

An Analysis of the Aesthetic Unity
in
Henry David Thoreau's
A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

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A warm drizzling rain had obscured the morning, and threatened to delay our voyage, but at length the leaves and grass were dried, and it came out a mild afternoon, as serene and fresh as if Nature were maturing some greater scheme of her own. After this long dripping and oozing from every pore, she began to respire again more healthily than ever. So with a vigorous shove we launched our boat from the bank, while the flags and bulrushes courtesied a God-speed, and dropped silently down the stream. [1]

1. Introduction

On Saturday, August 31, 1839, Henry David Thoreau embarked upon a two-week excursion of the Concord and Merrimack Rivers with his brother John in their home-built row-boat. The experience of this voyage provided the basis for the narrative of Thoreau's first book, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers which was published in May, 1849. Though nature beamed smilingly at the outset of their journey, the public did not smile upon the launching of his literary career.

Critical reaction to this work was almost universally

negative. Succeeding generations of critics have, by and large, perpetuated the view that this work is "woefully disorganized," [2] a "plainly enough perishable third-rate work," [3] and an "artistic failure." [4] As recently as 1974 A Week inspired bewilderment on the part of James McIntosh who complained that this work "baffled its first readers and is indeed a baffling subject for critical reflection." [5] What has "baffled" several generations of literary scholars as well as readers is the work's seeming lack of unity. They have had difficulty in sensing any structural connection or thematic harmony between the voyage narrative and the frequently occurring reflections and meditations that deal with a wide variety of topics.

Faced with this difficulty, one of the typical attitudes of critics towards this work has been to comment on the freshness and beauty permeating the passages describing nature and the voyage regarding them as separate from the "essays" which seem so often to interrupt the flow of the narrative. In 1944, Archibal MacMechan, irritated by "its scattering aim," criticized A Week saying that "It is neither a record of a week's excursion, nor a book of essays, but a jumble of the two." However, charmed by the beauty of Thoreau's discourse on the common sunfish, he lamented "If the whole book had been of this texture, it would be a classic." [6] Dudley C. Lunt even went so far as to fulfill MacMechan's wish by publishing a purged version in 1954 which eliminated all of the essay-like material from the original work. This attempt gained the approval of noted Thoreau scholar Walter Harding:

When . . . the book is stripped of its digressions, as in the recent edition entitled The Concord and the Merrimack, edited by Dudley C. Lunt, it becomes much more readable, and one can then recognize the validity of H. M. Tomlinson's judgment that it is one of the best of all travel books. [7]

A Week, a good "travel book" stripped of all its extraneous "digressions"! The publication of this shortened version is really symptomatic of the dismal fate to which Thoreau's first book has been subjected. But is this a proper reading at all of the book which heralded the beginning of Thoreau's literary career, and towards whose publication he invested tremendous amounts of time and energy, not to

mention his financial sacrifices? Should the "essays" be discarded lest they adulterate the flavor of the exquisitely fashioned voyage passages?

Much of the unfavorable criticism of A Week has been centered around the so-called "patchwork" organization characterizing this work. The original entry of the trip seen in his Journal is indeed very brief. Thoreau jotted down only such a skeleton record as "Camped in Merrimack, on the west bank, by a deep ravine" on September 2, 1839, and "Rowed and sailed to Concord, about 50 miles," for September 13, the last day of the journey. [8] It is known that Thoreau expanded the original record during the ten years between the actual voyage and the publication of A Week, extracting material from his Journal, storage-house of his ideas and inspirations, even returning to as early as 1837, two years before the voyage itself. He then "winnowed [it] into lectures," then essays, and eventually finalized the whole into book form. [9] The young writer was criticized for drawing upon these diverse sources for incorporation into A Week. Yet how in good conscience can we possibly accuse someone of plagiarizing himself? The craftsmanship Thoreau demonstrated in the above process of revision has been appreciated by recent scholarship. [10] This work can be construed as almost completely an example of his creative thought rather than an actual account of the excursion. Hence one of the questions we will treat in this study will be to what extent Thoreau is successful in harmonizing the various elements comprising this eclectic work into a cohesive whole.

Here, we would do well to say a few words regarding the evolution of literary criticism concerning Thoreau's second book Walden which reached its final form through a similar process of composition. Interestingly enough, Walden, though now regarded as "a masterpiece" and a cornerstone work of American literature, had also been considered to be a poorly organized "glue and paste mosaic of sketches" [11] until as late as 1941, when Francis O. Matthiessen, in American Renaissance, convincingly demonstrated the carefully planned structure underlying this work. "When, as a writer," Matthiessen noted, Thoreau "could fuse his thought and his observation by means of a symbol, which was not just suggested but designed in sharp detail, he was able, in Coleridge's phrase to elicit truth as at a flash." [12] If even the artistry of Walden was not fully appreciated until some ninety years

after its publication, it is hardly surprising that A Week should have suffered a similar fate and have been relegated to the status of a secondary work.

Though Matthiessen skillfully clarified the organic unity of Walden, pointing out the structural device of the circular image employed by Thoreau in this work, where the movement of the chapters, basically in accordance with the natural cycle of the seasons, echoes the theme of the renewal of spiritual life, he failed to detect any artistic unity in A Week. He laments the fact that the circular image seems unsatisfactory as a means for analyzing the structure of A Week:

The flow of the Week is as leisurely and discursive as the bends in the Concord river, and the casual pouring in of miscellaneous poems and essays that Thoreau had previously printed in The Dial tends to obscure the cyclical movement. [13]

Since then few scholars have regarded this work as worthy of serious consideration, the most common reaction being to simply dismiss this work as an immature precursor of Walden. The question of whether or not there exists any structural or thematic unity in A Week remains yet to be satisfactorily elucidated. And it is these matters which will occupy our attention and provides the subject of this study. In his Journal of summer 1845, shortly after he moved into the Walden cabin where he wrote the large part of A Week, Thoreau states the following: "Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written." [14] This was later incorporated in the third chapter of Walden. The above admonition is well worth remembering in order to fully appreciate the heretofore undescribed pattern of unity found in A Week.

2. Structural Unity: River Metaphor

Thoreau structured A Week according to the time unit of a week, devoting one chapter to each day from Saturday through Friday after an introductory chapter entitled "Concord River." Although the excursion had actually taken a full two weeks, he compressed a week period

from Thursday to Thursday spent on an overland round trip from Hooksett to the White Mountains, into a small portion of the chapter "Thursday," thereby reducing the account of the whole journey into seven "Days." The use of the week symbolism is one of the structural devices providing a sense of artistic unity to this work. This is reminiscent of a similar technique Thoreau employed in Walden where he condensed his two-year experiences into one year and used the four-season cycle as a unifying device. Moreover, by referring only minimally to the trip over "the unyielding land" (which actually accounted for as much as half of the whole journey as we have mentioned above), and by dealing almost exclusively with the voyage portion spent on the "flowing" waters of the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, the author consciously based the entire book on the metaphorical device which we will examine later in this chapter.

Each "Day" basically contains the record of the day's activities and adventures beginning with the early morning scene when the two brothers rise and launch on the day's voyage and ending with the evening camping scene on the bank of the river. Thoreau maintains this fixed daily pattern throughout the book. Even in the special chapters of "Thursday," where he presents a narrative of one week in the one-day time unit, he skillfully applies the same model in such a way that he creates the illusion in the mind of the reader that all the events recorded therein happen in the single cycle of a day. The recurrence of this daily narrative pattern based on the natural pulse of the day and night provides a rhythmical framework for this book.

A Week is multi-faceted in nature. Besides the account of the voyage full of detailed descriptions and observations of the surrounding nature and the region's inhabitants, Thoreau introduces the early colonial history of the areas he passes through as well as recording memories of a number of personal experiences. In addition, he shares with the reader a variety of thoughts which, ostensibly, come to mind during the course of the journey.

One of the keys to the overall structure of this work is the tense-shift we frequently encounter in it. It would be worth noting that throughout the book Thoreau uses the past tense exclusively when he presents the factual account of the voyage, while his thoughts and philosophical reflections are expressed in the present tense. The interpolated historical anecdotes and the recounting of his own previous

experiences are also in the past tense. In general, the past tense is employed for the concrete factual narration; and, except for objective, explanatory passages such as those found in the introduction of the Concord River, the present tense is used as a vehicle to convey vividly his ideas and speculations. This tense-alternation reflects the persona's psychological shifts (Thoreau playing the role of the narrator of his inner and outer voyages) of modes and provides us with a general guide to distinguish between the "narrative" and "non-narrative" sections.

Nonetheless, some reflective passages are so closely connected to the voyage account that it is difficult to tell them apart. Thoreau, after presenting an observation of a natural phenomenon or fact in the past tense, often immediately adds his ideas about them in the present tense. Thus some passages are a mixture of factual description and philosophical contemplation. It is difficult to draw a clear division line between all the voyage narrative and passages of a contemplative nature fused into it. In a like manner, attempts on the part of several critics at separating portions of the reflective materials into a category labeled "digressions" have been only marginally successful, since some materials are always found on the borderline. This uneasily-categorizable form is one of the most remarkable and significant structural characteristics of this work.

In A Week the course of Thoreau's thought meanders along in a manner analogous to the flow of the waters of the Concord and Merrimack Rivers visiting place to place as nature wills. In fact, from the early stage of writing A Week, Thoreau psychologically parallels their launch upon the river voyage to the "current of [their] thoughts." In the Journal of June, 1840, where the first expanded record of the excursion appears, he writes:

So with a vigorous shove we launch our boat from the bank, while the flags and bulrushes cursty a God-speed, and drop silently down the stream. As if we had launched our bark in the sluggish current of our thoughts, and were bound nowhither. [15]

And he constructs the whole book around this image of the river of thought "bound nowhither."

In the final version of A Week, the above cited passage found in his Journal appears in the Saturday embarkation scene rewritten in the past

tense and stripped of the underlined portion which expresses directly the author's psychological identification of the river excursion with his inner voyage. The omitted portion of the above citation invites comparison with the last two lines of the introductory chapter "Concord River" appearing in close proximity, where Thoreau declares his resolution to set out upon a voyage into the bosom of the unknown resigning himself over to the natural course of events:

I had often stood on the banks of the Concord, watching the lapse of the current, an emblem of all progress, following the same law with the system, with time, and all that is made; the weeds at the bottom, gently bending down the stream, shaken by the watery wind, still planted where their seeds had sunk, but ere long to die and go down likewise; the shining pebbles, not yet anxious to better their condition, the chips and weeds, and occasional logs and stems of trees that floated past, fulfilling their fate, were objects of singular interest to me, and at last I resolved to launch myself on its bosom and float whither it would bear me. (8, Emphasis mine)

Here the metaphor of the "current of thought" is not so obviously expressed as in the passage we have quoted from the Journal, but transformed into a more subtle and more pregnant figurative expression. The river, here, is the emblem of the ceaselessly flowing current of time which carries along "all that is made" — weeds, pebbles, trees and man, etc. — towards the unfathomable ocean of infinity following the law of nature. It is a symbol of the "progress" of the entire system; but, simultaneously, for each individual being in the system, it can mean "death" or decay. With this cosmic consciousness of human fate, the current of life flowing in man is a part of the larger life force of nature; and the stream of thought is one aspect of the functioning of the life flow in his body. Thus, when Thoreau decided to place himself in the bosom of nature and to "float whither it would bear [him]," he also allowed the natural current of consciousness operant within him, that is, his thought process, to express itself spontaneously. Perhaps, Thoreau, as an artist, may have in this manner avoided elucidating the structural metaphor of the "current of thought" too clearly in this introductory chapter and have chosen only to imply it to

the sensitive mind of the reader through the layers of subtle meanings. Or, the death of his brother John in January 1842 may have been responsible for Henry's deepened philosophical imagery.

Earlier in the same chapter, "Concord River," Thoreau associates the Concord with many famous rivers of history: The Xanthus, the Scamander, the Mississippi, the Ganges, and the Nile. This association expands the voyager's psychological horizon and beckons him into the past, even to the dawn of civilization; to a recollections of great historical figures and cultural achievements: Homer and other Greek and Roman poets, Ossian, Chaucer, Goethe, the ancient fables and mythology, Christianity, Hindu philosophy, etc. Just as the two brothers' boat travels up and down "the natural highway" of the Concord and the Merrimack Rivers, Thoreau's thoughts and reflections float freely up and down the river of time: from the present voyage account back into the past, his personal and the historical, and also to various philosophical contemplations inspired by nature, which might be considered as belonging to the future or of a timeless character as Thoreau remarks in the following passage:

As yesterday and the historical ages are past, work of to-day is present, so some flitting perspectives, and demi-experiences of the life that is in nature are in time veritable future, or rather outside to time, perennial, young, divine, in the wind and rain which never die. (4)

The above idea of the voyage of imagination along the current of time is expressed by the speaker himself. In "Friday" he enters into a meditation on Chaucer as the contemplative mood of the afternoon strikes him, saying: "we floated in imagination farther down the stream of time, as we had floated down the stream of the Merrimack, to the poets of a milder period than had engaged us in the morning" (310-11).

As we have noted, Thoreau does not clearly verbalize the image of the "current of thought" in the first chapter, entitled "Concord River"; but he occasionally mentions this analogy directly in the text so as to make the reader patently aware of this symbolic meaning of the river. For example, in "Saturday," shortly after the two brothers left their native village, appears this passage: "Gradually the placid current of our dreams, floating from past to future..." (13, Emphasis

mine). And in "Monday," following a long noontime contemplation: "The current of our reflections and our dream being thus disturbed, we weighed anchor once more" (128). Thoreau not only likens the stream of thought to the flow of a river, but consciously attempts to imitate this model of nature in the movement of his narration. For instance, the sluggishness of the river current often coincides with, or is used as a pretext for, the voyager's reflective mood. In contrast to this, when the river current flows rapidly, his mood is less reflective and he tends to maintain the narrative tone describing sequentially the unfolding landscape on the shore and the voyage events one after another.

Thus, A Week is, ostensibly speaking, a reflection of the natural flow of the author's thought in imitation of the natural river current. By adopting this technique, Thoreau is able to structurally integrate a variety of ideas and memories in such a way as to simultaneously depict two parallel voyages, that is, the actual and the psychological. The inner scenery unfolds in succession fluctuating between the concrete and the abstract, an illustration of what in psychological terms is referred to as "association," generally regarded as one of the fundamental functioning principles of the human mind.

Naturally, the threads of association are found most frequently in the record of the narrator's sensory experience, especially visual and auditory, during the journey. The visual stimuli evoke short, spontaneous philosophical reflections as well as observations regarding the colonial history of the region, and, on other occasions, reminiscences of past experiences called to mind by or in some way connected to his external perceptions. When the darkness settles in the evening, auditory impressions inspire his imagination.

As the river makes sudden bends, so the human mind sometimes makes abrupt transitions from the concrete to the abstract in response to certain mental impulses. The shifts from the voyage narrative into a number of rather long philosophical meditations sometimes cannot be explained by simple sensory association. Thoreau himself elucidates this in his concluding philosophical reflection appearing toward the end of "Friday":

I perceive in the common train of my thoughts a natural and uninterrupted sequence, each implying the next, or, if interruption

occurs, it is occasioned by a new object being presented to my sense. But a steep, and sudden, and by these means unaccountable transition, is that from a comparatively narrow and partial, what is called common sense view of things, to an infinitely expanded and liberating one, from seeing things as men describe them, to seeing them as men cannot describe them. This implies a sense which is not, common, but rare in the wisest man's experience; which is sensible or sentient of more than common. (326)

However, Thoreau integrates these meditative passages into the narrative context by way of thematic association. He assigns a theme to each "Day" and plans the whole chapter around the chosen motif, thus lending it a sense of unity. Each chapter is prefaced with epigraphs which generally suggest the theme of the day. We will now proceed with an analysis of thematic content of the individual chapters focusing upon those characteristics which contribute to their artistic unity.

3. Thematic Unity: Chapter Analyses

Concord River: Prologue

This introductory chapter contains all the clues necessary to decipher the artistic plan conceived by Thoreau and around which he fashioned this complex work. Besides providing a history and a description of the topological features of the Concord River and the surrounding region, Thoreau suggests the symbology of the river, and understanding of which is essential to an appreciation of the unity of A Week.

The author introduces the two names by which inhabitants of the region refer to the river: "the Musketaquid," or "Grassground River" as it was called by the Indians, and "the Concord," the name given by white settlers in 1635. "It will be Grassground River as long as grass grows and water runs here," says Thoreau, but "it will be Concord River only while men lead peaceable lives on its banks" (1). The Indian name properly describes the perennial natural surroundings while Thoreau emphasizes the literal meaning of "harmony or agreement"

inherent in the second name. Thus the river’s two appellations encapsulate one of Thoreau’s major thematic concerns in this work, the importance of an harmonious interface between man and nature and man and man.

The Concord River is perennial: “a huge volume of matter, ceaselessly rolling through the plains and valleys of the substantial earth” (7) and is probably even “as old as the Nile or Euphrates” (1). Thus in Thoreau’s imagination the Concord comes to transcend the particular and is symbolic of all the famous rivers of history. It further provides a point of departure from which Thoreau expands his thought reaching to the far corners of the earth. And the “perennial,” permanently young and divine quality in nature, serves ultimately as the core or the touchstone in the philosophical discussions appearing throughout this work.

In the last paragraph of this chapter we find that for Thoreau the river metaphorically represents the flow of time, an aspect of the immense, complex workings of unfathomable nature. When he decided to place himself in the bosom of nature and to “float whither it would bear [him]” (8), he also allowed the natural current of consciousness operant within him, that is his thought process, to express itself spontaneously floating freely up and down the river of time, back and forth between the past and present.

Saturday: Invitation to Nature

“Come, come, my lovely fair, and let us try
Those rural delicacies.” (9)

Saturday extends a cheerful invitation to appreciate “Those rural delicacies” removed from civilized society and couched in the mythical world of nature. It is a dual invitation: Nature’s invitation extended to the voyagers and, at the same time, the narrator’s invitation to the reader to share in his adventures. The brothers embark upon the placid water of the Concord from their native port into a mild afternoon. On the banks of the river, nature, adorned with wild flowers, displays a colorful pageant for their launching. Soon the voyagers find themselves floating through a new landscape where

“naught [is] familiar but the heavens” (15).

In this new setting, Thoreau’s eyes rest on a man fishing on the shore. This fisherman, remaining visible even from a mile away, stays long in the voyager’s psychic landscape and evokes a string of associated thoughts and memories. Thoreau may have chosen this figure partially because the topic fits the image of Saturday, that is, “liesure,” “relaxation,” or “recreation.” And partially perhaps because the fisherman is symbolic of the middleground between civilization and nature. Then the narrator’s course of thought shifts slightly from fishing to fish: he lists and describes a dozen “finny” inhabitants of the Concord waters. This biological explanation of fish, together with the previously mentioned floral description, serves the important purpose of inviting the reader into, and familiarizing him with the world of nature.

In the camping scene at the end of the chapter Thoreau portrays the natural environment into which they have ventured emphasizing the wildness of the surroundings isolated from civilization. The lonely boat on the shore looks like “the first encroachment of commerce on this land” and its mast stands for “the last refinements of civilized life” (30). The theme of this chapter suggested in the epigraph, an invitation to nature, has thus been carried out. It is this domain of nature that Thoreau explores in quest of the ideal relationship between man and nature.

Sunday: Sacredness

“The river calmly flows,
Through shining banks, through lonely glen,
Where the owl shrieks, though ne’er the cheer of men
Has stirred its mute repose,
.....” (32)

One of the two epigraphs of “Sunday,” suggests the quietude of a river valley in its un- disturbed repose, and sounds the keynote of this chapter. Sunday is the Sabbath. A calm, serene, and sacred atmosphere fills nature. On the narrative level, Thoreau describes the Sabbath scenes both in nature and human society, while on the abstract level he discusses fables, religion, and poetry, etc., concentrating on the

concept of sacredness, the motif of the day.

The chapter opens with a description of a quiet Sunday dawn. The landscape through which the brothers float is the wild woodland remaining untouched by civilization. "The stillness [is] intense and almost conscious, as if it were a natural Sabbath" (35). This sacred Sunday scene painted by Thoreau becomes a standard of measure which when applied to "sacred" human institutions finds them hopelessly wanting.

As they pass the village of Billerica, the sound of a church bell echoes through the woods, where the Indians used to live before they were displaced by the white settlers. The thought of a primitive life style carries the narrator's imagination far back into the ancient past, the world of fables and mythology. In them Thoreau perceives an "enduring and essential truth" (47) which appeals to man beyond the difference of time and space. Mythology is the poetic expression of heathen sacredness.

When passing the canal connecting the Concord and the Merrimack, the voyagers see "the people coming out of church" (49). Thoreau, then, levels a vehement, bold criticism at so-called "sacred" institution of the Christian church demonstrating that what purports to be sacrosanct and spiritual is in actuality thoroughly corrupted through the lower instincts of man and pales before the beauty, the parity, and the true sacredness of nature. His objective is to free people from the bondage of the intolerance and superstitions of religious traditions and awaken them into an unprejudiced natural view of the world. "You did not invent it; it was imposed on you. Examine your authority," he warns the people (55).

Presently their boat is let down into the Merrimack from the canal. In the undisturbed repose of the "glorious Sabbath day" (71), the brothers bask in the sun and then row leisurely up the river. A reflective mood ensues whereupon Thoreau enters into a meditation on poetry. Poetry is an expression of sacredness in the naturalistic sense as understood by Thoreau. It is "the loftiest written wisdom" (73). He further mentions books in general and the art of writing referring to poetry as their highest form. He emphasizes that books must be plain, vigorous, and the "natural harvest of their author's lives" (78). Thoreau advocates labor, vigor, and simplicity of human life and fundamentally identifies them with those virtues of nature, the

sacred, the value criterion for all.

This chapter ends appropriately on a serene note: though one of the brothers has a nightmare, he is soothed and reassured by the other, "for whenever they meet, the Good Genius is sure to prevail" (93).

Monday: Action and Reform

Monday is the beginning of the new workweek, the day following the Sabbath. In contrast to Sunday's quiescence, a sense of activity, dynamism, and renewal characterizes Monday — and these represent the motifs of this chapter. The themes are suggested in the epigraph. The first of these underlines the perpetual renewal of the world which starts each day afresh: "the world . . . neweth everie daie" (94); and the two quotations from the Robin Hood ballads convey an atmosphere of adventure and fighting. The narrative portrays the "bustle and activity of the Monday" (99) penetrating the surrounding scenery; the historical reflections deal exclusively with the Indian battles of the early 18th century; the major philosophical meditations focus on reform movements and further include a comparative discussion of Eastern and Western philosophy wherein the stereotypes of the "contemplative" oriental and "active" occidental are drawn.

Having set the basic tone of the day through a vivid description of the surrounding nature and the animated river scene, Thoreau's thought picks up the topic of the colonial history of the locale. Reflecting the dynamic Monday mood, his subject is the Indian war of 1725 in which Captain Lovewell participated.

The major meditation of the day treats reform movements. Though Thoreau criticizes "theoretical reformers" (103) who neglect to deal with the immediate reality of life, he does emphasize the necessity of "countless reforms" (107) in a stagnant society burdened with "institutions of the dead" (106). His main purpose here is to free men from the bondage of institutions, conservatism, and their psychological consequences. The narrator's current of thought, then, passes to a comparison between Oriental and Occidental philosophies. Pointing out the vast differences which separate the two, Thoreau considers that it would benefit Western intellectuals to learn more from the Orient to widen their views. He further suggests his wish to have the collected

scriptures of mankind printed in this manner liberating "the faith of men" (116) – and so, his concluding remarks return to the theme of reform.

In the afternoon the narrator once again recounts historical anecdotes related to the region: stories of "old" John Lovewell, "the father of 'famous Captain Lovewell,'" (130) and Farewell, "an indispensable hero to New England" (136). These Indian battles are to be remembered by the reader, not merely as exciting anecdotes of colonial history, but as representative examples of conflicts between people in the larger context of this book.

Monday night's predominant sound is an incessant drum beat pulsating from afar. Thoreau relates the simple drum music, which at another time and in another place might have been a call to war, to "the idea of infinite remoteness" – to Vedas, the stars and universe (142) : "Music is the sound of the universal laws promulgated" (143). As if to add a last touch to the Monday mood, the narrator reports a high, violent wind this night.

Tuesday: Commerce

"On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the world and meet the sky;
And through the fields the road runs by
To many-towered Camelot." (146)

Thoreau constructs the whole chapter around the concept of "commerce," embracing its total semantic domain. "Commerce" is defined as "business or trade; intellectual exchange or social intercourse; sexual intercourse." [16] Though when Thoreau actually uses the word "commerce" he means business or trade, this chapter encompasses all of the above three levels of the meanings of the word. Thoreau talks not only about economic activities, but social exchange between people to include the expression of love as well. Commerce interests Thoreau because it symbolizes the set of possible human relationships which obtain among men.

The scene pictured in the epigraph of the road running by "long

fields of barley and of rye" is surely a site of commercial activity and this road leads to "many-towered Camelot," representative of the social ideal of civilization that Thoreau is advocating. The narrator also touches upon the topic of "commerce" in a reminiscence of a previous excursion to the Saddle-Back Mountain. Thoreau once stayed overnight at a deserted observatory where he happened to read a newspaper left there. He became interested in "advertisements" and comments on them: "The advertisements . . . suggested pleasing and poetic thoughts; for commerce is really as interesting as nature" (152).

When the dense morning fog disperses, the brothers encounter a canal-boat: "One little rill of commerce already awake" (157). And as they continue their voyage they pass a town once known as "Brenton's Farm" as well as "Cromwell's Falls," both bearing the names of "fur-traders." At the falls several canal-boats are seen passing through the locks. These recurring references to traders and canal-boats, of course, belong to and deal with the economic level of the motif of commerce and serve to consolidate the basic tone of this chapter.

Now Thoreau shifts his eyes from economic activity to social intercourse, the second level of commerce. This transition is achieved through his encounter with "a brawny New Hampshire man" at Cromwell's Falls (166). Finding genuine humanity hidden under the rough surface of the man, Thoreau is inspired to discuss the distinction between civil and uncivil and recalls a previous journey in which he had a similar experience of meeting a man named Rice whose rude appearance belied his "pure and even gentle humanity" (172).

Returning to the voyage narrative and the first level of commercial activity: "Being now fairly in the stream of this week's commerce, we began to meet with boats more frequently; and hailed them from time to time with the freedom of sailors" (173). Thoreau regards the sailor's employ as "healthful" and "contemplative"; and he always had a sort of admiration for the "fabulous river-men" in his youth (175). However, the adventurous life of Merrimack sailors is to face an unfavorable future: "there is now but little boating on the Merrimack" and "in a few years there will be an end of boating on this river" (177).

Tuesday's noontime meditation deals with the adventure of Alexander Henry, the fur-trader and the narrator's next recollection is about the Penacock Indians' request for government protection from the

attacks by the violent "Mohokes" (183). This episode of Indian pit against Indian reveals yet another example of the difficulty and complexity involved in human social contact.

After lunching, Thoreau's thoughts center on Anacreon's poems, thereby broaching the third level of commerce, love. Though this is part of a series of a series of literary discussions interspersed in A Week dealing with authors essentially in chronological order, the appearance of "the Teian poet" of love is quite appropriate given the multi-level theme of commerce of this chapter (189).

Before sunset, in the town of Bedford, the narrator sees some stone-masons repairing the locks. One young man among them seems to wish to join the brothers, though he knows he cannot. At night, the voyagers wish to camp in a solitary place after a full day observing and reflecting upon the various aspects of human interrelating.

Thus, in "Tuesday," Thoreau paints both the desirable and undesirable aspects of commerce construed in the larger sense of the term. The inspiring ideal and sobering reality characterizing human interaction find expression herein.

Wednesday: Imagination and Friendship

Wednesday's epigraph, "man is man's foe and destiny" taken from Charles Cotton implies that man is inevitably a social being and Thoreau mentions such in his discussion on friendship appearing later in this chapter: "our fates at least are social. Our courses do not diverge; but as the web of destiny is woven it is full, and we are cast more and more into the center" (223). "Wednesday" continues to deal with interrelations among men, focusing upon a more spiritual and ideal level than the concrete level which dominates most of the previous chapter. This theme culminates in the eighteen-page long discussion of friendship in the latter half of the chapter. This chapter also concerns the functioning of man's perceptive faculties and the role of imagination as the ultimate interpreter of reality. It is quite apparent by this point that the author's presentation of the material in each chapter is planned around the theme of the "Day." The theme is reflected not only in the choice of the subjects of meditations, but also in the historical and personal anecdotes he recounts, as well as in the tone of the voyage

narrative itself.

The first object that catches the narrator's eye in the predawn voyage is a "smaller bittern, the genius of the shore," hunting for food (198). It is noteworthy that Thoreau describes this species as an ancient inhabitant of America: "It is a bird of the oldest Thalesian school . . . the relic of a twilight antediluvian age which yet inhabits these bright American rivers with us Yankees (199). This observation serves as supporting material for the discussion of an "Amerian" antiquity which Thoreau proffers in this chapter.

The setting of the forenoon voyage is one of great natural beauty. Thoreau sees in it an "Arcadian" poetic world. For him, the humble lock-men's houses are "more pleasing to [the] eyes than palaces or castles" and there are no "Arcadian life which surpasses actual luxury and serenity of these New England dwellings" (204). The brothers' boat then passes a wooded island "the fairest" they have encountered (205). These poetic settings seem to exemplify the beautiful world of the here and now to be enjoyed by man in this life about which theme the narrator will discuss shortly.

Passing some islands, Thoreau's thoughts begin to center around Nature's meticulous labor "with ant-like industry" in depositing sand until at last an island is born (206). This image is paralleled in the treatment of the next topic, potholes dug into rocks, the result of trapped, spinning stones endlessly revolving and etching their way deeper and deeper into their lithic hosts. The observations regarding islands and potholes whose existence span a period of several thousand years are treated by Thoreau in the same manner and with the same reverence as "antiquities as ancient and durable, and as useful, as any" of Rome, Greece, or Egypt (212).

Presently the narrator shifts slightly his focus of attention and introduces three well-known historical characters among the residents of the region in addition to a long list of other figures who are but mentioned in passing. The three major figures, Sachem Passaconaway, a great Indian chief described as a very old man of about one hundred and twenty years of age, his son Wannalancet, and a white general John Stark who died at the age of ninety-four. All are viewed as "human antiquities," so to speak, who not only literally enjoyed long lives, but whose deeds still evoke vivid images in the author's mind. At this point he sets this topic aside by deploring the barrenness of notable

persons in the present age. Some thirty pages later, following the long essay on friendship, Thoreau once again picks up this thread of thought and concludes his comments on the meaning of antiquity in a somewhat different vein by emphasizing that the nature of the past is subject to interpretation by the imagination of the individual viewer in the present: "The past is only so heroic as we see it. It is the canvas on which our idea of heroism is painted" (247). The brief anecdote of an old kettle found in the bushes by an old woman south of Uncannunuc about sixty years before and which was still being used "to dye thread in" is yet another example of Thoreau's preoccupation with objects of antiquity.

In the narration of their noontime voyage Thoreau precludes the discourse of friendship by describing an episode in which the brothers are offered a tow by a sailor of a canal-boat, which they have to decline. This episode with the canal-boat signals an interruption in the two brothers' largely solitary journey and the commencement of social interaction with others of their own kind.

Thoreau's concept of friendship represents the highest level of sincere, spontaneous mutual respect and affection, above all material expectation and social civility. It is a relation of "perfect equality" (229) and love of virtue in one another in which "a heroic sympathy of aspiration and endeavor" (231) is to be found. Thoreau is aware that such ideal friendship is rare. He likens the "Friend" to an idyllic island whose far-away shore is difficult for the mariner to attain, yet is, at the same time, a highly alluring destination. He also has recently had the sad experience of losing the friendship of a virtuous "gentle boy" (220); and, moreover, he knows that "there is no person quite transparent and trustworthy, but every one has a devil in him" (239). However, despite all the difficulties that reality presents, Thoreau does not give up the search for friends in life. Because, "the humanest and divinest faculties pine for exercise" and "life without love is like coke and ashes" (239). Thoreau's thoughts on friendship are further extended to include an expression of his love for all of his fellow human beings: "Ah, my dear Strangers and Enemies, I would not forget you. I can well afford to welcome you" (242). And a heartfelt greeting to "one and all" concludes this long afternoon meditation: "We'll one another treat like gods" (242).

When the narrator awakens from his musings to the reality of the late afternoon voyage, he proceeds to describe the day's remaining events:

the conclusion of the anecdote of the canal boat-man, the story of a small boy who wishing to join the brothers on the voyage is denied permission by his father, and finally the hospitality of a farmer who replenishes their food supply.

At the camping site, the brothers enjoy a beautiful evening scene so serene "as left nothing to describe" (246). This experience makes Thoreau think that however sublime a vision one may have had in the past, "sublimier visions appear, and the former pale and fade away" before the present ones (246). This reflection, in turn, leads him into a meditation on the subjective world of mental perception, and the meanings of the past and the present. What is significant is the present. The past becomes heroic simply because the mind's eye creates heroic images of the past. This last meditation is the spiritual high point of the entire chapter and reiterates the writer's thoughts on ages past which have been expressed earlier. It culminates with Thoreau's poem entitled "The Inward Morning" in which he poeticizes the experience of spiritual illumination.

The chapter's epilogue deals with both the themes of friendship and spiritual experience. It takes the form of a dream in which Thoreau enjoys having rectified a misunderstanding with a friend, a settlement which had not actually occurred. Long before the appearance of Freud's analysis of dreams, Thoreau understands the function of dreams as revealing and reflecting the unclothed self: "In dreams we see ourselves naked and acting out our real characters, even more clearly than we see others awake" (250). "Our truest life is when we are in dreams awake" (251).

Thursday: Art and Nature

"Go where he will, the wise man is at home,
His hearth the earth, — his hall the azure dome;
Where his clear spirit leads him, there's his road,
By God's own light illumined and foreshadowed."
(252)

In the epigraph taken from Emerson's "Wood-notes," Thoreau suggests a life in perfect harmony with nature: nature is his home and

his road is illumined by God himself. What becomes of man, then, if he does not harmonize with nature or becomes separated from nature? What of a life that has become artificial and stilted? These questions underlie the main concern of the chapter. The theme of “Thursday” is art viewed comparatively with nature; or at a more concrete level, the differences between what he calls an artist and a man of genius or a poet. The characters who appear in this chapter — a Roman satiric poet, Aulus Persius Flaccus, a young soldier fully armed for battle whom Thoreau encounters on land, Hannah Dustan who made good her escape from Indian captivity scalping ten of her captors in the process one hundred and forty-two years before, and Goethe — despite the seeming lack of connection between them, are all considered by Thoreau as artists in their own way. [17]

On Thursday morning it rains. Far from being depressed by the rain, however, the brothers cheerfully continue their journey listening to “the trill of the chip[ping] sparrow” in the pastures (252). Under Uncannunuc Mountain they leave their boat and further trace up the Merrimack on foot. Enjoying the rain, the narrator muses upon the pleasure of being in the midst of nature: “Nothing that naturally happens to man can hurt him, earthquakes and thunder-storms not excepted,” he says citing “a man of genius” living nearby (254). “Cold and damp” — even standing all day soaked in a swamp up to one’s chin listening to the chants of gnats and mosquitoes — can be a luxury, fancies Thoreau, for which indoor amusements and the attraction of the best literature have no comparison (254-55). These strings of ideas echo the epigraph depicting man and nature on intimate terms.

In their overland journey, Henry and John sometimes stay overnight at a country inn, a “barren society of ostlers and travellers” (260). In these unpleasant surroundings the narrator brings up the topic of the Roman satirical poet Aulus Persius Flaccus. Thoreau regards Persius as utterly lacking “the interior dignity” and “the elegance and vivacity” characterizing such older Greek poets as Virgil and Horace. He is measured one of the “fault-finders at best” (261). “The satires of Persius are the furthest possible from inspired; evidently a chosen, not imposed subject” (264). Persius, after all, is not a truly inspired “poet” or “genius,” but is what Thoreau calls an “artist” who is incapable of establishing an original relationship with nature.

During their journey in the woods, the brothers encounter "a soldier lad" heavily armed to the extent that he "can not easily dispose of his natural arms" (265). The poor young man's attempt at maintaining a "soldierlike bearing" is "a sore trial" and he is hardly successful (265). This small encounter constitutes the only event presented in detail of their journey on land. The author's purpose in spotlighting this incident seems to be to provide an example of a forced and artificial life which is conspicuously in disharmony with nature. Finally, they reach their destination, the summit of Mt. Agicochook, the site of the source of the Merrimack. The narrator, however, does not linger on the description of the land journey but hurries back to their return voyage at noon on the following Thursday.

Sailing rapidly down stream, the narrator's eyes observe "the fresh and primitive and savage nature": "The works of man are everywhere swallowed up in the immensity of Nature" (267). What follows is a reflection upon the meaning of man's art with respect to Nature. "Nature is prepared to welcome into her scenery the finest work of human art . . . A perfect work of man's art would also be wild or natural in a good sense" (268). However, "Art can never match the luxury and superfluity of Nature" (270). Nature is "the art of God"; and "her undertakings are secure and never fail" (270). We note here Thoreau's complete confidence in "Unerring Nature" which serves as the ultimate standard against which he evaluates human matters.

The minutely recounted tale of Hannah Dustan is further relevant to Thoreau's view of nature. One hundred and forty-two years before, Hannah Dustan and her two other companions (her nurse and an English boy) were frantically paddling down the Merrimack for their lives. They were escaping from Indian captivity; and there lay at the bottom of their boat "the still-bleeding scalps of ten of the aborigines" whom they had killed while asleep (272). While Hannah and her comrades are hurrying down the river after carrying out their revenge, they are unable to see the fresh beauty of nature in her early spring garb but only their own fear and terror: "Every withered leaf which the winter has left seems to know their story, and in its rustling to repeat it and betray them. An Indian lurks behind every rock and pine, and their nerves cannot bear the tapping of a woodpecker" (273). They are totally estranged from the surrounding nature. The forest is "a drear and howling wilderness" to Hannah and her fellow white men,

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while to the Indians who live close to nature it is “a home . . . and cheerful as the smile of the Great Spirit” (274). Thoreau does not make any moralistic judgment of Hannah’s or the Indians’ deeds. Nonetheless, the loss of Paradise means, for Thoreau, man’s separation and psychological alienation from nature just as witnessed in the case of Hannah.

The author’s introduction of his afternoon meditation proves to be of major significance to the chapter’s main theme. Thoreau, while highly regarding Goethe as “an artist” for his perfectly exact description of things, comments that he lacks in “the unconsciousness of the poet” (277). For Thoreau, an artist and a poet (or a genius) are fundamentally different:

The Man of Genius . . . is an originator, an inspired or demonic man, who produces a perfect work in obedience to laws yet unexplored. The Artist is he who detects and applies the law from observation of the works of Genius, whether of man or nature. (278)

“The talent of composition is very dangerous,” says Thoreau, “the striking out the heart of life at a blow, as the Indian takes off a scalp” (279). In spite of their effectiveness, the art of scalping and the art of composition are both dangerous — because they cause man’s alienation from nature. Hannah, who imitated the Indian’s art, moralistically became removed from nature; the art of Persius and Goethe deprived them of natural spontaneity and the light of inspiration. But the protagonists of this chapter are but representatives of man in general whose stultified life is separate from nature.

In this important philosophical reflection, the author expresses his view of the universe elucidating his remark appearing at the end of the introductory chapter of “Concord River”:

The hardest material seemed to obey the same law with the most fluid, and so indeed in the long run it does. Trees were but rivers of sap and woody fibre, flowing from the atmosphere, and emptying into the earth by their trunks, as their roots flowed upward to the surface. And in the heavens there were rivers of stars, and milky-ways, already beginning to gleam and ripple over

our heads. There were rivers of rocks on the surface of the earth, and rivers of ore in its bowels, and our thoughts flowed and circulated, and this portion of time was but the current hour. Let us wander where we will, the universe is built round about us, and we are central still. (280, Emphasis mine)

Here not only can we confirm our interpretation that the metaphor of the river of thought constitutes an integral part of his view of the universe in its totality, but we notice the resemblance between the epigraph of this chapter ("Go where he will, the wise man is at home") and Thoreau's embarkation declaration in "Concord River" ("I resolved to launch myself on its bosom and float whither it would bear me"). Man is a part of nature and his relationship with nature is fundamentally indissoluble.

On Thursday night the wind blows rustling through the woods. "There seemed to be a great haste and preparation throughout Nature, as for a distinguished visitor" (282): A prelude to the forthcoming season as well as to the finale of the voyage and this book.

Friday: Natural Life

Thursday night was "the turning-point in the season": "summer [has passed] into autumn" (283-84). Friday morning the cool freshness of autumn permeates the atmosphere. An autumnal mood dominates the chapter as he rapidly glides homeward through this refreshing new world "as if cleansed of the summer's impurities" (299). The narrator contemplates the ideal man-nature relationship.

He first describes Concord's annual cattle show held in October. The farmers gather at this autumn fair "as naturally as bees swarm and follow their queen" (286). He identifies this lively fair with the ancient festivals of harvest in Greece and Rome because of the underlying spirit of celebration of nature. In the cattle show, he sees one excellent example of man on intimate terms with nature.

Among the men whose lives the author holds in high regard are the poets: "It is the worshippers of beauty, after all, who have done the real pioneer work of the world" (288). For Thoreau a true poem is not what is written by a poet but is "what he has become through his

work" (290). This view of poetry that it should be actually "lived" by the poet himself explains his love of the ancient heroic poems of Ossian, who was a hero and bard himself. "In his poetry, as in Homer's, only the simplest and most enduring features of humanity are seen" (291). In contrast, "our civilized history appears the chronicle of debility of fashion, and the arts of luxury" (292). Thus, Ossian's world offers Thoreau a picture of human life reflecting the grandeur and simplicity of nature.

The scenery on the shore now seen from the opposite direction appears new to the voyagers. Observing the shadows of clouds cast over the surrounding landscape, he reflects upon the shadow of man's "imperfectly mingled spirit," that is his grief (298). He implies that it is possible to brighten one's shaded side, the part of man which suffers, just as the shadow of an object disappears if we shine a stronger light of virtue on it. The autumn flowers on the shore pleasantly entertain and beckon the two travelers. They rest awhile on the bank in Tyngsborough and from this vantage point they can see the property of a farmer who once extended them a night's hospitality. The narrator paints an idealized picture of the farm: its abundant fruits (beach-plums, Canadian plums, Porter apples, peaches, mush and water melons), its kind inhabitants, and "Elisha's apple-tree" which bears fine fruits (303). "To see a single peach upon its stem," says Thoreau, "makes an impression of paradisaical fertility and luxury" (303). He even compares this farm to one of ancient Rome called "the garden of Italy" where, it is said, "a pole being left would not be visible the day after, on account of the growth of the herbage" (304). In this manner, during the course of their Friday return voyage, the narrator proffers a series of positive ideas and observations suggestive of the fertility of nature and a vision of new possibilities.

When the voyagers reach the Concord, they have to row up the river once again. The weather becomes warmer and contributes to their meditative mood. The narrator once again muses over his favorite topic, poetry. English poetry after Ossian, in general, disappoints Thoreau because the British bard has lost much of "the dignity and sacredness of his office" (311). Nevertheless, Thoreau praises Chaucer calling him "the Homer of English poets" (312). In Chaucer he sees "the innocence and serenity of youth" (312) and "pure and genuine childlike love of Nature" (316). "He is so natural and cheerful, that

we might almost regard him as a personification of spring" (312). Chaucer's poetry, then, provides Thoreau a fine example of the attainment of ideal harmony with nature.

Again picking up the thread of the voyage narrative, nature herself is fashioning her own "Autumn" poem. And "behind the rustling leaves, and the stacks of grain, and the bare clusters of the grape, there is the field of a wholly new life, which no man has lived" (319). In the narration of this chapter and throughout the course of the entire book, Thoreau has been leading up to the presentation of the very core of his thought: the advocacy of "a wholly new life" — a natural life. "Men nowhere, east or west, live not a natural life. . . . [They need] not only to be spiritualized but naturalized, on the soil of the earth" (320). The scenario for this "natural life" is not an after life in the abode of heaven; it is neither spatially nor temporally removed from the here and now. "Here or nowhere is our heaven," states Thoreau (321). He speaks of an evolutionary leap forward into "another and purer realm" (322) wherein man is sensorily and spiritually in attunement in nature's domain. Man is just "on the verge of" (322) this new realm of "a purely sensuous life" (323); he has only to fully nurture the "divine germs called the senses" (323) to reach this point of development. In this last major meditation Thoreau's naturalistic philosophy comes clearly into perspective in its entirety. We further gain insight into how each piece of the already expressed ideas appearing in the numerous reflections of the preceding chapters functions in the total system of his philosophy. Thoreau reiterates his main thoughts here, as in a coda attached at the end of a musical composition. Though imagination evokes heroic, noble pictures on the landscape of the mind, they are ephemeral. However, sounds and olfactory sensations belong to that new realm, "from which [they] are wafted over to us" (322). Vis-à-vis the dignity of nature, society's traditional codes of morality are petty and insignificant. Both science and poetry have contributed to the revelation of the essence of nature; and "Veias, Menu, Zoroaster, Socrates, Christ, Shakespeare, Swedenborg" are "some of our astronomers" who have shown us the way" (326). The ideas constituting this philosophy are to be found in abundance throughout entirety of this work and when juxtaposed in the "Friday" chapter, form a cohesive unit expressive of his understanding of the intimate bond connecting man with nature.

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The voyagers are approaching their home port against the backdrop of a sunset. The scene is serene and impressive as if both the writer and nature were functioning in consonance and were both drawing their activities to a close at the completion of a satisfying task:

The sun was just setting behind the edge of a wooded hill, so rich a sunset as would never have ended but for some reason unknown to men, and to be marked with brighter colors than ordinary in the scroll of time. Though the shadows of the hills were beginning to steal over the stream, the whole river valley undulated with mild light, purer and more memorable than the noon. (329)

The author, who has recounted the long story of his quest into nature, now is about to give himself up to the bosom of Silence, only suggesting his last hope that his discourse might leave an invisible wake in the mind of his reader:

A good book is the plectrum with which our else silent lyres are struck. We not unfrequently refer the interest which belongs to our own unwritten sequel, to the written and comparatively lifeless body of the work. Of all books this sequel is the most indispensable part. (331)

The book draws to a close on a positive note tempered by an awareness of the immensity of the task of living each day fully, yet with full realization of the rich reward awaiting those who succeed in achieving a state of oneness with all encompassing nature. Reaching their native port of Concord, the brothers leap “gladly on shore” (332).

4. Conclusion

In the preceding study we have explored the structural and thematic fabric of A Week and have discovered that Thoreau’s concept of nature furnishes the key to its fundamental unity. Structurally speaking, the framework of this work, as we have seen, is based upon the natural

time-unit of the day and the narration proceeds in accordance with the pattern of the days' activities. Further, the movement of the entire discourse is modeled after the natural flow of a river with its infinite variation. The two rivers by means of which Henry and John explore an unknown world are obviously the most conspicuous natural phenomena in A Week. The author provides his work with a form which parallels this model of nature, and has achieved an effect similar to "stream of consciousness," a sequence of thoughts flowing freely from dimension to dimension connected by fine threads of association. It is important to recognize that Thoreau regards his inner flow of thought as a manifestation of the ceaseless process of nature and an integral part of the greater current of life force running through all beings. Thus, the river metaphor is deeply rooted in his philosophy and is deliberately chosen to express the natural mental flow within himself. Nature has further provided him with abundant vocabulary and imagery to verbalize the richness of his thought. Thoreau states the following in his Journal of May 10, 1853:

He is richest who has most use for nature as raw material of tropes and symbols with which to describe his life. If these gates of golden willows affect me, they correspond to the beauty and promise of some experience on which I am entering. If I am overflowing with life, am rich in experience for which I lack expression, then nature will by my language full of poetry, — all nature will fable, and every natural phenomenon be a myth. [18]

Each and every one of the components of this work is essential and, collectively, they combine to achieve artistic and thematic unity. The beautiful descriptions and detailed observations of the surrounding nature abound in the voyage narrative — fishes, birds, wild flowers on the bank, and the fantasy of nocturnal sounds, etc. — are not simply presented as a "travel report." They serve the function of bringing the reader into close proximity with nature as seen through the author's eyes and awaken him into the infinite splendor and richness of her domain. Sketching the historical anecdotes of the locale, especially of Indians, the author presents a microcosmic view of human society in which the problem between civilization and nature is brought into sharp relief through the white man-Indian struggle. The meditations bear the

key philosophical message and culminate in Thoreau's advocacy of natural living patterns at the end of the book. They not only appear in accordance with the themes of the respective days, but we find the craftsmanship of the author further demonstrated in their arrangement. For instance, the series of literary discussions on poetry starting from mythology and Homer ("Sunday") and ending with Chaucer ("Friday") are presented chronologically; and the very last short reflection on silence provides a fitting epilogue to the whole book.

The chapters also move towards the ultimate concern in this book. The movement is generally from the lower or more basic level to the higher or more spiritual plane. The theme of each chapter is suggested in the epigraphs. In "Saturday," Thoreau invites the reader to explore the world of nature. In "Sunday" amidst the wild natural setting, he criticises the traditional moral code advancing the sacredness of nature as the criterion for value judgments and against which he contrasts other aspects of human affairs in the ensuing chapters. Starting on Monday, Thoreau studies human life, moving from the smaller to the larger context. He talks about mundane life on Monday — the hustle and bustle world of labor, a world sorely in need of reform. The day also deals with war, a lower manifestation of human activity. Tuesday, he further examines man in the context of society. Thoreau views the external relationships from the economic, social and amorous standpoints. In "Wednesday," he discusses a higher level of human relationship which surpasses all the levels dealt with in "Tuesday." He emphasizes the importance of the function of imagination and describes ideal friendship. In "Thursday," Thoreau expands his perspective and sees man as part of the scheme of nature, pointing out how man has chosen a wayward course due to his artificial way of life. And in "Friday," he advocates a life in harmony with nature, a totally new and sensuous world.

Nature is, as Harding says, "a purgative, a panacea for the ills of civilization" [19] to which Thoreau always returns for an authentic measure by which to judge human affairs. And his firm conviction in the ultimate goodness of nature affords him a bright perspective into man's possible future. A positive and assuring tone permeates the entire book overshadowing the sadness of the memory of his departed brother, John.

A Week is a carefully planned artistic work. There exists structural

and thematic unity built around the key notion of nature. Criticism decrying the "formlessness" of this work must be completely abandoned. Thoreau did not write this book for the purpose of acquiring popularity nor simply to entertain the reading public. He wished his philosophy of life to appeal to his peers, to intelligent minds able to appreciate the depth of his thought. "The poet will write for his peers alone" (289). Perhaps the historical moment has finally arrived when he may encounter his long-searched for comrades among readers whose inner lyres resonate together with his. It is time for A Week to receive long-overdue recognition for its considerable artistic and ethical merits.

NOTES

- [1] Henry David Thoreau, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, ed. Walter Harding (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1963), p. 9. All the references to A Week are from this edition. Hereafter page numbers of quotes will appear in parentheses in the body of the text.
- [2] *Ibid.*, p. x. James Russell Lowell's comment on A Week summarized by Walter Harding.
- [3] Hiram M. Stanley, "Thoreau as Prose Writer," The Dial, 21 (October 1896), rpt. in The Recognition of Henry David Thoreau, ed. Wendell Glick (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 137.
- [4] Archibald Macmechan, "Thoreau," The Cambridge History of American Literature, 2 ([1917]; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1944), rpt. in The Recognition of Henry David Thoreau, ed. Wendell Glick (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1969). p. 208.
- [5] James McIntosh, Thoreau as Romantic Naturalist: His Shifting Stance toward Nature (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974), p. 137.
- [6] Macmechan, p. 208.
- [7] Walter Harding, A Thoreau Handbook (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1959), p. 56.
- [8] Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen, ed., The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1962), I, 91-92. Hereafter cited as Journal.
- [9] *Ibid.*, I, 413.
- [10] See Carl Hovde, "Nature into Art: Thoreau's Use of His Journal in A Week," American Literature, 30 (1958), 165-84. See also Walter Harding, "The Influence of Thoreau's Lecturing upon His Writing," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, 60 (1956), 74-80.
- [11] Wendell Glick ed., The Recognition of Henry David Thoreau (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1969), p. xv.
- [12] Francis O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford Univ.

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Press. 1941). p. 93.

- [13] Ibid., p. 167. Here Matthiessen without realizing passes over the symbol of the river’s flow as a unifying image which we will attempt to demonstrate persuasively in the main body of this thesis.
- [14] Journal, I, 369.
- [15] Ibid., I, 136.
- [16] The American Heritage Dictionary of English Language, ed. William Morris (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc. and Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970), p. 267.
- [17] Robert F. Sayre who studied A Week from a savagist perspective also notes the connection between Hannah Dustan and Goethe as artists in his recent book. See Thoreau and the American Indians (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 47-55.
- [18] Journal, V, 135.
- [19] A Thoreau Handbook, p. 153.