

## Andy Nagashima

After his seven-week lecture tour to Japan, Walter Harding wrote, “many in my audiences expressed the conviction that Thoreau’s philosophy was more closely akin to that of the Japanese than any other American author.”<sup>vi</sup> In fact, *Walden* is probably one of the most read American literary works in Japan today. Since the first translation appeared in 1909, a dozen translations have followed.<sup>ii</sup>

In what ways, then, is Thoreau’s philosophy akin to that of Japanese thinking, and why does *Walden* remain so popular in this far-off country? My purpose in this paper is to show how the cosmology of *Walden*, specifically its ethos of symbiosis, echoes with that of Japanese thinking. My definition of this phrase “ethos of symbiosis” is that man should live in harmony with one another and with nature.

### The Japanese Ethos of Symbiosis

Mountains, seas, insects and animals have been essential subjects in Japanese culture since the time of “Man’yōshū,”<sup>iii</sup> (the oldest Japanese anthologies of poetry, compiled in the eighth century), and they have remained essential right through the present day, as evinced by such movies as “Princess Mononoke”<sup>iv</sup> (an animated 1997 film by Hayao Miyazaki). For example, my ten-month old son’s favorite animated film is “My Neighbor Totoro”<sup>v</sup> (another work by Miyazaki, produced in 1988). Its opening song marvelously depicts the ethos of symbiosis with the simple words: “Foxes and badgers too, come out! / Let’s go exploring deep into the woods. / I have lots of friends, I’m so happy.”<sup>vi</sup>

The eminent British historian, Arnold Toynbee has compared the monotheism of Christianity with Japanese popular religious thinking, noting that, “Their [Japanese] ancestral religions, Shinto and Buddhism, both stand for man’s ethical obligation to cooperate with nonhuman nature... This is in contrast to the Judaic tradition of the West, which stands for man’s alleged license to coerce and dominate nonhuman nature.”<sup>vii</sup> Indeed, the Japanese ethos of symbiosis, in its deepest sense, is derived from such religious sentiment. For example, Daisaku Ikeda, a leading contemporary Buddhist philosopher who was recently made an Honorary Lifetime member of the Thoreau Society, offers an explanation of the Japanese ethos of symbiosis with a Buddhist term of “dependent origination” (*engi*, in Japanese): “Nothing and nobody exists in isolation. Each individual being functions to create the environment that sustains all other existences. All things are mutually supporting and interrelated, forming a living cosmos, what modern philosophy might term a semantic whole.”<sup>viii</sup>

### *Walden*: Man as part of Nature

Thoreau wrote that humans are “part of Nature”<sup>ix</sup> and “neighbor[s] to the birds” (85). Thus “any creature... holds its life by the same tenure” (212) that humans do. He also wrote, “I once had a sparrow upon my shoulder for a moment while I was hoeing in a village garden, and I felt that I was more distinguished by that circumstance than I should have been by any epaulet I could have worn” (276). Likewise, the Japanese *haiku* poet, Issa Kobayashi (1763-1828), wrote the following song that expresses his love for the small and humble things: “Come to see me—with each other/let’s play—little sparrow/without any mother.”<sup>x</sup>

Having been aware of the “presence of something kindred” (132) even in “wild and dreary” (132), Thoreau writes that “There is nothing inorganic” (308). For him, the ice in Walden pond was a “great bed-fellow” (272). Similarly, he noted that he found a “kindredship” (243) with the night-hawk, with the ripples of the pond, and with leaves raised by the wind. He also recognizes something “intimately related”<sup>xi</sup> between the melody of birds men’s ears. He wrote the following journal entry: “If I were to discover that a certain kind of stone by the pond-shore was affected, say partially disintegrated, by a particular natural sound, as of a bird or insect, I see that one could not be completely described without describing the other. I am that rock by the pond-side” (*HTJ*, 265-266). Similarly, Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), the most popular Japanese poet of all time, sang, “Such stillness— / The cries of the cicadas / Sink into the rocks” (*AJL*, 371).

### *Walden*’s Cosmology

Thoreau was amazingly well acquainted with Oriental religious works, especially given the scarcity of such writings in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. He had “an abiding interest in making both Hindu and Buddhist works more available.”<sup>xii</sup> *The Dial* introduced a section of the Lotus Sutra for the first time in America, and in the English language.<sup>xiii</sup> This chapter of *The Lotus Sutra* that was published in the *Dial* was called “The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs.” It depicts images of a “merciful rain” falling equally on all things, moistening the vast expanse of the land, and bringing forth new life from all the trees and grasses, regardless each plants size or shape. The passage is used in *The Lotus Sutra* as a symbol of the enlightenment of all people (the plants) as touched by the Buddha’s Law (the rain). Moreover, in celebrating the great variety of the plant kingdom, it also serves, according to Ikeda, as “a magnificent tribute to the rich diversity of human and all other forms of sentient and non-sentient life.”(Ikeda 160).

*The Lotus Sutra* is a central text for the most wide spread form of Buddhism covering northern India, Nepal, Mongolia, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan. In Japan, *The Lotus Sutra* was widely popularized in Japan by the efforts of Nichiren, a monk in the thirteenth century.

David Norton states, “in Japan it is the Nichiren school that has done most to democratize the idea of Buddha nature by following the Lotus Sutra.”<sup>xiv</sup> Norton pointed out “close correspondence of three profound philosophies—Greek eudaimonism, Nichiren Buddhism, and the pantheism of Emerson and Thoreau”(Norton 31).

Nichiren (1222-1282) wrote, “ultimately, all phenomena are contained within one’s life, down to the last particle of dust. The nine mountains and the eight seas are encompassed in one’s body, and the sun, moon, and myriad stars are found in one’s life.”<sup>xv</sup> Likewise, in *Walden*, human beings are depicted as “microcosms”(77), each with his “own sun and moon and stars” (130) but also his “own streams and oceans” (321). Thus, Thoreau encouraged his readers by writing, “explore your own higher latitudes” (321) and “be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you”(321).

*Walden’s* cosmology echoes with that of the Japanese and with their tendency to view the universal in light of the particular. Emerson wrote in his eulogy to Thoreau, “I know not any genius who so swiftly inferred universal law from the single fact.”<sup>xvi</sup> Like Thoreau, Yamaguchi Sodo (1642-1716) must have seen the universal in the “now and here”(97) when he sang: “My hut, in spring:/ true, there is nothing in it—/ there is Everything!”(*AJL*,385).

#### Notes

<sup>i</sup>Harding, Walter. “Thoreau in Japan.” *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 90 (1965),4.

<sup>ii</sup>Kogan Yoshie’s translation of the excerpts from “Sound” appeared in *Waseda Bungaku*, (August, 1909). Kōichiro Mizushima translated nearly its entirety of *Walden* in 1911. His edition had been published through five different publishers till 1933. The most recent translation was done by Masayuki Sakamoto in 2000. So far *Walden* has been translated in entirety or excerpts by 25 translators through 29 publishers. My paper, “Bibliography of Japanese Translation: The Writings of Henry David Thoreau,” will be published in an upcoming special issue of the *Studies in Henry David Thoreau* from the Thoreau Society of Japan.

<sup>iii</sup>The *Man’yōshū*, or “Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves,” includes nearly 4,500 poems.

<sup>iv</sup>*Princess Mononoke [Mononoke Hime]*. Dir.HayaoMiyazaki. Tokumashoten. 1997. Video Cassette.Tokuma Communications, 2002.

<sup>v</sup>*My Neighbor Totoro. [Tonari no Totoro ]*. Dir.Hayao Miyazaki. Tokumashoten. 1997. Video Cassette. Kong Tokuma Shoten Publishing.1992.

<sup>vi</sup>Martin,Theresa. Trans.”Stroll”[Sampo]1994. English Translation of the opening song. [http://www.wingsee.com/ghibli/totoro/music/totoroop\\_lyrics.txt](http://www.wingsee.com/ghibli/totoro/music/totoroop_lyrics.txt)

<sup>vii</sup>Toynbee, Arnold, and Daisaku Ikeda. *Choose Life: A Dialogue*. London: Oxford UP, 1976.

<sup>viii</sup>Ikeda, Daisaku. *A New Humanism: The University Addresses of Daisaku Ikeda*. New York: Weatherhill, 1996. 160. [From the speech delivered at Harvard University, Cambridge, September 24, 1993. “Mahayana Buddhism and Twenty-first-Century Civilization.”

<sup>ix</sup>Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Ed. J. Lyndon Shanley. Princeton: Princeton UP,1971. 210. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>x</sup>Keene, Donald, ed. *Anthology of Japanese Literature: From the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. New York:Grove Press, 1955. 431. Hereafter designated as *AJL* in the text.

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<sup>xi</sup>Thoreau, Henry David. *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*. Ed. Odell Shepard. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927. 265-266. Hereafter designated as *HTJ* in the text.

<sup>xii</sup>Versluis, Arthur. *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993. 81.

<sup>xiii</sup>“The Preaching of Buddha.” *The Dial*, January 1844. (An extensive research on the authorship of translation: Nagashima, Andy. “Who translated the Preaching of Buddha?” (October, 2001)[unpublished]. From the paper, I cite here the following letter from Charles Lane to Issac Hecker, dated 29 December 1843: “While you have been reading some of the Budhist [as spelled in the letter] Books, I find Miss Peabody has been doing the same in French, and translating them for the Dial if Mr.Emerson approves.” (Typescript of original at the Office of Paulist History and Archives, Washington, D.C.)

<sup>xiv</sup>Norton, David L. “Japanese Buddhism and the American Renaissance.” IOP Booklet Series 1. Tokyo: The Institute of Oriental Philosophy, 1993. 1-2. [the late Dr. Norton was a philosophy professor at University of Delaware]

<sup>xv</sup>Nichiren, *The Writing of Nichiren Daishonin*. Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 1999. 629.

<sup>xvi</sup>Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Brooks Atkinson. New York: The Modern Library, 1992. 820.

## **G. Madhusoodanan, India**

Max Oelschlaeger aptly remembers Henry David Thoreau as the “philosopher of the wilderness.” Indian and Eastern philosophy in general have a rich wilderness tradition. India’s pre-Christian Hindu religion and the later manifestations of it in Buddhism and Jainism emphasized compassion for all living beings and saw man as part of nature. They did not envision wilderness as evil or man as having ‘dominion’ over all he surveyed. As Roderick Nash says, “Wilderness, in eastern thought, did not have an unholy or evil connotation, but was venerated as the symbol and even the very essence of Society.” Then the logical question would be, whether Thoreau has anything to offer to India. The answer to this question lies in India’s philosophical and economic history.

The guiding spirit of the Indian independence movement—Mahatma Gandhi, who is venerated as the Father of the Nation—was deeply influenced by Thoreau. Gandhi’s attitudes towards the materialistic, consumerist western culture were not just shaped by eastern philosophy; Gandhi, with his western education, was the ideal product of an east-west symbiosis. Writings of Tolstoy, John Ruskin and Thoreau played a crucial role in shaping Gandhi’s philosophy and strategy. Thoreau’s essay “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience” was a major political influence on Gandhi in shaping his vision of Satyagraha—the form of non-violent political resistance. Gandhi’s economic vision of a decentralized village oriented and nature friendly development was also compatible with Thoreau’s three famous maxims of life: “Simplicity, Simplicity, Simplicity.” In a resurgent, post-independent India, Gandhi’s economic vision was relegated to the marginal alternative movements. Thoreau’s idea of civil disobedience lived on through Gandhi’s Satyagraha. Thus, the political and economic impact of Thoreau’s writings in post-independent India have been minimal. However, Thoreau has a presence in the cultural sphere—and its extension to environmental awareness.

The resurgence of environmental consciousness in the Indian psyche happened after a quarter century of planned economic development. Madhav Gadgil, the pioneering environmental writer, says, “The origins of Indian environmentalism lie in the early 1970s, when a number of events heralded a new awareness.” Details of those events is not our subject matter here. The philosophical moorings of early Indian environmentalism were largely Gandhian. In the wake of the revival of Hindu nationalist and fascist political and cultural movements, it was dangerous to espouse Indian philosophy in a religious way. Thoreau and Gandhi with their secular credentials were ideal apostles. Thoreau, though inspired by Emerson, moved away from Emersonian Christian transcendentalism. As Oelschlaeger says, “Emerson and the other transcendentalists unquestionably left their mark on Thoreau, but transcendentalism is a poor framework for understanding Thoreau’s idea of wilderness.” Thoreau rejects the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm, which has its origin in Christian ethics, when he writes, “The true man of science will know nature better by his finer organization; he will smell, taste, see, hear, feel, better than other men. His will be a deeper and finer experience. We do not learn by inference and deduction and the application of

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mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy. It is with science as with ethics—we cannot know truth by contrivance and method; the Draconian is as false as any other.”

Two of Thoreau’s works—the essay titled “Walking” and his book *Walden*—became popular in the Indian environmental and cultural sphere after the 1970s. His famous saying in “Walking”—“In Wildness is the Preservation of the World”—became the byline for wilderness enthusiasts and cultural anarchists. Perhaps Thoreau is best known in India through this saying in eight words and by his triple elegy of “Simplicity. . .” in *Walden*. The name of this Concord pond has come to symbolize peace and serenity. I know of many friends who have given the name “Walden” to their homes. You will also find this name being given to tourist and commercial outlets. *Walden* has also been translated into a few regional languages.

In India, Thoreau mainly lives in the cultural and literary sphere. And rightly so, because Thoreau is as much an artist as a naturalist. Thoreau’s observations about what is relevant in literature—“in literature it is only the wild that attracts us”—rings a strong chord in the Indian literary mind rooted in the epics of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Thoreau continues, “It is the uncivilized, free and wild thinking in *Hamlet* and the *Iliad*, in all the scriptures and mythologies, not learned in the schools that delight us. As the wild dusk is more swift and beautiful than the tame, so is the wild thought. . . . A truly good book is something as natural and as unexpectedly and unaccountably fair and perfect, as a wild flower discovered on the prairies of the west or in the jungles of the east” (“Walking” in *Natural History Essays*).

In the fledgling discipline of ecological literary criticism in India, Thoreau exerts a benign influence. In America, Thoreau’s first resurgence was as the beacon of the wilderness movement in the initial decades of the twentieth century. However, in the last decade of the twentieth century, Thoreau was rediscovered again as the inspiration for the deep ecological and the eco-critical movement. In fact, American eco-critics such as Lawrence Buell emphasize Thoreau’s literary significance. Buell attributes Thoreau’s canonization in America as a hero of high culture to his contemporary literary relevance. Buell says, “To read Thoreau in the light of this expanded conception of the environmental intertext is at once to redefine his cultural significance and to help revise our understanding of what counts as the American environmental imagination.” If Thoreau is thus not canonized in Indian cultural history, it is because of the strong ancient Indian philosophical tradition of thinking about man and nature. Thoreau’s relevance to India is that he articulated an alternative to the industrial era. Gandhi, who was inspired by Thoreau, did this for India in the political and economic sphere. In the realm of culture, India has many literary and philosophical stalwarts like Rabindranath Tagore, Sisir Kumar Ghose, Aurobindo who pioneered such an alternative aesthetic vision. Thus, Thoreau’s place in Indian cultural tradition, though not canonical, has become more relevant in the wake of skepticism about modernism and the depredations of globalization.

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”Will you accept this invitation?” Thus Isaac Hecker, in a letter of 31 July 1844, prompted Thoreau to join him in a walking tour of Europe. Although outlined as a sauntering excursion beyond the Atlantic crossing, with wide margins for spontaneous forays, the proposed itinerary was still a pilgrimage at heart with a set goal in Rome. Hecker longed for an institutional anchor to suit his own recent spiritual awakening and hoped to find it in the Eternal City. Thoreau was unimpressed. ”What’s the use of your joining the Catholic Church?” he scoffed. ”Can’t you get along without hanging to her skirts?” Still, Hecker’s tour proposal beckoned. Thoreau confessed to being ”strongly tempted” by the ”method of travelling especially—to *live* along the road—citizens of the world, without haste or petty plans.” Yet ultimately he had his mind set on something different. He declined the offer, explaining that ”I cannot so decidedly postpone exploring the *Farther Indies*, which are to be reached you know by other rout[e]s and other methods of travel.”<sup>1</sup>

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While Hecker soon left for Europe on his own, Thoreau stood by his choice of travelling a good deal in Concord. Other friends, notably Waldo Emerson and Thomas Cholmondeley, would later suggest to Thoreau the idea of a European trip, but it was not to be. During the years ensuing upon Hecker's initial query, Thoreau built his house by Walden Pond and eventually published an account of his time there in *Walden*. His responsibilities toward his immediate family grew steadily during the 1850's, and while a skillful jack-of-all-trades beyond his literary vocation, money was seldom if ever plentiful in the family household. This paterfamilias condition, more than any inherent aversion to far-off travel or the Old World as such, probably held him back in later years.

As a citizen of Northern Europe appreciative of Thoreau, I have often wondered what he would have made of our tracts in his day. In southwestern Sweden he would have found a landscape remarkably similar to that of Concord, the discrepancy in latitude being counterweighed by the warmth of the passing Gulf Stream. Disembarking in Gothenburg, he would face a bustling harbor replete with foreign ships and merchants. Apart from the thriving export trade in iron, wood, and salted fish, all carried by sea or canal, there would however be little to see save farmland, lakes and forests by the roads of the flat or gently undulating southern interior. Industry would hardly be apparent; few factories, no railroads, and everywhere struggling small landholders and tenant farmers. Many were squirrelling away meagre savings to board ship to America in search of a better future. Over a million Swedes eventually did make the journey.

The Swedish naturalists we know Thoreau to have read—Linnæus and his disciple Pehr Kalm—would no longer be alive to greet him, nor would for that matter Emanuel Swedenborg. Apart from a ready passenger seat on an eastbound coach or riverboat headed for Stockholm or Uppsala on the opposite coast (which would take about a week), other transportation and routes would be tricky and require a good guide. The Gothenburg—Stockholm railroad track, about 300 U.S. miles long, was completed only in 1862. Thoreau would then perhaps have recalled his own journal anecdote of 21 January 1838, later grafted into "A Walk to Wachusett," involving the reputed inscription upon the wall of a wayside Swedish inn: "You will find at Trollhätte [Trollhättan] excellent bread, meat, and wine, provided you bring them with you!"

In the mid nineteenth-century, the vast regions of Sweden to the north of the two large lakes and the main coastal cities were very sparsely populated. Even today the expression is that they are essentially "tassemarker," literally "pawland" or wilderness, despite covering a good two thirds of Sweden's total land area. Thoreau would have had a hard time reaching these wilds on his own but might have teamed up with a legendary Scottish bear hunter and sports fisherman like Llewellyn Lloyd (1792-1876), who settled down north of Lake Vänern in 1823 to guide compatriots in search of big game or fish, or a man like C.J.L. Almqvist (1793-1866), Sweden's foremost writer of the generation preceding Strindberg. Almqvist, an ordained minister who opted to become a philosopher in a vein similar to Emerson's, also successfully urged school reform akin to Bronson Alcott's, women's rights resembling those argued by Margaret Fuller, and even (for a short time) idealistic communal farming recalling that of Fruitlands and Brook Farm. Almqvist fell from grace in 1851, however, accused of having defrauded and poisoned a creditor. He fled to America and remained there for some fourteen years, in time claiming to have witnessed major battles of the Civil War as a correspondent for various U.S. newspapers (a claim unverified to this day).

To the north, should Thoreau have chosen such a destination, he would have recognized a landscape similar to Maine's, with dense, old-growth forests interspersed by lakes, wetlands and streams. Eventually, toward the far north, he would have come upon a truly senescent land—severely eroded hills, ancient riverbeds and systems of arctic foxholes dating back tens of thousands of years. Lacking mountain ranges striking for their height, or indeed anything akin to Katahdin's tableland and cloud-immersed peak, what sublimity accrues in the visitor to these areas was and is one of personal transience. The mossy, shrubby surroundings of the small reflecting tarns would arguably, then as now, be suggestive of extreme age; of an ecosystem extended well-nigh intact from time immemorial.

If it were summer, Thoreau would be assailed by the silent enemies always present also in *The Maine Woods*, perhaps more formidable than the Kathadin summit itself: the hordes of persistent *no-see-ums*, ever anxious for blood. Well into the seventeenth century, this region of Sweden was known in common lore as Bjarmaland, a land of magic powers entered by strangers only at their considerable peril. Here is also where the mythic Vaner, or demi-gods, are said to have roamed in human guise—among them the thundermaker Thor, whom Thoreau playfully counted as an ancestor. Barring a gentleman hunter or fervent writer-reformer, Thoreau may have found a native Sami to guide him on his way, the Sami having longstanding knowledge of, and rightful claims to, the territory as nomadic reindeer keepers.

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But we are without *A Yankee in Scandinavia*, and perhaps this is just as well. *Walden* and other later writings might then be lacking on our shelves and in our backpacks. Depending upon the season, the Swedish climate could well have been harsh on Thoreau's lungs; various contagious fevers also ravaged the Swedish countryside during the mid-nineteenth century. Even in royal circumstances there was risk. René Descartes, summoned by our queen Christina to Stockholm in 1649 to act as her tutor in philosophy, promptly contracted pneumonia in the cold and draught-prone castle and died within a few months. The Atlantic crossing could also be difficult and dangerous. Thoreau readers familiar with John Muir may recall Muir's last, lengthy botanical journey to South America, Africa and Mediterranean Europe in 1911-12. Finally chugging home on a steamer from Gibraltar headed for New York on March 18, 1912, it is chilling to consider what may have happened had he chosen to visit his native Scotland before returning to America. Just a few weeks later a ship called *Titanic* left from Southampton for New York.

If Thoreau never reached our shores, *Walden* certainly did. The book's impact upon Swedish readers is continuing and reverberant. It was translated in 1924 by a young poet and essayist, Frans G. Bengtsson, later reaching fame as a writer of Viking epics and royal biographies. The first issue of *Skogsliv vid Walden* (literally *Forest Life at Walden*) was small and made hardly a stir in the papers. Bengtsson had recently written his masters thesis on Thoreau, and this served as an informative if somewhat derivative introduction to the book.<sup>2</sup> Some twenty-three years later, however, a new issue appeared, this time with lavish illustrations by Stig Åsberg. Critics were now enthusiastic, and *Walden* sold well. The 1947 plates have since been the standard for all subsequent issues, which appear fairly regularly every three or four years.

While there is much to commend Bengtsson's Swedish translation of *Walden*, there are also a few drawbacks. Bengtsson was pressed for space, as the publisher wished to fit the book into a standard format, and so four chapters were silently excised from its middle sections. Further, though Bengtsson was awake to some of the double entendre and humor of *Walden*, his notes are few and occasionally misleading. Bengtsson was also conservative regarding his language, and *Walden* has unfortunately not been updated to modern spelling and verb forms since his effort, despite a countrywide reform during the early twentieth century. Coupled with Åsberg's often striking but also sombre illustrations, the effect upon today's readers can be one of effective distancing: Thoreau's character seems more of a remote saint than a man wishing to speak to his contemporaries and later generations. This effect is compounded by Bengtsson's translation of Thoreau's living "a mile from any neighbor" to an implicitly *metric* mile—more than six times the real distance.

Yet these various factors notwithstanding, the Swedish reception of *Walden* has been vibrant and largely appreciative. When Thoreau's book came out in translation in 1924, Sweden was predominantly an agricultural and rural nation. The bulk of the population was poor, and the state famously received foreign aid from Uruguay. Only in the coming decades did industrialization truly make a difference for the common man. The ruling Social-Democratic government came to embrace capitalism while vigorously pursuing programs involving pensions, free schooling and healthcare, all financed by taxation. People moved from country to town, headed for factories and administrations. During these decades of economic expansion, helped along by Sweden's problematic 'neutrality' policy during the two World Wars—which left our infrastructure and workforce intact—, *Walden* had little impact. Save as a quaint gentleman's guide to countryside otium along the lines of Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler* (issued in the same Swedish publisher series as *Walden*) or Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne*, it did not receive much attention.

During the late 1950's and on into the 1960's, however, Thoreau's economic and political radicalism was gradually recognized, in particular as *Resistance to Civil Government* was translated in 1960 (and it has been again in 1977 and 2001). Attitudes toward the writer consequently changed: radicals came to embrace Thoreau, while conservative critics—his early champions— increasingly shunned him. Negative effects of industrialization began to be exposed in various media, while legislation was passed that gave Swedes several weeks of vacation each year (roughly, time off went from nearly none save religious holidays and Sunday sabbaths during the turn of the century to five weeks of paid leave in the 1980's). The newly affluent middle class could afford a family car and a small summer house in the countryside and often enjoyed the whole month of July in a more or less rural setting. While this obviously had many positive effects, and still has, many vacationers also came to realize and criticize what they recognized as the Swedish market economy's stranglehold on nature.

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Our largest lake, Vänern, was found to be stocked with mercury from the slag water spewed out from the coastal paper mills. On my native island of Kållandsö, all fishermen save one went out of business. Ospreys, rather than responding to the lessened competition, virtually disappeared. Out boating as a youngster one autumn in the late 1970's, I found an adult bird's carcass bobbing in the water below its nesting tree without visible injury. Eventually moving west to Gothenburg, I came to marvel at the clarity of the local lakes there. It turned out they were deathly pale, however, killed off by acid rain primarily from the Ruhr industries in Germany. My parents read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. There was outrage at the state of things. What we now call the Green Movement had its tentative start in Sweden during this time. *Walden* became a cult text for people gathering under its banner.

While it is difficult to assess its tangible effects in each quarter, Thoreau's book helped galvanize a counter-policy movement in Sweden that was not all hip counter-culture. During the 1980's thorough cleanup efforts were made of toxic deposits in landfills and water systems; sweeping environmental protection legislation passed; and a Green Party assembled in 1981, reaching parliament in 1988. Historian Carl Holmberg, an expert on the Green movement in Sweden, describes Thoreau as an important influence throughout this gradual awakening of the nation to environmental consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

Today *Walden* is read for myriad reasons in Sweden, ranging from pure aesthetic pleasure to searches for blueprints of a more authentic and sustainable form of life. Vegetarians, vegans, animal rights activists, university Literature majors, Greens, Anarchists, Ayn Rand followers, nudist bathers—all seem to find laudable qualities in Thoreau's book. In a fine twist of fate, *Walden* has recently also become a touchstone for the influential Swedish publicist, poet and essayist Göran Greider, in many ways akin to the American Wendell Berry.<sup>4</sup> In his latest book, Greider draws richly from *Walden* to argue the merits of remaining in the northern regions of Sweden rather than joining the lemming-trains to the urbanized south. While he did not find opportunity to travel the Scandinavian interior himself, Thoreau's *Walden* at least made the trip in his stead.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Thoreau's remark on church affiliation as reported by Walter Harding in *The Days of Henry Thoreau: A Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965. 164. Harding's source is given as Walter Elliot's *The Life of Father Hecker* (New York, 1891). Regarding the other quotes, see *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*. Ed. Walter Harding & Carl Bode. New York: New York UP, 1958. 155ff.

<sup>2</sup>This introduction has in turn been translated into English by Thorsten and Rosemary Sjölin for the *Concord Saunterer* of 1998, pp. 65-96. For more details on Frans G. Bengtsson's translation of *Walden*, see also Henrik Gustafsson, "Notes on F. G. Bengtsson and the Swedish translation of *Walden*" in *The Thoreau Society Bulletin* 1999: 3, pp. 4-6.

<sup>3</sup>Carl Holmberg, a senior research fellow of the Department of History at the University of Gothenburg, is currently at work on a new study of the intellectual roots of the Swedish Green movement, including a chapter (in proof stage) on Thoreau, kindly extended to me in compiling the present survey. Notification in the *Thoreau Society Bulletin* bibliography will follow upon the study's completion.

<sup>4</sup>Greider's book bears the blunt title *F\*\*\*ing Sverige: Byn, Bruket, Skogen—en Modern Dalaresa* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2001), or, in English translation, *F\*\*\*ing Sweden: The Village, Mill, and Forest—A Modern Dala Journey*. The expletive in the title is an allusion to a film by the young Swedish director Lukas Moodyson, whose *F\*\*\*ing Åmål* (ca. 2000) chronicled the fate of two young girls stifled by a backward wood-mill town and seeking to escape.

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*Today I, feeling weak, read Thoreau and was spiritually uplifted.—Leo Tolstoy*  
The Journals

Before Leo Tolstoy in the 1890s, one can hardly find any documented trace of Thoreau's influence on Russian culture. Even his name evidently was not present among the names known to the public in Russia.

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Highly interesting and important is the fact that Thoreau's work was noticed by Leo Tolstoy. With characteristic keenness of mind, Tolstoy constantly kept up with the latest achievements of Western culture. Early in the 1890s he read Thoreau's essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" and told his friend and publisher Vladimir Chertkov that a translation of that work into Russian was desirable<sup>1</sup>; the essay was duly translated.<sup>2</sup>

Tolstoy's interest in Thoreau's works deepened with time. Leo Tolstoy saw the American thinker as his philosophical ally. This is also demonstrated by frequent references to Thoreau in Tolstoy's correspondence and numerous quotations from his works included by Tolstoy in collections of great men's aphorisms, such as *The Circle of Reading*, *The Path of Life*, *Thoughts for Everyday*.

The affinity of the ideas of Tolstoy and Thoreau is the subject of a separate and far-reaching study, so far not tackled by anyone. On becoming acquainted with Thoreau's ideas, Tolstoy undoubtedly paid the greatest attention to the theory of non-violent resistance, largely, if not fully, coinciding with his own doctrine rejecting violent resistance to social and moral evil. For this reason, Tolstoy especially marked out Thoreau's "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience." Thoreau's Romantic naturalism apparently left Tolstoy quite indifferent. Aymler Maude, the English Tolsoyan who had several personal conversations with the Russian writer, thus expressed Tolstoy's assessment of Thoreau: "Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience* he selects as the best of all Thoreau's writings. Its great merit lies in its clear statement of man's right to repudiate and refuse in any way to support, a Government which acts immorally . . . Thoreau was disinclined to devote himself to politics, but was also disinclined to support the Government of which he disapproved. . . . *Civil Disobedience* . . . may yet prove to be the source from which a telling protest against war, or other evils enforced by the Government, will spring."<sup>3</sup>

Traditionally, scholars limit the affinity between Thoreau and Tolstoy exclusively to the idea of nonviolence. But the fact is that that idea followed from more general philosophical premises of the two thinkers. To what extent

### **Tolstoy's Main House at Yasnaya Polyana**

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**Tolstoy's Villa Thoreau at Yasnaya Polyana**  
*Photos courtesy of Nikita Pokrovsky*

did these premises coincide? The problem has yet to be investigated. Although a certain similarity between the views of Thoreau and Tolstoy on morality, religion and science can be said to have been already established this statement can only be made with reservations and qualifications. Thus Tolstoy's secretary, V. Bulgakov, noted in his journal: "In the evening, [Tolstoy] said that he had reread Thoreau's *Walden*, and that he had liked this book this time round no more than before. 'Affecting originality, challenging, restive,' said Lev Nikolayevitch about Thoreau."<sup>4</sup> In the same year 1810, however, Tolstoy's publishing house *Posrednik* produced the most complete edition of *Walden* in Russian.

At Tolstoy's Yasnaya Polyana estate (near Tula), now a prosperous museum, visitors can see in his study the 1904 London edition of *Walden* among the books in Tolstoy's daily use. According to some accounts, Thoreau and his moral doctrine were the subject of constant discussions among the people close to Tolstoy. A secluded little building on the estate, the so-called "Apple Orchard Pavilion," which was used as a home hospital for the sick peasants to whom Tolstoy attended, was renamed in Tolstoy's family "Villa Thoreau," partly due to its resemblance to Thoreau's Walden cabin.

A study of Leo Tolstoy's attitude to Thoreau's philosophy contributes equally to a deeper understanding of the work of both thinkers. A great deal in this respect can be gained from the study of Tolstoy's archives and well-preserved library of Yasnaya Polyana, in which many books in foreign languages have not yet been adequately described—and there are great numbers of books by the nineteenth-century American philosophers and writers among them.

After the October Revolution of 1917 the name of Thoreau vanished for decades from the scene in the Soviet Union. After the Revolution Thoreau turned out to be an uncomfortable figure for the state authorities in Russia/Soviet Union—no matter what orientation the state had. Only in 1960 did the first modern edition of *Walden* come out in the Academy Press. However, all Soviet scholars (not many of them) who attempted to write about Thoreau confronted a serious moral dilemma. Ideologically they could (actually were allowed to) express some positive attitudes towards Thoreau's concept of nature but not toward his view on the state. True, rather often Thoreau was portrayed in Russia during those years as a severe critic of the American government but not of any other government. His nonviolence looked dangerous or at least suspicious for any authority, including the Soviet one. In other words, the Soviet reader could compromise with Thoreau's nature writings at most but not with his political philosophy.

However, the paradox of the situation was that many people in educated circles in Soviet society were quite familiar not only with the name of Thoreau but with all of his ideas as well. Sociologically it produced one of many paradoxes of that totalitarian time: nothing of the opposition writings was published but almost everything was read or at least known. In addition there was a huge interest in non-traditional and oppositional writers such as Thoreau. From my personal experience I can conclude that in 1974 when I proposed to write the first Ph.D. dissertation on Thoreau in Russia, there were those at Moscow State University and beyond who energetically supported my decision as well as those who criticized it, but everyone knew perfectly well who Thoreau was.

It was also indicative of those gloomy times in the Soviet Union known today as "Brezhnev's dream of reason" that people used historical figures like Thoreau for maintaining a free and not so free dialogue on up-to-date issues, i.e. personal independence (from the authorities), free thinking, freedom of expression. This was a vital part of symbolic dual thinking and acting typical of that period of time—the use of an Aesopian language of indirect hints. In this sense, Thoreau was our "language," and his heritage demonstrated its unprecedented potential for the inspiration of positive and constructive radicalism

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regardless of time and circumstances. In the same line it was illustrative of that time that my dissertation (very positive about Thoreau) successfully passed the committee, and all its opponents overnight became its sincere advocates.

The years of Perestroika of the 1990s with its almost unlimited freedom and chaos in social structures brought into being another paradox related to Thoreau. Against all possible anticipations, Thoreau did not win the struggle for Russia as one could expect. His ideas rather soon lost their oppositional and rebellious charm. Life in Russia itself became more radical and rebellious than what Thoreau could, figuratively speaking, convey through centuries and generations to people of Russia. On the surface, as one can see, almost no new dissertations, courses of study, and publications by or on Thoreau have appeared in Russia over the last years. He is not under any ban, of course, but perhaps he is no longer of any substantial interest for younger men and women.

One may assume that there is no niche for him on the scene in this country. As a moral writer and a fighter against property rights Thoreau demonstrated in his time everything opposite to what the contemporary Russian society, with its futile race for luxury and almost Freudian cult of wealth, is about. As a proponent of high morality, individual freedom of choice and self-reliance, Thoreau again does not match the current public mood in Russia. The burden of freedom seems to be too heavy for people. They prefer to delegate their freedoms and rights to higher authorities in order to be left alone with their daily problems of material survival. Furthermore, Russians today, being too tired of the unmanageable freedom of the press, express their willingness to re-install censorship of any kind. In this sense the public opinion in Russia today, I may guess, would definitely and almost unanimously approve Thoreau's arrest if it would have occurred again (especially in the condition when there is the corrupt war going on at Russia's southern borders these days—almost a carbon replica of the war with Mexico in Thoreau's days).

All in all, Thoreau is a hero without an audience in today's Russia exactly the same way as he was in his country in his own days. But countries grow and resurrect from within. And the popularity of the heroes grows simultaneously. And what has been Thoreau's public loneliness in America in his time turned out to be his wide fame today. The same phenomenon hopefully will take place in Russia some day.

After I finalized my paper and sent it off, by pure chance and on the same day I got access to a personal letter written by Professor Tatiana Venediktova of Moscow State University, a long-term friend and colleague of mine. She writes to her correspondent in Concord, MA, "I teach *Walden* every year to third or fourth year students of the two major universities of Moscow: Moscow State University and Russian State Humanities' University. Most of them major in literature, some in history, some others yet (this year) in philosophy. Usually after discussions in class I invite them to write papers-- to reflect as best they can on their response to the text as readers-- and thus combine whatever textual analysis they can produce with some soul-searching as contemporary citizens socialized in the Russian cultural tradition. I treasure some of these papers, wonderfully personal and original, always stimulating further discussion. I take it as proof enough of the fact that Thoreau has something to say to the present generation of young Russians--he teaches them through intellectual provocation and active questioning rather than "professing" (which would have been his own preference, no doubt)."

I thought it would be interesting to people outside Russia to learn about both perspectives on the subject in question. Professor Tatiana Venediktova definitely develops a much more positive and happier perspective on Thoreau in Russia today, which must evidently be closer to the foundations of the American spirit. I see it differently due to my present social analysis stance. For example, I have had an occasion to read some of the students' papers mentioned above. I found in them almost nothing but a juggling of post-modern reflections of the empty self having nothing to do with Thoreau. But of course tastes differ.

In any event the truth must or might be somewhere half-way between our opposite views.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>*Gudziy, N.K.* Tolstoy I Thoreau. Russko-yevropeyskiye literturnye svyazi (Tolstoy and Thoreau. Russian-European Literary Links.) Moscow-Leningrad, 1966.

<sup>2</sup>The Russian translation was published in England at Leo Tolstoy's expense. Only a small number of copies got into Russia, as the print-run was confiscated by the customs. For this reason, the work was not too well known in Russia. Before that, in 1887, part of *Walden* was translated into Russian and published in *Novoye Vremiya* (*New Times*) under the title *V lesu* (*In the Woods*).

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<sup>3</sup>Baturinsky, V.P. Aymler Moude on Leo Tolstoy, *Minuvshie Gody* (L'Annes Passes), 1908, issue no. 9, p.104. (In Russian).

<sup>4</sup>Bulgakov, V.L. *L.N.Tolstoy v poslediy god yego zhizni* (Leo Tolstoy in the Last Year of His Life). Moscow, 1957. 261.

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What to expect of Turkey? And what to expect of Turks at university reading Thoreau's *Walden*? In some respects the equation is perfect: the land that nourished Diogenes the Cynic is one of many layers. As recognized by one of his early reviewers,<sup>1</sup> Thoreau had a strong vein of philosophical cynicism<sup>2</sup>—sturdy common sense, representative actions that speak for themselves, aphoristic expression that finds things to be the opposite of what they appear, a call for simplicity, and even a partially submerged excremental vision as when, in the opening pages of *Walden*, he metaphorically describes the human animal as dung beetle, pushing his bolus of possessions, including a 40-foot barn, ahead of him down the road of life. Indeed, “the better part of a man is plowed into the soil for compost.” There's even a match of curmudgeonliness between the two thinkers (Emerson once remarked that he would as soon take Henry by the arm as take an elm tree by the branch).

And as for “layers,” Thoreau's polyvalent universe at least seems to have met its match in Turkey: the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara goes back to the oldest human settlements and counts some two dozen distinct civilizations, while the Istanbul Archaeological Museum goes back further still, well into the stone age. Add to this cultural richness an interplay between and within the layers, as events and institutions shade into and metamorphose into each other—Byzantine priests becoming imams during the Ottoman transition, or the developing mix of orthodox Sunni traditions with heterodox Shi'a traditions (many with connections to earlier Christian shrines and beliefs). And then there is Rumi, the thirteenth-century sufi whose poetry has become increasingly recognized in modern Western popular culture. Surely Thoreau, like Emerson, was aware of Rumi and felt an affinity for his Neoplatonic thought.<sup>3</sup> So one might expect that Thoreau's *Walden* might be a good “fit” for Turkey. There are even some heterodox shi'a traditions, especially those held by the large Alevi minority in Turkey, that have some affinity with the antinomianism that was so familiar to Emerson and Thoreau.

During a two-year stint as a Fulbright Professor in the mid-1980s in Ankara, and an additional year in the mid-1990s in İstanbul, I taught *Walden*, among a good many other things, to Turkish university students—from undergraduate survey courses through doctoral seminars, and from teacher-training institutes to Bosphorus University, where only the top 1/10th of 1% of the students who pass the Turkish university entrance exams are admitted.<sup>4</sup> With rare exceptions, my students were quite at home with Thoreau, as were the general public as when, in the fall of 1985, I participated in a panel discussion on *Walden* at the American Library in Ankara that was attended by students and academics as well as the public at large. The discussion was lively and enjoyable, and there was no sense that Thoreau's ideas were exotic or unusual. And during the spring of 1996 I gave a couple of guest lectures at Hacettepe University—one on Thoreau's use of stylistic modulation as a consciousness-raising device, and the other on some similarities between Thoreau's portrayal of Being in *Walden* and Heidegger's portrayal of Being in some of his early works. In the latter lecture, I suspect there was more interest in Heidegger than in Thoreau, but my audiences were not only comfortable with Thoreau but were well conversant with his work and thought. Perhaps some of this easy familiarity reflects an adaptability bred of centuries of nomadism and migration— I believe the Turks are more open to other traditions, including American traditions, than are any of their continental European neighbors.

So Thoreau is alive and well on both sides of the Bosphorus—in both Anatolia and European Turkey. At the present time I am embarking on another adventure, this time teaching as a senior Fulbright Professor in a Moroccan University during the 2003-2004 academic year. Like Turkey, Moroccan culture is a complex mixture with its own kinds of historical “layers,” including languages and races—a true multicultural society where Berber, Arab, Negro, Andalusian, French, and Jewish traditions exist in harmony. The Sunni tradition of Islam is more institutionalized here than in Turkey (despite Shi'a roots in the early Idrissid dynasty), and the society is on the whole less secular than Turkish society—the King, who is a sharif or descendent of the Prophet, is generally careful to accommodate religious leaders and maintains a balance between religious and secular attitudes. I am looking forward to experiencing the

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reactions and attitudes of my Moroccan university students as they encounter Thoreau's radical and individualistic version of being and identity as expressed in *Walden*.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Charles Frederick Briggs, "A Yankee Diogenes" in the Norton Critical Edition of Thoreau's *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government* (Second Edition) edited by William Rossi (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), pp. 314-17

<sup>2</sup>What's missing in the cynicism of Diogenes, of course, is an *aesthetic* vision that is used to express a quality of being; and what's missing in Thoreau is the unadulterated primitivism of Diogenes—Thoreau didn't want to live like the natives of Tierra del Fuego, he merely wanted to combine their hardihood with his own intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual values.

<sup>3</sup>Although a specialist colleague insists that calling Rumi "Neoplatonic" is an egregious "orientalism," the term nevertheless has some usefulness as a generic term of classification. I doubt Thoreau would have a problem with such usage in any case.

<sup>4</sup>One can't get special dispensation because one's daddy is rich and the president or the head of a 'security' agency as in the United States. My niece matriculated at Johns Hopkins and was astonished to find that Johns Hopkins was the 'fall back' school for a Turkish classmate who couldn't get into Bosphorus [Boğaziçi] University. Also of interest, in Turkey the university entrance requirements for teacher training programs are higher than the entrance requirements for regular literature majors.

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From Milton Metzger and Walter Harding, *A Thoreau Profile*, published by the Thoreau Society, 1962  
(Reprinted 1998)