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"I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself," Thoreau writes in "Solitude." This is how I go and come in *Walden*, a part of itself throughout the years.

Time passes and I change; *Walden* changes with me too; the nature of our walking together remains the same, though--the touch of strange liberty gradually unfolds itself, deepening into a sense of self-knowledge with realms immense, unexpected, rewarding. So I go on--provoked, enlightened, enriched beyond measure. And I know I need the concentration of this walking; I know distractions would always hurt me.

I was eighteen when I first found out about *Walden*. The year was 1979, and I was in the very beginning of my English studies at the university. What I had at the time was a split reality: the one at home with my father's huge library and the other one outside home. A complete whole of a reality was unthinkable. Moreover, it was dangerous. Totalitarianism seemed to have produced an everlasting world--faceless, motionless, timeless. My young body moved through space and forms of living created by the regime; my young mind painfully twisted, unable and unwilling to keep up with the physical move. The split reality I was experiencing threatened to split my identity too. What is for home and what is for outside home? What should I say and what should I not say? These questions did not long trouble me, though. I was fast enough to know the answers. But that did by no means flatter my intelligence; it only confused my self-respect. Each and every situation I got into presented itself before me in a dimension "forbidden" and a dimension "allowed": the first one gave me freedom, the second one blocked me completely. It was never a matter of choice to be made; things were so unrelievedly obvious. I had to survive, but I wouldn't want only to survive. I wanted a life, not a survival. The snobbish pleasure of having a "nonconvenient" family background was not for me; such "outsiders" usually ended up in a cynical servility to the regime. Studying at the university was of no help either, the courses in literature going together with ones in Marxism-Leninism. I had to find my own way and thus preserve my self-respect. In my hell I desperately needed my Virgil.

"I should not talk so much about myself if there were any body else whom I knew as well," a voice suddenly calmed me down. So you do that, focus on your own self, create yourself and your life. I was already holding *Walden* in my hands. "However mean your life is, meet it and live it," the voice persisted, and I could not but trust it. Finally it assured me that "if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours." This was all that I needed. No, it was a lot more than that; it was a vision beyond the split, the unifying vision I was yearning for. *Walden* became my bible; Thoreau gave me to myself.

Of course, I was reading *Walden* at home, in that kind of "Solitude" that becomes one's best companion. But the frozen eternity outside home started melting in my eyes, turning into a crazy slash of a moment, only temporal, not everlasting at all. The danger of this awareness was nothing compared to the hope it gave me, compared to the "I" shaped out of my previous personality. I was entering maturity and moreover, in a most rewarding way. With the years I learned that in this same context that Thoreau in his time could-- fortunately-- not predict, *Walden* has been a revelation to others too, a source of self-reliance and respect, a possibility to see beyond the visible--and to have trust.

By the time of the grand political change of 1989 I was in the middle of translating *Walden* into Bulgarian. "Civil Disobedience," which I also did in these months of tremendous changes, was already the slogan of our "velvet revolution." When *Walden* came out, the overall climate couldn't have been more adequate to it; hardly could the pulse of the ongoing process of political and spiritual emancipation be measured better than by Thoreau's different drummer. A novel significance was added to Thoreau's work.

A lot has happened since. The time of exaltation is far away and, happy as I was then to meet *Walden* with the insatiable hunger for freedom in my country, I am now back to my very own walking with it. Outside circumstances provoke me no more; it is only the circumstances of my own life that would always keep me awake for the morning star of the sun, for *Walden*. I need the sheer self-awareness it always endows me with; I treasure the "strange liberty" of walking it always anew.