

Thoreau's Anti-Hero and the Use of Polarities in *Walden*

EMANUELA ANA MĂRGINEANU

Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași

This article is a treatment of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* as it reflects the inner struggle against a – perceived – universal inner dualism the author projects onto his character. His aim is to illustrate a concept which was part of the larger dualities New England Transcendentalists in the nineteenth century worked out to reconcile: soul-body, spirit-matter, Idealism-Materialism, Nominalism-Realism, idea-action, Reason-Understanding, consciousness-the unconscious, time-timelessness. In *Walden*, Thoreau's anti-hero(es) is (are) featured to support the strong and important argument of the existence of an inherent animal-spiritual dualism in all human beings, but Thoreau closes the book in an optimistic key, stressing his belief in, and outlying the way towards, the possibility of redemption and overcoming of this “flawed” condition.

Keywords: anti-hero; double; polarities; opposite; Oneness.

In a discussion on archetypes as universal forms, C. G. Jung approaches, among others, the motif of the double origin: earthly and divine. The archetypes, according to Jung, are means of connecting the psyche with the innermost, genuine heritage, the recognition of which, even when unconscious, sparks in the individual a sense of understanding, familiarity and truthfulness. Grecian mythology abounds in examples – Jung reminds of the motive of the double origin of Heracles –, then there are the Homeric heroes born out of the union between a god or a goddess and a mortal; moreover, ancient Egyptian pharaohs were traditionally considered both divine and human (Jung, 1994: 24). In this context, Jesus Christ becomes, for the father of the archetypes, yet another archetypal motif in the broader system of “collective representations”, made to serve up a certain need of mankind to believe in the possibility of having the divine among them. Integration of dual tendencies within Oneness, within the Self, what Jung calls an integrative archetype, is, as he believed, a natural human tendency, and “the desire for wholeness and unity within oneself and the outside world, and its attendant frustrations, evidence themselves in several areas of human thought and experience” (Gougeon, 2007: 51).

The “double self” was a topic frequently approached by authors of the nineteenth century Romantic literature. It was one of the features the Romantic spirit struggled with and tried to overcome. With Goethe's “zwei Seelen”, the “portrait of a radically divided soul” (Porte, 2004: 2), it went on developing and becoming a motif in several literary masterpieces; some few examples include *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* (1852), *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1890), *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and many others. The issue of a possible reconciliation naturally followed, although most writers – Wilde, Stevenson, Melville, Hawthorne – seem to elaborate variations of the Faustian tension.

No less, nineteenth century New England Transcendentalists picked up the debate and tried to analyze it with the transcendental “eye”. Ralph Waldo Emerson's “The Conduct of Life” (1851) teaches that “the first lesson of history is the good of evil. Good is a good doctor, but Bad is sometimes a better”, being a universal principle that “Nature is upheld by antagonism”; thus, “the sun were insipid, if the universe were not opaque”, and good is built up on the bad, “as Art lives and thrills in new use and combining of contrasts, and mining into the dark evermore for

darker pits of night”. “And evermore in the world is this marvelous balance of beauty and disgust, magnificence and rats” he concludes, characteristically reaching towards equilibrium and harmony. His idea was that the negative side (vice, egotism) was an exaggeration of the positive (virtue, individuality), as both emerged out of the same power, of the same root. The cure for the negative force lies in the acts of its use, assimilation, incorporation, overcoming (Lopez, 1999: 259).

In respect to the fragmented self, Ralph Waldo Emerson might have found reconciliation of the two selves, the two tendencies, difficult to be achieved at the level of consciousness alone, when he wrote that “the worst feature of this double consciousness is, that the two lives, of the understanding and of the soul, which we lead, really show very little relation to each other, never meet and measure one another: one prevails now, all buzz and din; and the other prevails then, all infinitude and paradise; and, with the progress of life, the two discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves” (“The Transcendentalist”, 1842). While consciously “we live in succession, in division, in parts, in particular” (“The Over-Soul”, 1841), it is centrality, and the Oneness of the integrative Soul, the “Over-Soul”, which annuls the division. Coming out of one’s self, depersonalization and going into timelessness, diving into the unconscious and bringing it into consciousness and in so doing reaching up to a level of higher consciousness, becoming “a transparent eyeball” – all of which came together as part of the same experience – was the means of accessing the power of this absolute Unity. It was the transcendental experience which actually was able to bring opposites together into harmonious balance. In the same manner, the fifth movement of Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself” describes the union of body and soul “in terms of a sexual encounter that leads to a dynamic, even ecstatic, experience of unity and transcendence”, and at a cosmic level, becomes “union with the whole world and all of humanity” (Gougeon, 2007: 50).

The possibility or impossibility of reconciliation “plagued the Transcendentalists”, who “yearned for unity” (Porte, 2004: 4) yet finally resolved that the hero was not necessarily he who managed to heal the division but he who managed to “live nobly in a kind of sublime Faustian tension between hell and paradise” (4), accepting the “double nature” and the “privilege of a two-folded life” (Hedge apud Porte, 2004: 4, n. 7) yet working to “unite again the heavenly and the earthly world” (Emerson, “Goethe; or, the Writer”, 1850).

Transferred to their personal lives, the dualism widely reflects the relationship R. W. Emerson and H. D. Thoreau developed, with Emerson assuming the superior, condescending Idealist master role and allotting Thoreau the “practical disciple” role. The latter’s “vigor” and practicality, of which Emerson spoke in the eulogy of his friend, placed Thoreau at the opposite – and negative – pole of the dual pair. “One of the refined forms of torture that Emerson used against Thoreau dramatizes the distinction between soul and body. Emerson casts himself as the representative of mind or spirit, [...] and Thoreau as his ‘practical disciple’” (Ellison, 1984: 159), a contrast which governed the perception of their mutual acquaintances (159). Thoreau was fully aware of this, since in a Journal entry he wrote: “Alcott spent the day with me yesterday. He spent the day before with Emerson. He observed that he had got his wine, and now he had come after his venison. Such was the compliment he paid me” (159).

Nevertheless, Thoreau had his own genius and “self-reliance”, and he felt opposition was a theme worth developing on. In *Walden*, Thoreau approaches the topic in various guises, one of which is indirect, through “reflection” or “projection” in the other – the Canadian woodchopper, and the other is the direct statement of dualism of the “P”, the voice speaking in *Walden*. For Henry David Thoreau, “the issue of doubleness [...] was of central – almost obsessive – concern” (Porte, 2004: 5), while the “battle for unity [...] was the chronicle of his spiritual life” (Paul, 1958: 53). Accepting the idea of dualism, he still believed “nature [could] be overcome” through incorporating the negatives and becoming a stronger person because consciously assimilating obstacles. “These different selves, [...] had to be harmonized; the tension of [Thoreau’s] life was their resolution” (53). In *Walden*, Thoreau “plays”, among several other themes, the one of the double and its overcoming.

A number of characters feature in *Walden*, and whether or not they belong to history, they are used by Thoreau to support an idea and offer concreteness to his philosophical arguments. All the characters come in contradiction, on one level or another, with the central hero, the “I”, thus playing out the theme of the double. The nearest to the hero is the Canadian woodchopper, who, however, falls short in leading the life Thoreau aims towards by that he is living in the “torpid” state and has no intellectual or “spiritual” concerns. Unlike the Doppelgänger of O. Wilde or that of R. L. Stevenson, Thoreau’s double is not evil, monstrous, self-tormented or selfish; he is simply “sleeping”.

Thoreau’s Canadian woodchopper is a hypothetical other side of the hero – he is “the sleeper”. Their common features, but also the differences between them, make it clear that he is what the hero himself *would have been* if he had lived his life in the torpid state. They are both the same age, both are “quiet and solitary” (145), leading a leisured life: “he didn’t care if he only earned his board” (145); their eye color is blue – what is different is the presence of a spark; the woodchopper’s are “dull sleepy blue eyes” yet “occasionally lit up with expression” (145) and “a well of good humor [...] overflowed at his eyes” (146). They both are great talkers: “I dearly love to talk” (81); “How I love to talk! By George, I could talk all day!” (149). They live a simple life, love nature, read Homer (145), and are friends with the animals (146). Yet the woodchopper, “a great consumer of meat” – while the hero leans, with few exceptions, towards vegetarianism –, is “cast in the coarsest mold” (145), displaying “an exuberance of animal spirits” (146). He too had fed on a woodchuck (144). “In him the animal chiefly was developed”, while “the intellectual and what is called spiritual man in him were slumbering as in an infant” (147). This lack of any intellectual – that is, meditative, thoughtful, apprehensive – predilection made him “genuine and unsophisticated” (147). Moreover, he never rose above the level of consciousness: “He had been instructed only in that innocent and ineffectual way in which the catholic priests teach the aborigines, by which the pupil is never educated to the degree of trust and reverence, and a child is not made a man, but kept a child” (147).

His thinking was “primitive and immersed in his animal life” (150), “to a stranger he appeared to know nothing of things in general” (148). Nevertheless, a good eye like that of the perceptive hero sees the possibility of a spark, as the man sometimes resembles “a prince in disguise” (147), mostly through the sense of liberty (Thoreau apud Paul, 1958: 40) and carelessness emanating from him. On the other hand, this simple man displays a hint of nonconformity, though without the rebellious, belligerent and judgmental touch characteristic to the hero himself. At other times, the woodchopper appears as “a man whom I had not seen before”, and the hero wonders “whether he was as wise as Shakespeare or as simply ignorant as a child, whether to suspect him of high poetic consciousness or of stupidity” (148). Thoreau’s antihero is the – inferior – split half, an external projection. The hero vs. woodchopper dichotomy is that of awakened and conscious, versus slumbering and “unconscious”, unaware.

Dualism is the larger frame into which the antihero – as the reverse side of the hero – can be placed. There is in *Walden* an even more tense relationship within the self, and Thoreau goes on to develop on the theme of the inner double. He thus straightforwardly points to a dualism *within* sameness, and a redeeming awareness: “We are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers. It is reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled; like the worms which, even in life and health, occupy our bodies. Possibly we may withdraw from it, but never change its nature. I fear that it may enjoy certain health of its own; that we may be well, yet not pure” (219). And elsewhere:

I [...] am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but a spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it; and that is no more I than it is you. When the play, it may be the tragedy, of life is over, the spectator goes his

way. It was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned. This doubleness may easily make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes.
(135)

The “other” in this last passage is precisely the woodchopper, his double, whom the “I” can judge and look upon as a “spectator”, analyzing his speech, his language, his way of thinking, his way of life in as detached manner as a spectator would the actors on a stage. The passage is featured ten pages before Thoreau actually introducing the Canadian Paphlagonian man, after the reader has been prepared and had time to incorporate the idea of a double outside the self.

Nothing in *Walden* is either destructive or painful; Thoreau’s literature remains bright even when he speaks of the “lowest terms” life would be reduced to. Thoreau’s hero and the antihero are not part of the good-evil binary – which does not feature in *Walden* at all – but of the awakened-slumbering, spiritual-animal themes. The presentation of the “torpid” double is meant to awaken in the reader a revelation of his own slumbering condition, and make him see that, even if he may be leading a moral, simple, and “natural” life – tendencies which are advocated for in *Walden* –, this is still not enough, not for a certain, spiritual “as it is named” (210), kind of elevation. A higher awareness must trigger his everyday action. The reader, made aware of the fraction, of the duplicity in himself, must struggle to “overcome nature”. He must set out to live for a much higher purpose, above the natural tendencies and not for the mere satisfaction of material needs – which in time magnify to become luxuries, enslaving man’s spiritual side until it becomes atrophied. The delicate fruits of the spirit, he stresses, will not be plucked if man’s hands tremble too much from the hard-work he performs to satisfy his ever-growing greed, or if he never thinks such fruits are there waiting to be picked.

The idea of an intimate double is conveyed repeatedly in *Walden* by means of paradoxical statements, metaphoric versus literal use of words, a positive idea countered by its negative side; both strength and weakness are features nature accepts: “[n]ature is as well adapted to our weakness as to our strength” (11). The epitome of this dualism lies in the phrase “we are fauns and satyrs, the divine allied to beasts”, which reminds of the ancient unity, materialized in one man, between an Olympian god and a human. The hero, split within himself, struggles towards overcoming an intimate in-built part and climbing up to exclusive spirituality.

Thoreau acknowledges a “duplex” (Porte, 2004: 5) nature in man. There is one in himself longing for solitude, feeling “wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time” (135), and one who feels, by “a slight insanity in [his] mood”, oppressed by it (131). One who is a vegetarian, feeding on Indian meal and rice, and one who surrenders to savage impulses of devouring raw muskrats in the wood. One who goes to the village to gossip, returns to his solitary “convent” and bathes in the sacred waters of the pond to purify himself, to emerge anew. Thoreau, oscillating between extremes, believes that there must be only one dominating feature and that dualism must eventually be resolved into oneness. “Nature [which was what “degraded” men] is hard to be overcome, but she must be overcome” (221). Both of these selves, the “I” can detachedly analyze as he did the external self.

Thoreau’s dilemma focused on overcoming the bodily part, the trivial, the beastly, as he named it, practically, that is, not only speech but act. And if his struggle was directed towards overcoming his nature, he wanted to do it not by refuting – repressing it, in psychoanalytical terms – but by allowing it materialization when it urged to become manifest. “Not by constraint or severity shall you have access to true wisdom, but by abandonment, and childlike mirthfulness” (1984: 150), he wrote, and this came in agreement with Emerson’s conviction of listening to the inner voice¹. The episode that is illustrated in *Walden* is the one in which the hero, returning from his fishing, comes across a woodchuck, feels a wild temptation to devour it raw, and gives in to this savage

¹ Moreover, following from the Transcendental doctrine that man was divine and his impulses, uncensored by the will, were god-sent, obeying these savage fists meant listening to the god in him. According to Emerson, “Our moral nature is vitiated by any interference of our will. People represent virtue as a struggle, and

call. Interestingly, the author points out that it was not hunger which compelled him to this wild act; it was hunger for what the beast “represented”, namely wilderness and closeness to the unaltered core of nature. It is not a bodily need but a psychological need to identify himself with the animal spirit he knew lay in him that pushes the hero and he consciously obeys this impulse believing that, through the act, he will be able to overcome the beastly stage: “As I came home through the woods with my string of fish, trailing my pole, [...] I caught a glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across my path, and 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” (210).

This is not a singular occurrence, but it happened “[o]nce or twice [...] while I lived at the pond”, when “I found myself ranging the woods, like a half-starved hound, with a strange abandonment, seeking some kind of venison which I might devour, and no morsel would have been too savage for me” (210). It is thus that he realized he is split between two instincts, one “toward a higher” and “one toward a primitive rank and savage one” (210): “I like sometimes to take rank hold on life and spend my days more as the animals do” (210), “there is this instinct in me which belongs to the lower orders of creation” (214). The aim of his ascetics, of his purification rituals, of his silences is precisely to rise above these savage impulses and live in the ethereal.

Thoreau seeks inner harmony, reconciliation of contraries, a subduing of the bodily in favor of the preeminence of the spiritual, since one gains in so far as one loses, and rises in as much as one falls: “by turns our purity inspires and our impurity casts us down” (220); “[h]e is blessed who is assured that the animal is dying out in him day by day, and the divine being established” (220).

Constancy means static, lack of movement. Also symbolic is the movement of the pond, which during the last several years had risen and fell, “it is remarkable that this fluctuation, whether periodical or not, appears thus to require many years for its accomplishment” (181), since “one rise and a part of two falls” have been observed (181), and all the ponds, sympathizing with each other, have “recently attained their greatest height” (181). Thus, it is seen that the fall only pushes over for the rise, resembling a preparatory exercise towards heights.

Dualism itself could be viewed as a theme in *Walden*: “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 life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion” (91).

All the imagery built of contrasting pairs build up the theme of the double – Rise and Fall, low and high, earth and sky, material and spiritual, sleep and awakening, death and life, man being “either the driftwood in the stream or Indra in the sky looking down on it”, “a mass of thawing clay” and “a prince in disguise”, an insect in a million and God watching from above – which makes him a demigod, yet “such gods or demigods only as fauns and satyrs, the divine allied to beasts”: “I fear that we are such gods or demigods only as fauns and satyrs, the divine allied to beasts, the creatures of appetite, and that, to some extent, our very life is our disgrace” (220).

The “either-or” pair used here is not exclusive but serves to point out that “one is awakened in proportion as the other slumbers”, and if they are both virtually there, consciousness can choose which would take over. With *Walden*, Thoreau aims at taking over, and, Plotinian, obliterate or fade out the “degrading” association with the flesh in favor of spirit. “The wonder is how

take to themselves great airs upon their attainments, and the question is everywhere vexed when a noble nature is commended, whether the man is not better who strives with the temptation. But there is no merit in the matter. [...] We love characters in proportion as they are impulsive and spontaneous” (1983: I, 73, 74). There results that irrespective of the nature of the impulse, abandonment in itself, lack of resistance was good. In the larger context of *Walden*, Thoreau’s idea is that this temporary abandonment leads to an overcoming of the lower instincts, therefore their disappearance.

they, how you and I, can live this slimy beastly life, eating and drinking?” (218) and “[p]erhaps there is none that has cause for shame on account of the inferior and brutish nature to which he is allied” (220).

Thoreau believed “truth is always paradoxical” (*apud* Schneider, 1987: 53), both “physically and spiritually”; life is both matter and spirit, appearance and reality, sacred and profane, sleep and awakening. There is always the other, incorporated, reverse side, supporting it, which is why paradox as stylistic device is such a strong presence in the book. Co-existence of contraries is itself a paradox. Yet remaining into one of the conditions is what spoils the balance, and he makes it his duty to counteract and come to the aid. The accurate understanding of the quality, rank, and importance of each of the binaries makes the utmost difference (58). For Thoreau, “[t]he problem of living is to see reality accurately, to be able to see both sides, balance them, and establish their proper place” (58). This did not mean that, in the blink of a second in Brahma-time, man could not achieve perfection if they put their mind to it. In the search for perfection, at the cost of friends and everything regular life might have meant, man could become immortal through the outcome of his work and the perfection of it.

It is by advancing through opposites that Thoreau ascends and brings the reader upwards in the atmosphere of timelessness and perfection in the “Conclusion”. Oneness was the essential feature of man, he was part of a larger unitary frame: “We are one virtue, one truth, one beauty” he wrote in his Journal in 1839 (1984: I, 107). If civilization until then had meant dissipation, an effort of contentment, of focus was to integrate all the split tendencies back into their shell, and then one would be “only introduced once again to [himself]” (107). The parable of the Artist, serving several purposes and bearing several interpretations, partakes of one in the context of integration of the bodily into the spiritual and elevation above it. The concept of time and timelessness is of great importance, reflecting balance, as twentieth century psychomythic humanists such as Mircea Eliade, Norman O. Brown, C. G. Jung, Joseph Campbell and Eric Neumann emphasize (Gougeon, 2007). Thus, “only repressed life is in time, and unrepressed life would be timeless or in eternity” (Brown *apud* Gougeon, 2007: 51). It naturally follows that, as the Artist, “a healthy human being, in whom conscious and unconscious were balanced, would not be dominated and oppressed by time” (51). The parable Thoreau places at the end of his magnificent book brings to the reader the union so much longed for and the one that would help make him a complete man. It goes as follows:

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. [...] 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; [...] The material was pure, and his art was pure; how could the result be other than wonderful? (326-327)

In standing above Time, the artist had come to dominate all the physical limitations, he has “overcome” nature and attained to the wholeness, oneness, completeness and therefore perfection he longed for. Investing all his being, body and soul, in the artistic process, ensures the abolition of all physical limitations. He is no longer “double”; in giving up Time, in considering only Eter-

nity (Thoreau had advised: “read not the Times, read the Eternities”), he had achieved a sublimation, a transformation of the “evil” forces and raised above them. Although during his work “Brahma had awoke and slumbered many times”, for him and his work “the former lapse of time had been an illusion, and [...] no more time elapsed than is required for a single scintillation from the brain of Brahma to fall on and inflame the tinder of a mortal brain” (327). The split second, then, when man is aware, when he lives outside of time and into the eternal Oneness, brings him up and redeems him.

Art is, as Emerson believed, a bringing together of all energies, it is the “supreme refinement” through the use of “antagonistic energies”, of the “aboriginal might” and the power to transform – sublimate them into art – individuals are endowed with. “And the glory of character is in affronting the horrors of depravity, to draw thence new nobilities of power: as Art lives and thrills in new use and combining of contrasts, and mining into the dark evermore for blacker pits of night. What would painter do, or what would poet and saint, but for crucifixions and hells?” (Emerson in “The Conduct of Life”)

Thoreau’s essays overall are populated with men who in their struggle manage to raise above the physical limitations: the Indian, but also other Indian-like men – who can find their way through the forest without the slightest sound of their feet pressed to the ground or even dry leaves, or himself going through the forest during the darkest night, his *feet* carrying him, not his *eyes* – thus he advances unconsciously, and the out-of-consciousness state is a state of abolition of physicality. Lumbermen braving against water, defying gravity in the struggle to carry logs from one side of the country to the other, closely in touch with their instincts for survival, for in the rush of the rapids they pass there is no time to consciously plan and calculate moves, and also guides and woodsmen sleeping under the starry sky, sometimes in the pouring rain, fasting for days, their strong instincts close near consciousness, guiding them; and Thoreau’s own reaching the top of Ktaadn: all these speak of the same quest for the absolute, for that reach of the absolute in the blink of a second, only the time it would take for a spark from Brahma to inflame a mortal’s brain. That is all it takes to reach the absolute and go beyond yourself.

The dual nature, which Thoreau saw as a feature of life, is reflected in the structural pattern of *Walden* as well. The structure of the paragraphs reflects a tendency to lead the reader “from the mundane known to the transcendent knowable and back again” (Broderick, 1968: 66), from the profane to the sacred and return. The same goes for the macrocosm, the way in which chapters are structured and paired. Seeing “Economy” as the prologue establishing of “themes and motifs on which variations will be played” (Schneider, 1987: 51), there appears to be a deliberate attempt to create opposites in the rest. Thus, after “Economy”, “the next fourteen chapters progress by pairs of opposed chapters. Yet, if throughout the book Thoreau shifts between chapters that emphasize the ideal and those that emphasize the factual, a structure that imitates the fluctuations of nature itself in ebb and flow, day and night, fall and spring” (51), there is never an exclusiveness of theme, never pure “spiritual” or purely “beastly”. “Thoreau does not oversimplify these contrasts or make them mutually exclusive” instead “[t]he most factual chapters contain hints of the ideal and vice versa” (52). Though purity is one of the motifs most present in *Walden*, Thoreau understands it is only possible as an extreme, and extremes are only the result of deliberateness, conscious effort and struggle, and not found “naturally” in every circumstance. Therefore he interweaves the “double side” in all the topics approached: sounds and quietness, visitors and solitude, higher laws and brute neighbors, poets, philosopher, hermit and winter animals; moreover, animals seem to be characterized by a human side. Thus, for instance, although the waters of the pond are pure, a snake – associated with sensuality – lies on its bottom, “in a torpid state” (41). The hog skeleton he finds, though showing obvious signs of the absence of “temperance and purity”, is white (219). The vulture, majestically soaring high in the sky, feeds on carrion; the loon also soars high but also dives deep. Animals behave in a humane manner, while sometimes men are imbruted, leading “beastly lives”, “slave-drivers of themselves”.

Comparing *Walden* to *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, critic Sherman Paul underlines

that what *A Week* lacks is balance – the balance offered by the existence of precisely this dualism, of the “anti-”, the counterweight, the negative, which is a requisite for advance, for change and movement. *A Week* – the most transcendental piece Thoreau wrote – “is too much a static ecstasy, a trip to heaven without the tickets to limbo, purgatory, and hell, a book that speaks almost directly from the soul and does not carry the soul through its various forms of existence” (1958: 295) as *Walden* does. An excess and exclusiveness of the transcendental is tiresome and unreal, and keeping one’s feet firm on the ground while surveying the celestial realm was one of the goals of Transcendentalists. To use Henry Hedge’s phrase, the prophet “is at one a dweller in the dust, and a denizen of that land where all truth and beauty spring”.

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