Americans figure awkwardly, “sinister and slouching” in “their native woods.”

How much has history changed for the narrator, then? As the company drop Tom off at his house, the narrator begins to spin a pastoral environment inhabited by an Adamic character, living “on the edge of the wilderness...in a new world...far in the dark of a continent” playing a flute to accompany the howling wolves (78-79). He “shall live...in the primitive age of the world, a primitive man,” writes the tour-guide, returning to his familiar, romanticized descriptions of new world and new man. “Yet he shall...in this century be my contemporary; perchance read some scattered leaves of literature, and sometimes talk with me,” the narrator tells us, bringing this ancient moment into his own time, so that he and the primitive man occupy the same moment. However, the shift of time and place are not, as might be initially thought, a construction of synchronicity. Rather, having encountered the enormous time-frame of his planet, the narrator recognizes that his “primitive” man is actually not as far from his own moment of history as he thought.

Why read history then if the ages and generations are now? He lives three thousand years deep into time, an age not yet described by poets. Can you well go further back in history than this? Ay! ay! – for there turns up but now into the mouth of Millinocket stream a still more ancient and primitive man, whose history is not brought down even to the former.

Having witnessed galactic time the narrator here attempts to regain some of his agency as a historiographer or mythographer, turning to a larger scale of human history where he hopes to discover another form of humanity worth mythologizing. The man who emerges from such dark caves of time does not even have the means to hand down his own account of life. He lacks language, does not build houses out of logs but “a wigwam of skins,” uses a bark canoe, not a modern batteau, and eats meat, not hot bread and sweet-cakes. In other words, his skills and tools predate even the seemingly basic, primitive tools and skills that the protagonists had admired and used earlier. The personification of deep time in this red-faced man who appears “but dim and misty...obscured by the aeons that lie between [them]” is crude at best. The narrator attempts to imagine what planetary history could take shape as if embodied

as a human and falls against his old, tired trope of the romanticized Native American culture before it was contaminated by a white history. Having only just been disappointed by the reality of Neptune's condition, it is surprising that the narrator wishes to return to his aboriginal symbol. Yet, so he does, and his re-use of words like "ancient" and "primitive" to express something even *more* ancient and primitive than what he had described earlier suggests that he now remains bereft of imagination, still lost for words to describe this deeper, alien form of history he has encountered. The insertion, then, of an encounter with planetary deep time results in deeply foiling the narrator's own abilities to write about it (or, recover from it) successfully, thus disrupting the whole essay's narrative structure and construction of time.

The last paragraphs of the essay are reflective, written outside of the journey undertaken. The narrator describes Maine's wilderness as "grim and wild" in its uninterrupted areas. He also tells us that from far away they are "mild and civilizing," but when confronted close up "are something which you are unprepared for." The forest is not, the narrator insists, pastoral, well-kept, the "artificial forests of an English king"; rather it follows only nature's law. He then proceeds to describe a rich wilderness filled with various flora and fauna, resplendent with sounds and colors, reintroducing Nature with its capital letter. Now at some distance from its threat, the narrator can comfortably muse that "[w]hile the republic has already acquired a history world-wide, America is still unsettled and unexplored...we live only on the shores of a continent even yet." And while the humbled protagonist wraps "unsettled America" under the familiar cloak of a virginal land, still waiting to be discovered, awesome in its newness and abundance, the reader has not forgotten the moment of terrifying, planetary Nature, that could not be included in the narrator's language or mythography. So while the essay ostensibly ends peacefully, hopeful and expectant, the threatening encounter remains, albeit hidden and unpredictable—just as it surprised the protagonist after his descent from Katahdin.

Leo Stoller thinks that Thoreau's inability to recover from the universe's collapse "into ...parts" ended up effecting him for the rest of his life as he

“strive[d] in vain to reunite them.”¹⁵ Garber on the other hand, reads the last pages of “Ktaadn” as proof that Thoreau has collected himself, recovered, and can turn to his own clearing of Nature in his following works.¹⁶ My reading of “Ktaadn” as Thoreau’s most structurally experimental text however, explains the difficulty of inserting Thoreau’s Encounter in an otherwise recognizable romantic discovery narrative: or, put in the terms of this thesis, the difficulty of inserting stellar time into a historiography centered around the United States’ colonial history. While Nature certainly emerges as a trickster and full of contradictions in Thoreau’s later texts, his attempt at inserting an unsettling experience of nature in order to disrupt his protagonist’s formulations of history and myth ultimately results in making the protagonist’s agency impuissant, something that does not happen in later works where myth depends largely on the prowess of the hero-poet. Nonetheless, “Ktaadn” performs an important exercise in the making and breaking of time-frames that would prove useful in Thoreau’s later work, not least *A Week*, considering how fragile the intertwining of settler history with nature ended up being in “Ktaadn.” Moreover, Thoreau’s later work drew more firmly from histories across the globe, suggesting, perhaps, that Thoreau learned to seek the depth of human history by reaching across the planet, rather than letting the planet itself get in his way.

¹⁵Stoller, Leo. *After Walden; Thoreau’s Changing Views On Economic Man*. (Stanford, Stanford UP, 1957), 47.

¹⁶Garber, Frederick. *Thoreau’s Redemptive Imagination*. (New York: New York UP, 1977), 90. Garber’s reading of “Ktaadn” is a rich and rigorous one which would benefit any readers interested in alternative understandings of “Ktaadn”’s structure and pace.

8

Annie Dillard's Reanimation of Myth

In her autobiography, *An American Childhood*, Annie Dillard remembers being five years old at home, still figuring out how time related to her self as she moved through her domestic familial environment.

I sat mindless and eternal on the kitchen floor, stony of head and solemn, playing with my fingers. Time streamed in full flood beside me on the kitchen floor; time roared raging beside me down its swollen banks; and when I woke I was so startled I fell in.¹

Five-year-old Dillard's startled reaction to waking up in time, rather than beside it or outside it, is repeated throughout *An American Childhood* and then through *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, the ostensible sequel to Dillard's autobiography despite having been written over ten years earlier.² Little Dillard watches the trees through the screen door and falls out of time before the sound of a car passing brings her back into it. She walks through her neighborhood's snowy

¹Dillard, Annie. *An American Childhood*, (London: Picador,) 1988. 17. Hereafter referred to as *AAC*.

²Nancy Parrish writes that the "persona" of *An American Childhood* is "an artfully crafted retroactive anticipation of a constructed Annie Dillard who appeared over a decade earlier in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*." Parrish, Nancy C. *Lee Smith, Annie Dillard, and the Hollins Group : A Genesis of Writers*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1998), 126. Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1974.) Hereafter referred to as *Pilgrim*.

streets at twilight, loses herself in the colors and come back into reality and herself when the streetlights suddenly flicker on. "Who could ever tire of this heart-stopping transition, of this breakthrough shift between seeing and knowing you see, between being and knowing you be?" asks Dillard.³ By the time that Dillard's character is living at Tinker Creek, she is consciously working at recapturing these moments of transition that her childhood self seemed to negotiate with ease. By carefully concentrating on a frog being sucked dry by a giant water bug, or on seeing flat colors in a peach tree, or on petting a puppy, the narrator constantly discovers ways in and out of time. Her transience is strongly reminiscent of Thoreau's own questing protagonist in *Walden*, particularly in those moments where he impossibly crosses into his own line of sight and looms large and small in varying degrees.

Indeed, *Pilgrim* comes across firmly as a travel-narrative that has evolved into a genre that places much of the emphasis on the hero of the piece, rather than on the location of the hero. That is the first and most clear connection Dillard's work has with Thoreau's work: *Pilgrim* reanimates the Thoreauvian travel-narrative that creates a world with different temporal and geographical strata as mediated by the strong, knowledgable protagonist. Moreover, she honors another of Thoreau's travel-narrative tricks: the referencing throughout the book of other travel narratives, thus firmly locating *Pilgrim* in the travel tradition.⁴ In fact, *Pilgrim*'s relationship to *Walden* is not unlike that of a traveler responding to the enquiries and requests of his or her patron as the pretext for writing a travel narrative. At the beginning of *Walden*, as he is about to recount his life in the woods, Thoreau calls for other writers to respond with their own stories:

Moreover, I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men's lives, some such account as he would send it to his kindred from a distant land; for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me. I, 2

³AAC, 17.

⁴reference

E.B. White (of *Charlotte's Web* fame), in an article celebrating 100 years of *Walden*, attempts his own response to the request, and ends up complaining that he can't spend the day with Nature living sincerely because he has to write an article on *Walden*. Many of the writers who responded to Thoreau's request in the second half of the twentieth century were neither as discerning nor as humorous as White. Charles Seib's *The Woods: One Man's Escape to Nature*, George Sibley's *Part of a Winter*, or the Algiers' *At Home in the Woods: Living the Life of Thoreau Today* are all of questionable literary merit. The Algiers' book opens with a painfully bad rewrite of Thoreau's most famous line: "We went to the wilderness because 100 years ago a man wrote a book." These writers mainly suffer from apotheosized Thoreauvian gospel, where the romance of living in the woods becomes an attempt at hagiography. By the time Dillard responded to the call herself, Thoreau's stay at Walden had become part of American folklore, where the apotheosis of pastoral retreats had found its shrine at Walden Pond and its ideology in *Walden* the book.⁵ Annie Dillard, however, does not respond to Thoreau the gospel-teller, Thoreau the hermit, or Thoreau the pastoral saint. She is interested in Thoreau the writer, but more significantly, Dillard's book evokes Thoreau the introspective traveler:

I propose to keep here [in this book] what Thoreau called "a meteorological journal of the mind," telling some tales and describing some of the sights of this rather tamed valley, and exploring, in fear and trembling, some of the unmapped dim reaches and unholy fastnesses to which those tales and sights so dizzyingly lead. 11

What Dillard draws most emphatically from Thoreau's texts is the discovery narrative I explored earlier, which does not require unexplored land, but rather participates in an act of seeing which reconfigures and consequently demands the rediscovery of the land and place of the stationary traveler. Dillard's invocations of meteorology, of unmapped reaches, and of the mind resonate with Thoreau's own observation that "our own interior is white on the chart." And so Dillard's accounts opens fully into a landscape that ends up revealing more about the narrator than it does about Tinker Creek. As Don Scheese puts it,

⁵See Buell's *Environmental Imagination*, chapters 10 & 11 for a thorough reading of Thoreau's apotheosis and canonization.

“Dillard celebrates a mental terrain more than a physical terrain, the invisible over the visible landscape.”⁶

But Dillard also takes her travel-narrative a step further than Thoreau's, pushing aside any need for the long preamble of “Economy” that opens *Walden* and establishes the scene of departure. She begins almost immediately instead with the entrance of the narrator's awakening or entrance – an event that does not take place in *Walden* until halfway through the second chapter when the protagonist bathes. In other words, the key moment of departure is entirely abstract in Dillard's account, for that moment is not even accounted for in *Pilgrim* as it is in *Walden* or most other travel narratives. With no established scene of departure, *Pilgrim* deliberately avoids some of the key structural elements that occur in *Walden*. Without a scene of departure there is no sense, in Dillard's narrative, of what her account might be resisting. In *Walden*'s “Economy,” Thoreau marks his problems with his society, either in terms of financial transactions, fashion, labor, or time-keeping. When the narrator comes into himself as a myth maker in the following chapter, we already have a good sense of what institutions and hegemonic concepts his way of life will openly conflict with. In *Pilgrim* we are given no explicit concept of what she might be challenging. This is particularly curious because, as we shall see, her strong embrace of the protagonist as traveler-poet in her narrative, suggests that one of the narrative's basic motivations is the reshaping of the narrator's world through discovery, as emphasized in the tradition of travel narrative explored in Chapter Two. But without exposure to the world she is leaving behind, we are left not knowing what she is reshaping her new world against. I argue that *Pilgrim*'s objects of resistance emerge implicitly in her narrative, leaving us to look around her work for clues of hegemonic time-structures, or shifting world-paradigms that might result in the invocation of Thoreauvian travel narrative in the early 1970s.

The other result of not lingering on a point of departure in her travel narrative is that all the emphasis of the account is immediately placed on the narrator, rather than on her environment. She, like *Walden*'s protagonist, has

⁶Scheese, Don. *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America*. (Routledge: New York, 2002), 130.

an unusual relationship with time, while her practice of seeing and her experimentation in the present are directly in conversation with *Walden's* own concerns. For example, the initial image, above, of the figure sitting still while time rushes by next to her, described with the riverine "swollen banks," resonates with Thoreau's figure sitting on the river bank of time, watching it rush past him. "Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in," says *Walden's* protagonist, establishing himself firmly as occupying a location beside linearly progressive time. Dillard firmly shifts the narrative's lodestone away from a physical location or a spatial circumference that holds multiple times together. Instead it is her protagonist who holds everything together. It is the very body of the narrator which openly reacts to the time shifts, resulting in both a more viscerally textured narrative and a potentially more spiritual one than Thoreau's. Scott Slovic, while considering readings of Dillard as a "visionary naturalist" or "religious mystic," suggests that in fact she is "a devoted student of the human mind, of its processes of awakening."⁷ Slovic takes the first step in seeing Dillard's protagonist's baring of her self as the main event in *Pilgrim*. In other words, Dillard's narrator is not a guide for the reader, but opens up a human mind which the reader ends up studying. The visceral presence of the narrator becomes key to the world Dillard weaves into existence in *Pilgrim*, as she, the protagonist, becomes the point of mediation for the reader to her environment, through touch, sight, sound, and memory. The world that opens up to the reader is the unfolding of the narrator's mind so that the narrative takes an unusual shape and is able to sit next to history. We find ourselves much closer to the protagonist in *Pilgrim* than we were with the protagonist in *Walden*.

I read the lack of departure in *Pilgrim* as bringing about these two key differences between Dillard's narrative and Thoreau's: Dillard's removal of an explicit world that needs replacing by myth against Thoreau's clear disdain for the world he is trying to resist; and Dillard's magnification of attention to the protagonist's voice and shape in the world against Thoreau's more serious, deliberating, and less emotionally buoyant protagonist. The result of Dillard's

⁷Slovic, Scott. *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing: Henry Thoreau, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez*. (Salt Lake: University of Utah Press, 1992), 9.

account then, is to create a narrative that lingers in very specific sections of Thoreauvian mythology: the place where the narrator becomes subject to his own mythography. Thoreau employs that technique in *Walden* so that we see the protagonist write himself into the extraordinary layers of history that are constantly fluctuating. It is one of the more precarious moments in *Walden*, where it feels as though the protagonist may slip on the level-shifting bottoms he finds himself walking through. As Michaels reminds us, it is why it makes us nervous to read him. *Pilgrim* reads like those moments throughout. Dillard has placed all the emphasis on her protagonist's vulnerability, her temporality, and her mortality. When Walls writes of Thoreau's vision of mobility as "that sweet edge between life and death where one must face the fact of ones own mortal body cast up by the waves and reigning over the shore," she may as well be also speaking for Dillard's vision in *Pilgrim*. Without an explicit world to resist, and with so much emphasis on the protagonist, *Pilgrim* cavorts in those precarious places of Thoreauvian myth that threaten to make it collapse in on itself.

It is telling that Dillard chooses to visit Thoreau's method of myth-building, the positioning of literature "beside History," in the early 1970s, even as Dillard's sense of location and globe is vastly different to her predecessor's. In *An American Childhood*, for example, she marks her birth in April 1945 as the day of Hitler's death, writing that "Roosevelt had died eighteen days before." Settling herself against the death of these historic figures who are tied up in the events of the Second World War, Dillard locates her childhood clearly as post-war, into a time where people wanted to "calmly blow their way out of years of rationing." By the time she was writing *Pilgrim* America was just getting out of another war, one whose failure had been key to the reformulation of global structures and of understandings of government, power hierarchies, and economic networks. Where "the 1960s sought typically to appropriate mythologies of nationalism and the engines of state to bring about a regeneration of the common welfare," by the early 1970s ideals of nationalism had peeled away following the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, the fall of a trusted

president, and the move to a floating currency.⁸ As Fredric Jameson put it in the mid-1980s, the end of the 1960s came with a new world economic crisis; “a universal abandonment of the referential gold standard; an extraordinary printing up of even more devalued signifiers.”⁹ One capitalist system represented by old colonialism was finally replaced with another form of capitalism, neocolonialism: “something like the replacement of the British Empire by the International Monetary Fund.” The effect of these changes to literature, explains Jameson, can be understood by tracing the relationship of the sign to the signified and signifier. Where literature had been able, from 1967-72, he writes, to cultivate an autonomous space from the social or material world by usage of signs, albeit signs that also purposefully challenged ideas of what they might signify, by the early 1970s the upheaval of the social and material world structures meant that the signs no longer had a referent to moor themselves to. “The result is not [culture’s] disappearance but its prodigious expansion, to the point where culture becomes coterminous with social life in general.” What I take from Jameson’s reading of this shift in literary structures is that by the early 1970s it had become nigh on impossible to impose traditional mythologies or literary narratives on experiences as a way of creating art. Literature now had to face the new fissures, cracks, and bridges that had appeared in the social and global sphere of the world. Faced against this world in transition, Dillard’s attraction to Thoreau as a potential patron begins to become more clear, as his practice of writing new spaces and times in response to the crisis of change becomes useful for her own purposes. It is how she adapts his methods in response to her own unique era that is most interesting to his project. Her emphasis ends up lying in the creation of a temporal “I” that is not static, but that is in a state of perpetual becoming while struggling to come to terms with her mortality.

Pilgrims’s hero, while more viscerally present than *Walden*’s also comes across as less sure of herself. There is an authoritative tone, for example, to *Walden*’s hero, a forcefulness to his position that comes through in his

⁸Giles, Paul. “Historicizing the Transnational: Robert Coover, Kathy Acker and the Rewriting of British Cultural History, 1970-1997.” *Journal of American Studies*. 41.1 (2007)

⁹Fredric Jameson.

definitive statement above and others like “I am monarch of all I *survey*,” “...I propose... to brag as lustily chanticleer in the morning...,” “Well, there I might live, I said; and there I did live” (*W*, II). In contrast Dillard’s protagonist is far less certain of herself and instead of taking hold of her transitions in and out of time with the same forcefulness as Thoreau’s, she seems to fall in and out of time, helter-skelter, with a clumsiness and playfulness that defies Thoreauvian discipline: “[I] find myself in a shady side of town, in a stripped dining room, dancing”; “I plan to try to control myself this year.” Her very body registers the moves in and out of time, she is often left startled, dizzy, weary, gobsmacked after a transition from time to next-to-time happens: “I stir. The heave of my shoulders returns me to the present... and I yank myself away”; “I felt a rush of such pure energy I thought I would not need to breathe for days.” It is this breathlessness, the intensely physical responses to time, which mark Dillard’s protagonist as significantly different to Thoreau’s. Thus the reader of *Pilgrim* is immersed immediately into the protagonist’s moment of thinking and remembrance, heading straight into the “mental terrain” that will be traversed. In order to make clear that the “I” of the narrative is just as much its object as it is its subject, Dillard creates an immediacy to the narrator that is not just found in her full-on tactile proximity to her environment but also in her open “chatter” that addresses the reader as she thinks through and out of each transition, making for an unprecedented transparency in the *Walden*-like narrative. In the opening image of *Pilgrim*, the narrator wakes up in the morning to “find my body covered with paw prints in blood” left on her by her tom-cat after a night of hunting. She washes her “bare chest” in front of a mirror, noticing how the “blood streaked, faded and finally disappeared,” wondering what the bloody paw prints could signify: roses, blood emblems, stains, or marks. She finishes her wash never knowing the answer. Dillard’s bathing ritual clearly re-appropriates Thoreau’s bathing ritual in *Walden* where he weaves Confucius’s bathing tub, complete with Chinese inscriptions calling for renewal, into his morning swim in Walden, emerging clean and awake. But in *Pilgrim* the figure bathing is openly naked, the symbolic circles of tubs and ponds discarded, and the foreign inscriptions moved from those circles onto her

very body, written by nature rather than through a philosophical mediation of nature. The mirror and the blood being pushed away by the water outline and emphasize the figure's nudity, while the heat in the bathroom, "it was hot, so hot the mirror felt warm," seems to radiate in and out of the body, "my twisted summer sleep still hung about me." In Thoreau's bathing ritual, the sun stands firmly against the bath tub and the pond in its representation of morning and light as Aurora; in Dillard's the sun has been replaced only by its heat, felt tangibly against the protagonist's skin. It is as though the "I" of Dillard's narrative refuses mediation of nature through references of mythology, history, or philosophy. She is right up close, touching the sun, wiping off the illegible markings from her body. "I still think of that old tomcat" she tells us amicably, setting the tone for subsequent multitudes of stories from her life and her observations. The stories fill out the figure, making her three-dimensional, outlining her more clearly. Thus Dillard forces palpability into her protagonist, both as a character so that the reader can feel she is graspable, and as a figure that tangibly interacts with her environment, without any mediations.

Apart from rewriting a similar protagonist's entrance to the one found in *Walden*, and formulating a more visceral "I" than Thoreau, Dillard also takes on Thoreau's act of seeing as her most important method of discovery. She utilizes it to force those transitions from in-time to next-to-time that came to her so easily when she was a child. A game of seeing, much like Thoreau's view from the hill-top, takes place when Dillard is looking through a pair of binoculars at a flock of migrating hawks. "This looking business is risky," she warns us.

I discovered that I was in danger of joining the hawks on a vertical migration of my own. I was used to the binoculars, but not, apparently, to balancing on humped rocks while looking through them. I staggered. Everything advanced and receded by turns; the world was full of unexplained foreshortenings and depths... What prevents the men of Palomar from falling, voiceless and blinded, from their tiny, vaulted chairs? 23-24

Dillard's act of looking has a direct effect on her position on the ground. The binoculars work as imposed frames on the view being looked at, just as Thoreau

narrowed his frame by focusing on the two bodies of water and the land in between them. By looking through a magnifier and with greater focus, Dillard loses her own balance. What she has seen does not seem to follow the physical laws which surround her self, so she loses her sense of orientation and actuality. Measurements become unreliable as markers of location or indeed, of affirming the world's existence. The risks involved in this act of looking are less about the physical dangers of the wilderness and more about the danger of losing one's self in the vast, unknown micro-universe. The risk is that the new perspective will change everything. Seeing, for Dillard, like Thoreau, runs the risk of losing your bearings. Thus seeing becomes the discovery, since it demands the (re) finding of one's place and also emphasizes the uncertainty of one's location in both the first and in the second instance. In everyone of these transitions the narrator makes she loses her balance, unable to toe the line confidently, wavering clearly from one time-frame to the other. Her own place in time is never straightforward.

With the protagonist so firmly placed in the foreground of the action, the uncertainty of the landscape becomes coterminous with the narrator's own uncertain ipseity. The intensity of such temporality is never better exhibited than in Dillard's humorous passage describing the narrator's effort to test the ancient Roman theory that bees can be killed by echoes:

Hello! I tried tentatively: Hello! faltered the cliffs under the forest; and did the root tips quiver in the rock? But that is no way to kill a creature, saying hello. Goodbye! I shouted; Goodbye! came back, and the bee drifted unconcerned among the weeds.

It could be, I reasoned, the ancient Roman naturalists knew this fact that has escaped us because it works only in Latin. My Latin is sketchy. *Habeus corpus!* I cried; *Deus absconditus! Veni!* And the rock cliff batted it back: *Veni!* and the bee droned on. 262

It is not surprising that this passage comes towards the end of Dillard's account, as the narrator is faced only with her echoes, unable to change anything with her words. The impotency of the words lies in stark contrast to the powerfully worded account given throughout the book, where, if anything, the words have

worked as the mediums of seeing and change. But at the end of this passage, the narrator “stood alone,” thinking that she can still “hear the unaccustomed sound of my own voice honed to a quaver by rock, thrown back down my throat and cast dying around me, lorn.” The act’s solitariness is emphasized by the echoes, which work like the mirrors and blood in Dillard’s very first passage. The echoes “thrown back down [her] throat,” returned to her from the rock, forcing the voice back to its origin and thus drawing attention to the “I”’s solitary position. Beyond the act’s failure (that is, to kill the bee) lies also the words’ mortality, as they “[die] around [her].” If anything, it is the rock that has the power to change things, as it hones her voice. The powerless figure that remains is charged with mortality as nature continues its course, unaffected.

Once we recognize the mortality of the narrator we can fully understand Dillard’s immanent existence as uncertain. This is implied at in the Latin the narrator uses to “kill” the bee. *Habeus corpus, deus absconditus* and *Veni* bring images of the corporeal (through the body), of a hidden god, and of the narrator’s firm claim that she has arrived. These three Latin phrases bring the narrator in direct contact with her own temporality as she stands between the obvious and the hidden. Two versions of the world exist and she is stuck between them, uncertain which to fall into this time. Thus the newly jarring non-connections between narratives and histories that don’t belong together, caused by the upheaval of a world in transition are charted in the disconcerting gaps that the narrator feels caught up in. Consequently she turns to the gaps as the place of solace, embracing the cracks and tremors of transition as the sacred part of her narrative.

The gaps are the things. The gaps are the spirit’s one home, the altitudes and latitudes so dazzlingly spare and clean that the spirit can discover itself for the first time like a once-blind man unbound. The gaps are the cliffs [sp] in the rock where you cower to see the back parts of God; they are the fissures between mountains and cells the wind lances through, the icy narrowing fiords splitting the cliffs of mystery. Go up into the gaps. If you can find them; they shift and vanish too. Stalk the gaps. Squeak into a gap in the soil, turn, and unlock - more than a maple - a universe. 268-269

Michel Maffesoli, Bauman tells us, “writes of the world we all inhabit nowadays as a ‘floating territory’ in which ‘fragile individuals’ meet ‘porous reality.’”¹⁰ Sure enough, the constant threat of nothingness, gaps, gapes, losses, and disappearances in *Pilgrim* make for a narrator fully aware of her own momentariness in the shifting world outside and beside her. “In such territory only things or persons may fit as are fluid, ambiguous, in a state of perpetual becoming, in a constant state of self-transgression.” So too does Dillard make *Pilgrim*'s protagonist able to move fluidly from one time to another, never sure of her own location, always ready for renewal, testing her limits against what she sees and what she touches.

Critics haven't really considered Dillard in the same literary fold as the politicized New Journalists or the post-Vietnam writers. Buell, for one, describes her as “studiously apolitical.”¹¹ *Pilgrim* itself is often read as a return to the pioneer story, “which celebrate[s] back-to-the-soil lives and rugged American spaces.”¹² Indeed, in terms of content and overall style it makes sense that Dillard has been mostly grouped with other nature or environmental writers like Wendell Berry, Edward Abbey, or Barry Lopez, in the tradition of Thoreau as a nature writer. Thinking though about *Pilgrim* as a book that is in dialogue with the fracturings of linear temporality found in a book like *Dispatches*, for example, or in response to the influential writings of Mary McCarthy and Susan Sontag on their experiences of Vietnam, means that *Pilgrim* can be seen more clearly as a text that strains against the movement of its contextual history than might have thus far been realized. By thinking about Dillard in such terms her generic connections to Thoreau in actual fact become stronger, since Thoreau is, as we have seen, heavily invested in the reformulations of time and space as ways of resisting the dominant and potentially harmful structures of modern history and territory. However, *Pilgrim* does not end up being a

¹⁰Bauman, 209.

¹¹Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), Kindle edition.

¹²Howarth, William. “Itinerant Passages: Recent American Essays.” *The Sewanee Review*. 96.4. (Autumn 1988), 633-643.

mythopoeic text as *Walden* does. Instead, by appropriating *Walden*'s idiosyncratic scaffolding in opposition to the new, more modern forms of historical progression that dominate, Dillard ends up with a narrative shaped by an individual protagonist who can move through time much like Christianity's Virgin Mother can in Kristeva's description of "monumental time." Very much a text about experience, Dillard is not attempting a new type of historiography or writing a new type of history like we have seen in Thoreau's works, rather *Pilgrim* reads as an affirmation of the planet's existence and of deep time, that is, a time that follows non-human measurements, during a period where the sense of connection across the globe had been blurred. *Pilgrim* works as a pausing, a hiatus, of and from the ever accelerating time-frames of the the 1960s and 1970s. Sitting beside history, like *Walden* does, Dillard delves deep into the layers of natural history, rethinking how planet and time might be restructured in American letters.

Occasionally, though, a brief reference to the outside world changes a passage's direction, abruptly and shockingly. "Today I sit on dry grass at the end of the island by the slower side of the creek," writes the narrator. "I'm drawn to this spot. I come to it as to an oracle; I return to it as a man years later will seek out the battlefield where he lost a leg or an arm" (5). Mentions of war and its trauma are brief in Dillard's account. Here the mention arrives at the end of a section where Dillard has crossed a field full of steers, stepped over and under fences and barbed-wires to reach the small island that lies in the creek. She talks of squirrels, cows, crayfish, water striders, the fallen trunk of a sycamore tree, the movement of the creek's water and her occupation of reading, seeing, and observing in this picturesque, intricate location of wilderness. Without any warning, the battlefield appears, ghosted, on the spot that promises futurity as an oracle, and suddenly, in retrospect, all the fenced off territories Dillard has to cross to get to her island resonate with the suggestion of human conquering. Even the herd of steers we realize were described as "a field of shoes" with "cast-iron shanks and tongues like foam insoles. You can't see through to their brains...they have beef fat behind their eyes, beef stew" (4). Her whole environment is touched by the machine in the garden, as it

comes across in the commodification of farm animals, war, and the barbed separation of territory.¹³ While Thoreau is explicit in the metaphoric occupations of the village which often interrupt or weigh down his thoughts as he tries to “return to [his] senses,” Dillard lets the occupations of the world around her interrupt her text, able to include them. The final mention of the battlefield and the amputee’s return to it, not to find his lost limb, but to revisit the location of loss and the origin of his physical and psychological trauma doesn’t lead to a sense of closure. Instead it opens up trauma, the reader is left with the amputee bared in the text, the image is disconcerting and unexpected.

More significantly perhaps is that this unsettling simile precedes Dillard’s more famous description of the frog being sucked to death by the giant water bug. While out perfecting her frog spying technique, the protagonist notices one particular frog that lies surprisingly still, half in and half out of the water like a perfect amphibian should. The frog, unlike all the others, doesn’t jump as she approaches it. She kneels down, “dumbstruck” that she can be so close to a creature that should have jumped away by now.

He was a very small frog with wide, dull eyes. And just as I looked at him, he slowly crumpled and began to sag. The spirit vanished from his eyes as if snuffed. His skin emptied and dropped; his very skull seemed to collapse and settle like a kicked tent. He was shrinking before my eyes like a deflating football. I watched the taut, glistening skin on his shoulders ruck, and rumple, and fall. Soon, part of his skin, formless as a pricked balloon lay in floating folds like bright scum on top of the water. It was a monstrous and terrifying thing...An oval shadow hung in the water behind the drained frog; then the shadow glided away. The frog skin bag started to sink. 5-6

How can the death of a frog be the monstrous image, one might think, when only seconds earlier, we were given the more human image of an amputee returning to the scene of a battlefield? And this is perhaps the best instance of Dillard’s mediation of her outside world into her microcosm at Tinker Creek. The gross description of the frog’s demise is so intricate with detail that it is impossible to turn our eyes from it, we are as fixated as the protagonist. He

¹³Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

is anthropomorphized, as the spirit in his eyes dies away; the reference to his skull, not an anatomy usually thought about in relation to frogs, collapsing and looking like a fallen tent; the attention to his skin losing its form. All of these elements make the frog visceral to the reader, we can feel his death, his insides being amputated. The unspoken horror of the amputee has been transferred instead to the death of the frog. “That it’s rough out there and chancy is no surprise,” she continues a little further down. “Every live thing is a survivor on a kind of extended emergency bivouac” (6-7). It is as though the bivouac metaphor confirms the suspicion that Dillard is thinking about war; the bivouac being a temporary, unsheltered camp of transition for soldiers on the move. Suddenly every reference to the protagonist’s temporality, her doubleness as both a time-traveler but also solidly mortal against the bees, reveal her found vulnerability as the found vulnerability of the soldiers and victims across the world.

This is not to conclude that *Pilgrim* is actually an anti-Vietnam text that no one has noticed so far (despite how tempting it might be to read the two mountain ranges referenced most often, Tinker and Dead Man, as oblique war allegories). To force a black and white politics into Dillard’s text would be to ignore the complex weaving of multiple threads of texture and her more obvious interests in “vision,” God, or, indeed, nature. But to consider Dillard’s narrative as entirely apolitical would also be to run the risk of considering her writing as indifferent to the context of her outside world. It would be, in fact, similar to accusing Thoreau of ahistoricity, when a quick run through either of their texts shows flickers of the world around them, showing how their microcosms are actually more subtly written out of the “real” structures beyond Tinker Creek or Walden Pond than initially thought. Consider, for example, how Howarth considers *Pilgrim* a return to the pioneer myth, when, two years earlier, John Hellman reads Sontag’s and McCarthy’s reports of Northern Vietnam as the pastoral ideal their own country has lost.¹⁴ “North Vietnam is still pioneer country,” writes McCarthy in her account, “where streams have to be forded,

¹⁴Hellman, John, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986).

the ethnic minorities....recall American Indians.”¹⁵ The “old fashioned school desks,” the “kerosene lamps,” the “basins of water filled from a well,” the “open porch,” “the one or two-seater toilets” all bring back “fragments of my personal history.” Unable to help herself, McCarthy reads a nostalgic American myth in her Vietnamese surroundings, even if she is aware of the overt ease with which Vietnam avails itself to symbolism: “Near the bombed brick house...there was a big bare blasted trunk, maybe an oak, which was putting out a few new leaves; my companions eagerly pointed them out, making sure I did not miss the symbol of resistance and birth.”¹⁶ In McCarthy’s view though, the natural world offers itself less as symbols of resistance, and more as an American pastoral landscape that has been invaded by the machine, where the “rural peace and simplicity” is interrupted by “urban power and sophistication.”¹⁷ As she is shown around the Hung Yen Province she notices that “in rural North Vietnam, under the stimulus of the US bombing,” mountains have been dug into to make factories, industry, hospitals, and schools have been moved out of the urban, “streams have changed their courses” and nomadic tribes with horses “have been settled as farmers and equipped with bicycles, all in the name of “progress.”¹⁸ Worse of all in McCarthy’s description is that it is the US machine that has forced the urban into North Vietnam’s rural, pioneer country. Sontag expresses great delight when she discovers that the Vietnamese recycle the remnants of war equipment. Shot down airplanes, unexploded bombs, flare parachutes are all transformed into surgical instruments, combs, jewelry, alarm bells, and even into “the protective canopy of [an] operating room.”¹⁹ The practicality of the Vietnamese doesn’t just appeal to McCarthy’s and Sontag’s left-leaning politics, but also to their sympathy for back-to-basic husbandmen societies. “Johnson’s politics,” writes Hellman, “ignored the crucial urge that had [once] made Vietnam appear an alluring field for American dreams—the romantic desire of Americans to escape their own machines, their own affluence, their own racism, their own alienation. Now that impulse provided the passion

¹⁵McCarthy, Mary, *Hanoi*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968) 35.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁷Marx, 19.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁹Sontag, Susan. *Styles of Radical Will*. (Toronto: Collins Publishers), 1969

compelling the opposition to the war in Vietnam.”²⁰ Sontag and McCarthy are thus moved by the part of their own romanticized history that they see reflected and under attack in North Vietnam, and they carefully take that image home with them for the rest of America to see, empathize with, and join them in their antiwar movement.

In comparison Dillard’s book reads like a complete turning away from Vietnam-led literature: an almost conscious decision to redraw American pastoral out of the ground as a reaction against the horrific, overbearing, machine her country had come to represent in the seeming pastoral retreats of other countries. By 1970 the My Lai Massacre, where hundreds of Vietnamese civilians, women, and children were raped, killed, and mutilated by American forces, had firmly embedded the image of the USA as a ruthless form of military industrialization expanding into innocent territories into the country’s collective mind and no doubt into the world’s. The rapid fire acceleration of mechanization and industry may have lead to moments perfect for re-romanticized notions of frontierhood and American heroism, as with the moon-landing in 1969, but by the 1970s that same acceleration was leading to destruction of nations, including itself, and threats of nuclear wars that could lead to destruction of the world; a threat that needed to be relaxed with a formal detente. Meanwhile the unpegging of the dollar in 1971 against the value of gold placed the American economy in the hands of the International Monetary Fund. New economic hierarchies were thus coming into being, soon followed by the falling of the country’s president after Watergate. Inside and outside America, the world structure was changing. Dillard was writing as the renewed vision of an American pastoral, albeit located on the other side of the globe, was withdrawing with the armies in Vietnam and soon after the USA’s monetary entrance to the global market. Dillard’s text ends up obliquely charting these rifts and cracks that her country was collecting, its confusion with itself as it changed track, and pieces together a world out of the left over narratives and contradictions of a country in transition. Where the idealized “middle landscape, a rural nation exhibiting a happy balance of art and nature” made a return in the anti-war

²⁰Heller, 88.

movement, it later appears in *Pilgrim* in a distorted and often terrifying adaptation.²¹ Consider, for example, the passage on the Polyphemus moth in the chapter "The Fixed." Treated as a traumatic memory, the narrator remembers going to school as a child where a classmate has brought in the cocoon of the soon-to-be moth. It is ceremoniously placed in the ubiquitous mason jar which seems to have a history of holding insects for the children to observe. The promise of the moth, as seen in a book, is exciting: "it would be beautiful. With a wingspread of up to six inches, the Polyphemus is one of the few huge American silk moths." In the picture it "looked like a mighty wraith, a beating essence of the hardwood forest" (60). The cocoon is passed around the class, throbbing with heat and hatching potential. The moment of transformation from this cocoon, of promised renewal, into one of America's most beautiful creatures, emblematic of the beauty of nature, almost leaps out of Dillard's hand while she is holding it, the pupa heaving to get out. The teacher takes the cocoon from Dillard and firmly places it into the jar. The moth emerges from its cocoon, male, heavy, and breathing. But its transformation cannot be completed as it has to spread its wings out before the chemical that varnishes its wings stiffens them. The narrowness of the jar doesn't let the giant moth open its wings and they harden on his back, rendering him flightless. "He was a monster in a Mason jar," writes Dillard. "Those huge wings stuck on his back in a torture of random pleats and folds... They made a single nightmare clump still wracked with useless frantic convulsions" (61). Worse, continues the narrator still in her memory, as she stands outside of the school during recess she realizes someone must have set the moth free, too late, as she sees it walking down the driveway, dragging its weight on itself, "his wings glued and rucked on his back...like a collapsed tent." Like the amputated soldier and the inner-less frog, the moth has been deformed into nothing but a nightmare version of the pastoral promise it had embodied in its cocoon. It may have its freedom but the trauma is literally carried unnaturally on its back. "The Polyphemus moth never made it to the past," the narrator tells us (59). "[It] is still crawling down the driveway, crawling down the driveway hunched, crawl-

²¹Marx, 226.

ing down the driveway on six furred feet, forever” (61). It is as though the pastoral myth of America, still existing, has been disfigured after being placed for too long in a glass jar for observation. That narrative isn’t going to work here, Dillard seems to be telling the reader, the perfect middle ground can’t exist here. Or, to think like Jameson, these Signs are no longer significant. It is as though she is responding in complete agreement to Leo Marx’s conclusion that “the resolutions of our pastoral fables are unsatisfactory because the old symbol of reconciliation is obsolete.”²² Some other kind of narrative is needed to satisfy the global transition into a new world order.

One of the first things Dillard does is create a time-frame that does not remain static like the middle ground of America’s pastoral. She is not coy about what sort of time she seeks to follow through in *Pilgrim*. In the chapter “Untying the Knot” time is offered as a holistic whole, incomprehensible against the idea of linear time. Finding a snakeskin in the woods which is knotted in the middle, it ends up not being a knot at all, but a mysterious continuous “loop without beginning or end” (73). “Time is the continuous loop” writes Dillard, “the snakeskin with scales endlessly overlapping without beginning or end, or time is an ascending spiral if you will, like a child’s toy Slinky. Of course we have no idea which arc on the loop is our time, let alone where the loop itself is...” (76). This image of time, looping into itself, textured with scales, and moving with the awkward gait of a Slinky, ends up being much more complicated than just a simple circle. It has form but it can be stretched, lengthened, shortened, and its ends are interchangeable as they move down a “flight of stairs.” Nonetheless it moves seamlessly, and the looped image turns into a snake, tail in its mouth, rolling across mountains before turning into a wheel of fire; “this is the arsonist of the sunny woods,” writes Dillard, a clear nod to Thoreau’s accidental burning of a forest in 18???. “catch it if you can,” challenges the narrator as she moves into her chapter on catching the present moment (77). The shape of time Dillard has chosen, in all its transformative power, has no beginning or end even as it moves forward, coming in and out of itself.

²²*Ibid.*, 364.

Meanwhile the retrospective 1970s war narratives were also keeping time differently, resulting in confused, upset linearities. “How long you been in-country?” asks an ex-bureau chief in Michael Herr’s *Dispatches*, “All fuckin’ day,” replies the soldier, “the weight was really on him, and the words came slowly.”²³ Herr’s collection of retrospective essays on his time as a war correspondent in Vietnam for *Esquire* depicts the Vietnam that would become cultified in films like *Full Metal Jacket* and *Apocalypse Now*; a microcosm of murky wilderness, out-of-control violence, and distorted or disillusioned understandings of morality and “Americanness.” The feeling of disconnect between Americans in Vietnam and Americans visiting Vietnam comes through clearly in that short dialogue between the bureaucrat and the infantryman, not just in the incredulity the soldier has that such a question can expect to have a regular answer, but also in how differently time operates between those immersed in the war and those outside it. While newspapers were counting the passing of every year of the war, and the military counted dispatches to Vietnam in months, the experience of the soldier comes down to one, long day. “You couldn’t use standard methods to date the doom,” writes Herr earlier, showing how a completely different time reigned in Vietnam.²⁴ The overlap between a narrative like Herr’s and a narrative like Dillard’s is that both don’t adhere to standard time formations, as though the everyday time of their decade cannot be negotiated in their heavily experiential stories. Both writers disparage, either openly or by refusing to acknowledge it, a state-enforced time-frame that was loaded with a now-breaking American mythology of exceptionalism, progress, and frontier exploration. But where Herr’s characters and narrator are captive to the endless time-frame of Vietnam, the time-frame that feels like one long day that cannot be escaped from within the war’s borders, Dillard’s protagonist is out to *catch* the endless time-frame, actively interacting with this alternative. She takes hold of the new temporality found in Tinker Creek, stalking it and tracing it out, before catching it.

As Herr’s confused time narrative reads like one of his hectic helicopter rides through Vietnam, Dillard’s chapter, “The Present,” ties itself to a sycamore

²³Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*. (New York: Knopf, 1978), 79.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 49.

tree that the narrator constantly returns to. "I want to talk about trees," she tells us. "Trees have a curious relationship to the subject of the present moment... trees live quite convincingly in the same filament of air we inhabit, and, in addition, they extend impressively in both directions, up and down, shearing rock and fanning air, doing their real business just out of reach" (86-87). The trick with trees, discovers Dillard in a very Thoreauvian manner, is that they seem to exist in multiple geographic and temporal locations. The sycamore in *Pilgrim* grows alongside the main roads of Pittsburgh and in the wilderness of Tinker Creek; it was the tree Dillard, as a child, peeled the mottled bark off of till it looked "moist, thin-skinned and yellow" and the tree Xerxes stopped an entire army to look at; it is the tree cicadas, in their thirteen-year life cycle, are scrabbling under until they emerge for a matter of months; and the tree which sits atop an awesome movement of ground water seeping slowly through the earth. The narrator sits under this sycamore in order to connect herself to the galactic present moment as she observes, in her mind's eye, the exploding surface of the sun next to the "eerie scent of the chinook" wind in the northland. As galaxy, globe, and Tinker Creek collapse into the sycamore tree so does the entirety of Dillard's narrative thus far. "The tomcat that used to wake me is dead;" she says.

[H]e was long since grist for an earthworm's casting, and is now the clear sap of a Pittsburgh sycamore...The giant water bug I saw is dead, long dead, and its moist gut and rigid casing are both, like the empty skin of the frog it sucked, dissolved, spread, still spreading right now, in the steer's capillaries, in the windblown smatter of clouds overhead, in the Sargasso sea. The mocking bird that dropped furred from a roof...98

Sharks she saw in Florida continue to move in order not to die, and the horrific, deformed, Polyphemus moth is still crawling down the driveway, while the snake whose skin she found moves through the nearby quarry. Everything exists together, even in its death and in its movement, as the sycamore oversees history and multiple measurements of time. Even the unspeakable war flickers around the sycamore when Xerxes, besotted with the colors of the sycamore, "that fusillade [that] halts any army in its tracks," orders the goldsmith travelling with the army to make him a gold medal with the tree wrought upon it.

“But it goes without saying, doesn’t it, Xerxes,” asks the narrator, “that no gold medal worn around your neck will bring back the glad hour, keep those lights kindled so long as you live, forever present?” Xerxes’ medal is worthless, the narrator is suggesting, as though alluding to the multitude of medals bestowed on the returning soldiers of her era. It means nothing of the time which it tries to represent. It is instead a memento mori, a reminder that death is imminent in the small time-scale that humans works in. A perhaps more terrifying image though appears after the narrator goes through her listing of dead animals and insects. “... but this is no time to count my dead.” She writes. “That is nightwork. The dead are staring, underground, their sleeping heels in the air” (98). This shocking image directly contradicts the beauty or organic nature of death that she has just traced out. The dead are in the shapes of humans, eyes open, legs stuck in awkward rigor mortis, momentarily uncountable. There is a deep trauma here, placed firmly in the sycamore’s soil, anachronistic and shocking, against the natural image of the creek. But it too is bundled into the present moment that the narrator forms around herself, as she holds the contrary narratives together by sitting under the sycamore.

By slowing down time in one particular place, Dillard’s full immersion of the narrator in that temporal deceleration also marks *Pilgrim* as a book that stands for the constraint of mobility as a position of spiritual or psychological liberation; a concept that no doubt flew in the face of the then evolving power-hierarchies of our time where, as Bauman puts it, “it is the most elusive, those free to move without notice, who rule.” At the same time, being in one place and knowing it well shows a marked difference to how the war-orientated nonfiction essays related their narrators to their location. In the opening to *Dispatches*, Herr describes looking at a map of Vietnam on his apartment wall. “The map was a marvel,” he writes, “especially as it wasn’t real anymore.”²⁵ While the map itself was an old one, made in Paris, even recent maps from 1964 “didn’t reveal much anymore; reading them was like trying to read the faces of the Vietnamese, and that was like trying to read the wind. We knew that the uses of most information were flexible, different pieces of ground told different

²⁵ *Dispatches*.

stories to different people. We also know that for years now there had been no country here but the war.” The land Herr’s narrator sits on has lost its history as a nation, it is connected only through the violent and disjointed run of war. Even against the USA it stands as a no-place. “Vietnam would always be a place with no real points of reference,” writes Philip Beidler, “then or now. As once in experiential fact, so now in memory as well.”²⁶ Dillard’s Tinker Creek however is written into memory, the experience of the narrator being present in it makes it firmly exist. The narrator holds strong to her location on the globe: “You take huge steps, trying to feel the planet’s roundedness arc between your feet,” she says, measuring the earth in her tread. Herr, upon seeing the slaughtering of Vietnamese by soldiers of the American military, soldiers who were protecting him writes “I stood as close to them as I could without actually being one of them, and then I stood as far back as I could without leaving the planet.” And here lies the fundamental difference between these two creative nonfiction narratives that came out within years of each other, both heavily invested in the psychological experience of their main characters and in trying to make sense of the left over trauma and the current transition; Dillard goes to planet, to earth, to escape standard time and set up a temporal alternative. Herr feels that he must be expelled from the entirety of the planet to escape the horrors he is witnessing.

Instead of escaping horrors, Dillard goes looking for them. Out of the romanticized narratives of nature, the protagonist turns her slowed down gaze at nature and its excesses in her chapter “Fecundity” to find a nightmare of overbreeding, breakages, parasites, and death coming out of the earth she is touching. She traces out the abundant networks of life teeming out of her landscape. “I wakened myself with my own shouting,” begins the chapter. “It must have been that terrible yellow plant I saw pushing through the flood-damp soil...the plant as fleshy and featureless as a slug, that erupted through the floor of my brain as I slept, and burgeoned into the dream of fecundity that woke me up” (159). Having started with that terror, the narrator continues firmly on, determined to show the reader that her previous view “is too optimistic.”

²⁶Beidler, Philip. *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam*. (Athens: University Georgia Press, 1982), 16.

Her perspective has been too narrow, she explains. "It is not one pine I see, but a thousand. I myself am not one, but legion. And we are all going to die." Her images of a "mantis's abdomen dribbling out eggs in wet bubbles like tapioca pudding glued to a thorn" or the "film of a termite queen as big as my face, dead white and featureless, glistening with slime, throbbing and pulsing out rivers of globular eggs." A normally romantic image of salmon swimming up stream is turned into "the rivers run[ning] red and lumpy with salmon." Suddenly the way everything works together in intricate detail is viewed as a packing together of billions of palpitating living things, from tiny atoms through to barnacles, to eggs, to humans running wild across the planet, breeding and eating. Even human emotions are excessive, "patently painful and harmful" she writes. And when she turns back to the library she is overwhelmed by the amount of information, of human words and emotions. By the end of the chapter she realizes what her mistake has been; it was to freeze-frame the world in one second of its production. "When I added the dimension of time to the landscape of the world," she writes, "I saw how freedom grew the beauties and horrors from the same live branch." Once again the narrator interrupts a notion of horror and of trauma and brings it back into her shape of time. She can stop time and take things apart but then also put them back into time, as she had been doing with her own figure. Herr, meanwhile, has become trapped in the temporal shape of the Vietnam war, and the oppression of Vietnam's time is so strong he feels that he literally cannot leave it without falling off the planet. In this way it is as though Dillard can put the world back together again, complete with gaps and misconnections. "If one lives only in the present," Bauman quotes Juan Goytisolo, "one risks disappearing together with the present."²⁷

"I drive myself deeper and deeper into exile from my own kind" the narrator tells us as she reads books on science and nature in the library (179). The exile Dillard experiences is the writer's exile, as understood by Bauman. It sits both outside and inside the home it observes and writes about. Most importantly, the writer's exile "is the refusal to be integrated—the determination to stand

²⁷Bauman, 205.

out from the physical space, to conjure up a place of one's own, different from the place in which those around are settled, a place unlike the place left behind, and unlike the place of arrival."²⁸ Both for Thoreau and Dillard, the place they choose to exile themselves to is driven deep instead of far, on a vertical axis instead of horizontal. From the sidelines of another time they observe their worlds shifting to modernity and postmodernity respectively. As such they create distinctive temporal shapes in response to these two different moments of transition. Writing about fiction writers in her book of essays *Living By Fiction* Dillard considers with awe how Robert Coover and Donald Barthelme rearrange narrative and time in their short stories, shedding light on her own careful shaping of time in response to the history and world she writes from. "There is no cause and effect," she writes, "no law of noncontradiction."²⁹ The narrative collage that they create remakes space and time in a way that seems completely counterintuitive to reality. "Events occur without discernible meaning; 'mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,' " she writes as though in direct conversation with Fredric Jameson's article, "Periodizing the 60s." "What if the world's history, and the events of our own lives in it, were as jerked, arbitrary, and fundamentally incoherent as is the sequence of episodes in some contemporary fiction? If it, these writers may say; they are."

²⁸Bauman, 208.

²⁹Dillard, Annie. *Living By Fiction*. (New York: Harper, 1982), 23-25.

As soon as we reach sheets of past it is as if we were carried away by the undulations of a great wave, time gets out of joint, and we enter temporality as a state of permanent crisis.

– Gilles Deleuze

9

Susan Howe's Interruption of History

Susan Howe's poem, *Thorow* (1991), is arguably the most extraordinary of recent works that respond to and adapt Thoreau's method of resistance and challenge in the shape of alternative time-constructs.¹ Nineteen pages long, *Thorow* encapsulates both the multiple layering of histories as found in the mythological shaping of *Walden* and the violent disruption of recorded history with unrecorded history as found in the historiographical shaping of "Ktaadn" or *A Week*. In so doing, *Thorow* exemplifies Howe's political and literary agenda of interrupting national chronology and canonical chronology through the adamant articulation of that which has been left inarticulate. In agreement with Dimock's claim that literature's temporal shape can challenge standard chronographies, in particular those chronographies that are dictated by territorial regimes or institutions of canonization, Howe writes that "if history is a record of survivors, Poetry shelters other voices."² For Howe, poetry becomes the alternative place where unestablished historiography can be written,

¹*Thorow* has garnered the interest of many critics and resulted in a myriad of useful and insightful readings. Amongst these are: Perelman, Bob, *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History*. (Princeton: Princeton UP), 1996; Lazer, Hank, *Opposing Poetries: Readings*. (Evanston: Northwestern UP), 1996; Naylor, Paul *Poetic Investigations: Singing the Holes in History*. (Evanston: Northwestern UP), 1999.

²Howe, Susan. *The Birthmark: unsettling the wilderness in American literary history*. (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1993), 57.

often challenging oppressive, and usually masculine, orderings of history. As Pete Nicholls puts it, "Howe's version of American history thus issues a challenge to the discipline, enjoining an attention not only to these myriad 'other voices,' but also to the hegemonic forms of language in which, customarily, we invite them to speak."³ By understanding poetry in conjunction with history and culture ("it would be hard to think of poetry apart from history," and "I don't think you can divorce poetry from history and culture"), Howe locates poetry as the place where the order of a standardized history can be interrupted. Moreover, Howe's added concerns with the hegemonic *language* of history mean that her disruption of standard history occurs not only in the shape of her poem, an undermining of conventional narrative structures, but also with a keen eye to the disruption of language and words as a further challenge to standard historical order. Thoreau thus becomes an important precursor for her writing, as she visualizes him as her "scout" showing her a way "through" history. Thoreau has taken up this role once before for Howe, in *My Emily Dickinson*. In her brief introduction to the book Howe describes Thoreau's own introduction to *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* where he looks at the Concord river and finally resolves "to launch a boat from shore and let the river carry him." Keeping Thoreau's river firmly in mind, Howe tells us that "Emily Dickinson is my emblematic Concord River. / I am heading toward certain discoveries."⁴ Thus Thoreau is not the river, but the traveler who has preceded her. Consequently, Howe receives Thoreau in his travel writer guise. While Dickinson may be a wilderness to explore, Thoreau represents the explorer; someone who has already forged a path through the wilderness. Thus she adapts his method of exploration: one that involves the construction of alternative time-frames.

Howe's issue with the standardization of history and the literary canon is articulated most clearly in her two prose books, published just before and just after her book of poems *Singularities*, wherein *Thorow* is included. *My Emily Dickinson* (1985) and *The Birth-mark* (1993), the latter a collection of essays,

³Nicholls, Peter. "Unsettling the Wilderness: Susan Howe and American History," *Contemporary Literature*. 37.4 (Winter 1996), 586-601.

⁴Howe, Susan, *My Emily Dickinson*. (New York: New Directions, 1985), 9.

the former a long essay on Emily Dickinson, explicitly call for a revision of American history, specifically in American literature. *My Emily Dickinson* locates the nineteenth-century poet within a complex weave of American and British literature (and history), effectively bringing Dickinson's poetry out of the claustrophobic agoraphobia of Dickinson's infamous biography, out of New Critical readings which insist on isolating the poems from their cultural context, and away from an oppressive editorial and publishing process begun by Thomas HJohnson and R.W. Franklin. Nicholls writes that for Howe, "the scholarly exercise of choice and decision is, in her view, always complicit with a kind of violence, a political denial of those "memories in disguise" which the unimpeachable authority of print represses."⁵ The power of the editor and of the printing press become Howe's most significant targets in her books, where, much like Thoreau draws out Hannah Dustan's silent voice in *A Week* to uncover a neglected part of historiography, she goes to great lengths to draw out the oppressed silences of voices like Dickinson and Mary Rowlandson. As such, her books read as a rescuing of voices from the conservative and authoritarian masculine voices that have been editing and writing these works into limiting, insular chronologies, all the way from Cotton Mather to Franklin. As Fiona Green explains, "Howe is always alert to the ways in which messages from the past have been intercepted. Attending particularly to the mechanics of textual transmission, Howe scrutinizes those editorial and institutional frameworks that come between her and the vestigial presences she wants to recover."⁶ In *The Birth-mark*, aptly named after Hawthorne's story about a beautiful woman with a birthmark which her husband wishes to remove, seeing it as an imperfection, Howe clearly expresses her distrust with the editorial process:

The issue of editorial control is directly connected to the attempted erasure of antinomianism in our culture...For me, the manuscripts of Emily Dickinson represent a contradiction to canonical social power, whose predominant purpose seems to have been to render

⁵Nicholls, 591.

⁶Green, Fiona. Plainly on the Other Side: Susan Howes Recovery. *Contemporary Literature* 42.1: (2001) 78-101

isolate voices devoted to writing as a physical event of immediate revelation.⁷

Howe seeks to recover these works and by thus doing, issues a challenge to the structure of the American literary canon. Moreover, by relocating Dickinson and Rowlandson in a rich and deep history of literary traditions and national events, Howe does more than just rewrite them into America's history and canon but challenges the established disciplinary forms (forms constructed by critics like Hugh Kenner, F.O. Matthiessen, and Perry Miller), both by choosing to include events and texts normally overlooked by the Academy, and by writing in a distinctly unconventional and anti-scholarly style.

It is the method of Howe's writing and her narrative structure which most strongly underscores her openly radical and anti-authoritarian purpose. Identifying herself as part of America's antinomian tradition (a tradition, in other words, which expresses enthusiasm and revelation) and by rejecting "canonical social powers," Howe pushes for a literature that is not isolated and which revels in the implosion of language and history.

This [antinomian] tradition that I hope I am part of has involved a breaking of boundaries of all sorts. It involves a fracturing of discourse, a stammering even. Interruption and hesitation used as a force. A recognition that there is an other voice, an attempt to hear and speak it. It's this brokenness that interests me.⁸

Where *My Emily Dickinson* and *The Birth-Mark* are explicit in their desire to fracture discourse, and while Howe's essays themselves are challenges to the conventions she abides, it is in her poetry that we truly witness these broken boundaries, stammers, interruptions and hesitation "used as force" to collapse perceptions, historical accounts, and "hegemonic forms of language." Moreover, given Howe's interest in history and using literature to challenge institutional histories, I argue that in *Thorow* Howe adapts and uses Thoreau's structural inclusion of violent histories in order to disrupt dominant time-frames, envisioning a temporal shape not unlike the ones we have seen in *Walden* and *A*

⁷ *Birth-Mark*, 1.

⁸ Howe, Susan. "Encloser." *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, ed., Charles Bernstein, (New York: Roof Book, 1990), 192.

Week. As such, Howe picks up on a Thoreauvian literary genealogy that has so far gone neglected, one which encourages literature to embrace new temporal structures as forms of challenges to the norm. Just like Thoreau is interested in the brokenness of Dustan's voice or Rowlandson's walk, which enter his texts unspoken and implicit, Howe looks for the places in the history of Lake George where the broken acts have been left unnoticed, and pulls them up into the history prescribed by institutions and the sovereign nation, so that her poem presents a history layered with "broken boundaries, stammers, interruptions, and hesitations." The result culminates in an explosion of words scattered across two pages near the end of *Thorow*: a visualization of a layered and disrupted history.

Thorow relies on certain basic texts, what Ming-Qian Ma calls the "source texts," which are the writings of Thoreau and the journals of William Johnson who led the British to victory in the war at Lake George in 1755.⁹ These source texts, though, are not explicit in Howe's poem. Rather, the emphasis is on the location of the poet: Lake George in the Adirondack mountains where she has ostensibly gone to teach a poetry workshop. Lake George, originally named Andia-ta-roc-te, "was in the 1750s, the scene of some of the fiercest battles of the French and Indian Wars," Marjorie Perloff explains. Defeating the French in 1755, the English renamed the lake, changing its name from the French Lac du St. Sacrement to Lake George. Over a two-year long battle, the French and English finally declared a truce, "only to be broken by the raids of restive Indian tribes who in turn attacked and massacred the French and the English, and forced a massive retreat."¹⁰ Lake George, which on a map looks like a long tear in the midst of New England, thus already holds three competing voices in its name alone: French, English, and Native American. There are already, then, three varying historiographies of the lake, as each name would suggest, which are fully realized in the battles and conflict between the three

⁹Ma, Ming-Qian. "Articulating the Inarticulate: Singularities and the Counter-Method in Susan Howe." *Contemporary Literature* 36.3 (1995), 466-489. Jenny L. White makes the argument that Cooper's books are the main source text in "The Landscapes of Susan Howe's 'Thorow,'" *Contemporary Literature* 47.2 (2006), 236-260.

¹⁰Perloff, Marjorie. *21st-Century Modernism: The "New Poetics."* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 172.

peoples struggling to conquer the lake for themselves. Drawing on the layers of historical settlement of Lake George, including her own time there in 1987, and its fictionalized characterization in Cooper's novel *Last of the Mohicans*, Howe brings all the threads of the lake's history together and then proceeds to see how they layer up together when so many of the histories are fraught with the violent disruption of battles and broken territories. Thus, the violence of the mid-eighteenth century leaves the "traces of blood" that Howe is so intent on preserving in her poetry; what she otherwise describes as "traces of *real* events."¹¹ By including these events, her literature forms a version of time that directly challenges the way time has been presented by institutions and editors before her.

Howe's real brilliance lies in *how* she chooses to encapsulate these traces of violence or history in her poem. By using both an unusual structure (as seen above) and arcane words while also disrupting language with unusual spellings, Howe considers the construction of a new time frame with multiple, disrupted histories through the very visual structure of her poem and through the language she chooses to express it. In effect, Howe integrates the disruptions of violent histories into her poem like Thoreau does in his excursion narratives, and then lingers in those disruptions, plumbing their depths, layering each disrupted history, literally, one over the other, so that language enacts depth. Consider, for example, the title of the poem, *Thorow*. With this one word Howe explores a myriad of meanings and recording, layering Thoreau himself with multiple lines of history. She shows us in a brief quoted passage early on, that Thoreau changed his name from David Henry to Henry David, much to the chagrin of his fellow Concordians, who took his name's revision as a show of arrogance. Other revisions of his name include Hawthorne's letters to him, which were initially mistakenly addressed to "Mr. Thorow," and Daniel Ricketson who playfully replies to Thoreau that he should visit soon, "leave the land of *Thor*, and *row* along our shore." Meanwhile, Howe plays her own games with Thoreau's name. His French ancestry resonates with the battle at Lake George and the anglicization of names. And she finds the word *Thorow*

¹¹ *Singularities*, 44 and *Bernstein*, 194.

in Sir Humphrey Gilbert's account, *A New Passage to Cataia*, where he writes "To prove that the Indians aforementioned came not by the Northeast, and that there is no thorow passage navigable that way" ("Thorow," 41). The identity of Thoreau, how he has been written into history, usually ignores these versions of his name, but Howe goes out of her way to reveal them, placing emphasis on the way names can be misconstrued, spelled wrong, or twisted to mean something else, deliberately bringing his name in line with Thor, or suggesting it as a substitute for the word "through." In this sense she is following on from a language game Thoreau himself enjoyed as he considered all the different names of the locations he visited, not least in his opening paragraph to *A Week*, which considers the old name for the Concord River, Musketaquid, meaning Grass-Ground River, and brings it in line with the Nile and the Euphrates. Thoreau goes on to consider if the river's new name will only stick when "men lead peaceable lives on its banks," a subtle criticism of colonial history. The violence of name changes, for one, as in the historical event at Lake George, resonates both in Thoreau's life and in his work. "Ktaadn" too is filled with pedantic listings of names, especially mountains and rivers, often painstakingly given in their native forms. Howe quotes Daniel Ricketson's letter to Thoreau again: "—am glad to see that you have studied out the history of the ponds, got the Indian names straightened—which means made more crooked—&c.,&c." ("Thorow," 42). Even these "Indian names" have undergone alterations from Thoreau's time to Howe's, though, as 'Ktaadn" becomes "Katahdin" and "Andirondac" becomes "Andirondack." All of Howe's attention to words reveals their long lines of history and of their own historiographies, most of which have been neglected. The words themselves acquire historical depth, so that when they are positioned together on the pages of her poem they form texts deep in multiple threads of history, all threading out of the words themselves. The result is a poem that places multiple chronographies in one place, centered around Lake George, through each and every word. The poem thus enacts the plumbing of history through the simple enunciation of each word. In this way, Howe's temporal construction, contained by Lake George, is redolent of *Walden's* construction which brings multiple histories in one place and lingers

over them. Only instead of images or references, Howe relies primarily on words to evoke these unarticulated histories.

Thoreau's violent disruptions in his excursion narratives, often embodied as the stalling of thought, language, or the introduction of silence, is precisely that moment Howe identifies as a stammering and hesitation: where words are made crooked or interrupted by other words, so that the chronographies don't overlap one another, but instead *interrupt* one another. Keeping Thoreau's excursion narratives at the forefront of our minds, and the way they are deeply effected by the violent irruptions in their historiographies, we can see how, visually at least, *Thorow* falls in step with them, giving voice to the trauma through broken borders and cut off words, while simultaneously slipping even deeper into the narrative interruption. After all, *Thorow* performs the process of turning "narrative in non-narrative" (a phrase which titles the second section of the prose which opens the poem), ending "with spatial dislocation and language that has become no more than inarticulate lisp."¹² Howe's literary shape contains an even more radical time-construct than Thoreau's, where the poem lingers in the disruptions themselves. To paraphrase Buell again, Howe riots in the hallucination of the interrupted terrain. The speaker of her poem, unlike Thoreau's excursion protagonist who loses agency when faced with violent histories, has the world-building prowess of *Walden's* protagonist, carefully constructing and drawing up all the interrupted terrains against one another, to create an exploding world, coming out of Lake George. Howe essentially *uses* the disrupting histories to create a temporal construct constantly at odds with itself, in direct conflict with the muted, tame historiographies presented of Lake George thus far.¹³ "In the seventeenth-century," writes Howe in "Thorow," "European adventurer-traders burst through the forest to discover this particular long clear body of fresh water. They brought our story to it.

¹²Marjorie Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism: The "New Poetics."* Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. 172.

¹³An interesting point of comparison here are the paintings of Lake George produced in the 1860s by second-generation Hudson River School artists, Martin Johnson Heade and John Frederick Kensett. Their depictions of the lake are peaceful, sublime portrayals of the water, illuminated by a transcendental glowing light. Both the elements of nature or humans are placed in harmony with the lake's surroundings, as though its vicious history a hundred years earlier, never happened. Considering Howe's visual bent, her version of Lake George comes in direct conflict with these untroubled renderings.

Pathfinding believers in God and grammar spelled the lake into *place*. They have renamed it several times since. In paternal colonial systems a positivist efficiency appropriates primal indeterminacy.” The layering of proper names onto the lake in a language so rigid it is *believed in* results in the appropriation of “primal indeterminacy” to a rigid set of rules and beliefs. Just like standard time is set in its choice of units and method of measurement, so is this imposed “story” that colonials spelled into Lake George. *Thorow* goes out of its way to bring back a primal indeterminacy to the lake, recovering its stories through the explosive visualization and articulation of its histories.

It is not just Thoreau’s role as scout, though, and not just his temporal structures, that lend themselves to language slippage, which appeal to Howe. In an interview with Edward Foster, Howe says that Richard Slotkin’s *Regeneration Through Violence* is “a crucial book for anyone interested in American literature”.¹⁴ She expresses admiration for Slotkin’s rewriting of Native American culture into the American literary canon and for his reading of captivity and frontier literature. In his book, Slotkin also presents a keenly different reading of Thoreau’s *Walden*, relevant to Howe’s own structural methods:

Thoreau’s American epic is the epic of the captive, in which the adventuring impulse turns inward and becomes a moral and psychological struggle against the forces that imprison the body and against the torpor of the mind and spirit that bind the soul to Satan or (to use a term more appropriate to Thoreau) to death and “deadness.”¹⁵

By reading transcendentalism as part of the captivity narrative tradition, Slotkin accentuates a violent kind of Thoreau, one more usually found in “Slavery in Massachusetts.” And to read transcendentalism as “a moral and psychological struggle” is to suggest that Thoreau’s entire oeuvre is involved in disruption, albeit a spiritual kind of disruption. Thus, Thoreau fits into the tradition that Howe affiliates herself with: an antinomian tradition most clearly expressed in captivity narratives and in the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

Howe’s location in *Thorow* lies on the periphery of Thoreau’s own explorations. He never went to the Adirondack mountains, mentioning them at the

¹⁴*Birth-mark*, 167

¹⁵reference 538

end of “Ktaadn” as part of New York’s undiscovered wilderness. Thus, Howe takes on the mantle of Thoreau’s exploration in an area he had yet to go but which appears on the edges of his travels and books.¹⁶ *Thorow* opens with a specific space-time location, much like “Ktaadn.” We are informed that Howe spent the winter and spring of 1987 in a cabin at the edge of Lake George to teach a poetry workshop. Immediately then, we are thrown into a Thoreauvian trick: that the speaker of the poem is a writer and has the same name as the poet. The speaker then goes on to provide markers to help us locate her and orient ourselves, giving us the name of the lake and the road on which her cabin is. Such map-like markers reminds us of Thoreau’s own markers in an essay like “Ktaadn”; locating civilization and nature in harmonious synchronies. But Howe’s markers are specific to her time, and nature has been overrun by globalization and a gridlock of chains:

Scores of two-star motels have been arbitrarily scrambled between gas-stations and gift shops selling Indian trinkets, china jugs shaped like breasts with nipples for spouts, American flags in all shapes and sizes, and pornographic bumper-stickers. There are two Laundromats, the inevitable McDonald’s, a Howard Johnson, assorted discount leather outlets, video arcades, a miniature golf course, two run-down amusement parks, a fake fort where a real one once stood, a Dairy-Mart, a Donut-land, and a four-star Ramada Inn built over an ancient Indian burial ground. Everything graft, everything grafted. And what is left when spirits have fled from holy places?
40

The difference of symbols in Howe’s list to Thoreau’s is not just indicative of the chronological context in which their two experiences are set. While the gas-stations bring to mind the lumber industry Thoreau thought of throughout “Ktaadn,” in terms of fuel and necessity, the production of fuel and energy is no longer accessible to an American in nature, so it is now manifested in gas stations, which, in turn, are connected to an oil industry spread across the other side of the world. Thoreau’s log cabins have been replaced by two-star motels, as though places to sleep are now understood only in terms of ratings then out

¹⁶White argues that precisely because Thoreau never got there, he is pushed out of the poem and the poem becomes more clearly about Cooper, who had set his stories at Lake George. That reading insists, as many readings of Howe do, on focusing on Howe’s landscapes and locations, rather than considering what her historical formulations might be.

of what they are built or who they house, while the traces of Native Americans are found in gift-shops, made out of Eastern materials in peculiar shapes that seem to have little to do with their culture. The Native American is completely commodified and hidden, reinforced by the ancient burial ground, redolent of the forgotten grave in *A Week*, which has been covered by food-chains that serve processed food. The alienation lies heavy in Howe's description of the town, where nature, myth, and history have been completely overrun by market and trade in ways that Thoreau could not have even imagined. There is no harmony of the lake turning into some kind of port, a place of communication and trade, while still maintaining its natural beauty, which Thoreau envisaged. There is no respect for nature or human skill portrayed in Howe's bleak description. By thinking of how everything is grafted she also points to Thoreau's problem with grafted trees in "Wild Apples," as though the wild has not been allowed to flourish on its own, but forced into the ugly shape through incessant grafting. The holy land, echoing the French's name for the lake, Sacramento, has been banished. The vision of whole, transcendental, ancient nature is nowhere to be seen.

The markers that Howe tries to use fail to work as locaters, only dislocating her from her idea of what visiting Lake George might be. Thoreau's Adirondack mountains are littered and the hope that the town might have been able to sit next to nature in some kind of idealized middle ground is lost. Howe decides to remain outside of the town instead, turning hopefully to find grounding in nature, in "the weather's fluctuation" and "in the rise and fall of light and snow." These images, of seasonality and light shifting, move toward a pastoral ideal. But just as her language begins to lull us with its repetition and pacing, as though she is about to relate a fairy tale made out of nature, the thought is stopped, held in mid-air and discontinued.

After I learned to keep out of town, and after the first panic of
dislocation had subsided, I moved into the weather's fluctuation.
Let myself drift in the rise and fall of light and snow, re-reading
re-tracing once-upon

Howe's abrupt interruption of her drifting just after the words "once-upon" puts an immediate halt to the hope that the poem might retreat to a pastoral

narrative. The interruption of the sentence, left hanging in the air as the section is left unfinished, is redolent of the sentence in *A Week* which similarly ends a section on the word “–once–” as it lists the preceding names of the narrator’s location, without ending. This is the first interruption in “*Thorow*,” and, as shall be seen, the mildest, anticipating the myriad of interruptions that will follow.

In the next section, “Narrative in Non-Narrative,” Howe begins anew, standing “on the shores of a history of the world” looking at Lake George, “a blade of ice to write across not knowing what She.... Yes, she, the Strange, excluded from formalism.” Howe openly rejects the formal writing of a lake into a set historiography. She also rejects straight narrative as a way of expressing the female voice. Thus Howe writes herself into the challenge of using her own voice to excavate Lake George, by going “down to unknown regions of indifferentiation;” in other words, the inarticulate places that have been made by those which are articulated, the silences and gaps. As explored in the previous chapters, the female’s inhabitation of time, according to Kristeva, is often in conflict with the teleological, linear time that measures out history: “time as departure, progression, and arrival.”¹⁷ The same time, in fact, that Howe portrays the European adventurer-traders as enforcing on the lake, visualized as “pathfinding believers.” The image of pathfinding suggests a forced linearity, and their role, “bursting” onto the lake, as discoverers, enforces concepts of departures and arrivals. The speaker of *Thorow* does not arrive or depart. Rather she deftly escapes the clutches of “paternal colonial systems” by letting the Adirondacks occupy *her*: “The Adirondacks *occupied* me.” Thus the speaker takes this extraordinary planetary time into herself, rather than traversing the mountains as a traveler creating pathways and histories. The existence of female time, “which conforms to that of nature,” argues Kristeva, next to the “time of history” that runs linearly, by “masculine” values, results in a “rupture, an expectation or an anguish which other temporalities work to conceal.” The narrator’s merging with the Adirondacks, the invocation of the mountains into the narrator, in full knowledge of the historiographies

¹⁷Kristeva, 17.

that “spell” the lake into place, indicates the narrator’s conscious, deliberate decision to enforce the rupture between the two temporalities. Unlike the protagonist of “Ktaadn” who is suddenly and awfully possessed by the Titan of the Burnt Lands, losing connection to himself and the careful time-structures he had been building up to that moment, *Thorow*’s protagonist goes looking for this Titan, and remains unperturbed by it. As such, Howe’s protagonist emerges in the beginning of the poem as a forceful female agent, able to access temporalities Thoreau’s male narrators cannot while also able to be part of the standardized history. In this powerful position, the narrator can take on the “paternal colonial systems.”

Tellingly, the speaker’s first action is the destruction of constructed boundaries: “Fence blown down in a winter storm / darkened by outstripped possession / Field stretching out of the world” (44). The previous fluctuations in weather, that had been calming and repetitive, about to evoke a mythological pastoral, emerge here as a forceful winter storm that removes set border lines. The collapsed fence, a marker of civilization’s particular type of constructions, often shutting cultures and territories in and out from each other, and a marker that is always symbolic of land possession, indicates a collapse of the territorial boundaries. “Possession,” meanwhile, sits in dual meaning, as now it could indicate the winter storm re-possessing the landscape, or the fence’s possession, that of the land it borders, being stripped away from it. Either way, in the blink of an eye, the field does not just stretch out into the world, but out *of* the world, so that even the global boundaries of the planet are surpassed by the knocking down of a fence. Already the narrator has begun to construct a new world, only unlike the calm, deliberate, decelerated artist of Kouroo, she begins with disruptions.

Thus Howe reformulates our understanding of the natural world she is in; in her dislocation she will re-map the Adirondack mountains in new language and in new space. The new language, or rather the new words, that Howe uses are key to the reformulation of place and history as she recasts them, spreading out their meanings beyond their previously limited boundaries through the act

of cryptography. “Must see and not see / Must not see nothing” the narrator informs us before changing the way we see words: “Dear Seem dear cast out / Sun shall go down and set / Distant monarchs of Europe / European grid on the Forest / so many gether together / were invisible alway Love.” The juxtaposition of “Dear” and “Seem” force the eye to also see “Deer” and “Seam,” as though the words are ghosting each other, providing mutations of each other through their similar sounds and different spellings.¹⁸ The snide joke is that the words aren’t what they seem. “e”s and “a”s are easily swapped to make similar sounds, only to completely change meanings. Placed together in this way the words become points of tension, not even sure what they should be meaning. Having thus halted our reading with this visual and oral contradiction, Howe then traces out the line of European colonialism to the “distant monarchs” on another continent who are placing grids on New England, divvying up the forests of Lake George into lines and borders. But having already suggested a slipping of meanings in the careful positioning of “dear” and “seem,” she goes on to switch the “e” and the “a” in “gather” and “together,” creating “gether together”: dialect versions of words that mean not a gathering of people, but a group of people gathering something in unity. This orthographical slippage means that the words themselves seep out of their intended meanings and of the way they are formally understood. Words can no longer be trusted as fixed points on a page. Howe thus undermines the regularized “units” of poetry: that is, the words that make it up. The gridded forests will most likely falter against this erosion of lexical certainty. These spelling deviations, Perloff explains, “emphasize the palimpsestic nature of Howe’s poem, its verbal and visual strata that the “scout” must uncover.”¹⁹ Not just verbal and visual though, the words, often old or obsolete spellings of words familiar to us (“alway” for “always”), provide depth, the traces of their own morphological history and evolution. Language itself becomes vulnerable to the passing of time. The narrator brings up language’s past into the present, causing a juxtaposition of a word from the past with a word from the present so that two chronological moments, otherwise separated by a number of years, are yoked

¹⁸Like Gertrude Stein in “Tender Buttons”: “Mean. Potato. Leaves.”

¹⁹Perloff, 170.

together through the poem's very language. Standard time is flouted by the words themselves.

At the same time, while "Dear Seem" is visual and thus aurally sly, "gether together" almost forces a stutter when read out loud. The words trip us up to make us momentarily inarticulate. Their spelling alterations, in fact, begin to undermine the usual set way of reading and of understanding, enforcing a slowing down of reading, a re-evaluation, a re-consideration of every word that we are about to read. Their missing, or misplaced letters constantly bring the reader up short, enforcing a decelerated and an "off beat" reading. A decelerated reading is to engage in a lingering, arrested moment, as articulated by Stockton. Forcing this slowed down reading, Howe can enact Dimock's theory of deep time with a "double [or triple? quadruple?] threading" which "thickens time, lengthens it, shadowing in its midst the abiding traces of the planet's multitudinous life" through the words themselves.²⁰ Thus the pace of the poem itself dictates its temporal concerns, placing emphasis on its historical depth, rather than on historical progression. At the same time, the "off beat" reading

generate[s] a temporal bond at odds with the chronological progression of the nation, and at odds with the chronological succession of sanctified texts. What results is a kind of serial unpredictability, the unexpected contact between points of time numerically far apart. Nowhere is this more salient than in the reading and translation of ancient texts: texts written in "dead" languages centuries ago.²¹

While Howe doesn't utilize dead languages like Latin or ancient Greek, her use of archaic words and spellings certainly points to dead versions of the English language, and thus the insertion of one century's version of language against another's pulls time "in different directions," and out of joint. Howe tears sequential time apart at its seams, thus challenging ideas of national progression and literary succession.

As the poem progresses, the words become more erratic in their spelling, as Howe describes the slaughtering of people and war in the Adirondacks. The

²⁰Dimock, 3.

²¹*Ibid* 113.

violent events of Lake George begin to emerge, traced out in archaic words, misspellings, odd syntax, and gaps.

at Fort Stanwix the Charrokey
paice

only from that Alarm
all those Guards

Constant parties of guards
up&down

Agreseror

Bearer law my fathers

Revealing traces

Regulating traces 46

The traces make us think immediately of the blood in the fairy tale. The images of war in old language emphasize the violence not only of the war itself, but of the violence of the wars' unclear writing into history. Indeed, by mentioning Fort Stanwix, Howe takes us to 1758 and the battle for the frontier between the French, English, and Native Americans. The Cherokees were not included in the land negotiations which took place in the Fort, nor did the Fort manage to maintain peace in the area, instead provoking more violence. Thus peace is refigured into its old spelling of "paice," a word meaning peace from civil unrest but also meaning through, resonating with path, thorow, or passage. It sounds like "pace," and its position after "Charrokey" makes one want to read it as a verb, as though the Cherokee are pacing at Fort Stanwix after the sound of the Alarm. The old spelling of "paice" further resonates through "alarm" too, reminding the reader that the word's original meaning was an exclamation meaning "to arms." Meanwhile, "Agreseror," a slipped spelling of "aggressors," suggests that the violence of the word itself has forced incoherency into its

meaning. In these short lines that lack sequence as sentences, as pairings of words, and even in the correct sequencing of letters, the narrator seems to be rewriting the history of the 1758 battle. The words enact the tugging of different directions: one direction is the words wanting to make meaning and cogency, and the other direction is simple chaos, the collapse of meaning. The paternalistic bearers of law, regulating the traces, are also present in this breaking down of meaning, as the speaker forces interruptions and conflicts into the landscape and its historiography so that the emphasis of the poem lies firmly on inarticulation rather than on articulation. The main event of the poem's history becomes the stammer that Howe is so keen to revel in. "The stutter is the plot," Howe quotes Olson as saying.

It's the stutter in American literature that interests me. I hear the stutter as a sounding of uncertainty. What is silenced or not quite silenced. All the broken dreams. Thomas Shepard writes them down as soon as 1637. And the rupture from Europe. Continents have entered into contact, creating a zone of catastrophe points. A capture morphology... History has happened. The narrator is disobedient.²²

Howe's explanation for her embrace of the stutter recognizes how points of rupture or catastrophe are also planetary, enacted in the collision of continents, redolent in the positioning of Charrokey in the same section as "bearer law my fathers": the narrator herself recognizes her location in the story of European settlement by acknowledging the law makers as her ancestors. However, she also knows that she can be disobedient, that as the daughter of these makers of history, she can appropriate their authority to force the inarticulate catastrophe between French, English, and Native America out into her altered language. Thus the violence and conflict of Lake George emerges in this first section of *Thorow* as lexical and syntactic interruption, as though the nonverbal actions in history disrupt the poem with their inability to be articulated.

The narrator closes the poem's first section with an image redolent of circular time: "Let us gether and bury / limbs and leves," bringing the story of the dead to an end (48). The burial brings the promise of a new beginning: "Wood

²² *Birth-Mark*, 181.

and feld / all covered with ise / seem world anew." The words are still written askew though; the burial resonates with the ancient burial ground covered by gauche buildings, and "seem" lies heavy with our previous misreading of it as "seam," only now it also echoes "seen". "world" reads as a collapsing together of "wood" and "feld" and "feld," and "world" further remind the reader of the field that stretched out of the world. The war and its dead and its survivors remain inarticulate as the words trying to give them voice can only slip into one another, providing myriads of meanings, but none which can accurately portray the final events of the battle. It is as though the words themselves are struggling against the threat of the incomprehensible. In other words, the lexical morphing in Howe's poem can be read as words under attack from other sources of meaning that are nonverbal. Once we understand the words in this way, we can see that Howe creates "literature [that] taps into preverbal layers of consciousness; [that] has input from narratives generated by other bodily registers."²³ The preverbal, enacted through the constant shifting of lexical morphology, suggests that voices can be referenced even though they are language-less. "Some of the most poignant passages in Thoreau's text center on the fragility of relics of prior cultures; these almost-sentient objects do not, after all, have voices of their own, leaving them, and the stories they are capable of telling, vulnerable to human indifference," writes McGill of Thoreau's *A Week*.²⁴ Similarly, the ancient Native American burial ground brought up by Howe in the beginning of her poem, actively ignored by the town on the shores of Lake George, seems to come to life here, in the shifting of meanings and the consequent strong emergence of unarticulated death.

The second section of *Thorow* attempts to envision the renewal promised earlier, as the narrator becomes a traveler, much like Thoreau's protagonists, and eventually begins to lose her bearings in preparation for the disorienting explosion of words in the third section (see above). "Walked on Mount Vision / New life after the Fall," the speaker tells us, only to recognize the falseness of renewal, "So many true things / which are not truth itself." The language that follows is clear and articulate, without the upsets of violence found earlier.

²³Dimock, 162

²⁴McGill, 370.

The speaker's agency is clarified as she speaks openly of emancipation: "In the machinery of injustice / my whole being is Vision." Yet even in the emancipated voice, Howe has difficulty knowing if it will provide a real break out of colonialism and hegemony. The lines, "The literature of savagism / under a spell of savagism" suggest that even the word savagism blocks any real literature from emerging. Yet she still walks through Nature and thinks of history and myth made in the Adirondacks. "First precarious Eden" is undercut by "a scandal of materialism" while her "ancestors tore off/ the first leaves / picked out the best stars" unable to avert themselves from property. After all, it is "The origin of property / that leads here..." The problem that Howe struggles with is how to ensure that her own poem will not enslave, engrave, or own what she includes in it as so many others' have. The poem is rife with contradiction and the narrator tries to figure out how to maintain balance. "Hunt and not the capture," she writes, as though reminding us that exploration can include violence, but doesn't have to include oppression or hegemony. How can her poem not be a "capture morphology"? If Thoreau is re-enacting captivity epics where he fights "against the forces that imprison the body," then how can Howe, also captive in the history of her forefathers, emancipate her own voice and the voice of others? The answer lies partly through the merging of herself with nature, with the Adirondacks *occupying* her, so that she can tap into pre-verbal layers of consciousness to challenge dominant historiographic forms. By the end of the section the speaker begins to prepare us for the collapse she will throw us into, as she indicates a loss of orientation that she herself enforces. "Unconscious demarkations range / I pick my compass to pieces / Dark here in the driftings / in the spaces of drifting / Complicity battling redemption." Though steady and located in a Nature that belongs at once to Thoreau and Howe ("My thick coat and my tent / and the black of the clouds" could be either Thoreau's voice or Howe's), the speaker "picks [her] compass to pieces" to rid of herself of even "unconscious demarkations," eager to enter the darkness and spaces of an excursion that has lost its way with no destination anymore, only drifting. In the final explicit words of the poem, the speaker admits to her position as complicit in the standardized formulations of world and history,

seeing it as the final hurdle to redemption and an alternate version of history, one that riots in its disruption.

The explosion of words that almost, but not quite, mirror each other on the two pages that follow take us careening into the inarticulate. The words themselves, though obviously there and readable, battle against being read or understood. They layer across one another, providing unexpected juxtapositions. It's almost as though Howe has realized that Thoreau missed his chance when the protagonist ends up personifying deep time in the form of an ancient, primitive native in "Ktaadn." Instead she recognizes that deep time's real expression comes in the linguistic breakdown he experienced – that planetary time's manifestation or preverbal time's manifestation cannot come through a conventional description of someone without language, but can only be rendered in the display of language's collapse. This rings especially true when taken into consideration with Howe's understanding of words as pods of historical memories in and of themselves. The collapse of history which Thoreau witnesses upon experiencing planetary time is thus not re-witnessed by Howe, as much as it is put into effect by her protagonist, who has established her agency in the previous sections as a harbinger of historical disruption. Howe's literary expression of preverbal time, though, is more boldly violent than Thoreau's. The immediate violence we recognize when looking at these two pages, is the violence against margins. The central stanzas (not quite) doubled on each page, beginning "[The] Frames should be exactly / fitted to the paper," are barely legible in their upside down form, with the dislocated words falling around them, while even the meaning trails off into the nonsensical, "very deep Rabbit," reminding us of Thoreau's decision to burrow in "Where I Lived and What I Lived For," and the "tracks of the rabbit" in Howe's first section (47). Howe's visual and linguistic violence through the *literal* frame-breaking of the standard printed page brings historical irruption through the inclusion of fragments to an even more radical plane, openly challenging all forms of hegemonic structure.

By disrupting history's language in and through Thoreau's texts and with her own active anti-hegemonic poetry, Howe forces the emergence of a history deeper than that of Lake George's; one that reverberates with language written

in Mesopotamia, French colonialism, and Native American hunting. In a curious adaptation of Thoreau's *Walden*, the speaker of *Thorow* brings in multiple layers of histories in broken and disrupted forms to encapsulate "deep time". Most noticeable in the section are Howe's words of war: "Gabion / Parapet," "canon," "siege," "firing," "garrison," "war song," "war belt," etc. In between and written over these words of war are words of recordings of history like "war song," "Treaty," "Resolution," and "Messages" or "Messengers." Yet on top of these historical records lie words from Thoreau's excursion accounts: "batteau," "canoes," "Fires by night," "wood," "Places to walk out to," "islet," etc. Lake George's violent historical event is layered with its official accounts, with Thoreau's non-violent exploration of history and civilization, and with symbols of ancient forms of language. *Thorow's* speaker's exploration, her forced juxtaposition of these historical events and accounts, leads her to more frail relics in the dust of language's history, as "Picked up arrowhead" is placed under "hieroglyph." The sacred carving resonates with the carved arrowhead in its shape, the two symbols conversant with incredibly long stretches of time, and both used as tools of conquering: one as a weapon to kill, the other as a word to give name to something, and thus conquer it. Well aware of the weight of each word she places on the pages the narrator rearranges the shape of history through her anarchic location of them.

The end of *Thorow* purposefully slips from a possible reconstruction of history, fragmenting sense and narrative even further.²⁵ Almost all the words are distorted, holding different meanings in every syllable or misreading. They are Howe's final words against embedded narrative and colonialism, yet visually they depict a picture of a lake made up of words:

²⁵Perloff calls *Thorow* an Eliotic poem, quoting "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," noting that Howe allows the poem to open itself out further. The difference between Howe and Eliot, though, is Howe's own constant reformulation of words, her purposeful fragmentation as opposed to the collecting of fragments.

anthen uplispth enend
 adamap blue wov thefthe
 folled floted keen

Themis

thouscullingme

Thiefth

The emphasis of the “th” sound suggests rewritings, or writings out, of Thoreau. The stuttering of “end” in “enend” reminds us of Howe’s belief in hesitation and stutters. “Thoreau” turns into “thefthe” and eventually “Thiefth,” suggestive of thieves and theft, much like property is stolen and reconquered. The speaker’s agency is brought into light through the suggestion of her disruptive thievery of words as she also remakes them, distorts them, and relocates them. Against these skewed words comes the name “Themis.” Slotkin quotes J. L. Henderson in his book for the definition of the god, Themis: “the final socio-religious, artistic, or philosophic cultural form of any given community, varying in its character from nomadic, hunting cultures and the herdsmen to settled agricultural groups and larger organization of hieratic city-states.”²⁶ Themis stands for the establishment, and is purposefully placed by Howe in the final lines of her long poem. Themis at once becomes a word that seems to have grown out of “Thoreau”, but also represents the hegemony that the speaker moves against in the poem: the movement itself is suggested visually in the faint arrowhead triangulations of “anthen,” “adamap” and “folled” ; “uplispth” “blue wov” and “floted”; “enend” “thefthe” and “keen”. “Themis” is finality, bringing out the bottom of history, the depth of the lake, even as “sculling” returns to ideas of passaging, referring to the oaring of a boat, a journey on

²⁶Slotkin, 11.

water. Now “blue wov” and “floted” fall into place as descriptions of the lake and we realize that Howe’s poem is ending with that simple description: of the lake’s history of conquest as figured by Themis, of its history of thievery, as figured by the sounds of thieves as conquerors, of its natural beauty found in its color and movement, and of its constant unknowability as all these elements constantly work against one another. “There was never such a pure place.” Howe tells Tom Beckett in an interview of the Lake George ideal she had hopes to discover. “In all nature there is violence. Still it must have been wonderful at first sight. Uninterrupted nature usually is a dream enjoyed by the spoilers and looter – my ancestors.”²⁷

Thorow is an unusual and exceptional text in its response to Thoreau’s work. Howe’s method of language-breakage as a way of disrupting and reconstructing history is further deepened by her emphatic call for individual agency against conservative narratives and contemporary academic understandings of American literature. The resulting poem moves beyond concerns involving language as a potential tool for refiguring reality and self, and instead utilizes this new-found power in language to hit violently against the American Academy and its constructed history. While this describes much of Howe’s work in general, *Thorow*’s significance to this thesis ultimately lies in its literary utilization of a Thoreauvian text while engaging in its political inheritance. Though Slotkin’s reading of *Walden* as a captivity narrative is unusual, Howe’s use of Thoreau as a scout who will lead her to explosions reminds us of Thoreau’s words against his pro-slavery government: “I need not say what match I would touch, what system endeavor to blow up; but as I love my life, I would side with the light, and let the dark earth roll from under me, calling my mother and my brother to follow ” (“SM” 32). In other words, Howe’s use of Thoreau to empower her own poetic violence places herself firmly in the Thoreauvian tradition of accommodating violent narratives in literature in order to challenge the chronological progression of sovereign territories and their sanctified canons. Thoreau’s clear

²⁷Beckett, 20-21.

figuration in *Thorow* shows that Howe is interested in the historical interruptions encountered in the Burnt Lands and in the violent histories Thoreau includes in "A Walk" and *A Week*. And while others before her may read that interruption as a purely linguistic one, Howe is able to recognize it for all its historical significance, and follow Thoreau into the same temporal place of literature beside History in order to interrupt an entire master narrative – the history of Lake George.

Our literature has no more curious story than the evolution of this local crank into his rightful place of mastership.

—Bliss Perry

10

Conclusion

Drawing this thesis to a close, I have to consider whether the goals I laid out in the introduction have been reached. While some aspects of the project have not been as fruitfully mined as they could be, it is my contention, nonetheless, that the thesis has laid down the ground work and apparatus for considering the temporal manifestation of Thoreau's resistant rhetoric in his narratives. By rethinking his myth as a location beside progressive time and made up of a layering of multiple histories, and considering his excursion narratives as radical historiographies for the silent or oppressed voices, I would argue that the thesis has shed light on an as yet darkly lit area of Thoreauvian studies.

The thesis has also been a work in progress and worked on mostly in isolation from other Thoreauvians. As such, it has been particularly significant and relieving to the project's long-term isolation that the emergence of the collected essays in *Thoreauvian Modernities* in March, 2013, all drew on topics touching and related to the ones tackled in this project, as if the thesis were in direct conversation with them the whole time it was in the making. Bruno Monfort's essay "Thoreaus Work on Myth: The Modern and the Primitive" returns to the question of mythology in Thoreau's work. Monfort argues that Thoreau's modern myth, while a deliberate construction against the material culture of

Thoreau's reality, cannot be made "the way the Greeks did it."¹ He writes that "interacting between the creative mind and its natural environment, mythology will disallow an analysis of the world in merely material or purely historical terms. But then it also points to the limitations entailed by this sort of purely human construct." Due to the modern human agency of Thoreau's myth, Monfort considers mythology as irrevocably both outside and inside the human reality, both a construct of and a turning away from the material and historical a priori of human culture. Monfort thus places a lot of emphasis, as I have done, on the agency of the myth-maker in Thoreau's work.

Even more intriguing than Monfort's evaluation of Thoreau's mythology is William Rossi's essay "Thoreau's Multiple Modernities." In it, Rossi argues that Thoreau's response to modernity is not a refusal of it, but rather, another version of it that manifests in a layering effect, as opposed to a monolithic one. "It is time to pluralize Thoreau's relation to modernity," writes Rossi, as he then takes on a deft reading of "Autumnal Tints" as "a complex intervention into normative modern temporality." In his reading Rossi discovers Thoreau's multiple temporalities and his reconceptualization of time's shape:

While *Autumnal Tints* is full of humorous, reflective digressions, this adverb ["now"] repeatedly pulls the audience back into the intensifying present of the unfolding season. At the same time, within each section the audience is situated bodily, incorporated into the present-tense narratives that Thoreau had originally constructed in the *Journal*, *creating a series of moments embedded within the ongoing temporal arc*. The result is a representation of "our" time that is neither one dimensional nor empty but full.²

Rossi's reading of "a series of moments" under one "ongoing temporal arc" resonates with my own readings of passages in *Walden*, not least the furniture placed outside in nature and the drawing out of multiple time frames around one object. Describing this act of layering as "cumulative temporalities," Rossi concludes that Thoreau uses it to offer a collective modern temporality to his readers as an alternative to the linearized modern temporality. In other words,

¹*Thoreauvian Modernities*, 156.

²*Ibid.*, 65. My emphasis.

Thoreau's reshaping of time is still a significantly modern shaping, just not a normative one.

Meanwhile, Kristen Case's essay, "Thoreaus Radical Empiricism: The Kalendar, Pragmatism, and Science," while working closely from Walls' critical framework on empiric holism, proceeds to uncover significant strands of Thoreauvian thought through her analysis of his mostly-forgotten Kalendar, a collection of Thoreau's "observations of seasonal change over the years in a variety of lists and charts."³ Case's intriguing rediscovery of the Kalendar opens up more questions about Thoreau's later work and his empirical view of humans and nature: "in its recognition of the interrelation of all things." She suggests that his work on philosophy and science points to a radical understanding of ecology that is relevant to the way we are reevaluating our understanding of planet, ecology and our location in it today. Case is keen to show how Thoreau's emphasis on "locating the human within the natural world was not only confined to the monthly charts of general phenomena. Indeed, I believe that the entire project reflected a desire to recontextualize the human." Case's claim that Thoreau's focus is on the human and on his or her practice, be it of writing or reading, or, as Walls argues, of being mobile, in and through nature sheds light on my own discovery that Thoreau's protagonists are key agents in the structuring of worlds.

What Thoreaus late work enacts is a new conception of the human, one in which we are defined by our relation to, rather than our separateness from, other organisms; in which we are allied, not opposed, to the material world; and in which human experience, including human emotion, is understood as empirical reality. This new conception restores the individual to his or her community, recognizing the essential embeddedness of human experience, its utter inextricability from the natural and social worlds in which it unfolds. It is characteristic of this orientation that it expresses itself as a method, a practice, rather than a law.

Case's articulation of Thoreau's reconceptualization of the human or of the individual, as ultimately defined or expressed by "a method" or "practice," reflects this thesis's claim for Thoreau's mythography and historiography in

³*Ibid.* 188.

a new and interesting way. By articulating mythography and historiography as methods or practices, this thesis could consider Thoreau's concept of being human in light of Case's essay, and read his narratives as less resistant to sequential chronological progressions and hegemonic historiographies, but rather read them as eco-global constructions, where "we are defined by our relation to, rather than our separateness from, other organisms; in which we are allied, not opposed to the material world."

Indeed, most of the essays in *Thoreauvian Modernities* center on Thoreau's late Humboldtian philosophy of the human as a part of a cumulative world order, less enamored perhaps with the theory of Thoreau's "resistance" than this thesis is. Nonetheless, my work here on the strength and agency of Thoreau's protagonists and on Thoreau's new shapes of time in his literature engages on a variety of levels with the work undertaken by these other Thoreauvian scholars spread far and wide across the globe. It is reassuring that the famous Concordian has sparked conversation transnationally. I am reminded of the scene in *Walden* where a conversation inside Thoreau's cabin reaches "loftier and grander" tones so that the conversationalists have to literally push their chairs back away from each other to let their sentences unfold. "You want room for your thoughts," writes Thoreau, "to get into sailing trim and run a course or two before they make their port." Crossing the globe, this thesis has been written in Melbourne, emailed to a print shop in Oxford, delivered by hand to the Exam Schools, and sent by mail to the examiners in America. No doubt, then, that gives its sentences plenty of space to unfold.

Bibliography

- Abrams, Robert E. *Landscape and Ideology in American Renaissance Literature: Topographies of Skepticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.
- Adams, Stephen, and Donald Ross. *Revising Mythologies: The Composition of Thoreau's Major Works*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1988.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*. London: Verso, 1993.
- Allen, Thomas M. *A Republic in Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2008.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity, 2001.
- Beckett, Tom. "The Difficulties Interview." *Difficulties* 3, 2: (1989) 17–27.
- Beidler, Philip. *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam*. Athens: U Georgia P, 1982.
- Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1976.
- Berger, Michael Benjamin. *Thoreau's Late Career and the Dispersion of Seeds: the Saunterer's Synoptic Vision*. Rochester: Camden House, 2000.
- Blanton, Casey. *Travel writing: The Self and the World*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Breitweiser, Mitchell Robert. *American Puritanism and the Defense of Mourning: : Religion, Grief, and Ethnology in Mary White Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative*. Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1990.

- Broderick, John C. "Imagery in Walden." *University of Texas Studies in English* 33: (1954) 80–89.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.
- . *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, kindle edition.
- Burnham, Michelle. *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange on American Literature 1682-1861*. Hanover: Dartmouth UP, 1997.
- Carroll, Lorryne. *Rhetorical Drag : Gender Impersonation, Captivity, and the Writing of History*. Kent: Kent State UP, 2007.
- Cavell, Stanley. *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1998.
- Christie, John Aldrich. *Thoreau as World Traveler*. New York: Columbia UP, 1965.
- Cutter, Barbara. "The Female Indian Killer Memorialized: Hannah Duston and the Nineteenth-Century Feminization of American Violence." *Journal of Women's History* 20, 2: (2008) 10–33.
- Darwin, Charles. *A Naturalist's Voyage Round the World*. New York, 1846.
- Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974.
- . *Living By Fiction*. New York: Harper, 1982.
- . *An American Childhood*. London: Picador, 1988.
- Dimock, Wai Chee. *Through Other Continents; American Literature Across Deep Time*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006.
- Dimock, Wai Chee, and Lawrence Buell, editors. *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007.

- Fisher, Philip. *Still the New World: American Literature in a Culture of Creative Destruction*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000.
- Franklin, Wayne. *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1979.
- Garber, Frederick. *Thoreau's Redemptive Imagination*. New York: New York UP, 1977.
- Giles, Paul. "Historicizing the Transnational: Robert Coover, Kathy Acker and the Rewriting of British Cultural History, 1970-1997." *Journal of American Studies* 41, 1: (2007) 3-30.
- . *The Global Remapping of American Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011.
- Glick, Wendell, editor. *The Recognition of Henry David Thoreau*. Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 1969.
- Golemba, Henry. "Unreading Thoreau." *American Literature* 60, 3: (1988) 385-401.
- Green, Fiona. "'Plainly on the Other Side': Susan Howe's Recovery." *Contemporary Literature* 42, 1: (2001) 78-101.
- Greenfield, Bruce. *Narrating Discovery: The Romantic Explorer in American Literature, 1790- 1855*. New York: Columbia UP, 1992.
- Harding, Walter. *The Days of Henry David Thoreau*. New York: Dover, 1982.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The American Notebooks*. Yale UP, 1932.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "The Duston Family." *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* 2: (1836) 396.
- Hellman, John. *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*. New York: Columbia UP, 1986.
- Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*. New York: Knopf, 1978.

- Hicks, Granville. *Literary Horizons: A Quarter Century of American Fiction*. New York: New York UP, 1970.
- Howarth, William. "Itinerant Passages: Recent American Essays." *The Sewanee Review* 96, 4: (1988) 633–643.
- Howe, Susan. *My Emily Dickinson*. USA: New Directions, 1985.
- . *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. Roof Book, 1990.
- . *The Birth-mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1993.
- James, Henry. *Hawthorne*. London: Macmillan, 1879.
- Johnson, Barbara. *A World of Difference*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1987.
- Kolodny, Annette. *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Women's Time." *Signs* 7, 1: (1981) 13–35.
- Lawson-Peebles, Robert. *Landscape and Written Expression in Revolutionary America: The World Turned Upside Down*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.
- Lazer, Hank. *Opposing Poetries: Readings*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1996.
- Leach, Hadley. "Thoreau's Aphoristic Form." *Arizona Quarterly* 68, 3: (2012) 1–26.
- Lewis, R. W. B. *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1955.
- Lowney, John. "Thoreau's Cape Cod: The Unsettling Art of the Wrecker." *American Literature* 64, 2: (1992) 239–254.

- Luciano, Dana. *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: New York UP, 2007.
- Lutz, Tom. *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004.
- Ma, Ming-Qian. "Articulating the Inarticulate: Singularities and the Counter-Method in Susan Howe." *Contemporary Literature* 36, 3: (1995) 466–489.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine and the Garden*. Oxford UP, 1967.
- Mather, Cotton. *Humiliations Followd With Deliverances*. Boston: B. Green & J. Allen, 1697.
- . *Decennium Luctuosum: an History of Remarkable Occurrences in the Long War which New England hath had with the Indian Savages*. Boston: B. Green & J. Allen, 1699.
- . *Magnalia Christi Americana: or the Ecclesiastical History of New England*. London: T. Parkhurst, 1702.
- Matheson, Neill. "Thoreau's Inner Animal." *Arizona Quarterly* 6, 4: (2011) 1–26.
- Matthiessen, Francis Otto. *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. London: Oxford UP, 1968.
- McCarthy, Mary. *Hanoi*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968.
- McGill, Meredith L. "Common Places: Poetry, Illocality, and Temporal Dislocation in Thoreau's A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers." *American Literary History* 19, 2: (2007) 357–374.
- Michaels, Walter Benn. "Walden's False Bottoms." *Glyph: Johns Hopkins Textual Studies* 1: (1977) 405–421.
- Myerson, Joel, editor. *Emerson and Thoreau: The Contemporary Reviews*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1992.

- Naylor, Paul. *Poetic Investigations: Singing the Holes in History*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1999.
- Neufeldt, Leonard. *The Wild Apple Tree*. Ph.D. thesis, Urbana University, 1966.
- Nicholls, Peter. "Unsettling the Wilderness: Susan Howe and American History." *Contemporary Literature* 37, 4: (1996) 586–601.
- Park, Mungo. *The Life and Travels of Mungo Park: with an Account of His Death from the Journal of Isaaco, the Substance of Later Discoveries Relative to His Lamented Fate, and the Termination of the Niger*. New York, 1840 and 1842.
- . *Travels of Mungo Park*. London: Dent, 1954.
- Parrish, Nancy C. *Lee Smith, Annie Dillard, and the Hollins Group: A Genesis of Writers*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1998.
- Perelman, Bob. *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996.
- Perloff, Marjorie. *21st-Century Modernism: The "New Poetics"*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.
- Pfeiffer, Ida. *A Lady's Voyage Round the World: A Selected Trans. from the German by Mrs Percy Sinnett*. New York, 1852.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket and Related Tales*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994.
- Porte, Joel. *Emerson and Thoreau : Transcendentalists in Conflict*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1966.
- Pratt, Lloyd. *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2010.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation 2nd ed.* New York: Routledge, 2008.

- Reynolds, Larry. *Righteous Violence: Revolution, Slavery and the American Renaissance*. Athens: U Georgia P, 2011.
- Richardson, Robert D. *Henry Thoreau : A Life of the Mind*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986.
- Rowlandson, Mary. *Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*. New-England, 1682.
- Sattelmeyer, Robert. ““When He Became My Enemy”: Emerson and Thoreau, 1948-49.” *New England Quarterly* 62: (1989) 187–204.
- Scheese, Don. *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Sharon, Cameron. New York: Oxford UP, 1985.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1973.
- Slovic, Scott. *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing: Henry Thoreau, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez*. Salt Lake: U of Utah P, 1992.
- Sohnya Sayres, Stanley Aronowitz, Anders Stephanson, and Fredric Jameson, editors. *The 60s without Apology*. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1984.
- Sontag, Susan. *Styles of Radical Will*. Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1969.
- Specq Francois, Laura Dassow Walls, and Michel Granger, editors. *Thoreauvian Modernities: Transatlantic Conversations on an American Icon*. Athens: U Georgia P, 2013.
- Spengemann, William C. *The Adventurous Muse: The Poetics of American Fiction, 1789-1900*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1977.
- Spillers, Hortense J., editor. *Comparative American identities: race, sex, and nationality in the modern text*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

- Stein, Gertrude. *Tender Buttons: Objects, Food, Rooms*. Auckland: The Floating P, 2009.
- Stevens, Wallace. *Collected poems*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984.
- Stockton, Kathryn Bond. *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke UP, 2009.
- Stoller, Leo. *After Walden; Thoreau's Changing Views on Economic Man*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1957.
- Stout, Janis P. *The Journey Narrative in American Literature: Patterns and Departures*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983.
- Taussig, Michael T. *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1980.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980.
- . *The Maine Woods*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983.
- . *Walden: An Annotated Edition*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995.
- . *Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems*. New York: Library of America, 2001.
- . *Cape Cod*. Princeton UP, 2004.
- Traub, Valerie. "The New Unhistoricisim in Queer Studies." *PMLA* 128, 1: (2013) 21–39.
- Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. London: Vintage Books, 2012.
- Walls, Laura Dassow. *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century National Science*. Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1995.
- Warner, Michael. "Thoreau's Bottom." *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 11, 3: (1992) 53–79.

- White, Jenny L. "The Landscapes of Susan Howe's "Thorow"."
Contemporary Literature 47, 2: (2006) 236–260.