

Literary Approaches to Henry D. Thoreau's Essays

—A Study of *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience*—

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I. Introduction

Henry David Thoreau(1817-1862), a Transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher, was an essayist and poet hardly known to American literature in the 1850's. The bulk of his essays(including poems) were not published in his life except three prominent works, *Walden*(1854), *Civil Disobedience*(1849), *A Week on the Concord and the Merrimack Rivers*(1849). Thoreau's great thought, as stated "My life has been the poem I would have writ,/But I could not both live and utter it," can be compared to a still pond surrounded by great mountains.

Thoreau's outward life reflected his inward stature as a small and quiet pond reflects the diminished outline of a mountain.¹⁾

Concord, where Thoreau was born, grew up, and died as a lonely essayist, was a small town, but the literary center of the American Renaissance in the 19th century. Thoreau's *Journals*, from which his brilliant essays and poems were derived and in which they were compiled, is true statement of his thoughts and ideas, intelligence and passion, life and truth. His literary career as a Harvard graduate can be commonly stated as a transcendental practician, but it cannot be denied that he was an obstinate essayist persistent to his belief.

Thoreau's life can be summarized in two aspects: first, he was an active practician of Transcendentalism in the American Renaissance literature: secondly, he was a practical social reformer appealing to anti-slavery convention. Thoreau, as a polite citizen, made much social trouble in his anti-social activities, but his works proved important as American classics.

1) Sculley Bradley et al., *The American Tradition in Literature*, Vol.1. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1967), p.1236.

Two aspects of Thoreau's life provided the bulk of his literary materials: his active concern with social issues and his feeling for the unity of man and nature. He took an early interest in abolition, appearing as a speaker at anti-slavery conventions,...

He was able also to associate his private rebellion with larger social issues, as in his resistance to taxation. He refused to pay the church taxes(1838),... In his refusal to pay the poll tax, which cost him a jail sentence(1845), he was resisting the "constitutional" concept which led Massachusetts to give support in congress to southern leadership, as represented by the Mexican war and repugnant concerning slave "property."²⁾

Thoreau's active concern with such social problems as his resistance to abolition, church donation, and taxation was definitely concreted in his philosophical idea for the unity of man and nature through many travel experiences and meditative observation. His representative journeys are as follows: a boat trip to Merrimack River(1839), Penobscot forests of Maine(1846, 1853, 1857), walking trip to Cape Cod(1840, 1850, 1855, 1857), which was published in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*(1849), *The Maine Woods* (1864), *Cape Cod*(1865), *A Yankee in Canada*(1866). This paper aims to explain in detail Thoreau's literary thoughts and beliefs in nature through *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience*.

II. Thoreau's Essays, Poems, and lectures

1. Life and Career

Henry D. Thoreau, who called himself "a mystic," was a Transcendentalist and a natural philosopher³⁾ of American Renaissance literature. Considered one of the most "Yankee" of America's writers, he was not of famous old England ancestry. His French grandfather, John Thoreau, a sailor, emigrated to Boston from the Channel Islands in 1773 and his other grandparents were of Scotch and Welch stock. Henry was born, the third of four children of John and Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau, in Concord, on July 12, 1817. Henry was the only one of the "Concord writers" born in Concord who had been considered to have a sharp intelligence and reasoning, and to be an outsider, alien to the traditional Concord.

Though Thoreau was recognized to be a boy of artistic and intellectual tastes, poverty prevented him from doing much for them. One of his lifelong entertainment activities was playing the flute alone. His childhood was happy because circumstances favored both his need for company and his taste for solitude: he used to tramp through woods and along quiet streams alone. In his later years, he confessed the blissful days in *Journals* as follows:

In youth, before I lost any of my senses, I can remember that I was all alive, and inhabited my body with inexpressible satisfaction: both its weariness and its refreshment, were sweet to me. This earth was the most glorious instrument and I was audience to its strains.⁴⁾

2) Ibid., p.1238.

3) Darrel Abel, *American Literature*, Vol.2 (New York: Barron's Educational Series, 1963), p.112.

4) Ibid., 113.

Henry attended Concord Academy and Harvard, when he got one of the scholarships provided by Harvard for poor student. He was superior in such language courses as French, German and the classical languages and also in mathematics but not an especially distinguished student in college. When he attended Harvard, from 1833 to 1837, the Transcendentalist Movement from the Unitarian establishment began among the young clergymen. The young Thoreau was an early convert. In 1835, Thoreau, then in his junior year in college, was given a leave from his classes for teaching school for six months—a custom then at Harvard, to assist needy students. He stayed meanwhile in the household of Orestes Brownson, the Unitarian minister, who made the earliest decisive Transcendentalist influence upon him. When Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature*(1836), the "bible" of the Transcendentalists, was published and read among many Americans, Thoreau was graduated in 1837, consciously in possession of the vague ideas which were to control his life thenceforward.

According to Emerson's advice, Thoreau began to keep a journal as an exercise in observation and expression, and his extant journals, from which all his literary works were subsequently drawn, began in October, 1837. When Thoreau died twenty-five years later, "there were thirty nine volumes of manuscript journals carefully packed in a wooden box he had himself."⁵⁾

He tells of the importance of journalizing as follow:

February 1, 1841

My journal is that of me which would else spill over and run to waste, gleanings from the field which in action I must reap. I must not live for it, but in it for the gods. They are my correspondent, to whom daily I send off this sheet postpaid.⁶⁾

In June, 1838, John and Henry opened a private school in Concord and in September they began teaching in the Concord Academy. Henry taught Latin, Greek and higher mathematics, but he regarded school-teaching as more than a temporary expedient. He wrote in *Walden* his own confession:

I have throughly tried school-keeping, and found that my expenses were in proportion, or rather out of proportion, to my income, for I was obliged to dress and train, not to say think and believe, accordingly, and I lost my time into the bargain. As I did not teach for the good of my fellow-men, but simply for a livelihood, this was a failure.

Thoreau's characteristic figure was well shown in his refusal to pay a tax collected for the benefit of the church, which was a token declaration of his intellectual independence. He later related his independent belief in *Civil Disobedience*.

...the State met me in behalf of the Church, and commanded me to pay a certain sum toward the support of a clergy man whose preaching my father attended, but never I myself. "Pay," it said, "or be locked up in jail. "I declined to pay... I did not see why the school master should be taxed

5) Ibid., p.115.

6) Odell Shepard ed., *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1961), p.20.

to support the priest and not the preacher the schoolmaster; for I was not the State's schoolmaster, but I supported myself by voluntary subscription...However, at the request of the selectmen, I condescended to make some such statement as this in writing:—"Know all men as a member of any incorporated society, that I, Henry Thoreau, do not wish to be regarded as a member of any incorporated society which I have not joined."

Thoreau's representative life, as a natural philosopher, was Walden life. He began Walden life (July 4, 1845 - September 6, 1847) at Walden pond after setting up a roughly poor cottage in a clearing in the woods on land belonging to Emerson. Thoreau set up a cabin with the investment of \$28. 12½. It is recorded that Thoreau purchased an Irish farmer's shanty for \$4.25 to get the roofing and lumber and sold the other materials to get \$9 and earned some money from his own laboring.

Many critics who could not understand Thoreau's Walden life blamed his nonsensical attitude, but Thoreau had a steadfast conviction that he lived an economical life with "a broad margin" of leisure, realizing his wish "to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life."⁷

Thoreau believed that "civilization is a real advance in the condition of men,... though only the wise improve their advantages." And he was not attempting to be a "hermit," that is to sever social relations and devote himself to extra-human concerns; in fact, he not only maintained his Concord friendships, but was more than usually companionable with woodchoppers, shanty Irish, and other humbler classes of society, deepening if anything his social sympathies.⁸

Emerson, recognizing Thoreau's literary talent and nature, gave Henry the opportunity to make acquaintances among writers and publishers in New York; Hawthorne recommended him to the editor of the *Democratic Review*, who eventually printed a couple of slight pieces by Thoreau, but efforts to establish him as a New York magazinist were fruitless. He gave up his efforts too early. If Thoreau had kept on trying to do his best without disappointment, he would have succeeded in the literary society in New York. Leon Edel explains as follows:

That he found the life in the city less congenial than the familiar woods and fields of Concord is understandable. Given his difficulties in relating to his human—as distinct from animal—environment, he could discover no comfortable friends in an urban community.⁹

When Thoreau took his last excursion to his favorite mountain, Monadnock, with Ellery Channing, he caught cold on December 3, 1860. This developed into consumption. On the morning of May 6, 1862 he died, sitting upright on his couch, murmuring "moose" and "Indian".¹⁰

7) Abel, op. cit., p.123.

8) Ibid., p.123.

9) Leon Edel, *Henry D. Thoreau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970) pp.17-18.

10) Abel, op. cit., p.166.

2. Thoreau as Essayist

Thoreau's inward life, as recorded in his *Journals*, was enriched by meditative thinking and observation, travel experience and steady reading. In this sense, his *Journals* are the most valuable articles of private property left by Henry Thoreau at his death in 1862.

Alfred Kazin says it is "the record of a life and the life itself in "Thoreau's Journals" as follows:

For his journal—now reprinted for the first time since the edition of 1906 long out of print—is not merely the record of a life lived almost entirely within. It is the life itself. Thoreau's Journal was not a hide-out for his lacerated soul, not altogether what he and others have most used it for—the storehouse out of which his published books would come.¹¹⁾

Some essays, revised from several of Thoreau's lectures, had never been read to his audiences and were published in a magazine in his later years. Among these were "A Walk to Wachusett," in *The Boston Miscellany*; "Ktaadn" (later included in *The Maine Woods*), in *Sartain's Union Magazine*; essays on Canada and Cape Cod excursions (later included in *A Yankee in Canada* and *Cape Cod*)¹²⁾ in *Puritan Monthly*, edited by George W. Curtis; and "Chesuncook" (a second section of *The Maine Woods*), in the *Atlantic Monthly*, edited by James Russell Lowell.¹³⁾

Thoreau's posthumous articles were not equal to the two books published during his lifetime. "The Maine Woods" speaks well of his fine nature as the reporter of his deepest penetration into natural wilderness. Three sections "Ktaadn," "Chesuncook," and "The Allegash and East Branch," present a mountain, a moose, and an Indian as their respective interest.

His essays adhered to "inexorable demand for exact truth" and made him intransigent in action. In his essays he took the form of mustering not only all the truth but all the force and art that was in him for every utterance he made. Waldo Ralph Emerson says in "Thoreau" that "he was a speaker and actor of the truth, born such, and was ever running into dramatic situations from this cause."¹⁴⁾

As Thoreau confessed, "The World, in the long run, is always on the side of those who have been able to contrive some definite pattern out of life." "Thoreau was truly of the pioneer mind of nature. He knew "how primitive at bottom was the life that surrounded him," and was a man close to "the elements, the forest, the sea, the soil."¹⁵⁾ Thoreau

11) Alfred Kazin, "Thoreau's Journals," ed., Walter Harding, *Thoreau; A Century of Criticism* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1970), pp.187-189.

12) Cape Cod is photographed at last, for Thoreau has been there... with his stout pedestrians, he plodded along that level beach, —the eternal ocean on one side, and human existence reduced to its simplest elements on the other,—and he pitilessly weighing each.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Cape Cod," ed., by Harding, op. cit., p.41.

13) Abel, op. cit., p.162.

14) Harding, op. cit., p.26.

15) Ibid., pp.118-119.

is one of them that were able to discover the perfect integrity of nature and found in such abundance in trees and wild animals.

Thoreau, a writer, a man writing, is a lover of all nature. He thought true writing was not the composition of mere words and actions, nor even the accurate representation of facts, but the expression in words and facts of truths.

3. Thoreau as Lecturer

Thoreau, as a Transcendentalist and anti-slavery orator, was making efforts to get himself established as a lecturer, for he persisted in thinking lecturing his proper vacation. So his major articles express "an illumination of the Transcendental mind."¹⁶ He had delivered occasional public lectures to his fellows, including Transcendentalists, ever since the years of his graduation from Harvard. The important chance for his life was to read a lecture before the Concord Lyceum in 1848,—a version of "Civil Disobedience." In 1849, he had the chance of taking a trip to Salem and Maine to lecture at Bangor and Portland,¹⁷ But the responses to his lecture were apathetic and inattentive and he finally failed in becoming a popular lecturer. In 1853 he wrote in his journal,

I have offered myself more earnestly as a lecturer than a surveyor. Yet I do not get any employment as a lecturer.... But I can get surveying enough..... But they who do not make the highest demand on you shall rue it. It is because they make a low demand on themselves.

Though Thoreau was inclined to put all the blame for his failure on his audience, he was truly a poor lecturer. There is one point to which we should pay attention: he was a strong anti-slavery orator. As an American citizen of the Abolitionists against the Fugitive Slave Law (1850),¹⁸ he insisted that men are created equal to the law and conscience; these are unnegotiable human rights bestowed by God. He demonstrated his beliefs in practical action, insisting that Negro slaves were forced to lose the essence of human nature, when unlawfully arrested, restricted, oppressed, and deprived of free will.

In Walden,

I... wonder that we can be so frivolous... as to attend to the gross but somewhat foreign form of servitude called Negro Slavery, there are so many keen and subtle masters that enslave both North and South. It is hard to have a Southern overseer; it is worse to have a Northern one; but worst of all when you are the slave-driver of yourself.

When the authorities of Boston seized a Negro fugitive named Sims and sent him back to slavery in 1851, Thoreau turned an ardent Abolitionist, and participated in anti-slavery

16) Derry Miller ed., *The Transcendentalist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p.324.

17) Abel, op.cit., p.159.

18) Richard N. Current et al., *American History: A Survey* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p.362. Another explosive force in national society was the Fugitive Slave Act of the Compromise. Many people in the North, were hostile to the law from the moment it was passed, believing that it violated various procedural guarantees of the Constitution and the basic concepts of English-American law.

movements. When the government of Massachusetts had returned Negro Anthony Burns to slavery in 1854, Thoreau, who had already helped a fugitive slave escape to Canada, had strong hostility against government and stepped forward to discharge some of the most eloquent invective. On July 4, at Framingham, Massachusetts, he delivered a scathing attack, not on slavery in the South, but on "Slavery in Massachusetts."

The inhabitants of Concord are not prepared to stand by one of their own bridges, but talk only on taking up a position on the highlands beyond the Yellowstone river.... There is not one slave in Nebraska; there are perhaps a million slaves in Massachusetts.¹⁹⁾

Thoreau's lectures, no doubt, were drawn from the materials in his journals. It is commonly stated that his journals were not utilized so fully but his books added to the materials meagerly represented in his lectures and essays a rich complement drawn from his journals.

The major topics of Thoreau's lectures (and essays) had two main, overlapping concerns: (1) how to live a true and simple life, and (2) the enjoyment of nature. The best of his lectures on the first of these topics was "Getting a Living," which was later published as the essay, "Life Without Principle."

Abel summarized his lectures as follows;

The lecture goes on to attack conventional ways of getting a living, as fatal to a man's spiritual life and manhood..... Thoreau's nature lectures... offered novel facts more than challenging thoughts. These lectures consisted of what might be called "Walking Essays," dealing with Thoreau's travels in Concord, and "Travel Narrative," describing his excursions farther afield. Such Walking Essays as "Walking," "A Winter Walk," "Wild Apples," "A Walk to Wachusett," are leisurely Transcendental saunters in which the poet looks deeply into familiar local facts and finds both interesting natural details overlooked by superficial observers and deeper truths interesting to the poetic or philosophic mind.²⁰⁾

4. Thoreau as poet

Thoreau says that poetry, so simple and natural, is nothing but healthy speech and the common fact in his experience.

Nov. 30, 1841

Good poetry seems so simple and natural a thing..... poetry is nothing but healthy speech.... The best lines, perhaps, only suggest to me that man simply saw or heard or felt what seems the commonest fact in my experience.²¹⁾

Thoreau was speaking well of nature not only out of himself, but out of the plenum of truth in nature. He saw the material world as a means and symbol; it is the fact that imports. All the creatures (universe, animal and vegetable world, human being) lay in glory in his mind, a type of order and beauty of the whole. It is his habitual way of transcen-

19) Abel, op. cit., p.157.

20) Ibid., p.162.

21) Shepard op. cit., p.28.

dentalizing the material world perceptible to his sense: he regarded nature as raw material of tropes and symbols with which to describe his life.

Facts should only be as the frame to my pictures; they should be material to the mythology which I am writing..... My facts shall be falsehoods to the common sense.... Facts which the mind perceived, thoughts which the body thought.²²⁾

Thoreau's poetical thought is more clearly stated in the metaphorical opening of his best-known poems, "The Inward Morning":²³⁾

Packed in my mind lies all the clothes
Which outward nature wears,
And in its fashions hourly change
It all things also repairs.

In vain I look for change abroad,
And can no difference find,
Till some new ray of peace and uncalled
Illumes my inmost mind.

What is it gilds the treer and clouds,
And paints the heavens so gay,
But yonder fast—abiding light
With its unchanging ray?

Lo, when the sun streams through the wood,
Upon a writer's morn,
Where'er his silent beans intrude
The murky night is gone.

Although Thoreau tried to express his proper one of uttering in nature's tropes and symbols transcendental truth, he was forced to adhere consistently to a prosaic world to spend a good deal of his life on other tasks. That is why Thoreau as poet could not publish poems with regular and systematical planning, only publishing his transcendental verses in his prose writings. But his poetical spirit was well illustrated in his most personal treatment to the realities he valued most. In this sense, his life and biography was in his verses; it was in the sense of spiritual biography, his personal history transcendentalized, rather than mere factual biography.

His poems are his most personal treatment to the realities he valued most.... His biography is in his verses, but this rather in the sense of spiritual biography, his personal history transcendentalized, than mere factual biography.²⁴⁾

22) Abel, op. cit., p.167.

23) Bradley, op. cit., p.1481.

First published in *The Dial* for October, 1842, and reprinted in Thoreau's "Wednesday" chapter of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*(1849).

24) Abel, op. cit., p.168.

Poetry, to him, was a piece of very private history, which led us into the secret of his life, but it was not the secret of stealthy actions but the secret of private thoughts. His specific references to persons, places, and events may be with certainty identified in his poems, but "the more generalized references which reflect upon the meaning of experience are more significant and usually are the substance of his poems":²⁵⁾ his poems represented his inward imagery and personality.

Certain specific references are one addressed to his brother, John, and one supposed to be about Edmund Sewell, "Lately, Alas, I knew a Gentle Boy." This poem, despite its presumably specific reference, generalizes and idealizes its meaning.

Lately, alas, I knew a gentle boy
Whose features all were cast in Virtue's mould,
As one she had designed for Beauty's toy
But after manned him for her own strong-hold.

The cardinal Transcendental beliefs are well connoted in Thoreau's poems. In such poems as "It Is No Dream of Mine," he declares the omnipresence of spirit in nature:

I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven
Than I live to Walden even.
I am its stony shore,
And the breeze that passes o'er.

In other poems, the difference between mere sense perception and Transcendental insight are emphasized as in "Inspiration" which is composed of 21 stanzas of 4 lines.

Inspiration²⁶⁾

Whate'er we leave to God, God does
and blesses us:
The work we choose should be our own.
God leaves alone.

Making my soul accomplice there
Unto the flame my heart hath lit,
Then will the verse forever wear—
Time cannot bend the line when God hath writ.

But now there comes unsought, unseen,
Some clear divine electuary,

25) *Ibid.*, p.168.

26) Bradley, *op. cit.*, pp.1489-1487.

"Inspiration," one of Thoreau's best poems, is also important because it reflects his transcendental ideas as applied to creative expression, especially poetry. Not published in its entirety during Thoreau's life, this poem was convinced early fragments of it appear in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) as a kind of commentary on the ideas of this prose volume.

And I, who had but sensual been,
Grow sensible, and as God is, am wary.

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

I hear beyond the range of sound,
I see beyond the range of sight,
New earths and skies and seas around,
And in my day the sun doth pale his light.

A clear and ancient harmony
Pierces my soul through all its din,
As through its utmost melody,—
Father behind than they, father within.

It speaks with such authority,
With so serene and lofty tone,
That idle Time runs gadding by,
And leaves me with Eternity alone.

Such is the Muse, the heavenly maid,
The star that guides our mortal course,
Its wheat's fine flour, and its undying force.

Fame cannot tempt the bard
Who's famous with his God,
Nor laurel him reward
who has his Maker's nod.

In the Transcendental conclusion,

If I but love that virtue which he is,
Though it be scented in the morning air,
Still shall we be truest acquaintances,
Nor mortals know a sympathy more rare.

"Light-Winged Smoke, Icarian Bird," which Emerson call his best one, is felicitously set in *Walden*. What distinguishes these poems as a group is the kind of subject they treat—"always something in nature which by its scarcely substantial, transient, volatile character suggests the relation between the visible solid state of things and some more ethereal invisible reality."²⁷ Among these are "Fog," "Low-Anchored Cloud," "Pray to What Earth does This Sweet Cold Belong," and "Woof of the Sun, Ethereal Gauze."

27) Abel, *op. cit.*, p.171.

Smoke²⁸⁾

Light-winged Smoke, I carian bird,²⁹⁾
 Melting thy pinions in thy upward flight;
 Lark without song, and messenger of dawn,
 Circling above the hamlets as they nest;
 Or else, departing dream, and shadowy form
 Of midnight vision, gathering up thy skirts;
 By night star-veiling, and by day
 Darkening the light and blotting out the sun;
 Go thou my incense upward from his hearth,
 And ask the Gods to pardon this clear flame.

Haze³⁰⁾

Woof of the sun, ethereal gauze,
 Woven of Nature's richest stuffs,
 Visible heat, air-water, and dry sea,
 Last conquest of the eye;
 Toil of the day displayed, sun-dust,
 Aerial surf upon the shores of earth,
 Ethereal estuary, firth of light,
 Breakers of air, billows of heat,
 Fine summer spray on inland seas;
 Bird of the sun, transparent-winged
 Owlet of noon, soft-pinioned,
 From heath or stubble rising without song,
 Establish thy serenity o'er the fields.

Darrel Abel described the trait of this poem common in somewhat irregular blank verse, with subtle variations of rhythm and muted effects of assonance and alliteration;

The trait of this poem common to the class are, besides the kind of phenomenon considered, the apostrophizing of the subject in a long train of epithets which move from physical to spiritual aspects of it; the delicacy of image; the ingenuity and variety of address; and finally its invocation

28) Bradley, *op. cit.*, p.1486.

One of the vignettes captioned "Orphics" published in *The Dial* for April, 1843, this was reprinted in "House-warning" in *Walden* (1854), following the sentence: "When the villagers were lighting their fires beyond the horizon, I too gave notice to the various wild inhabitants of Walden Vale, by a smoky streamer from my chimney, that I was awake."

29) *Ibid.*, p.1486.

Daedalus, mythical artism of the Greeks, escaped his enemies on wings made of feathers and wax. *Ibid.*, p.1486.

30) One of the vignettes captioned "Orphics" published in *The Dial* for April 1843, this was reprinted without title in Thoreau's "Tuesday" chapter of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849)

in terms which establish the poet's own relation to it.³¹⁾

Thoreau who lived with Transcendental beliefs showed its philosophical faith in his poems: he preferred the spiritual world to the material world, the eternal to the momentary, the truthful to the factual. Emerson appraised that an unsleeping insight and meditative wisdom was in him.

...there was an excellent wisdom in him, proper to a rare class of men, which, showed him the material world as a means and symbol. This discovery, which sometimes yields to poets a certain casual and interrupted light, serving for the ornament of their writing, was in him an unsleeping insight.³²⁾

■. The Philosophy of Thoreau's life

Around the 1840's, Thoreau had a steadfast belief: man should be allowed leisure and detachment to find himself and to make a choice of life. Thoreau was deeply interested in his determination to be self-reliant: "For an impenetrable shield, stand inside yourself."

The problem was how man could distinguish self (finding himself) from mere social life (mere convention and habitual living). He thought that man should lead a sincere joyous life instead of a toilsome sham existence as described in *Walden*: "A man's life should be a stately march to a sweet and unheard music." Man can try "to pick out the strains of this celestial music amidst the worldly din."... it could be achieved only by some kind of physical retreat from the hurlyburly of getting and spending."³³⁾ Nobody can answer the problem discussed above, but we can have a clear definition: it is a Spiritual Life.

With this spiritual view of life, many of his Transcendental contemporaries were joining Brook Farm³⁴⁾ as a retreat from a naughty world, but Thoreau refused to enter it.

Thoreau excused himself saying that the ideal Utopia men can build on earth is another system and organization apt to restrict man's thinking, decision, and free will. He wished the human life independent and free from man-made institution; it was the only way to be free from daily toilsome labor; it was the higher thing to him.

He wished, he said, to test the things by which society around him lived. He stuck for a kind of personal freedom... They (the men in Concord) were mortgaged to their encumbered properties and their daily labor. Thoreau would practice a rude economy and avoid enslavement: he would free himself for high things, mainly reading and writing, and his observation of nature.³⁵⁾

31) Abel, op. cit., p.171.

32) Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Thoreau" in *Walden and Civil Disobedience* ed., by Owen Thomas (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), p.272.

33) Abel, op. cit., pp.119-120.

34) Brook Farm, at West Roxbury, Massachusetts, was in existence as a community for six years, from Spring of 1841 to that of 1847. During the first half of this time it was an informally organized socialist community; during the latter half it was reorganized and enlarged as a Fourieristic phalanstery.

35) Leon Edel, *Henry D. Thoreau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1970), pp.17-18.

1. Essay, "Walden"

Walden (1854)³⁶⁾ is the first edition entitled "Walden or Life in the Woods," as Thoreau there states about 1846. It was later revised in the preparation of readings for meeting of the Concord Lyceum and again for publication as a volume in 1854, the source of the present text. The main topic of *Walden* is that men should lead sincere joyous lives instead of lives of toilsome labor: "men lived an economical simple life with 'a broad margin' of leisure, realizing his wish 'to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life'³⁷⁾ It is another paradoxical creed of Thoreau's way of living.

Thoreau presented a complex organization of themes related to the central concept of individualism. But *Walden* is unostentatiously learned because his knowledge was a constant fact of his intellect, not the result of the mere memory of information.

This book is a complex organization of themes related to the central concept of individualism: such as the economy of individualism (the experiment at Walden Pond); the spiritual and temporal values of individualism in society or in solitude; the survival of self-reliance amid depersonalizing social organization; the related observation of animal and plant life; and the transcendental concept of the accomplished human personality both Time and the Timeless.³⁸⁾

His deep interest in nature was already set in his early inward life. In his Commencement debate at Harvard, a decade before his Walden life, Thoreau discussed the following:

Let men, true to their natures,... lead manly and independent lives; let them make riches the means and not the end of existence.... This curious world which we inhabit is more wonderful than it is convenient; more beautiful than it is useful; it is more to be admired and enjoyed than used.

This doctrine, drawn from Emerson's *Nature* (1836),³⁹⁾ became the philosophy of Thoreau's life. *Walden* is his report of his most striking experiment, Walden life, to the world. *Walden*, composed of eighteen chapters follows a simple, effective plan. A long first chapter, "Economy," discusses what are the true necessities of life. The important point of life is not to gain Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel (Thoreau states Fuel as a necessity of life), but how to gain these. When man has a definite object of how to live, such social problems as freedom, success in life, property, and so on can be explained: The practical problem is not to define what is necessary, but how much, and how much labor must be spent to get it.

Thoreau concludes that much less will suffice than people commonly think:

36) Bradley, op. cit., p.1242.

The earliest manuscript of this world-famous book, entitled "Walden, or Life in the Woods," was prepared, as Thoreau there states, about 1846.... these were published in full by Reginald L. Cook (*Thoreau Society Bulletin*, Winter, 1953).

37) Abel, op. cit., p.123.

38) Bradley, op. cit., p.1243. Refer to footnote.

39) Emerson's first major work, *Nature*, was the first comprehensive expression of American Transcendentalism. The small first edition of *Nature*, published anonymously in 1836, gained critical attention, but few general readers.

In fact, "most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hinderances to the elevation of mankind." people spend most of their lives, not in getting necessities, but superfluities, luxuries. Such superfluities are not worth what they cost... "A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone."⁴⁰⁾

In the Walden experience, Thoreau insists that he was very happy because Walden life cost him incredibly little trouble to get the necessities: "I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself than be crowded on a velvet cushion." Such enjoyment would be found by rejecting what was artificial and unnecessary, saying "Our life is frittered away by detail... Simplify, simplify." He enjoyed himself with strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself. He saw, with clearer vision, more intense delight, the beauty of Walden Pond in all seasons, hours, and aspects of weather. Thoreau of *Walden* is a witness to a true world which he himself alone has visited—not the visible world around Walden Pond, but an inner world which the Walden experience allowed him to explore. Lewis says;

This is what Walden is about; it is the most searching contemporary account of the desire for a new kind of life.⁴¹⁾

2. Thoreau: No Hermit

Just after his Harvard graduation, Thoreau joined the Transcendentalists' group under the powerful sway of Emerson's thought as a member of the Concord group. But he was not taken in by the transcendentalist excesses of the Concord nor by the millennial dreams on the Concord hushes. Thoreau was rather interested in the Greek classics, the Oriental teachings, the nature-worship of the French and German philosophies, and the English romantic poets. Sherman Paul put it into the following statement:

The source of strength in his thinking came rather from other strains an absorption with the Greek classics, a prolonged study of the Oriental teachings, the Greco-British tradition of individualism, the nature-worship of the French and German philosophers and the English romantic poets, and finally a conscious modeling upon the way of life of the American Indians.⁴²⁾

His personal essays and nature soliloquies is a devastating attack upon every dominant aspect of American life in its first flush of industrial advance—"the factory system, the corporations, business enterprise, acquisitiveness, the vandalism of natural resources, the vested commercial and intellectual interests, the cry for expansion, the clannishness and theoretic smugness of New England Society, the herd-mindedness of the people, the unthinking civic allegiance they paid to an apportionist and imperialist government."⁴³⁾

Thoreau hates blind obedience to systematic government and institution and industrial:

40) Abel, op. cit., p.144.

41) R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp.20-21.

42) Sherman Paul ed., *Thoreau: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.G.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p.20.

43) Abel, op. cit., p.123.

factory system which meant the exploitation of others. His dogmatic statement was well shown in his definition of way of living to get the living necessities: the "cost of a thing" is "the amount of life which is required to be exchanged for it immediately or in the long run."

In this sense, Walden life for two years and two months was not a secluded life but an experimental life to check an attempt to simplify his life, to find a more natural spontaneous mode of living: "it was not an attempt to return to the wild, to revert to the primitive."⁴⁴ Thoreau never rejected that American civilization is a real advance in the condition of man but rejected the social symptoms of neglecting human nature and rights through the mechanism, industrialism, materialism, and mannerism.

Thoreau was never attempting to be a hermit, rather, in fact, he not only maintained his Concord friendship; but also was more than usually companionable with woodchoppers, Shanty Irich, and other humble classes of society, deepening if anything his social sympathies. At "Visitors" in *Walden* he clearly states that he loved society as much as most, and he was no hermit.

"I think that I love society as much as most, and am ready enough.... I am naturally no hermit, but might possibly sit out the sturdiest frequenter of the bar-room, if my business called me there. I had three chairs in my house; one for solituded, two for friendship, three for society."

His purpose in going to Walden Pond was not to live cheaply nor to live dearly, but to transact some primitive business with the fewest obstacles: he was deeply concerned with one kind of economy—the economy of life, not that of money. Lewis states as follows;

Thoreau prescribes the following cure: the total renunciation of the traditional, the conventional, the socially acceptable, the well-known paths of conduct, and the total immersion in nature.⁴⁵

As stated in *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau, as a social critic, has a strong duty to resist governmental authority when it is unjustly exercised.

Thoreau was uncompromising: his belief was too tight to admit something wrong. It was a taut, astringent rejection of everything (church system or social, government problems), that could not pass the most exacting tests of the individual life. In this strong sense, he was accused of being a nihilist and his thought effected an almost Nietzschean transvaluation of values, but on the contrary, he was a supporter of individualism indulged in Nature and American democracy. Max Lerner, in "Thoreau: No Hermit." states as follows:

But his hermit-like individualism may easily be overemphasized, just as his absorption with nature has been overemphasized. Both must be seen as part of a rebellion against the oversocialized New England town,... While he regarded individual development as the only aim of society, and the individual's moral sense as the only test and ultimately the only safeguard of institutions, he did not

44) Lewis, op. cit., p.21.

45) Lewis, op. cit., p.21.

envisage the individual as the necessary cadre of society.⁴⁶⁾

Thoreau emphasized at one point that he was no hermit, explaining why he began and finished Walden life as follows:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had I had not lived.... I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not lift, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms,.... I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one.

3. Higher Laws

The most critical chapter of *Walden* is "Higher Laws," in which Thoreau sets forth the dual reality which he had grasped firmly by stripping away the superficialities of conventional life: spiritual life.

"I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both."

The oneness with which Thoreau was able to identify himself with nature meant that he could appreciate and understand realities in nature. "The conventional life of man is really an artificial existence which obscures both of these realities and leaves man with a mere counterfeit of life."⁴⁷⁾ He transcendentalizes every topic in *Walden*, and refuses to accept the ordinary values in society because he thinks it is derived from a false economy of commodity. Thoreau's philosophy of living does not mean any analysis of problems in thinking, but rather the intelligent shaping of one's way of life. What man should seek is self-realization and the practical problems which man faces is not with what to provide himself, but how to live: "Since he must provide himself with food, clothing, and shelter, he must do it with simplicity and as little effort as possible, in order to allow a margin of leisure for the exploration of "reality." Man's whole moral life and the structure of his knowledge are built up from the primitive base of his practical dependence on nature: this is why Thoreau constantly uses the word "higher".⁴⁸⁾

It means the expansion of "spiritual" life in human beings, which always remains rooted in nature: Thoreau looks forward to conversal soul and to omnipresent Providence. The problems of who he is, where he stands, and what he pursues in life's direction are to awaken to conscious spiritual life: the "higher laws" expressed in *Walden*. When man is ignorant of his bottomless potential possibilities, he seems to fall into "ignorance, lethargy, shame, fear, and bad management."⁴⁹⁾

46) Paul, op. cit., pp.21-22.

47) Abel., op. cit., p.147.

48) William Drake, "Walden" ed., Paul, op. cit., p.78.

49) Ibid., p.79.

Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and appearance... till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call *reality*, and say, That is, and no mistake...(*Walden*, II, 108). Be it life or death, man crave only reality.(*Walden*, II, 109) If we know all the laws of Nature, we should need only one face, or the discription of one actual phenomenon, to infer all the results at that point. Now we know only a few laws, and our result is vitiated, not of course, by any confusion or irregularity in Nature but by our ignorance of essential elements in the calculation. (*Walden*, II, 320)

Thoreau's conclusion in his *Walden* life is that the man who can simplify his own life will find the true meaning of the "Higher Laws."

I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness.

N. Civil Disobedience

The essay, "Civil Disobedience," appeared in the anthology *Aesthetic Essays*(1849), edited by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, transcendentalist bookseller in Boston. There it was entitled "Resistance to Civil Government." Under its present title it appeared in the posthumous collections *A Yankee In Canada*(1866) and *Miscellanies*(1893).

Civil Disobedience(1849) was neglected for more than half a century, although it formulates democratic ideas inherent in *Walden*. Thoreau believed and demonstrated by example that it government, responding to expediency or majority pressures, infringes upon the fundamental freedom of thought or choice of moral alternatives of the individual or the majority, the remedy is nonviolent, or pacific, resistance.⁵⁰⁾ Thoreau, at the specific occasion of being arrested and sent to jail for refusal to pay his poll tax, states his strong application of Transcendentalism to politics: the individual conscience above institutional formulas, traditions, and social convention.

It discusses something about the Mexican War and the Fugitive Slave Laws.⁵¹⁾ it is his own practical demonstration against American government policies.

Thoreau practiced civil disobedience as a principle, in protest against the Mexican War, the Fugitive Slave Laws, and slavery itself.⁵²⁾

50) Bradley, op. cit., p.1461.

51) Mexican War: Between Mexico and the United States(1846-1848); the issues included slavery and the annexation of Texas.

52) Lewis Mumford, from *The Golden Day* ed., Paul, op. cit., p.13.

Civil Disobedience can be summarized in five points as follows;

1. Thoreau expresses his strong beliefs in the utility of government, saying

"I heartily accept the motto, 'That government is best which governs least.' Government is an expedient by which men would fain succeed in letting one another alone." This aim is subverted whenever government assumes and imposes an independent authority, or is perverted whenever it becomes an instrument of part of the community for imposing its will on the rest. Then it becomes inexpedient and its sanction to government.⁵³⁾

2. Thoreau discusses the responsibility of men to make government their instrument, not to resign themselves to being its instrument. "I think we should be men first, and subjects afterward." "An undue respect for law" will make a citizen "a mere shadow and reminiscence of humanity."

"I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government. Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it... A government in which the majority rule in all cases cannot be based on justice, even as far as man understands it. Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?... A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men, serve the State with their conscience also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part."

3. Thoreau denounced critically that his American government is the slave's government, questioning, "How does it become a man to behave toward this American government today?" "I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as *my* government which is the *slave's* government.

All men recognize the right of revolution; that is, right to refuse allegiance to and to resist the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable. ... All machines have their friction. ...But when the friction comes to have its machines,... I say, let us not have such a machine any longer."

A bad government should be resisted, not theoretically and generally but actually and locally, where it meets the citizen in his daily affairs.⁵⁴⁾

Thoreau was also rebellious towards his Massachusetts, the political state as it confronts him:

I quarrel not with far-off foes, but with those who, near at home, cooperate with, and do the bidding of, those far away, and without whom the latter would be harmless.

It was not against the South but against the North which Thoreau found his inexpedient government.

Practically speaking, the opponents to a reform in Massachusetts are not a hundred thousand poli-

53) Abel, op. cit., p.126.

54) Owen Thomas ed., *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966), p.227.

ticians of the South, but a hundred thousand merchants and farmers here, who are more interested in commerce and agriculture than they are in humanity, and not prepared to do justice to the slave and to Mexico, *cost what it may.* (*Civil Disobedience*)

4. Thoreau then discusses the consequences to the individual and the government of such defiance: "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison." It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoners on parole, and the Indians who were pressured, cast away out of his native territories unjustly can stay peacefully. The state may throw the citizen's boy in prison, but she cannot resist to control over one's conscience; the citizen's rights and privilege.

But even suppose blood should flow? Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound, a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now.

Thoreau asserts that the government is despotic and impotent against the virtuous will of a citizen.

5. The essay *Civil Disobedience*, concludes with a distinction between mere legality and justice, which is the same as that between prudence and wisdom, or expediency and truth. Abel concludes as follows:

"Civil Disobedience" is, in terms of worldwide fame and influence, the greatest of American essays, one of the world; classic treaties on political justice and also on political action. But as a piece of American literature, it is simply the most specific and dramatic statement of the Transcendental doctrine that anyone brave enough to "stand right fronting and face to face to a fact," anywhere at any time, thus confronts eternity and the absolute.⁵⁵

V. Conclusion

Henry D. Thoreau, a man of simple tastes and high idealism, is "the supreme example in American culture of man who did what he wanted, the man who best typifies the rugged individualism of the nineteenth century."⁵⁶ He is not esteemed as a natural philosopher but as a commentator of Nature and natural life he tried to demonstrate its way of life in Walden life.

Thoreau who was deeply interested in Transcendentalism tried to find Soul, Universal Soul, spritual life and reality in his inward life through Nature: he rejected the traditional convention, custom, and religious patterned services. He asked us to consider the rewards and costs of a personal, formed life.

He believes that man can clarify and concentrate as well as simplify his life, that he can consciously shape the materials of his life and in the shaping transform living into an art and an adventure.

55) Abel., op. cit., p.128.

56) Clarence A. Brown and John T. Flanagan eds., *American Literature: A College Survey* (New York: Mc-Graw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), p.289.

His subject is not only the state of men but the promising condition of man.⁵⁷⁾

It is true that Thoreau's essays are rarely studied in American literature. The main reasons are that his literary thoughts are heterogeneous to the contemporary thoughts, culter, and American tradition: it expresses the strong characteristic of his unique ideal, individualism, and the Transcendentalism, as stated in "Higher Laws" in *Walden*.

The essays can be summarized in this paper as follows:

1. Thoreau, as an essayist, inquires into the essential truth, reality, soul, and the spiritual way of living: he made compromise with the traditional social order and organization. He lived an economical simple life with "a broad margin" of leisure, realizing his wish "to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life.

2. Thoreau, as a lecturer, is the Transcendental humanist: he was a steadfast Abolitionist to make demonstration against the Fugitive Slave Laws and the Mexican War.

3. Thoreau, as a poet, is man of the Transcendental idealism. His themes lay in glory in his inward mind and a type of the Universal order and beauty of the whole world: it is the habit of transcendentalizing the material world perceptible to sense that he referred to, "He is the richest who has most use of nature as raw material of tropes and symbols with which to describe his life."

4. *Walden*, as stated clearly in "Higher Laws," is a complex organization of themes related to the central concept of individualism: such as the spiritual and temporal values of individualism in society or in solitude; the survival of self-reliance amid depersonalizing social organization; the related observation of animal and plant life; and the Transcendental concept of the accomplished human personality; simultaneously aware of relations both with Time and the Timeless.

5. *Civil Disobedience* is one of the greatest of American essays, one of the world's classic treaties on political justice and also on political action: it is an unusually cogent statement of the contemporary American political policy.

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57) Paul, op. cit., pp.1-2.

國文要約

Henry D. Thoreau는單純한自然作家가 아니라自然, 自然生活, 生活의意味를說明한解説者이다. 超越主義思想에 탐닉했던 그가終來의傳統的因襲, 慣習, 宗教儀式에서 벗어나自然을通하여靈의世界, 마음의世界를憧憬했던思想家이다. 이런意味에는 Thoreau는 19世紀初 American Renaissance 文學에 있어時代를 앞서觀照한思想家이다.

Thoreau의文學은研究가되지 않았던 것이事實이다. 그理由는 Thoreau의文學思想은 그時代的思想, 文化, 傳統에異質感을 주었고 또 한편으로는 Higher Laws에서 밝힌 것처럼 그의思想과作品이 Self-Culture라 생각하리만큼個性이 강한 것이었다.

1. 隨筆家로서 Thoreau는事物의正確한眞相, 本體, 眞理를追求하려했다. 特히社會生活, 社會現象에對한 그의態度는既存社會秩序에非妥協的이었고原始 그대로의自然, 自然精神을 사랑하였다. 自然속엔誤謬, 僞善이 없는非理가 없는純粹한法則만이 있다고確信했다.

2. 講演者로서 Thoreau는超越主義人道主義者였다. 그의主題는眞實하고素朴한人間生活, 自然을 사랑하고自然의攝理대로生을營爲하여야 한다고力說한다. 無人間制度나因襲에盲目的으로追從하는生活을功擊하면서良心에따른平凡한「삶」을眞實이라主張한다.

3. Thoreau는詩人으로서 잘 알려지지 않은超越主義理想詩人이다. 人間의 깊은心靈, 自然속에 나타난眞實을吟頌한詩人이라 할 수 있다. 物質的인世界보다는靈의世界, 瞬間보다는永遠을事實보다는眞實을追求한詩的洞察力을 갖고 있는詩人이다.

4. *Walden*의主題는人間이살아가는勞苦보다는「生」을誠實하게즐겁게營爲해야 한다는 Thoreau의生活哲學이며當爲性이다. *Walden*은個人主義의有用性, 價値를主張하고非人格化되어가는社會속에人間信賴의回復, 自然界(動·植物)에對한相關性있는觀察, 時間과永遠性關係를通한人間生活에對한信念이었다.

5. *Civil Disobedience*은 Thoreau가超越主義信念을政治에適用한文書이다. 本隨筆의論旨는個人的良心(確信)은制度, 傳統, 慣習보다優位에있으며社會制度에基準한相對的인道德性보다는絶對的道德律을強調한다. 따라서 *Civil Disobedience*는當時美國內에深刻的社會問題였던 Mexican War와 Fugitive Slave Law를非難하는自身の行動原理였다.

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