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"PECULIAR LOVE" : THOREAU'S EROTICS

by

BRIAN BREWER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1997

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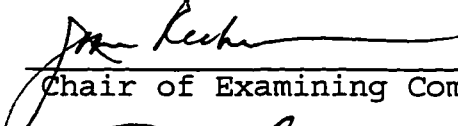

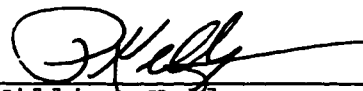
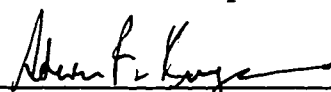
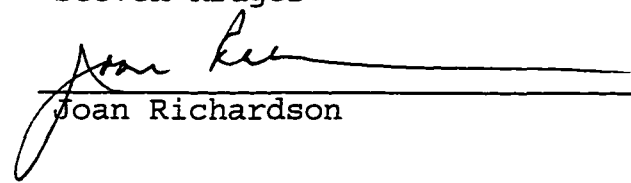
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

"PECULIAR LOVE": THOREAU'S EROTICS

by

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Henry David Thoreau's writing reflects the cultivation and practice of an order of thought predicated on an erotic engagement with the world, a love relation with the whole of the Emersonian "NOT ME" that comprises nature, art, other men and one's own body. This is an alternate, erotic means of knowing the world that Thoreau poses counter to knowledge governed by the intellectual, rational "understanding." Thoreau's alternate order of thought seeks to avert the purposeful, intellectual ratiocination, containment and domination of natural "phenomena" (in its broadest construction) as well as the social systems and cultural practices built upon this domination. Instead, Thoreau envisions an engagement of mind (or, equally, self or Emersonian ME) with the world

that operates within what Herbert Marcuse in Eros and Civilization calls "the aesthetic dimension," the space where mind and matter, thought and feeling, intellect and affection are unified rather than divided in an agonistic relation. Marcuse posits this as a necessarily erotic engagement with the world, effected by a re-eroticization of the body's sensual capacities that have been repressed and cathected into the service of culture-building structures, e.g. those designed to perpetuate human reproduction and labor. By detailing parallels between Marcuse's cultural critique and Thoreau's in Walden, then by reading closely Thoreau's discourses on love, friendship, nature and imagination, I argue that the redemptive ideal posed by the liberation of Marcuse's eros is the same redemption Thoreau poses in Walden for the famous "lives of quiet desperation." What is more, though Marcuse sees this redemption as only an ideal, contemporary queer theory provides an alternate perspective for viewing such "peculiar love" as one epistemological consequence of lives--experiences, identifications of self--that run athwart a naturalized heterosexual order, providing the scope to consider

Thoreau's entire poetic practice as witness to a queer
erotic aesthetic.

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I first discovered the promise of such pleasure from Professor Joan Richardson, to whom I dedicate this work. First teacher, then advisor, then friend, Joan made reading and writing new for me by suggesting, as Thoreau says, "a separate intention of the eye." Since then, Joan and I have become lovers in the most marvelous Thoreauvian sense, as the following pages explain.

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Part One: Queer Thoreau

As I love nature, as I love singing birds, and gleaming stubble, and flowing rivers, and morning and evening, and summer and winter, I love thee, my Friend.

But all that can be said of Friendship, is like botany to flowers. How can the understanding take account of its friendliness? (Week 232)

So concludes--tentatively--Thoreau's excursus on Friendship, a late addition to his draft of A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers and his summation of ten years' worth of Journal speculation on the nature of love and friendship. The analogy Thoreau strikes between his love for nature and his love for his friend seems on initial reading to inflect the love in Friendship with a certain chastity, signifying a love platonic in its roving contemplation of the beauty of nature, and as such bearing all of the strong yet pointedly un-erotic good cheer that in another context makes the phrase "I love you as a friend" mean something at once sweet and slightly disappointing. This reading hinges, of course, on the

chastity of Thoreau's love of nature; his popular and critical reputation as a "bachelor of nature," a reputation supported by his life-long celibacy and his arguments for chastity in Walden, would lead few to consider Thoreau's love of nature as anything but chaste-- which is to say, unerotic. For in a culture just emerging in Thoreau's time and extending to the present day, where the erotic is qualified in terms of the sexual, and the sexual determined in terms of a strict set of object choices, Thoreau's alignment of "nature" with "my Friend" as objects of the transitive "I love" holds little signficatory scope for anything other than the chaste and platonic.

Yet Thoreau takes care in the above to show not just what he loves but how he loves. He loves his friend as he loves a nature sensually rich--singing, gleaming, flowing --and eternal as the ever turning and returning seasons. As I read Thoreau's line, the roaming, hungry, swelling, loving interlude between "As I love nature" and "I love thee, my Friend" suggests something more than, though importantly predicated on, similitude of types and the interchangeability of objects. Nature and Friend as

objects meet in analogy, yet remain apart rhetorically and syntactically, bridged by a poetics which writes the occasion of love as a very idiosyncratic, very sensual venture, an eternal wandering of the I, a progress through the ever-presencing of sing-ing and gleam-ing and flow-ing that turns the turn of day and night into morn-ing and even-ing. As we read through the profusion of love objects, we return again and again to a certain silent intransitivity, to the very act of love. As Thoreau writes his way from nature to his friend, joining his words in a chain of sense- and presence-making, he--we--make love.

I read this first line mindful of the second line's caveat. There, "all that can be said of Friendship"--the compendium of accounts that he has just collated in his excursus for A Week--represents the limits of a certain way of understanding, "like botany to flowers." He asks how such accounting may in turn account for the "friendliness" of Friendship. Along one order of thought, if the question reads as rhetorical, the implied answer is "It cannot"--and we wonder what use to make of the long account we have just read, and to what end Thoreau offers his many, and often contradictory, definitions, schemas

and qualifications of Friendship. But if we read Thoreau's question as "In what way can the understanding take account?" just as he has urged the questions "How do I love? How do I love nature? How do I love thee, my Friend?" we enter an alternate order of thought where questions of use and comprehension become moot; we suspend our understanding to ask instead, "What am I doing? What is happening to me as I read?"

Thoreau's question, by urging these two orders of thought simultaneously, evokes the Transcendental distinction between, on the one hand, understanding as the operation of the rational faculty, and Reason on the other as the intuitive knowledge of a universal consciousness, the life and spirit of Emerson's Over-soul. As Emerson's beloved friend and student, Thoreau took this distinction to heart: "Every property of matter," Thoreau learned, "is a school for the understanding. . . .Reason transfers all these lessons into its own world of thought, by perceiving the analogy that marries Matter and Mind" (Emerson, Nature 26). When we accede to Reason, we move beyond rational understanding to another "world" or order of thought, where we perceive the analogy-making process itself,

realize our part in creating relations and thus become party to the marriage of "Matter and Mind." We may, with Thoreau, try to understand--to penetrate, qualify, classify--Friendship into a kind of "botany," but we might also look otherwise, with "a separate intention of the eye" as Thoreau advises elsewhere in A Week (40), and discover the friendliness, the loveliness, of our relation-making practice. The act of accounting becomes an act of relation-making, an act of love; so it is in his act of writing and in our reading of how Thoreau loves that we catch a glimmer of his love, his "friendliness."

1. Queer Thoreau

If we suspend for the moment an urge to understand Thoreau's love for his friend as determined through analogy by the objects of his love, if we practice instead a separate intention of the eye and contemplate instead the "marrying" taking place--syntactically, rhetorically, figuratively, experientially--as we read his words, we may find the love that is so deeply embedded--immanent, even--in the Transcendentalist project. Our understanding, however, again, seems to preclude the possibility of an attendant eros suffusing this love, particularly when attempting to understand one who evokes love as often as does Thoreau the bachelor of nature. Indeed, it seems that a certain willful blindness marks Thoreau criticism when it comes to the eroticism. To give an example: in 1840, after his marriage proposal to Ellen Sewall had been rejected, Thoreau wrote in his journal a poem which concludes with the following stanza:

I thought by loving all beside
 To prove to you my love was wide
 And by the rites I soared above
 To show you my peculiar love. (Miller 181;

7 Nov. 1840)

Though "peculiar" here may signify Thoreau's love for Ellen in particular, it carries as well the idea of idiosyncrasy, that Thoreau is trying to show Ellen and us a very particular, very queer kind of love. Yet for years, and largely on the basis of this poem, biographers and critics have presumed for Thoreau a conventional romantic attraction to Ellen Sewall which, having failed, rendered him this "bachelor of nature," despite not only inadequate documentation of Thoreau's feelings for Ellen, but also evidence across his work of strong attractions to men and a striking eroticization of natural phenomena. Writing from an idea of the erotic predicated on sexual object choice, Raymond Gozzi in 1957 suggested that Thoreau was possibly homosexual, suffering from an unresolved oedipal complex; for Gozzi and others since, this analysis has neatly contained any suggestion of homoeroticism in Thoreau's writings. Yet to analyze Thoreau's life and work according to a conception of sexuality dichotomized into the homo- and heterosexual, as nearly every critic who has considered Thoreau's affectional life has done, inadequately accounts for, if not disregards, his pan-

erotic response to nature and his efforts to "take account of" the terms of affectional relations. Thoreau tells us what he means by "peculiar love": to "love all beside" and to "soar above rites"--social conventions and their institutions--which consider love between the sexes different in character, or designed for different ends, than love for all else beside.

To describe both Thoreau's conception of a love which encompasses all beside and the erotic force that this love conjures is one goal of this study; another is to show how this love is embedded in his poetic practice. In order to make the case for an eroticized poetics, indeed to describe what it is I will call "erotic," I wish in this study to correlate several currents of thought regarding both eros and Thoreau's poetic practice. In particular, I will consider 1) how recent Thoreau scholarship has focused on an aesthetic relation Thoreau establishes between himself and the world; 2) how the erotic may be seen to emerge in this kind of aesthetic relation; and 3) how criticism over the last twenty years has resisted normalizing Thoreau's famous penchant for paradox and contradiction, on the level of both language and

narrative, suggesting instead, to my mind, a revolutionary (and sometimes impossible) order of thought adequate to represent the erotic-aesthetic relation. All of the criticism I cite comes together, in different ways, in terms of how it figures resistance to normalizing regimes: of sexuality, of narrative and poetic practice. To varying degrees, the critics share perspectives that correlate with contemporary Queer Theory. I would like to elaborate this point in some detail.

In two essays, Walter Harding, widely regarded as the dean of Thoreau studies, has collected what he calls the available "facts" regarding Thoreau's sexuality. In "Thoreau and Eros" (1978), Harding enumerates these facts, including: 1) Emerson's and F.B. Sanborn's "cover-up" after Thoreau's death of the inspiration for his famous "gentle boy" poem, attributing this inspiration to Ellen Sewall despite clear evidence that the poem was inspired by her eleven-year-old brother Edmund (145); 2) Thoreau's Journal passages praising the beauty of boys and men, including the Irish boy Johnny Riordan (147), the lumberman Tom Fowler who served as Thoreau's guide through the Maine woods (150), manual laborers wandering Walden

woods (149), canal boaters on the Concord and Merrimack rivers (150), other anonymous boys and men swimming nude (148), and of course Alek Therian, the Canadian woodchopper described in Walden and, more extensively, in the Journal (151); and 3) the virtual lack of comment on women except to disparage them (151-152). Harding offers these along with other observations regarding Thoreau's obsession with male friendship, anecdotal evidence indicating a lack of overt interest in heterosexual relations, and frequent confessions of an unspecified guilt and impurity in the Journal, in order to initiate the free discussion of a topic that seems to have been literally unspeakable, as dumbfounding as it has been unseemly: Thoreau's sexuality. Harding elaborates his points in a later essay, "Thoreau's Sexuality" (1991), and suggests in conclusion

that possibly some of Thoreau's lifelong radicalism, the completely different angle of vision with which he viewed the world around him, his perennial habit of questioning all things may have derived from his realization that he was different from others. (41-42)

I have already indicated Thoreau's willingness to practice "a separate intention of the eye" and have suggested that we may need to read this way as well; my emphasis on Harding's "completely different angle of vision" indicates the direction of my interest in Thoreau's eroticism, for while Harding's "facts" by themselves only lead us to a dead-end speculation regarding Thoreau's sexuality, they make a serious case for an examination of the erotic concerns, no matter how organized, that may bear upon Thoreau's insistently peculiar perspective. While I am not concerned here with Harding's speculation that Thoreau's aesthetic may derive from his sexuality, I believe that the correlation is important and that his aesthetic and his erotic sense do more than inform one another: they are one and the same. Thus it is my argument that his "angle of vision," and his understanding of the aesthetic relations created out of this vision, provide the scope for understanding the erotic force so prevalent, yet so inadequately accounted for, in his work.

Thoreau paid a great deal of attention to the force of his "peculiar love" throughout his career and attempted

to work out the terms of this love, particularly during the early years of his journal. One important early determination was that Love and Friendship are two words for the same relation, following one law of attraction. In the fall of 1839, at age twenty-two and two years into his journal-keeping, he notes that "Commonly we degrade Love and Friendship by presenting them under the aspect of a trivial dualism" (1: 107-08). Already we see the recognition evoked a year later in the stanza to Ellen that his love is not qualitatively different according to the object of his love, be it a friend, a lover or "all beside"; to make such distinctions trivializes and degrades the love relation. Thoreau's understanding of his "peculiar love" suggests a scope of feeling rarely called upon by readers: his "wide" love encompasses all regardless of object, so that, indeed, as he loves nature, so he loves his friend; it makes friendship in all contexts considerably more passionate; and it makes love considerably less--or trivially--heterosexual.

As will become clear in this study, Thoreau treats the subject of Love and Friendship to a degree second only to his attention to nature. Indeed, as he progressively

realizes Love as one force animating all his relations, not just with friends but, importantly, with nature, his accounts of "singing birds, and gleaming stubble, and flowing rivers, and morning and evening, and summer and winter" become at once accounts of nature and of love, showing the same dynamics that he discovered while writing on friendship. "All that can be said" of love gives way to the love in saying all, in speaking nature, in the practice of what Thoreau calls "poetic genius." His writing on friendship thus merits our close attention for several reasons, each of which shapes the terms of this study: as an important "botany" that I will delineate in Part Two, the order of which determines the scope and character of his love; as, in turn, an order of thought-- or, as I will argue in Part Three, an order of love--which informs his reception of nature; and as, in turn, an order of thought and love which informs his poetic practice, the subject of Part Four. Guiding my inquiry is, again, Thoreau's question in the epigraph above: How can the understanding take account of love?

When we question a "botany" designed to draw distinctions within and between love, friendship, romance,

sexuality and eroticism such as have emerged in western culture since Thoreau's death, we engage an order of thought currently considered under the rubric of Queer Theory. Indebted largely to the constructionist premises of Foucault's History of Sexuality, queer theory offers a mode of cultural criticism with sexuality as its analytic focus, taking an anti-foundationalist stance against naturalized sexual categories. Yet at the heart of queer theory is an immensely provocative, and productive, paradox: while it recognizes the historical and cultural constructedness of sexual and erotic categories, it also recognizes, pragmatically, the material force of essentializing sexual identities. As its name suggests in multiple ways, queer theory does this by examining sexually troubling representations which thwart dominant notions of naturalized sexuality, but it also examines these representations as necessarily idiosyncratic or peculiar, emerging as effects of individual identity. Queer, then, is less descriptive of sexual identity than it is descriptive of a perspective--a "separate intention of the eye," a "completely different angle of vision"-- necessarily idiosyncratic, and informed by difference from

the dominant, naturalized (sexual) order, whether that difference itself is essentialized as, for example, gay and lesbian identity, or not.¹ As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick proposes, and as I will consider later in terms of Thoreau's poetic practice, "there are important senses in which 'queer' can signify only when attached to the first person. One possible corollary: that what it takes--all it takes--to make the description 'queer' a true one is the impulsion to use it in the first person" ("Queer and Now" 9).

Already, in considering what constitutes the "queer," we are presented with a set of insistently Thoreauvian concerns. His impulsion to show Ellen his "peculiar love," for example, and his Journal effort to account for the "friendliness" of love and friendship--indeed, his entire Journal project--are all governed by the same first-person perspective that so famously shapes his writing. But a

¹ As Michael Warner points out in his essay "From Queer to Eternity":

Queer theorists are much more at ease with the idea that queerness is necessarily an effect of representation. They have less interest in what it means to be lesbian or gay than in the kinds of fantasy, performance, display, and talk that make sexuality as queer as it is. (19)

queer inquiry into Thoreau's work gains further urgency when we consider the aesthetic concerns embedded in the notion of "loving all beside" and the place of Thoreau's "completely different angle of vision" in shaping this aesthetic.

Recent scholarship has considered what one critic calls a "horizontal" aesthetic operating in Thoreau's nature writing--an effort to suspend a necessary transcendental or ideal aspiration in the reception and writing of nature, particularly in his Journal observations (Peck 54). In Writing Nature, Sharon Cameron's detailed analysis of the narrative exigencies of Thoreau's Journal considers this aesthetic in order to demonstrate "how the wholeness of nature and the wholeness of the Journal will come to be identical" (6). Cameron's primary purpose is to argue the Journal as an autonomous composition, but what I find to be her key qualification concerns the nature of this wholeness for Thoreau, which she describes as "predicated not on connections but on the breaking of connections. In fact, discontinuity could be described as the Journal's dominant feature, for no thought is ever entirely separated from or jointed to any

other thought" (6). Through close readings of certain Journal passages, particularly passages from the years 1850 to 1852 (during Thoreau's major revisions to Walden), Cameron determines that Thoreau was revising "not primarily the text, but rather a passion for nature divorced from social meaning" (24). Though Cameron eventually focuses on the peculiar narrativistic dilemma that this liberated, fully idiosyncratic passion poses for Thoreau in his preparation of Walden for publication, my interest lies in the very character and expression of a passion divorced from higher meaning, social utility or metanarrativistic service.

To assert the division of the natural from the social in Thoreau's project, and to suggest another scope for Thoreau's concept of the nature of relations, Cameron describes the Journal's discontinuities on several levels of relations:

- Thoreau resists anthropomorphizing what he sees, "dismiss[ing] not just Thoreau's consideration of himself but his consideration of other selves" (11);
- his poetic practice, and particularly his use of

metaphor, seems designed to draw correspondences among discrete phenomena in nature, the "ultimate goal" of which, detailed in one example,

is not to connect pears to stars--with the comparison inaugurating a transcendence of the natural--but . . . to connect pears to apples, pears to pears, pears to leaves, with comparison inaugurating a reiteration of the natural in a way that precludes suggestion of human significance, so that "metaphor demonstrates the gratuitousness of transcendence rather than its desirability" (13);

- his Journal poses the (historically, critically) confused question of its relation to audience as either a private or public work (15);
- the fragmentary nature of the text itself suggests to Cameron that "an inquiry into the Journal is primarily an investigation of how fragments epitomize relations" for Thoreau (17).

I read in all these observations a double urge on Thoreau's part: to revise radically the terms of his relations both to nature and to audience by de-

naturalizing or divorcing his relation to a nature consequently reconceived as whole, separate and discontinuous with himself; and by crafting a poetics adequate to express this relation, one that is equally "denaturalized," that will call attention to its own play rather than transcend itself in the service of narrative unity. Erotics aside for the moment, I consider this urge as "queer" insofar as the queer also resists naturalizing scripts, and sets its sights instead on the very performativity of self--the play of self-representation when sexuality is divorced from higher service. What is queer is, of course, disconcerting to the status quo, which is precisely the point: Cameron notes that "the very incongruity which disconcerts us about our perspective of the Journal, and about Thoreau's perspective in the Journal . . . creates that requisite gap in which Thoreau will erect creations of another order" (9). My ultimate concern here and in what follows is this other order of creations--Thoreau's act of creation itself and the re-creation that Thoreau's poetic practice urges while we read. These emerge from the incongruities that a queer perspective admits. And already, Cameron's study suggests

certain terms that Thoreau discovers in love and carries with him to nature: the notion of a discontinuity among phenomena (human and natural), what Thoreau terms contenance, that foregrounds the self as necessarily relational; and "the gratuitousness of transcendence" as a superfluous effect to be enjoyed in the present rather than deferred.

Cameron's forceful delineation of the Journal's discontinuities suggests that Thoreau's "requisite gaps" occur on the aesthetic level, involving relations of perception and perspective between self and nature, self and text, text and audience. In Thoreau's Morning Work, H. Daniel Peck follows a similar line of thought, identifying as well certain perceived anomalies in Thoreau's work in order to revise our notion of the Journal's coherence. In particular, like Cameron, Peck arrives at the perceptual "gap" between subject and object, paying particular attention to the correspondences Thoreau draws among natural phenomena, and argues against an agenda of ordering the world in a "vertical," hierarchical or transcendent manner. Peck notes this entry of December 25, 1851: "Let me not be in haste to detect the universal law,

let me see more clearly a particular instance" (3: 157)
and argues that

The effect of Thoreau's preference for dwelling in the world, rather than leaping beyond its "instances," is essentially to flatten the vertical design of Emerson's metaphysic, which is to say that Thoreau works primarily in a "horizontal" framework of perception. . . .In a horizontal framework of perception, the most characteristic object of vision is the relation between one feature of the landscape and another. . . .To acquire meaning, he seems to say, every natural object must be seen in relation to another, and then still another. . . .

Another way to say this is that Emerson's thought, for all his desire to find spirituality in the world, remains essentially neo-Platonic. . . .what most concerns him is . . . the visual relation that returns the world's diverse objects to the subject's inner life, where these are integrated and transformed. Thoreau, on the

other hand, is more interested in the relations between the objects themselves. (54)

Thus Thoreau's correspondences, Peck argues, are different from Emerson's; he cites Sherman Paul's determination of Emerson's correspondences between natural fact and spiritual truth as "conceived to bridge the chasm between mind and world that resulted from two centuries of Cartesianism" but notes that "the metaphysical structure in which this agency does its work is essentially dualistic" (54), reminding us that the very idea of Emersonian correspondence sustains the notion of transcendental truth or spirit "above" the field of perception rather than "within" it (54). The degree to which Thoreau departs from the neo-Platonism of Emersonian correspondence is the subject of continued debate;² what is generally agreed is that, as Peck puts it, Thoreau "inherited idealism not as a faith but as a problem" (73). His strong sensationalist bent, witnessed in Walden and in

² Joel Porte's Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict (1965) argues that Thoreau's "sensationalist" interests contributed largely to the break between the two friends. Porte's argument was met with resistance upon publication; my study should suggest new reasons for re-considering Porte's position.

the Journal, leads Thoreau not to discredit idealism but rather to direct his attention elsewhere, with "a separate intention of the eye," toward correspondences among phenomena as evidence of the harmony of the universe. For Peck, "Relation and harmony--these are the desiderata of the sauntering eye, the twin objectives of the Journal's unending work, and the central aesthetic values of its picture of the world" (62). For Thoreau to view nature aesthetically "challenges the objectivity of the scientist" (63), as his critique of "botany" cited earlier suggests, and enables him instead to know another order of harmony between self and nature and "thereby to perceive its deeper moral and metaphysical coherence" (64).

The relation-making among discrete phenomena which Thoreau's Journal largely comprises leads Peck to question where these relations reside, "in nature as an objective reality or in the mind of the perceiver" (66). Peck uses specific Journal observations to argue that

A phenomenon for Thoreau is an entity that bridges the gap between subject and object; it is the 'structure' that holds this dichotomy together and preserves the world from Emerson's

(and, indeed, his own) overreaching romantic imagination. (68)

Evoking Coleridge's definition of the romantic imagination, Peck continues:

A phenomenon is not merely an invention of the imagination ('fancy,' the material for 'Poesy') but has an almost empirical status lying halfway between subjective and objective reality. It is, we may say, the meeting place of the perceiver and the perceived. Put another way, a phenomenon is the structure that makes and secures a place for the human response that, in the terms we have defined, is specifically aesthetic. (68)

I detail Peck's and Cameron's attention to Thoreau's aesthetic relation with nature in order to introduce a frame for considering an attendant erotic relation. If we conjoin Cameron's notion of Thoreau's Journal project as determinedly fragmentary and relational with Peck's promotion of these relations as an aesthetic means of perceiving moral coherence in the world, we come very close to what Herbert Marcuse in Eros and Civilization identifies as a redemptive "aesthetic dimension."

Marcuse's aesthetic ideal provides another order of perceiving the self in the world which, by virtue of a "liberated Eros," poses relief from the modern discontent characterized by Freud in Civilization and Its Discontents. I look to Marcuse's "inquiry into Freud" as a frame for my study of Thoreau for two reasons: as he critiques Freud's analysis of modern discontent, Marcuse's arguments align nearly point for point with Thoreau's arguments for redemption in Walden; and in arriving at a redemptive "aesthetic dimension," Marcuse provides an understanding of the erotic concerns that may subtend the revisionary aesthetics that Cameron, Peck and others have begun to elucidate in Thoreau's writing, concerns that may today be called queer. Thus in order to understand how Thoreau's passion for his friend and for nature may be at once chaste and erotic, and how his writing project may reflect this passion for his reader, I turn my attention to both Marcuse's and Thoreau's redemptive ideals in further detail.

2. Eros

The erotic-aesthetic conjunction that I see embedded in Thoreau's poetic practice may be understood in part in terms of Thoreau's efforts to capture a unified sensibility, the conjunction of sense and intellect; Marcuse helps to explain an erotic force implicit in this sensibility. In positing the aesthetic dimension as at once emerging from and providing the scope for a freely erotic relation between self and world, Marcuse examines the philosophical history of the term aesthetic, with particular attention paid to the transformation from its original meaning as pertaining to the senses, to the connotation established in the eighteenth century as pertaining to beauty. He finds both conjoined in Kant's derivation of the aesthetic function in the Critique of Judgment, where "the aesthetic dimension occupies the central position between sensuousness and morality--the two poles of human existence" (176), and so finds there comprised "the inner connection between pleasure, sensuousness, beauty, truth, art, and freedom" (172). "To Kant," Marcuse summarizes,

the aesthetic dimension is the medium in which

the senses and the intellect meet. The mediation is accomplished by imagination, which is the 'third' mental faculty. Moreover, the aesthetic dimension is also the medium in which nature and freedom meet. (179)

I will detail Thoreau's idea of the mediation of the imagination in my discussion of nature in Part Three; for now, we may see compelling links between Marcuse's interpretation of Kant's aesthetic function and Thoreau's redemptive project in Walden.

Thoreau concludes the "Higher Laws" chapter of Walden with the story of John Farmer who, to the question "Why do you stay here and live this mean, moiling life, when a glorious existence is possible for you?" resolves to "let his mind descend into his body and redeem it" (499-500). This phrase is crucial to my understanding of the erotic scope of Thoreau's writing project: though it is conventionally understood to propose a subordination of animal nature by force of intellect, I read instead another "horizontal" coordination at work, a unification of sense with intellect, that corresponds with the larger record in Walden of a fully sensual "descent" or immersion

into nature. Walden's redemptive themes have always been evident to readers, including the cleansing, baptismal force of immersion in Walden pond; here I am considering another kind of immersion made possible by an aesthetic relation with nature. This immersion provides the occasion for a redemptive rapprochement between self and the world, a freedom for "lives of quiet desperation" that, in their despair, "deny[] the possibility of change" (331).

For Marcuse, the specific erotic scope of the aesthetic dimension is predicated by the cognitive and appetitive function of sensuousness attested by Kant:

Sensuousness, the mediating concept, designates the senses as sources and organs of cognition. But the senses are not exclusively, and not even primarily, organs of cognition. Their cognitive function is con-fused with their appetitive function (sensuality); they are erotogenic, and they are governed by the pleasure principle.

(183-84)

Likewise, Thoreau's call to let the mind descend into the body concludes an argument sustained throughout the "Higher Laws" chapter for the "con-fusion" of appetite and

imagination: "they should both sit down at the same table" (494). However, the degree to which the conjunction of sense and imagination might unleash erotic force is determined, in Marcuse's model, by the relative constraint or liberation of Freud's pleasure principle, or the degree to which the body might be (re-)sensitized. Indeed, most of Eros and Civilization is devoted to a critique of Freud's premise in Civilization and Its Discontents of a deterministic, inexorable constraint upon the force of eros to unify and gratify--the force of the pleasure principle--by a performance principle which governs and perpetuates social structures by extracting labor from libidinal force (43). I find in Thoreau's arguments in Walden the same considerations of constraints on freedom and pleasure, and a suggestion, elaborated in his Journal, of re-sensitization as a necessary adjunct to enjoying a new relation with the world. (Or, put another way, I find in Marcuse's critique a surprisingly Thoreauvian argument for "the possibility of change.")³ By examining in some

³ Some of what follows is my independent elaboration of correlations drawn also by Michael Warner in his essays "Thoreau's Bottom" and "Walden's Erotic Economy," particularly his use of Marcuse (routed at times through Guy Hocquenghem's Homosexual Desire) to initiate a

detail the close correspondences between Walden's major critiques and those in Eros and Civilization, we may begin to see how Thoreau's aesthetics might serve as a prime descriptive locus for his eroticism.

To begin, let us consider that what Thoreau figures as redemptive in Walden admits our pleasure in the world and our capacity to express "a simple and irrepressible satisfaction with the gift of life" (384), and that Thoreau's critiques, particularly in Walden's first chapter, address the cultural constraints imposed upon this pleasure. Marcuse, for his part, begins his critique by acknowledging Freud's theory that the constraints imposed by western civilization on the pleasure principle --on eros--serve the organization and perpetuation of that civilization. Marcuse summarizes Freud:

The organization of sexuality reflects the basic

discussion of the erotic concerns (and confusions) subtending a dialectics of self/other ("Thoreau's Bottom") and Thoreau's familiar critique of capitalist economy ("Walden's Erotic Economy"). My purpose here and in the remainder of the dissertation, however, to distinguish it from Warner's project, is to establish the terms of a relational aesthetic operating in Thoreau's work, to establish an erotic force behind this aesthetics, and to characterize a poetics adequate to that aesthetic.

features of the performance principle and its organization of society. Freud emphasizes the aspect of centralization. It is especially operative in the "unification" of the various objects of the partial instincts into one libidinal object of the opposite sex, and in the establishment of genital supremacy. In both cases, the unifying process is repressive--that is to say, the partial instincts do not develop freely into a "higher" stage of gratification which preserves their objectives, but are cut off and reduced to subservient functions. This process achieves the socially necessary desexualization of the body: The libido becomes concentrated in one part of the body, leaving most of the rest free for use as the instrument of labor. (48)

Important here is the connection established between centralization of the libido and unification of the libido's object; the "partial instincts" Marcuse refers to whose objects are so unified include instincts for sensual and sexual gratification which "are, according to the

degree of their independence, tabooed as perversions, sublimated, or transformed into subsidiaries of procreative sexuality" (40-41). Nowhere in Thoreau's writing is there any presumption of genital supremacy--of the genitals considered as the primary locus of the libido--nor of one libidinal object. This is not due to reticence regarding sexual matters and figures on Thoreau's part. On the contrary, as Part Three's discussion of Thoreau's response to nature will show, sexual concerns, sensual pleasures and their objects are so pointedly many, diffuse and confounded in Thoreau's writing as to thwart any idea of a unifying and subjugating order which would constrain the scope of the body's engagement with the world. Indeed, it is this very resistance to imposing order on the phenomenal world which Cameron and Peck argue lies at the heart of Thoreau's aesthetics and which indicates his vision of another order.⁴

⁴ For example, Cameron's view of the Journal as an autonomous composition in which Thoreau "writes nature" leads her to consider Walden by contrast as mediating the natural for an audience; it is redemptive insofar as it "presents not nature but the seductive rapprochement of the natural and the social to which, put in the harshest terms, nature is sacrificed" (24). To "sacrifice" nature

Thoreau, like Marcuse and Freud, is keenly aware of the close connection between repressed pleasure and alienated labor. In Walden's first chapter "Economy," for example, Thoreau considers the conjunction of labor and human needs and, in his own theory of civilization and its discontents, recognizes the vitiating effects of alienated labor:

Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor

here means that Thoreau must engage a cultural--i.e., narrative--practice that imposes de facto the kind of order on his subject that, if we and our idea of nature are to be redeemed, must be broken. But Thoreau's very resistance to his own narrative is embedded in Walden, as critics since Cavell and Benn Michaels have begun to explore.

would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be any thing but a machine. How can he remember well his ignorance--which his growth requires--who has so often to use his knowledge? We should feed and clothe him gratuitously sometimes, and recruit him with our cordials, before we judge of him. The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly. (327)

Through this summary critique of alienated labor, Thoreau aligns with the most fundamental of Marcuse's considerations, including the place of reason in sustaining a repressive order. Man "has no time to be any thing but a machine" if he is to preserve his value in a market economy; Thoreau recognizes this state as both effect and cause in a vicious economy of reason, a particular way of ordering knowledge. It is "through mere ignorance and mistake" that man labors to avert "factitious cares." These labors are "superfluous" because designed to meet artificial needs. Through another kind of

knowledge man could recognize the extent to which he labors unnecessarily--and Thoreau attempts to force this recognition in the remainder of the chapter, enumerating and evaluating such "necessities of life" as shelter, food, clothing, etc. Stated another way, Thoreau sees that man is "actually" ignorant by virtue of this knowledge: the knowledge man "has so often to use" is of a specific order which grants him value and thus sustains the social structures he lives by, though, ironically, at the expense of enjoying "the manliest relations to men." In another order of relations, predicated on another order of knowledge, we would meet man's needs "gratuitously," "feed and clothe him" for his own sake athwart a system of value and exchange,⁵ so that he may "remember well his ignorance" for the sake of his own growth, a growth fed by both sense and imagination. In this ignorance of knowledge-as-value, life's finer fruits can be plucked.

Marcuse provides an unwitting gloss of Thoreau's concerns, those expressed not only here but throughout

⁵ This concept of "gratuity"--also called "superfluity"--is central to Thoreau's "peculiar love," as I will reiterate throughout this study in terms of love, nature and poetics.

Walden, when he coordinates both the repression of gratification and alienated labor with the ego's "rational transformation of the human and natural environment."

Marcuse describes the order of rational thought or reason which in the West divides subject against object:

The struggle begins with the perpetual internal conquest of the "lower" faculties of the individual: his sensuous and appetitive faculties. . . .Their subjugation is, at least since Plato, regarded as a constitutive element of human reason, which is thus in its very function repressive. The struggle culminates in the conquest of external nature, which must be perpetually attacked, curbed, and exploited in order to yield to human needs. . . .The ego becomes preconditioned for mastering action and productivity even prior to any specific occasion that calls for such an attitude. . . .Nature is a priori experienced by an organism bent to domination and therefore experienced as susceptible to mastery and control. . . .this idea of reason becomes increasingly antagonistic

to those faculties and attitudes which are receptive rather than productive, which tend toward gratification rather than transcendence-- which remain strongly committed to the pleasure principle. They appear as the unreasonable and irrational that must be conquered and contained in order to serve the progress of reason. (109-11)

When Thoreau asks us to consider our relation to Nature, as Walden is customarily understood to ask, his question becomes laden with implications that are customarily overlooked save in conjunction with the aesthetic concerns raised by Cameron, Peck and Marcuse. Our ability to receive and enjoy pleasure in nature is predicated by how we know nature, whether as an object to be mastered or as something else, and how we know our self, as a reasoning being or as something other. In the aesthetic dimension, as Peck has pointed out, Thoreau averts transcendental correspondence and the dualism it sustains by viewing natural phenomena not simply as objects of perception but as the occasion for creating a "structure" that "bridges the gap between subject and object." Indeed, Marcuse

implies that transcendence as the telos of human "faculties and attitudes" must be averted if we are to receive and enjoy fully the pleasure of nature, the pleasure in living. Thus by reconsidering the relation between self and Nature, the Transcendental ME and NOT ME characterized by Emerson as self or soul on the one hand and, on the other, "both nature and art, all other men and my own body" (Nature 8), Thoreau faces the question of what passes for knowledge.

Thoreau makes clear in the passage cited above that what ordinarily passes for knowledge is in fact a specific way of ordering relations between man and his environment whereby larger social structures are sustained at the expense of individual gratification, both sensual (enjoyment of fruits) and affectional (enjoyment of the "manliest" of relations). What is more, Thoreau figures these pleasures in the same way: the fruit men might pluck were their fingers less clumsy and trembling from coarse labor are other men, whose "finest qualities . . . like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling." In the present order, however, "we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly." Thus

Thoreau's primary consideration in this passage is the constraint placed on our capacity to enjoy pleasure, Marcuse's (and Freud's) originary observation.

When soon thereafter Thoreau questions his famous "lives of quiet desperation," he again addresses our pleasure:

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things. (329)

This passage addresses the extent of man's alienation, not just from nature, other men, and the fruits of his labor, but from the very knowledge of pleasure so that his alienation goes unrecognized. What passes for leisure and play testifies instead to divided, incomplete lives, where

brave animals bespeak our own lack of courage, and games reserved for certain hours are, because of this constraint, deprived of their play. Characteristic "wisdom," which averts desperation in favor of resignation and which thus sustains this alienation, is the same order of knowledge that fuels our alienated labor, so that "the bravery of minks and muskrats," in a country game which comes after city work, becomes consolation for our lack, for our constraints, a point of emotional redemption granted value in a system of difference and exchange. For where Marcuse argues that "The culture of industrial civilization has turned the human organism into an ever more sensitive, differentiated, exchangeable instrument" (92), this culture's same ratiocination of natural phenomena, present to Thoreau as "botany," sustains the system of difference between man and nature which permits exchange, the perpetuation of notions of lack and thus the value of exchange. In our desperation, animals are endowed with the courage we lack; in our resignation, we accept our incompleteness and quietly defer fulfillment to some future, transcendent end. In such resignation do we deem ourselves wise.

As the passage continues, Thoreau critiques both this wisdom and its end:

When we consider what, to use the words of the catechism, is the chief end of man, and what are the true necessities and means of life, it appears as if men had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other. Yet they honestly think there is no choice left. . . .Here is life, an experiment to a great extent untried by me. . . . (329)

In the words of The Shorter Catechism from the New England Primer, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever" (qtd. in Meyer 415n8). God as Logos orders knowledge; in it and for its glorification does man act, and by doing so does man defer what Thoreau would deem real union and true satisfaction, "a simple and irrepressible satisfaction with the gift of life" (Walden 384). Instead, we await the promise of eternal pleasure. The common mode of living--of knowledge, labor and pleasure--seems to be a chosen mode averred by the performance of the catechism itself. Thoreau knows, however, by the evidence of quiet desperation, that men

accept this end without considering alternatives. Instead of relying on the reason which preaches resignation, which orders knowledge to serve a transcendental reward, Thoreau will suggest a more empirical approach and try the experiment of life, though "a peculiar kind of empiricism," as Walter Benn Michaels calls it, "which stresses not only the primacy of experience but its unrepeatability, its uniqueness" (140).

This experiment with another order of reason implies another order of time which shapes desire in terms other than past regret and future expectation. For Marcuse, the force of reason to order and constrain sensual gratification, a force which "epitomizes the antagonistic relation between subject and object" (112), correlates with an order of time which upholds this division between reason and external nature, yet which also carries the promise of reconciliation. In the Western metaphysical tradition, Aristotle's hierarchy of the modes of being, with the nous theos at the top, sets the structure for the transcending subject who may find "the ultimate unity of subject and object" only in a mode of being which is, according to Aristotle, reserved only to the god and not

for this world. This unity, the idea of "being-in-and-for-itself," can be approached but never met in this life, so that becoming, and an idea of time ordered in terms of past and future which admits becoming, is privileged over being and the present. "Otherwise," says Marcuse, "the empirical world does not partake of such fulfillment; only a yearning, 'Eros-like,' connects this world with its end-in-itself" (112).

As we have seen Thoreau meet Marcuse's case for redemption point for point in Walden in terms of labor, pleasure and reason or knowledge, so does he consider time; still in "Economy," Thoreau writes:

In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line. (336)

Here the conventional means of demarcating time, the pattern of the seasons and of the sun, are suspended in favor of the ever-present moment and the fact of being, and we recall that Thoreau loves his Friend as he loves a

nature marked grammatically for ever-presence, the "singing birds, and gleaming stubble, and flowing rivers, and morning and evening." Thoreau expresses desire for another, literal, mark, the very "nick of time," and its mark is rendered in physical terms: he wants to "notch it on my stick," "to toe that line." Thoreau continues, "You will pardon some obscurities, for there are more secrets in my trade than in most men's, and yet not voluntarily kept, but inseparable from its very nature" (336). The inseparability of Thoreau's revision of time with his "trade," his project, suggests the same implication that Marcuse argues: as the ordering of time into past, present and future sustains the ordering of knowledge into a system of becoming, a chain of deferrals of what the Transcendentalists understood as "Reason" and whose telos is the nous theos, so an order of presence suggests the pleasure of being, the engagement of the body, another kind of knowing which is its own end, and a poetic order adequate to this knowing, one that for Thoreau will serve to notch his stick. There is, in short, a strong anti-metaphysical urge in Thoreau, or at least a metaphysical disregard, that tends to collapse the Aristotelian

hierarchy and return the nous theos to humankind.

That this other order shapes desire differently is suggested in his next paragraph, his most famous obscurity:

I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtledove⁶, and am still on their trail. Many are the travellers I have spoken concerning them, describing their tracks and what calls they answered to. I have met one or two who had heard the hound, and the tramp of the horse, and even seen the dove disappear behind a cloud, and they seemed as anxious to recover them as if they had lost them themselves. (336)

As Barbara Johnson has pointed out, when we ask what the hound, bay horse and turtledove mean, when we try to recover them, we are as anxious as Thoreau's travellers, and in the same way--we engage a desire to know (53).

⁶ I grudgingly agree with Harding that to read HOUND BAY HORSE TURTLEDOVE as an anagram for HENRY D THOREAU DOUBTS LOVE (or LOVES DOUBT) is amusing but unimportant (New Thoreau 191); nonetheless, I am speaking ultimately in this dissertation about Thoreau's doubts about the accepted order of knowing and a constrained, constraining order of love found at its root. The anagram for me is thus highly charged.

Thoreau is "still on their trail" as he will always be, and that is his point: he will be ever-present on the trail of desire, in the experiment of living, rather than looking ahead for their recovery. The many other travellers (whom he "speaks" like ships, as if emphasizing a particularly solitary, self-circumscribed pursuit) are not "as anxious to recover them" as Thoreau is but "as if they had lost them themselves"; his anxiety is of another order--he instead is "anxious to improve the nick of time." Thus his attention to marking physical presence, his description of "their tracks and what calls they answered to."

When Thoreau speaks about anxiety he is concerned with meeting his desire, achieving a union that is the very heart of eros. In one sense, the goal of this dissertation is to characterize this desire and how Thoreau meets it in a poetics of being. "Economy" is his opening bid in Walden for an alternative vision of redemption, urging a re-examination of the very terms upon which we live and know, what we consider the necessities of life and why, and how we spend our time and enjoy our pleasure. As with Marcuse, and as Cameron and Peck argue

for Thoreau, his vision is predicated on a specific, alternative model of man's relation to Nature. For though Nature seems to stand as the primary redemptive force for Thoreau, and is commonly understood as such for readers of Thoreau, he makes this crucial distinction: if we would find redemption by natural means, let us first be like Nature rather than subordinate it to our ends; or, as he asserts at the conclusion of "Higher Laws, "let his mind descend into his body and redeem it" (500).

Thoreau introduces this distinction at the conclusion of "Economy," where it again becomes clear that, as with Marcuse, a critique of our relation to nature bespeaks a critique of the transcendent subject. Here Thoreau reasserts his fundamental aversion to systems which offer metaphysical reward:

Our manners have been corrupted by communication with the saints. Our hymn-books resound with a melodious cursing of God and enduring him forever. One would say that even the prophets and redeemers had rather consoled the fears than confirmed the hopes of man. There is nowhere recorded a simple and irrepressible satisfaction

with the gift of life, any memorable praise of
God. (384)

In his alternative vision for redemption, the "simple and
irrepressible satisfaction" is met in the present life:

If, then, we would indeed restore mankind by
truly Indian, botanic, magnetic, or natural
means, let us first be as simple and well as
Nature ourselves, dispel the clouds which hang
over our own brows, and take up a little life
into our pores. (384)

What is important here is not so much the alternative
system, the program or code for living, be it "Indian,
botanic, magnetic" or, for that matter, any other
"natural" code devised by man, but our condition for
receiving the knowledge of these systems. And once again
it is asserted even on the level of grammar: if we would,
let us first be; future is subordinate (conditional, one
might even say a gratuitous, superfluous effect) to
present, becoming subordinate to being. To be like nature,
"simple and well," to "take up a little life into our
pores," means to re-imagine nature as something other than
subordinate to human intellect, which subordination, as

Marcuse affirms, is the work of reason. As cited from "Higher Laws," Thoreau suggests that first we must bring mind down to the same level as body, re-value the body and the natural world of which it is part, and thus meet nature, find a kind of symmetry with nature. Redemption thus requires another order of conceiving or constituting nature, which is to say, another order of mind and another understanding of self.

When Thoreau calls for the mind to descend into the body and redeem it, we may now understand him to call for the coordination, as opposed to subordination, of thought with body, feeling, sensation, and that this redemption is achieved in Marcuse's aesthetic dimension. Marcuse arrives at a model of aesthetic relations predicated on free Eros --an erotic sense or sexual order other than that harnessed into the oedipal structure and the heterosexual order which serves it. This aesthetics marks an alternative reality principle which sees union between man and nature and thus gratified eros, the pleasure of being.

Marcuse's ideas might be described as queer by half; though his critique of Freud's metapsychology is rooted in a rejection of biological determinism, arguing instead the

cultural contingency, and thus mutability, of Freud's psychic schema, he poses an ideal realignment of the pleasure principle and reality principle "altered in favor of the former" where "Eros, the life instincts, would be released to an unprecedented degree" (154). Queer critics such as Michael Warner question the premise of a "free Eros," in Warner's case noting criticism of Marcuse "by Foucault and others for implying an intrinsically liberating sexuality, a pure culture of the polymorphous" and asserting that "the question remains open as to whose erotics will count as Eros" (158). Nonetheless, what Warner in his article and I in this discussion assert, though to different ends, is not Thoreau's recovery of but rather his idea of a utopian, redemptive erotics and its attendant set of themes, predicated for Thoreau on "as many ways as there can be drawn radii from one centre" (Walden 331) and the "separate intention of the eye" required to see these possibilities.

What might also be called queer by half is the compelling though nearly-impossible conjecture on Thoreau's homosexuality cited at the start of this discussion. Though application of the term "homosexual" to

Thoreau's life, work and self-identity is both problematic and misleading, it does serve as a kind of place-holder in queer theory for certain manifestations of desire and eroticism that go against the grain of naturalized, normalized sexual categories. And here we return to Walter Harding's coordination of the homosexual "facts" of Thoreau's life and work with the "completely different angle of vision" that, I argue, comprises both Marcuse's and Thoreau's erotic aesthetic.

For Marcuse, any realization of his ideal culture would require a realignment on the level of the entire human race of the psychic structures that both Freud and Marcuse believe we are born into: "it must be a supra-individual process on common ground. As an isolated individual phenomenon, the reactivation of narcissistic libido is not culture-building but neurotic" (209).⁷

⁷ My argument is not that Thoreau evidences alien psychic structures but rather possesses the idea of and desire for another kind of relation to the world, at once aesthetic and erotic. I would not say that Thoreau is, for this reason, neurotic. Yet Marcuse does not consider that this alternative culture-building libido could already be in place. With the emergence of a gay liberation movement in the late sixties came revisions of Marcuse's ideas which asserted the existence of other libidinal orders, most forcefully in the work of Guy Hocquenghem, work taken today as queer and which I will introduce later in my

Nonetheless, to support further his argument, Marcuse looks for the presence in western culture of "certain archetypes of imagination which, in contrast to the culture-heroes of repressive productivity [i.e. Prometheus and Hermes], symbolized creative receptivity" (175). He finds them in Orpheus and Narcissus, whose images "are those of the Great Refusal: refusal to accept separation from the libidinous object (or subject). The refusal aims at liberation--at the reunion of what has become separated" (170). For Marcuse, Orpheus and Narcissus represent the force of liberated eros to create another order of relations; at the same time, they represent the homosexual in western culture:

The classical tradition associates Orpheus with the introduction of homosexuality. Like Narcissus, he rejects the normal Eros, not for an ascetic ideal, but for a fuller Eros. Like Narcissus, he protests against the repressive order of procreative sexuality. The Orphic and Narcissistic Eros is to the end the negation of

discussion.

this order--the Great Refusal. In the world symbolized by the culture-hero Prometheus, it is the negation of all order; but in this negation Orpheus and Narcissus reveal a new reality, with an order of its own, governed by different principles. The Orphic Eros transforms being: he masters cruelty and death through liberation. His language is song, and his work is play. Narcissus' life is that of beauty, and his existence is contemplation. These images refer to the aesthetic dimension as the one in which their reality principle must be sought and validated. (170-71)

As I read Walden, encountering contradiction upon contradiction on all levels of signification, tripping over words whose meanings radiate with "as many ways as there can be drawn radii from one centre," yet finding beauty and play and love, I find something very close to this Orphic and Narcissistic Eros. Thoreau's difficult poetics is a purposeful, transformative, redemptive negation of readers' expectations for order, offering instead song, play, beauty and contemplation.

This signals an important erotic attachment Thoreau makes with his reader. Marcuse asserts that the "being" that is transformed in the aesthetic dimension signifies not just the self, but "things animate and inanimate, in organic and inorganic nature" for which "The Orphic and Narcissistic Eros awakens and liberates potentialities that are real . . . but in the un-erotic reality suppressed" (165). Not only does Thoreau record his self-transformation and redemption, but in his very poetic rendering, and in our reading, Thoreau urges an erotic transformation in us. That is, it is in our practice of reading, our acts of "erecting creations of another order" out of the gaps, overlaps, dissonances that Thoreau's texts pose to us, that we make love--and this practice, this praxis, is how the understanding takes account of the love of love. In this way, Thoreau may be at once chaste and erotic, may make love with the world simply by loving. As this mode of "being" signifies things being, so that "These potentialities circumscribe the telos inherent in them as: 'just to be what they are,' 'being-there,' existing" (Marcuse 165), so eros is the telos inherent in Thoreau's idea of chastity. Taken out of higher service,

the eros contained by chastity is allowed simply to be; its very circumscription allows its transformative force for song, play, beauty and pleasure. And the transformation--redemption--effected by this mode of being is not simply Thoreau's "self," but all things with which his self joins in relation--lovers, nature and reader.

(I would thus qualify our understanding of Thoreau's chastity otherwise so thoroughly contextualized by James Armstrong in "Thoreau, Chastity, and the Reformers." In this essay Armstrong considers a question posed by Walter Harding at the 1976 meeting of the Modern Language Association--"How could so sensuous a man have been so frightened by sex . . . ?"--and demonstrates the extent to which Thoreau's overall asceticism adheres to many of the often terrifying dictates of the moral reform movements flourishing in America during his lifetime (125). Regarding chastity in particular, Armstrong cites the deep cultural influence of Sylvester Graham's A Lecture to Young Men (1834), quoting the following exhortation against masturbation and nocturnal emission:

Remember, my young friends, the end of your organization! Recollect the final cause of your

organs of reproduction--the propagation of your species--requires but seldom exercise of their function!--and remember that the higher capabilities of man qualify him for more exalted and exalting pleasures than lie within the precincts of sensual enjoyment. (Lecture 37-38).

Graham's rhetoric borrows from a dominant idea in the natural philosophy of the time, the teleological argument from design formulated authoritatively for the early nineteenth century by Georges Cuvier that looked to "final cause" to explain biological phenomena (Ospovat 6-8). But as natural history during Thoreau's time underwent the profound ideological revolutions that led to Darwin's theory, rejecting the teleological model in favor of a view of mutable structures emerging by chance from a prodigal nature, so Thoreau, as we have just seen in other contexts, rejected arguments from design in favor of another wisdom that views life as a succession of "being." I will examine Thoreau's relation to the revolutions in natural history in further detail in Part Three; for now I suggest that chastity meant something to Thoreau other than honoring the final cause of his organization,

something that still admitted sensual pleasure as a supremely "exalted and exalting" enjoyment.)

For Thoreau to craft for himself a transformation of "being" that calls upon a fully-eroticized relation with the world, and to craft as well a poetics adequate to that being, might suggest to Marcuse a pose that is at once homosexual and "neurotic"; to me it suggests a queer perspective. Guy Hocquenghem's analysis of homophobia in Homosexual Desire describes the inordinate dread that arises from a perception of the inordinate desire that homosexuality represents in twentieth-century western culture; as Michael Moon summarizes in his introductory essay to Hocquenghem's work, "Homosexuality expresses something--some aspect of desire--which appears nowhere else, and that something is not merely the accomplishment of the sexual act with a person of the same sex" (50). What marks this perspective as queer, and what leads me to posit Thoreau's work as queer, is again this very notion of the "homosexual" ascribed to Thoreau not as the binary counterpart to heterosexuality but as "an abstract, separate, and excoriated division of desire" (Weeks 35) unaccountable yet contained by official, naturalized,

reproductive sexuality. Thus in the analysis that follows, I will examine the traces of "some aspect of desire," strongly homoerotic, indeed, in Thoreau's aesthetic project, not so much answering Harding's call to determine Thoreau's sexuality as accounting for Thoreau's loves.

My design in this discussion has been to offer a preliminary perspective that eroticizes the aesthetic concerns recently raised in Thoreau criticism. Michael Warner is the only critic to have elaborated, albeit within a limited scope, a specifically erotic valence to Thoreau's writing; what I wish to add in the following chapters is an analysis of this eroticism in terms of both aesthetic and poetic practice. I will describe the terms of Thoreau's erotic aesthetic and their operation in this "other order" as they emerge in three relational modes most prevalent in Thoreau's work: love, nature and writing. Part Two examines Thoreau's conceptualization of love and friendship, a subject treated with near-obsession in Transcendentalism in general and in Thoreau's writing in particular. What emerges is a schema for love relations that by design sustains the requisite gaps cited by Cameron and Peck, within which Thoreau erects "creations

of another order," the self-in-love. In Part Three I will show how this concept of love translates Thoreau's relation to nature into the aesthetic occasion for unadulterated sensual and imaginative enjoyment (as an ideal, at least, if not sustained in practice), locating in Thoreau's view of nature what Marcuse calls an "erotogenic" force for imaginative generation. Lastly, in Part Four I will turn to Thoreau's narrative and poetic practice to consider the ways in which it carries as well an "erotogenic" force predicated on the schema established in Part Two. This last discussion will not offer a formal Thoreauvian "poetics," for the same reason that Thoreau's discourses on friendship can offer only a limited understanding of "friendliness." Instead, I will read closely throughout this study with an eye toward Thoreau's poetic, queer "excesses," and in Part Four I will consider both the critical discomfort these excesses have inspired and Thoreau's desire for such excess, arguing in the end an erotic relation established between Thoreau and his reader.

Part Two: Love

Love that I love, and I will love thee that lovest it.

(Journal 1: 329; 14 March 1842)

My discussion in Part One proposed reasons for characterizing the place and force of eros in Thoreau's work. Two reasons are clear and compelling: Thoreau frequently evokes love of a "peculiar" kind in his writing, particularly in writing nature; and critical readers have recognized interests in Thoreau's work which they describe--somewhat misleadingly, in my view--as homoerotic. These reasons concern love and affection--for men, for nature--as a theme in Thoreau's work. But there is also reason to consider how eros may be a force embedded in his poetic practice, meaning both the way he uses language and the relationship this "peculiar" use establishes with his reader. As I discussed in my comparison of Thoreau's concerns in Walden with Herbert Marcuse's in Eros and Civilization, Thoreau holds a revisionary, redemptive interest in an order of thought and relation with the world that runs counter to, and is

critical of, rational or teleological cultural interests. Thoreau seeks a relation with the world in what Marcuse describes as an aesthetic dimension, predicated on both a specifically sensual knowledge and on a condition of self that is receptive to such knowledge. I suspect that this reconceived relation between self and world accounts for a commonly perceived--and sometimes self-admitted--strangeness or obscurity in Thoreau's writing. Marcuse gives us further reason to look for a "liberated" eros at the base of this work, and to consider Thoreau's writing project as evincing a "queer" erotic practice.

I turn next to Thoreau's writing on love and friendship in order to determine the terms and scope of his peculiar love. As Thoreau himself admits about this writing, it is necessarily "botanizing," a classificatory venture that in itself does not account for the love of love; in this regard we will find nothing thematically erotic, though my readings will put into relief the erotic valence immanent in his writing love, just as the string of presencing qualifications involved the love of the "As I love nature . . . I love thee" passage. But these writings are also a necessary point d'appui insofar as

Thoreau writes against his culture's expectations for love, its investments and interests in the love relation-- particularly with regard to the power of sympathy, a high Romantic model of love that the Transcendentalists as a group treated extensively. I begin then with an examination of "sympathy," and I will show how Thoreau's redefinition of this force supports his sense of self as discrete and relational--the self identified by Cameron and Peck that may engage the world in an aesthetic relation. What emerges from this "continent" sympathy, ironically, is an extravagant, superabundant, "superfluous" love that is at once its own end and the very eros of being.

3. Sympathy

Thoreau's revision of sympathy begins early in his career, evident in this Journal critique from an entry dated December 31, 1840:

This sickly preaching of love, and a sympathy that will be tender of our faults, is the dyspepsia of the soul. . . .Let not ours be a wiped virtue, as men go about with an array of clean linen, but unwashed as a fresh flower. Not a clean Sunday garment, but better as a soiled work-day one. (Miller 202; 31 Dec. 1840)

Thoreau's rather visceral denunciation of the "sickly preaching of love" and its attendant sympathy bears ironic witness to what was a common conception in early nineteenth-century America: that love is a relation of sympathy between two like-minded individuals, between whom all is known and shared equally. The particular character and force of this sympathy is evident in the Romantic transformation of marriage in bourgeois culture from a social, legal and economic arrangement to include its modern understanding as a sacred joining of two souls. This understanding took root particularly well in

nineteenth-century America, where the Puritan legacy of the individual's direct enjoyment of God's love provided fertile ground for both the Romantic ennoblement of individual instinct and passion and the Transcendental tenet of divinity immanent in all creation. In American Romanticism, human love becomes tantamount to God's love, and its experience is known as sympathy (Rotundo 130-31).

The Transcendentalists more than any other group in America popularized the sympathetic model of love. In his essay "Friendship," Emerson, evoking Goethe, calls on sympathy as an "affinity," a love relation which, in turn, determines our relation with the world:

My friends have come to me unsought. The great God gave them to me. By oldest right, by the divine affinity of virtue with itself, I find them, or rather not I, but the Deity in me and in them derides and cancels the thick walls of individual character, relation, age, sex, circumstance, at which he usually connives, and now makes many one. High thanks I owe you, excellent lovers, who carry out the world for me to new and noble depths, and enlarge the meaning

of all my thoughts. (342-43)

Though sympathetic love in this example platonically disregards "individual character," including sex, the same dynamic informed ideal marriage for Margaret Fuller in Woman in the Nineteenth Century as a necessary condition for equality, "deep communion" and "real intercourse" between the sexes:

[Man] would not deem it a trifle, that he was to enter into the closest relations with another soul, which, if not eternal in themselves, must eternally affect his growth. . . .Were he a step higher, he would not carelessly enter into a relation where he might not be able to do the duty of a friend, as well as a protector from external ill, to the other party, and have a being in his power pining for sympathy, intelligence and aid, that he could not give.

(71)

Thoreau, for his part, does not eschew sympathetic love as the earlier passage might suggest; far from it. He begins with this model for affectional relations, but he submits it to characteristic scrutiny, twisting, troping,

and clarifying its terms and implications in order to wrest from the model the clearest account of its applicability to his own experience. By 1851, a time of both intense emotional turmoil regarding his Concord friendships and deep revision of draft for Walden, Thoreau is able to write in his journal his most lucid definition of friendship, an affection solidly grounded in sympathy, but now of a peculiar character:

My difficulties with my friends are such as no frankness will settle. There is no precept in the New Testament that will assist me. My nature, it may [be], is secret. Others can confess and explain; I cannot. It is not that I am too proud, but that is not what is wanted. Friendship is the unspeakable joy and blessing that results to two or more individuals who from constitution sympathize; and natures are liable to no mistakes, but will know each other through thick and thin. Between two by nature alike and fitted to sympathize there is no veil and there can be no obstacle. Who are the estranged? Two friends explaining. (3: 146-47; 21 Dec. 51)

For Thoreau, friendship is clearly a sympathetic relation, but his qualifications demonstrate the degree to which he reconsiders the term to reflect his individual concerns⁸, specifically with regard to the constitution and articulation of self. The "difficulties" he refers to concern accusations of coldness and a lack of demonstrated affection for his friends, and his response addresses specifically the unspeakability or undemonstrability of the relation. Talking about friendship "is not what is wanted" between friends: not only is it not necessary, it belies the friendship relation, indicating a lack of sympathy.

The "sickly preaching of love" cited earlier addresses the same issue: if love must be preached, if sympathy must be prescribed as an antidote to human failure, then no genuine love can arise from these exhortations. In both cases, Thoreau evokes a conceptualization of sympathetic love that disallows

⁸ These three passages show, incidentally and very generally, how various Transcendentalist agendas could be: Emerson emphasizes the articulation of universal laws, Fuller of social constructs and their reform, Thoreau of his self and his relations.

exchange and, by consequence, any telos other than that inherent in being-in-sympathy--a crucial qualification that will color all his relations borne of love, including those established with nature and through writing. In the present examples, love may not be traded through representative words--its "unspeakability" suggesting the need for another order of language--nor may love be traded as a means to an end such as salvation or friendship. As the example of "loving all beside" was meant to indicate to Ellen Sewell, love for Thoreau is intransitive, is its own proof and reward, presenting his peculiar self rather than serving as a means to an end. Indeed, that his love is unutterable, perhaps "secret," though "unwashed as a fresh flower," aligns it much more closely with similar, later nineteenth-century formulations of that other "peculiar" and dirty love, homosexuality, than with (and setting it apart from) the "clean Sunday garments" of his culture's understanding of the Christian caritas, the philanthropic industry which trades in such charity, and popular notions of a romantic love which trades in such sympathy to secure marriages.

Thoreau's aversion to "trade" or exchange between

lovers arises from the idea that the sympathy of the love relation exists as an effect of "constitution." Love is the coming together of whole selves, not the parceling of self piecemeal through tokens of love. "Two friends explaining" are "estranged" because they are not constitutionally true, not wholly present and known. True love establishes itself between like natures who by virtue of their constitutional similitude "will know each other through thick and thin," offering the "unspeakable joy and blessing" of a seamless, perfect union where "there is no veil and there can be no obstacle." On the surface, this is not so different from Emerson's view of a sympathetic love that makes many one. Thoreau does not rest in Emersonian universals, however; the whole of his writing project is governed by the idiosyncratic, first-person perspective made so explicit at the opening of Walden: "it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were any body else whom I knew as well" (325). Not only must he turn and return to the self that finds expression in love relations; in doing so, in love, he might enjoy as well the bonus of love that reveals the self, makes self-

constitution known.

He arrived above at an idea--it may be secret, thwarted by estranging relations--of the "nature" of his self; he continues the passage:

you who complain that I am cold find nature cold. To me she is warm. My heat is latent to you. Fire itself is cold to whatever is not of a nature to be warmed by it. A cold wind is warmer to a feverish man than the air of a furnace.

That I am cold means that I am of another nature. (3: 146-47; 21 Dec. 1851)

"Nature" signifies doubly as both natural phenomena and self-constitution in this passage, forming a rhetorical bridge--a poetic union--between the cartesian ME (self) and NOT ME (art, nature, mine and other bodies) that underlie Emersonian Transcendentalism. This confounds any notion of a determinate "nature" that, once the Emersonian "thick walls of individual character, relation, age, sex, circumstance" are canceled, might encompass the many made one of Emerson's ideal. Instead, through the evidence of sympathy, Thoreau determines that he is of the nature of nature (whose nature, as suggested in Part One and as will

be elaborated in Part Three, Thoreau understands to be "wild," extravagant, outside the bounds of rational comprehension). This makes him of another nature--different by virtue of an individual character divorced from social claims--than his estranged companions. Importantly, this further reveals an understanding of his relation to nature as identically sympathetic--in this way he is "as simple and well as Nature"--so that this relation may carry the same affectional (and potentially erotic) valence as his love for his ideal friend. Though the above passage bears witness to a kind of despair over ever realizing his ideal of human sympathy, which in turn might help realize the secret of his nature, his sympathy with nature, as we shall see, holds as well clear promise for realizing the secrets of the self.

This realization of course is the lesson of Walden, whose final shape and character--constitution, we might say--took form in radical revisions contemporaneous with the above speculations on, and real difficulties with, human friendship. What Thoreau has imagined of sympathetic love informs Walden's most famous aphorism, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (329): our

desperation arises, he argues, when we live "denying the possibility of change. This is the only way, we say; but there are as many ways as there can be drawn radii from one centre" (331). Here and above, the fullness of relations hinges on conserving the integrity of the "one centre" of self so that, paradoxically, infinite sympathies, like radii from one centre, may be known. This has the effect of de-naturalizing any rational idea of a right relation, if not rendering "unnatural" the relations of those who complain of Thoreau's coldness--of those who most likely "preach" sympathy, who most likely forsake pieces of self to follow the "rites" that Thoreau soars above, who very probably lead lives of quiet desperation.

Thoreau's critique and re-definition of sympathy in the early 1850s--particularly his determination of friendship as the unspeakable relation of "two or more individuals who from constitution sympathize"--is the culmination of years spent trying to describe the constitution of the relation. Reiterated in Walden's determination of self as "one centre," these many descriptions hold to a single imaging strategy: Thoreau draws a relation between individual, discrete entities as

points in space which always remain distinct, emphasizing a necessary distance between lovers who will not themselves bear the mark of their relation--they will not merge or reconstitute in any way--who form some kind of union that does not alter individual integrity. Thoreau imagines this distinctive union early and often in the Journal in terms of orbiting planets, as in the following:

Let ours be like the meeting of two planets, not hastening to confound their jarring spheres, but drawn together by the influence of a subtile attraction, soon to roll divers in their respective orbits, from this their perigee, or point of nearest approach. (1: 38-40;

14 Mar. 1838)

In this passage, Thoreau calls upon the image of gravitational force to qualify the kind of attraction friends experience. Echoing Emerson's belief that "My friends have come to me unsought," Thoreau images a friendship relation that precludes any willed influence by offering planets which, by virtue of what he calls elsewhere a "perfect sphericity,"⁹ generate an attractive

⁹ In this instance, Thoreau uses planetary imagery to

force. To "confound their jarring spheres" would disturb their gravitational force. Instead, friends in sympathy will submit to "the influence of a subtile attraction" that brings them near one another yet conserves their ability "to roll divers in their respective orbits." Such submission might appear to be a kind of passivity; according to the logic of the metaphor, however, distance preserves each planet's tremendous force for attraction: as spheres they have the power to jar, to knock off course both themselves and anything crossing their paths. By not confounding their spheres, by not abnegating part of their individual force, they preserve their power for attraction.

These images will find analogous expression later in an ironically anti-transcendent description of friendship as god-like:

describe a perfection of self that obtains when we yield to the force of instinct; importantly, this receptivity is absolutely distinguished from passivity:

Our lives will not attain to be spherical by lying on one or the other side forever; but only by resigning ourselves to the law of gravity in us, will our axis become coincident with the celestial axis, and [only] by revolving incessantly through all circles, shall we acquire a perfect sphericity. (1: 142-43; 16 June 1840)

Woe to him who wants a companion, for he is unfit to be the companion even of himself.

We inspire friendship in men when we have contracted friendship with the gods. (2: 33; June 1850)

Again, we may not ask for a friend; this betrays a lack of true sympathetic union. To be a fit companion we must "contract[] friendship with the gods," we must enjoy sympathy between ourselves and an immanently divine world --indeed, we must recognize and yield to the divinity immanent in ourselves--then we might "acquire a perfect sphericity" that in such perfection holds the power to attract. The friend may submit, but the friend's own very active love of the world provides a gratuitous power to attract, a superfluous, extravagant effect beyond exchange. Thoreau reiterates this view in A Week:

Friendship . . . consists with a certain disregard for men and their erections, the Christian duties and humanities, while it purifies the air like electricity. . . .We may call it an essentially heathenish intercourse, free and irresponsible in its nature, and

practising all the virtues gratuitously. It is not the highest sympathy merely, but a pure and lofty society, a fragmentary and godlike intercourse. . . .It requires immaculate and godlike qualities full-grown, and exists at all only by condescension. . . .When the Friend comes out of his heathenism and superstition, and breaks his idols, being converted by the precepts of a newer testament; when he forgets his mythology, and treats his Friend like a Christian, or as he can afford; then Friendship ceases to be Friendship, and becomes charity . . . (224)

In this regard the love relation as god-like represents for Thoreau an anti-transcendent reclamation of the nous theos: our love is god-like insofar as it is not based on the sympathy of Christian caritas, but is ironically "heathenish . . . free and irresponsible," not answerable to "men and their erections," to social claims or cultural metanarratives--indeed, answerable to nothing. This is the only way for lovers to enjoy "all the virtues gratuitously."

All of Thoreau's images of love and friendship thus emphasize a necessary individual integrity or wholeness--a "contenance" of self, as he will later describe it--as a precondition for love. In this emphasis, however, they seem to contradict, or at least frustrate, the possibility for any kind of union among lovers. Yet this is precisely the point, as we shall see, of Thoreau's paradoxical metaphors: to force an alienation from the familiar and accepted--in this case, images of love as a harmonic, complementary union--and to urge a re-imagination of what "union" (or "god," or "love," or "wisdom," or "sympathy," or "friend," etc.) might mean. Otherwise, at this early stage, Thoreau does not stray far from the Transcendentalists' discourse on sympathetic love.¹⁰ But it

¹⁰ Indeed, insofar as Thoreau holds to the Transcendentalist formulations that Emerson put forth in his 1840 essays "Love" and "Friendship," Thoreau's ideas share the same capacity to frustrate as Emerson's did--even among some Transcendentalists. Emerson records this response in a journal entry from August 16, 1840:

After seeing A[nna]. B[arker]. I rode with M[argaret]. Fuller to the plains. She taxed me as often before so now more explicitly with inhospitality of soul. She & C[aroline]. [Sturgis] would gladly be my friends yet our intercourse is not friendship, but literary gossip. I count & weigh but do not love. They make no progress with me, but however often we have met, we still meet as strangers. They feel

remains for Thoreau to characterize this other kind of union, and he does so with the same planetary imagery, as in his poem "Love":

We two that planets erst had been
 Are now a double star,
 And in the heavens may be seen,
 Where that we fixèd are.

Yet, whirled with subtle power along,
 Into new space we enter,
 And evermore with spherical song
 Revolve about one centre. (1: 172; 20 Jan. 1839)

wronged in such relation, & do not wish to be catechised & criticized. I thought of my experience with several persons which resembled this: and confessed that I would not converse with the divinest person more than one week. M. insisted that it was no friendship which was so soon thus exhausted, & that I ought to know how to be silent & companionable at the same moment. She would surprise me,--she would have me say & do what surprised myself. I confess to all this charge with humility unfeigned. . . .Yet would nothing be so grateful to me as to melt once for all these icy barriers, & unite with these lovers. I must do nothing to court their love which would lose my own. Unless that which I do to build up myself, endears me to them, our covenant would be injurious. (Journals 7: 509-10)

Identifying the union of love in these stanzas becomes a matter of perspective, the "separate intention of the eye" predicated on our detachment from "one way" that enables the reception of infinite possibilities. Here the two planets achieve the status of one "double star" that, from one perspective, appears fixed in the heavens. At the same time, the two lovers maintain the necessary distance which laws (metaphors) of gravity enforce. They are each still propelled by the same "subtle power" of attraction imaged in the earlier passage; now, in addition, they each whirl "about one centre"--yet another perspectival point for union. Their orbits, from this view, are confounded, but never their "spheres"; their bodies remain as double, two continent entities oriented to the same center. The shifting perspectives that this integrity of self forces figure love as a paradox, enabling Thoreau to erect a creation of love, as Peck might put it, of another order.¹¹

¹¹ The dilemma this paradox poses echoes Thoreau's later concerns, particularly in Walden, about finding a point d'appui, whether it be a solid bottom or a common point of reference (see discussion of Walter Benn Michael's "Walden's False Bottoms" in Part Four on this); it also suggests his solution to the dilemma, which is that there exists no such thing as a determinate point of reference.

These images feature a third shared, unifying term, a sun or center which orients the two planets. It is a sign of union exterior to--not physically integral to--the two in love, and it appears in other passages, as in this stanza from A Week:

Two solitary stars,--
 Unmeasured systems far
 Between us roll,
 But by our conscious light we are
 Determined to one pole. (234)

The planet imagery in this passage again emphasizes the fundamental solitude or, equally important, integrity of each friend, though now asserted further by their incommensurability one with another--no "measured system" can relate the two. But in this passage the "pole" or third shared term which determines the friends' mutual orientation is effected by the friends' "conscious light," a phrase that conjoins thought with the sensory stimulus of the stars' illuminating power--precisely the aesthetic conjunction indicative of the play of "free" eros in Marcuse's aesthetic dimension. In this stanza the "one pole" is seen as emanating from the two-in-relation, so

that it becomes much more than one of infinite perspectival points for union; it is actually created by their love.

In another passage, however, it is the lovers' mutual aesthetic engagement with the third, mutually orienting term, rather than the term itself, which will provide the space for the play of eros. Here Thoreau describes the sharing of thought and sense in friendship, and an idea of consciousness as marking the union of two, as suggested in the passage above, receives elaboration:

I would live henceforth with some gentle soul such a life as may be conceived, double for variety, single for harmony,--two, only that we might admire at our oneness,--one, because indivisible. Such community to be a pledge of holy living. How could aught unworthy be admitted into our society? To listen with one ear to each summer sound, to behold with one eye each summer scene, our visual rays so to meet and mingle with the object as to be one bent and doubled; with two tongues to be wearied, and thought to spring ceaseless from a double

fountain. (1: 113-14; 26 Jan. 1840)

The overarching premise to this model is that two in a sympathetic relation unite in the perception of a third term. In this passage, two "meet and mingle" through the senses in a triangulated relation with a perceived object --a third term functioning in the same way as the center, sun and pole of the previous passages. Though they "listen with one ear to each summer sound" and "behold with one eye each summer scene," the path of perception is such that their eyes and ears meet--their bodies come into contact, unite, become one--through the mediation of the object of perception. Each friend beholds the same "summer scene," for example. Each friend is an agent of perception; his gaze is turned toward the object. Thus positioned, each friend is as well the recipient of a sense impression of the object. Because each friend shares a relation with the same object, each path of perception meets in the object to form one path of perception, but now "one bent and double." In this way, their senses "meet and mingle" through the perceptual refraction of the object perceived. Together in sympathy, so together in perception, they are "double for variety" so that their

lives are extravagantly sensual; they do not share one sensual experience (that would be incontinent), only one occasion and mutual orientation. There are no gaps or silences, but instead an "indivisible" system of perception shared by "two tongues," a superabundant "double fountain"--a superfluous effect--which, like the twin stars whirling about together, is ceaseless in thought.

That the point of orientation determines an aesthetic relation--and by aesthetic I mean again the sensual fullness of its reference to perception, beauty and feeling--will become central to our understanding of Thoreau's project in subsequent discussion. For now, we need to remember that the aesthetic conjunction is made possible when two enjoy a relation of similitude and sympathy. That the two gentle souls, like the twin stars, remain two as well as one conserves the premise which enables sympathy to be the primary force which joins two in love and friendship; that is, each friend must be considered as a self whole and separate in order to align, be it in orbit or in perception. That Thoreau's model of sympathetic relations holds fast to figures of alignment

opposes it to the relations he critiques, those relations that are culturally understood as sympathetic, yet which he deconstructs to reveal as self-vitiating in their demand for the exchange of professions of love or in adherence to mediating social "rites."

4. Contenance

What is extraordinary about Thoreau's model of love, and what makes it especially difficult to locate the erotic scope of his love, is this notion of lovers who remain separate, distinct, whole and untouched. As his writing develops, Thoreau considers with greater interest the condition of the self in love; in his excursus on Friendship in A Week, Thoreau writes:

[Friendship] takes place, like vegetation in so many materials, because there is such a law, but always without permanent form, though ancient and familiar as the sun and moon, and as sure to come again. The heart is forever inexperienced. They silently gather as by magic, these never failing, never quite deceiving visions, like the bright and fleecy clouds in the calmest and clearest days. The Friend is some fair floating isle of palms eluding the mariner in Pacific seas. Many are the dangers to be encountered, equinoctial gales and coral reefs, ere he may sail before the constant trades. But who would not sail through mutiny and storm, even over

Atlantic waves, to reach the fabulous retreating
shores of some continent man? (213)

In this passage friendship is like vegetation, following a principle of spontaneous, organic growth and manifest in endless experiences of form or phenomena, the endlessness of which makes the heart "forever inexperienced" and thus always open to experience. This impermanent form of and perpetual readiness for love derives from the same notion of self that we have seen make both sympathetic love and the "infinite radii" of experience possible: self as center, whole and contained in a state of "being" that comprises its own telos. Thoreau abstracts this quality of self as contenance by troping on its concrete significations.

In the present passage, Thoreau applies this model not to himself but to his ideal Friend as "some fair floating isle of palms," self-contained as a kind of geographic continent that attracts the mariner. Indeed, he concludes his definition by naming the friend "some continent man," an object of desire strong enough to entice mariners through danger of "equinoctial gales and coral reefs." The friend as land-continent is continent:

self-sufficient, as inviolate as the heart is inexperienced; his "fabulous retreating shores" the "never failing, never quite deceiving" form of friendship, yet fleeting, like "bright and fleecy clouds" and "some fair floating isle." The voyage to "reach" this friend seems doubly futile, both risking the danger of "mutiny and storm" and denying the possibility of safe purchase in the friend's floating, retreating shores. Accepting the inviolacy of the continent friend, however, and knowing that Thoreau figures love as a relation that by definition denies any kind of mutual insertion, we begin to understand that any hope of finding purchase in the friend is beside the point; it is the wave-bound voyage itself, with its gales, reefs, mutinies, storms and calms, that reiterates the wave of experience/inexperience that constitutes being-in-love for Thoreau. In our relation with such a friend, we remain timelessly attracted, enticed, allured--the same "subtile" attractive force figured by the lovers as orbiting planets. Like the testimony of "loving all beside" and the presencing interlude between "As I love nature" and "I love thee" that introduced this study, it is the experience of

sailing toward the friend rather than the reaching of the friend that bespeaks love; the friend, accessible or not, provides the occasion rather than the object for our loving.

In Part One I discussed reasons for considering Thoreau's writing as encompassing a view of nature not as an end for objectification and rational domination, but as an occasion for the awakening of an aesthetic, sensual knowledge borne of love. Thoreau's early writings on love bear this view out. Indeed, very early he realized that "love does not analyze its object" (1: 285; 14 Sep. 1841); rather, in love one turns and returns to its object, with the effect, as witnessed above, of conserving the heart "forever inexperienced." Thoreau's idea of lovers as continent, bearing in themselves no trace of mutual claim, no footprints on their retreating shores, permits him to deflect attention away from the friend as an object of love to be achieved, and toward instead the experience of loving itself. In turn, when we find Thoreau describing the cultivation of a continent self, including the continence implicit in chastity, and emphasizing the mode of experience that such continence enables, we may

understand Thoreau to be describing the cultivation of self-as-lover.

In one respect, this continence comes from self-reliance, as reflected in the following Journal excerpt that Thoreau incorporated nearly verbatim into Walden's conclusion:

However mean your life is, meet it and live; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. . . .Love your life, poor as it is. . . .Cultivate poverty like sage, like a garden herb. Do not trouble yourself to get new things, whether clothes or friends. That is dissipating. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. If I were confined to a corner in a garret all my days, like a spider, the world would be just as large to me while I had my thoughts. (2: 74; Oct. 1850)¹²

In this passage, the language of continence is implicit in

¹² I cite the Journal version for the phrase "That is dissipating," which does not appear in the Walden transcription.

Thoreau's argument against self-dissipation, predicated on the crucial distinction that our life may be wholly our own rather than indebted to exterior agents, either cultural (friendship) or material (clothes). Here the getting of new things, "whether clothes or friends," is "dissipating," an incontinent vitiation of self that thwarts our meeting and living our life. If we love our life, then we realize that it is the self whole unto itself rather than "things"--clothes, friends even, in the conventional sense; all those accretions that, piecemeal, replace the self--that makes the world large, that changes in ways that matter. Indeed, we matter, we make matter meaningful while we have our thoughts, in our ability to trope the world, to "Turn the old; return to them." Again, this is how continence permits the infinite possibilities for change that Walden promises: in conserving the integrity of self, we avert the self-dissipation that otherwise results when we seek to invest our affections outside ourselves. Most important, it is we who, in loving the life of the self, make experience new, who maintain the heart "forever inexperienced." This is the same mode of being predicated on a "free" eros that Marcuse

describes as "circumscrib[ing] the telos inherent in them" (165) and permitting the perpetuation of song, play, beauty and pleasure.

It is this circumscription of self, or the necessary re-negotiation of boundaries of self, that urges an ultimate boundlessness, a capacity for extravagance which, as Thoreau argues in Walden's conclusion, "depends on how you are yarded" (580). Again, along a rational order of thought, it seems paradoxical: by circumscribing or "yarding" the bounds of self, by not relinquishing the self to exterior attachments, we achieve the capacity for potentially infinite new experience--a kind of self-dispersal in thought and feeling that is fundamentally different in character from its seeming cognate, self-dissipation. Unencumbered Thoreau, "confined to a corner in a garret all my days" in the ugly, lovely figure of the spider, may project infinite radii of experience, constantly renewing a delicate web of attachments now better understood as the aesthetic ephemera of the self who loves. By averting self-dissipation--by renewing the self, by troping the world--one continually experiences another kind of self-dispersal where in thought and

feeling one may enjoy all the world, "loving all beside."
This is the very character of Thoreau's eroticism.

We return then to the condition of lovers afloat in space or at sea, who by virtue of their continence sustain the power to attract and be attracted, for whom physical conjunction would dissipate their attractive force. Again, in the midst of Walden's major revisions, Thoreau reaffirms this view of continent love in his journal:

To one we love we are related as to nature in the spring. Our dreams are mutually intelligible. We take the census, and find that there is one.

Love is a mutual confidence whose foundations no one knows. The one I love surpasses all the laws of nature in sureness. Love is capable of any wisdom.

"He that hath love and judgment too
Sees more than any other doe."

By our very mutual attraction, and our attraction to all other spheres, kept properly asunder. Two planets which are mutually attracted, being at the same time attracted by

the sun, preserve equipoise and harmony.

(2: 185; 30 April 1852)

When we align the continent self's capacity for infinite experience with its power to sustain attractive force, we may begin to see how continence, predicated on the force of love, urges a mode of self whose experience of the world is fundamentally erotic. In the above passage, we encounter again the paradox of two in love as at once two and one and recall the earlier aesthetic triangulation that joins two lovers via a shared summer scene. Here, similarly, "dreams are mutually intelligible," and we again find scope for union in some deep, unknown part of the loving self "whose foundations no one knows." Continence is again asserted in the image of the planets in orbit around the sun; they share the sympathetic "mutual attraction" to one another that comes from continence, and also share an attraction to the sun-- "equipoise and harmony" are preserved, the two remain two, and the unifying experience of love sustained. The sun here serves the lovers in the same capacity as the shared "summer scene" in the earlier passage, though now in a triangulation of attractive force that provides the

occasion for the lovers' shared experience. In analogy, spring urges the same triangulation, providing the occasion for a union between man and nature analogous to the relation of lovers. Thoreau thus envisions an experiential, aesthetic, attractive self "kept properly asunder" from, and thus defined against, all that is outside the self. In this continence Thoreau envisions relations of attraction, indeed rests at the center of a web of attractions, as his means of knowing the world.

Thoreau's model of love as an attractive force that informs all relations between the continent self and the world suggests to me an eroticism that is at once insistent yet for Thoreau difficult to characterize, particularly in light of what he understands to be the cultural constraints placed upon affectional relations, indeed upon pleasure, as expressed in Walden. We look for the various unions formed of love and find aesthetic conjunctions, mutual attractions, "a mutual confidence whose foundations no one knows" yet which expands the self, encompasses all wisdom and allows the lover to "'See more than any other doe.'" We look for the sign of love's consummation, evidence for completion, and find nothing

but an unspoken, unfathomed space. Knowing now how Thoreau disallows completion in love by figuring lovers as complete, continent selves, we--he--must look otherwise:

When we ask for society--we do not want the double of ourselves--but the complement rather. Society should be additive and helpful, we would be reinforced by its alliance. True friends will know how to use each other in this respect, and never barter or interchange their commonwealths, just as barter is unknown in families. They will not dabble in the general coffers, but each put his finger into the private coffer of the other. They will be most familiar, they will be most unfamiliar, for they will be so one and single that common themes and things will have to be bandied between them, but in silence. They will digest them as one mind; but they will at the same time be so two and double, that each will be to the other as admirable and as inaccessible as a star. (Miller 216; 20 Jan. 1841)

Thoreau begins with an assertion that seems to contradict all of the figurations we have examined thus far: that we

want the complement rather than the double of ourselves in society; that this kind of society "should be additive and helpful," an "alliance" which reinforces our position. Read against those other passages, however, which posit on the one hand a society that adheres to its established "rites" and precepts for love relations, and on the other a manner of sympathetic love that transcends such rites, this observation carries a veiled suggestion of the limitation of society; or put another way, the passage is definitional, absolutely distinguishing society from friendship. For in the next sentence, he asserts that "True friends will know how to use each other in this respect"; that is, true friends, in his ideal relation of true love, possess another kind of "wisdom" or knowing that allows them to "soar above" the social relation of complementarity in recognition of its limits.

Thoreau comes close to opening up the erotic potential of his love relations in describing the special, other "use" lovers may make of each other. He relies on the economic imagery that reinforces his critique of exchange noted earlier, where friendship is "an unspeakable joy" that does not trade in words. But here,

in terms that counter the fortune of alliance that society offers, Thoreau's true friends know not to "barter or interchange their commonwealths" with each other. Instead, and in contradistinction from social relations, true friendship take place in private. Reduced to the "silence" of single-mindedness so that barter or alliance-making become moot concerns, they are each left with nothing else but the "true" other that words of institutional sympathy and coins of society otherwise stand in for. The true friend is left to "put his finger into the private coffer of the other"--Thoreau's first, surprising imaging of physical contact between lovers.

What the "private coffer" refers to is unspecified; it refers intransitively in a frustrating, wonderful poetic turn--whirl, rather, an ecstatic dervish--that scintillates star-like, recapitulating (while I read it) the very condition of love: the "private coffer" is the bonum of an "additive and helpful" society turned into the good body politic of the "commonwealth" turned into the treasure of the "general coffers"--and collapsed into the most private pleasure of the body of the true friend. The "private coffer" is a container, it is a site of

contenance, a place where continent lovers may meet, where, as we have seen, "dreams are mutually intelligible" and thought may "spring ceaseless a double fountain," and where now these "common themes and things" are silently bandied, where lovers may bander. Star-like, it is the anus, the "one centre" of infinite radii of possibilities, the unknown foundation, as cited earlier, of the "mutual confidence" of Thoreau's lovers--it is the private coffer.

My reading brings to the fore Marcuse's "free" eros as translated by Guy Hocquenghem into the queer condition of what he terms "homosexual" desire--where, and as with Thoreau, "desire is desire" unrelated to its object (Moon 17). Hocquenghem's qualification "homosexual" here represents an intentional misnomer for

an aspect of desire which is fundamentally polymorphous and undefined, which appears nowhere else, and that is more than just sexual activity between members of the same sex. . . .
 .[but which] is artificially trapped within the grid of "civilisation" and created as an abstract, separate, and excoriated division of desire. (Weeks 35)

The anality culturally associated with homosexuality indicates a mode of desire that thwarts all the social structures and relations that make up the "grid of 'civilisation'": those institutions that, in Part One, we have seen Thoreau and Marcuse critique point for point; and specifically the social uses imposed upon love relations that we see Thoreau critiquing in the present discussion.

The flash of anal eroticism that Thoreau urges me to read in the above passage thus comprehends a mode of love where, as he says, lovers "will be most familiar, they will be most unfamiliar" because they will be at once one and two. Hocquenghem's understanding of anal desire helps to collapse this paradox:

The desires directed towards the anus, which are closely connected with homosexual desire, constitute what we shall call a "group" mode of relations as opposed to the usual "social" mode. The anus undergoes the movement of privatisation; the publicising or, to be more precise, the desiring "grouping" [groupalisation] of the anus, would cause the

collapse of both the sublimating phallic
 hierarchy and the individual/society double
 bind. (110)

Thoreau's lovers are "most familiar" in the "group" mode that, divorced from the binary exchange implicit in heteronormative relations (including homosexual relations patterned on heterosexuality), opposes the "social" mode. Indeed, my understanding of Thoreau's insistence on the "loving all beside" that began this study comprises the erotic potential of the group mode; this is further supported by an early Journal entry where he revises classic models of male love: "History tells of Orestes and Pylades, Damon and Pythias, but why should not we put to shame those old reserved worthies by a community of such? Constantly, as it were through a remote skylight, I have glimpses of a serene friendship-land . . ." (1: 113; 26 Jan. 1840). In light of the logic of Thoreau's schema for sympathetic, continent love, one that precludes a necessary binary exchange between lovers, I take him to envision here not a community of couples, but a community --a "grouping"--of lovers. Hocquenghem for his part expresses this erotic mode in surprisingly Thoreauvian

terms: "The anus's group mode is an annular one, a circle which is open to an infinity of directions and possibilities for plugging in, with no set places" (111).

Thoreau writes, of course, within and against a culture that has not yet institutionalized the modern homosexual as a "type," much less critiqued the structures that have created it. He envisions this other erotic mode "through a remote skylight" in the house of culture, and in its terms the friends are as well "most unfamiliar"-- they forsake the familiar tokens of social exchange-- words--and so remain suspended in silence, each "as admirable and as inaccessible as a star." And in Thoreau's terms, the paradox of familiarity makes sense when we remember his efforts to defamiliarize our assumptions regarding exchanges in intercourse. It is all too easy, and all too dissipating, to forget love by letting the transaction and its completion become important; like words of sympathy sought as the sign of friendship, "that is not what is wanted," though for "the mass of men" that is what is familiar, and accepted, and so leads to "lives of quiet desperation." As Thoreau's critique of the getting of new things suggests, when we suspend the

dissipation of self wrought by any form of social commerce, we accede to continence, to another order of self where the world--lovers, nature, all phenomena with which we sympathize--will be "most familiar" and with which we may become "one and single."

This provides the scope for intensely erotic imagery where "bodies" commingle, particularly when Thoreau writes nature. We recall the summer scene enjoyed by one ear and one eye; so above we find "common themes and things" not spoken about by true friends but "digest[ed] . . . with one mind," and private coffers--the whole of the continent self--penetrated by lovers' fingers. Our friends "know how to use each other in this respect" because, ironically, they suspend use; they will "never barter or interchange their commonwealths" to get new things, but instead conserve self in order to make even more intimate exchange possible--another order of pleasure that Thoreau describes as superfluity.

5. Superfluity

We are left with the paradox of exchange among lovers: how may Thoreau forswear the exchange of tokens of self in order to preserve the self continent, yet in turn, through continence, enjoy an even more intimate exchange with a lover where, ironically, the body becomes fragmented and body parts commingle? As we have seen, "continent man" has come to describe Thoreau's ideal lover, whose continent nature he shares and with whom he therefore enjoys a relation of sympathetic love. As we have also seen, the quality of continence which those who enjoy this "wide," "peculiar" love share has the effect of concentrating and sustaining desire, cast in images of perpetuity such as orbiting planets and floating islands, rather than dissipating desire in a finite trajectory of determinate ends, such as a relation intended for consummation. Certain of these unwanted "ends" have already been cited: the "wiped virtue" of preached love; the estrangement of friends explaining the terms of their love; the plaintive demands of those other natures who ask for sympathy; the "dissipation" of the self troubled "to get new things." What Thoreau seeks instead through

continence, and through a lover similarly, sympathetically continent, is an endless, boundless enjoyment: the "unspeakable joy and blessing" of "two by nature alike and fitted to sympathize"; this sympathy's "divine and innocent and perennial health"; the eternal "spherical song" of the "double star"; the aesthetic meeting and mingling of sight and sound, of lovers for whom "thought . . . spring[s] ceaseless from a double fountain"; the opening of one's unnamed, thus infinitely possible, "private coffer" to the other's fingers; the forever inexperienced heart that forever renews its acquaintance with the world.

Thoreau concludes the "Philanthropy" chapter of Walden with a critique identical in tone to the "sickly preaching of love" noted earlier. In counterpoint, he states his desire:

I want the flower and fruit of a man; that some fragrance be wafted over from him to me, and some ripeness flavor our intercourse. His goodness must not be a partial and transitory act, but a constant superfluity, which costs him nothing and of which he is unconscious. (383)

Thoreau pointedly does not want his man's words merely,

his conscious effort, his goodness calculated as a means to an end; he wants instead a full, sensual enjoyment not of words but of the "ripeness" the words express when coming from whole "fruit and flower" of an impartial--continent--man.

There is a enormous voracity to Thoreau's appetite at times, but of a peculiar kind; as he claims at the beginning of "Higher Laws,"

As I came home through the woods with my string of fish, trailing my pole, it being now quite dark, I caught a glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across my path, and felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for that wildness which he represented. Once or twice, however, while I lived at the pond, I found myself ranging the woods, like a half-starved hound, with a strange abandonment, seeking some kind of venison which I might devour, and no morsel could have been too savage for me. The wildest scenes had become unaccountably familiar. (490)

The appetite Thoreau describes here is not for meat but for "wildness," borne of self-abandon, outside of order--the kind of extravagance that depends on how one is "yarded." The appetite is enormous because the temptation is inordinate--the infinite possibility of another unfamiliar "excoriated division of desire" that is wildness. In terms of Thoreau's other order of love, each lover, by making no claim to any part of the other, conserves the entire self for the other to enjoy fully. By not allowing goodness in "a partial and transitory act," by enjoying instead the unwilled, unexpended, "unconscious" relation of continent, sympathetic love, Thoreau seeks to enjoy the infinite pleasure of love as "a constant superfluity," that dispersion of the effects of the continent self that counters the dissipation of self in contracted attachments. He may "turn the old; return to it" endlessly; this, in turn, provides the erotic, imaginative scope to deconstruct, commingle with and return again to the fully present lover. The erotic emerges in Thoreau in the gratuity or superfluity of affection which results when will, aim and exchange--ends, in other words--are suspended and the self conserved. This

idea of love, and of the self whose relations are governed by such love, determines the character of all Thoreau's relations, including those with nature and those established through poetic practice.

As we have seen, through his redefinition of sympathetic love Thoreau asserts a kind of love that appears antithetical to notions of giving or exchange yet offers instead a new economy of superfluity--the inordinate pleasure we attain when we realize the infinite possibility that radiates from one center. Since sympathy occurs because it is constitutionally so, occurs once we attend to the peculiar nature of our individual nature, tokens of exchange that support social ends become entirely meaningless, as do systems such as law or language that give such tokens meaning. They in their own way become superfluous, though free for another kind of enjoyment--pleasure--instead of use. In certain instances Thoreau tropes on economic imagery to describe this other order of superfluous exchange that takes place as a result of continent, sympathetic love:

The love wherewith we are loved is already
declared, and afloat in the atmosphere, and our

love is only the inlet to it. It is an
 inexhaustible harvest--always ripe and ready for
 the sickle. It grows on every bush, and let not
 them complain of their fates who will not pluck
 it.

Again, Thoreau approaches metaphors of economy, though now
 in terms of "an inexhaustible harvest" of love which is
 always "already declared," again rendering its declaration
 moot. We need only be in a condition to receive, to
 recognize our love as "the inlet to it." He continues:

We need make no beggarly demand for it, but pay
 the price, and depart. No transaction can be
 simpler--Love[']s accounts are kept by single-
 entry. When we are amiable, then is love in the
 gale, and in sun and shade, and day and night,
 and to sigh under the cold cold moon for a love
 unrequited, is to put a slight upon nature; the
 natural remedy would be to fall in love with the
 moon and the night, and find our love requited.

(Miller 214-15; 19 Jan. 1841)

Thoreau figures a superfluous, "single-entry" transaction
 here which counters any other economic figure of exchange

or completion--and which counters any model of love which asserts exchange or completion, such as two Aristophanic halves forming a whole, or its naturalization as heterosexuality. A double entry account would duly report the credit gained by another's expenditure. In the superfluous anti-economy of love, one may "pay the price" for love simply by resting in the condition of loving, by the condition of amity, by "falling in love with the moon and the night."

That it may occur that we might not at times muster such an amiable condition suggests the human constraints to letting in the atmosphere of love; but as he continues, he looks to another field for sympathy in the great NOT ME, one that will increasingly occupy his love:

I anticipate a more thorough sympathy with nature when my thigh-bones shall strew the ground like the boughs which the wind has scattered.--Thus troublesome humors will flower into early anemonies, and perhaps in the very lachrymal sinus, nourished by its juices, some young pine or oak will strike root. (Miller 214-15; 19 Jan. 1841)

In this naturalist's redaction of Ezekiel, the superfluity of sympathetic love is literalized as fluid, characterized as a kind of consanguinity with nature where the "troublesome humors" that prevent our thorough enjoyment of nature convert to the life of nature, the juices which nourish flowers and trees. Here also is a literalization of the self-dispersal that is unifying rather than dissipating, that makes the world large. That it can only be achieved through death speaks more to Thoreau's frustration at finding his ideal sympathy with human lovers than to any desire for literal, corporal self-obliteration; as a figure for sympathetic love of the world, however, his bodily dispersal bespeaks the petite mort of his ideal erotic union, lets flow the juices of jouissance.

By virtue of the continent condition that permits relations of superfluity with the world, the object of love matters not at all; if love never stands still, "nor does its object," or as he says elsewhere, "love does not analyze its object" (1: 285; 14 Sep. 1841). Thoreau later explains:

The great and solitary heart will love alone,

without the knowledge of its object. It cannot have society in its love. It will expend its love as the cloud drops rain upon the fields over which [it] floats. (1: 332; 15 Mar. 1842)

In this passage, Thoreau's "heart," because it loves only, or simply, "without the knowledge of its object," is continent: "the great and solitary heart will love alone." Thoreau's heart "cannot have society in its love" because its object is indeterminate; no token of love is exchanged which would identify and therefore constitute such a society. Rather, "It will expend its love as the cloud drops rain upon the fields" in the kind of gratuitous dispersal akin to the "fragrant goodness" which, as we have seen, Thoreau desires from a man, the "constant superfluity, which costs him nothing and of which he is unconscious." That "the great and solitary heart" only loves, intransitively, as does Thoreau's fragrant man, without reference to any object, does not mean that the heart does not know desire, does not yearn for some thing with which to form a loving relation; rather, as he explains elsewhere, love "has its holidays, but is not made for them" (1: 219; 22 Feb. 1842). Though we

typically--culturally--look to the object of love or desire to characterize the love and to determine the erotic scope (if any) of a love attachment, Thoreau's model forces us to look otherwise and to consider the erotic in any of his pronouncements of love, whether they refer to other men, nature, or writing. When we read Thoreau sympathetically, contently, superfluously, we read an erotics.

When I have described Thoreau's notion of human love as a relation of sympathy and content similitude, I mean simply that Thoreau loves lovers. Consider the following:

It is not easy to find one brave enough to play the game of love quite alone with you, but they must get some third person, or world, to countenance them. They thrust others between. Love is so delicate and fastidious that I see not how [it] can ever begin. Do you expect me to love with you, unless you make my love secondary to nothing else? Your words come tainted, if the thought of the world dated between thee and the thought of me. You are not venturous enough for love. It goes alone unscared through

wildernesses. (1: 329; 14 Mar. 1842)

In a passage cited earlier, Thoreau explains that "between two by nature alike and fitted to sympathize there is no veil and there can be no obstacle" (3: 146; 21 Dec. 1851). So in this passage, sympathetic love is so because there is no "third person, or world," or social demand, "to countenance" the lover. When a lover "thrust[s] others between," he is incontinent, not whole and self-sufficient. Thoreau desires a continent love, another great, whole, solitary heart "to play the game of love quite alone with," "to love with." Only the person who does not need the countenance of others is "venturous enough" for a love that "goes alone unscared through the wildernesses," the places outside the bounds of man's institutions, specifically in this case the institutions of love. "Love that I love," Thoreau concludes simply, "and I will love thee that lovest it" (1: 329; 14 Mar. 1842).

The passages on love and friendship I have examined report Thoreau's ideal of love, both his speculations and his responses to real affectional relations that seem

sorely to miss the ideal. In both cases a constant reference to nature appears: "As I love nature . . . I love thee"; "Let not ours be a wiped virtue . . . but unwashed as a fresh flower"; "you who complain that I am cold find nature cold"; "To one we love we are related as to nature in the spring"; "I want the flower and fruit of a man." Nature emerges as the paradigm of continence precisely because it is not man, does not relinquish part of self in allegiance to social demands:

I love nature partly because she is not man, but a retreat from him. None of his institutions control or pervade her. There a different kind of right prevails. In her midst I can be glad with an entire gladness. If this world were all man, I could not stretch myself, I should lose all hope. He is constraint, she is freedom to me. He makes me wish for another world. She makes me content with this. None of the joys she supplies is subject to his rules and definitions. What he touches he taints. In thought he moralizes. One would think that no free, joyful labor was possible to him. (4: 445;

3 Jan. 1853)

In relation with nature Thoreau finds the self-expansion that continence affords. It provides the model for "a different kind of right," another order of being unbridled by social demands, that is as much a guide for the loving self, peculiar because not normalized, as it is for the ideal lover. This wilderness makes his love venturesome, allows him the extravagance that concludes Walden, allows him to love "all beside," offers him grounds for pleasure rather than use:

How infinite and pure the least pleasure of which nature is basis, compared with the congratulation of mankind! The joy which Nature yields is like [that] afforded by the frank words of one we love. . . .Methinks that these proser, with their saws and their laws, do not know how glad a man can be. What wisdom, what warning, can prevail against gladness? There is no law so strong which a little gladness may not transgress. I have a room all to myself; it is nature. It is a place beyond the jurisdiction of human governments. (4: 445-46; 3 Jan. 1853)

Our understanding of Thoreau's relation to nature and its

representation in his writing hinges on this model of self and other as equally continent, enjoying the "gladness" of superfluity. As "the place beyond the jurisdiction of human governments," nature becomes the place of superfluous, indeterminate pleasure, providing the scope of erotic superfluity that only the ideal lover could occasion. As we will see in the following discussion, Thoreau's writing on nature indeed provides the occasion for locating his peculiar love, his peculiar erotic.

Part Three: Nature

The poet writes the history of his body.

(Journal 3: 36; 29 September 1851)

Though Thoreau identified the terms of his "peculiar love" while accounting for human affectional relations, the passages I have examined in the preceding discussion characterize this love as either a desired ideal or a real failure. He recognized a paradox in continent love--that an inviolable circumscription of self forecloses exchange or trade in the affections for other ends, but permits instead the "extravagance" of superfluity, a superabundant dispersal of the effects of the self-in-love to be shared sympathetically by other continent lovers. But because of his failure to meet this order of love in another human, we find some idea, but little testimony, of the ecstatic, erotic self-dispersal and commingling that Thoreau seeks. We know that the pleasure of love for Thoreau is superfluous, sensual and aesthetic--the ceaseless, double fountain of sight and sound enjoyed by lovers witnessing a summer scene, or the gratuitous flavor and fragrance of a

man's goodness. We also know that, in counterpoint to the social ordering of affectional relations, this pleasure is private because outside the bounds of that order, continent as a "private coffer," an image that combines anality's unspeakable pleasures with a dispersal of the lovers into pieces of treasure.

But it is when Thoreau turns to a nature seen as wild--"beyond the jurisdiction of human governments," beyond the domination of human reason and its narratives--that we find not only the erotic dispersal of the self-in-love, but also the peculiar genius that may receive nature's superfluity in love and translate it in poetic practice. As Sharon Cameron argues, when Thoreau "writes" nature in his Journal he testifies to conceptual discontinuities between and among his self and natural phenomena. He de-naturalizes nature in his Journal insofar as he abandons any effort to sustain a "natural" order or cultural metanarrative for nature, and he recapitulates this disorder in his fragmentary, desultory journal observations. The "creations of another order" that Cameron sees Thoreau "erect" out of these conceptual gaps are what Thoreau identifies for himself as the "history of

his body," a history, as we shall see, borne of a specifically sensual knowledge that Thoreau will identify as the source of poetic genius. Thoreau's erections arise in love with a nature seen, I will argue, as another "private coffer"--continent, beyond naming and social intervention and so wild, holding a treasure that Thoreau finds fertile and prodigal, endlessly scattering its effects in pieces of sensual pleasure.

When I claim that Thoreau de-naturalizes nature, I mean simply that Thoreau recognizes as human constructs the laws and systems devised to account for nature, and that these natural histories bespeak human relations with nature rather than any absolute account of nature per se. Thoreau's long-standing reputation as a poet-naturalist¹³ has tended to shadow the manner of his reception and use of "natural history," sustaining the easy assumption that, by virtue of his prodigious botanizing, he must somehow be part botanist or at least, by virtue of his obvious love of nature, an amateur naturalist in the truest sense.¹⁴

¹³ Derived from William Ellery Channing's 1902 memoir Thoreau, the Poet-Naturalist. Channing was the only friend Thoreau could tolerate accompanying him to the woods.

¹⁴ As William Howarth notes at the beginning of The

Yet, as Richard Sattlemeyer argues in his study of Thoreau's reading, the increased intensity and range of Thoreau's study in the natural sciences, "from Aristotle and Pliny to Agassiz and Darwin," bespeaks "a catholic taste in natural history writing" unencumbered by a scientific method still nascent during his years at Harvard. This allowed Thoreau throughout his life "to explore the diversity of approaches to and theories of nature that were in competition before the triumph of the Darwinian paradigm during the second half of the century" (11). Considering Thoreau's particular interest not only in the ancient natural historians but also in the radical revisions of natural history in the first half of the century that led to evolutionary theory, I agree with Sattlemeyer's conclusion that Thoreau's increased attention to these writers "marks his belief that the meaning of nature is dependent upon man, the perceiver, and that natural history must indeed have a historical component" (91). Likewise, the meaning of nature for

Book of Concord, his study of Thoreau as writer, the Concord town hall clerk's entry upon Thoreau's death on May 6, 1862 reads: "Henry D. Thoreau. 44 years, 9 months, 24 days. Natural Historian" (3).

Thoreau, and our understanding of his reception of nature, depends on Thoreau the perceiver--which is to say, Thoreau the lover.

I shall consider Thoreau's reception of nature in the following discussion as determined by his peculiar love, where nature becomes an emblem for continence, sympathy translates into the consanguinity of all matter, and superfluity is found in nature's prodigal fertility. Thoreau's recognition of the historical aspect of natural history allows him to suspend the gloss of order and reason that attempts to appropriate nature for social ends. This leaves him to face the phenomenal world of nature as continent--wild, beyond the human intervention of naming, and so a treasure of inordinate, piecemeal, dispersive sensual effects. He meets nature as one lover does another, and his writing nature--indeed his writing anything, his poetic practice--encompasses the erotic play of continence and extravagance that he could only dream of in human relations. The following examination of Thoreau's response to nature will lead me to a reading of Thoreau's poetic extravagance as an imaginative response motivated by his desire to meet the superfluity, the de facto excess

of his peculiar love. Thoreau's extravagant poetics is the mark of that inordinate erotic appetite that is the queer "excoriated division of desire" and that, as such, readers of Thoreau have found mystifying if not disturbing. As his love is queer, so is his love of nature, his writing nature, his writing.

6. Nature

When in 1958 Perry Miller presented the text of Thoreau's "lost" journal spanning the months from July 1840 to January 1841, he put forward in notes and commentary his wildly cutting interpretation of "consciousness in Concord," the specifically Transcendentalist "drama" that was unfolding "behind the pages of this innocent-seeming volume" (12). Miller views Thoreau's treatment of several recurring themes, including death, love and friendship, as "stratagems" for dealing with a profound anxiety that Miller believes these issues raised for Thoreau, namely the threat of self-dissolution. As Miller considers the larger span from Thoreau's youthful, doctrinaire-Transcendental "consciousness" to the redemptive strategy of Walden, he offers this slice of the journal as "a chapter in this perverse pilgrimage" (127). And to Miller, none of these stratagems is more perverse than Thoreau's writing on love and friendship. Throughout all the journal volumes, Miller is at once "impressed" and "appalled--not only by the obviously insatiable drive that brings Thoreau back, again and again, to 'friendship,' but by the monotony of his

rhetorical devices for translating friendship into no friendship" (90), where "a luxuriating in friendship and in its inadequacies becomes simply monstrous" (92).

Against the background of this "perverse," "appalling," "monstrous" conceptualization of love relations, Miller comments on Thoreau's passion for his other love, nature:

He who reads the Journal must be struck by the way in which this or that phenomenon, which may figure casually from time to time, suddenly becomes the object of a consuming passion; then, day after day, Thoreau will address prose sonnets to it, until the frenzy dies down. Were these the diaries of any other writer, we would say that he was having a series of "affairs." As he recounts these crises, he follows the classic pattern of infatuation, and once the emotion reaches a climax, the object becomes so indifferent to him as to be seldom thereafter mentioned. In the autumn of 1856 he suddenly becomes obsessed by the "dear wholesome color of shrub oak leaves, so clean and firm," just as

another man might find himself surprised by an irresistible desire for a neighbor's wife. One divines something of the libertine whom Thoreau hid behind what Emerson miscalled his "Stoic" exterior as he perceives that Thoreau was conscious of what these surges meant, that he indulged himself in them: "I love and could embrace the shrub oak with its scanty garment of leaves rising above the snow, lowly whispering to me, akin to winter thoughts, and sunsets, and to all virtue." Again and again in these spasms the language becomes highly erotic. As he himself says of this occasion, "I fell in love with a shrub oak." (205n)

Miller's note exemplifies the logical and ludicrous conclusions drawn when eroticism is gauged in terms of a normalizing heterosexuality. Miller is correct in part: Thoreau's Journal is filled with short-lived, passionate, erotic addresses to a variety of natural phenomena, and one divines something perhaps akin to the libertine, though only in respect to Thoreau's marvelous sense of indulgence. One does not divine, however, how Miller could

consider Thoreau to have "hidden" behind Emerson's deliberate (and posthumous) misnomer; it is Emerson, rather, who hid Thoreau's idiosyncrasies behind a revisionary, normalizing eulogy with an eye to critical posterity, choosing to ignore a passion he found troubling rather than condemn it outright as Miller does.¹⁵ The

¹⁵ Miller is referring to Emerson's biographical sketch "Thoreau," the published version of his funeral oration, in which Emerson determines that "[Thoreau's] poem entitled 'Sympathy' reveals the tenderness under that triple steel of stoicism, and the intellectual subtlety it could animate" (486). The tenderness of Thoreau's "Sympathy," however, is addressed to Ellen Sewall's eleven-year-old brother Edmund. In "Thoreau's Sexuality," Walter Harding notes that "Both Emerson and Frank Sanborn, Thoreau's friend and biographer, insisted that Thoreau had written the poem about Ellen despite irrefutable evidence that Thoreau had written the poem before he ever met Ellen" (34-35); Emerson's and Sanborn's revisions mark the genesis of the myth of Thoreau's love affair with Ellen Sewall. Harding remarks elsewhere that

the poem "Sympathy" which Thoreau wrote in 1839 in tribute to the eleven-year-old Edmund Sewall seems pretty strong evidence of homoerotic inclinations. . . . Apparently Ralph Waldo Emerson was disturbed enough by the implications of the poem (or was he just plain naïve?) that he created out of whole cloth the story that Thoreau had written the poem about Ellen rather than Edmund Sewall--though he was hard put to explain why its subject is male rather than female. ("Afterword" 247)

I believe that Emerson was more disturbed than naïve regarding Thoreau's passions overall; indeed this is the central contention of Joel Porte's Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict (1965). Porte remarks that "Thoreau represented the side of Emerson--rebellious,

critical legacy that ensued because of Emerson's purposeful revision rightly breaks down in Miller's analysis--the contradictions and idiosyncrasies of Thoreau's concept of love, friendship and the erotic re-emerge--yet Miller's narrow vision of the erotic, where Thoreau's "spasms of language" make sense only in reference to another "man's" heterosexual infatuations with neighbors' "wives," mockingly translates the eroticism of Thoreau's reception of nature into a "perverse" correlative to his "appalling" ideal of love. Where Miller's understanding leads him to describe Thoreau with a term that connotes perverse erotomania and moral dissolution, I shall argue an erotic abandon or jouissance in the way Thoreau receives nature, the very "gladness" that Thoreau testifies he feels in nature, indeed the very opposite of the libertine's jadedness.

unsocial, brooding, and in love with artistic 'idleness'-- which the older man increasingly came to dislike and wished to suppress" (35) so that Emerson's view of Thoreau's "stoicism" has become part of "The common view of Thoreau, which sees him as a disciple of Emerson and states that he regarded 'the material world as a symbol of the spiritual,'" a view "undoubtedly largely promulgated by Emerson himself in his biographical sketch of Thoreau" (122). I discuss Emerson's discomfort in further detail in Part Four.

To understand Thoreau's reception of nature, I return to Emerson's view of "NATURE" as comprising the "NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body." The opposition that Emerson poses between the self or ME and the NOT ME of nature is precisely the division that Marcuse argues underlies Western culture and sustains modern discontent; to relieve the antagonistic relation between self and world requires another order of mind than the rational and teleological, an order predicated instead on a specifically sensual knowledge attained by a re-eroticization of an entire, other "self" in which both mind and body are conjoined and operating in the "aesthetic dimension" of thought and feeling. I have argued in Part One that Thoreau proposes the same idea of redemption as Marcuse's, and for similar reasons, and I have shown in Part Two how his concept of love is predicated on a relation between self and world that suspends "the getting after" ends in favor of the "extravagant" pleasure of the moment. I have shown also how the enjoyment of this love requires for Thoreau another order of knowledge and reason. His idea of "continent" love derives in part from his effort to

realize another way of knowing, to re-imagine the relation between the ME and the NOT ME, and his experience with nature feeds this effort.

At the conclusion of Part Two we saw Thoreau suggest nature as an ideal lover, encompassing all of the requisite attributes of his "peculiar love": a continent system outside the self, uncompromised by human social demands, whose effects are a constant superfluity that Thoreau seeks to enjoy in a relation of perfect sympathy. But Thoreau initially recognized his "contenance" vis-à-vis nature with a shock, expressed in the famous, disturbing episode recorded in The Maine Woods. In the fall of 1846, in the middle of his stay at Walden, he climbed to the top of Mount Katahdin; in his account he begins to realize the conceptual discontinuity between human life and what we call "Nature":

It was vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits. Some part of the beholder, even some vital part, seems to escape through the loose grating of his rib as he ascends. He is more lone than you can imagine. There is less of substantial thought and fair understanding in

him, than in the plains where men inhabit. His reason is dispersed and shadowy, more thin and subtile, like the air. Vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature has got him at disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty. She does not smile on him as in the plains. She seems to say sternly, why came ye here before your time? This ground is not prepared for you. Is it not enough that I smile in the valleys? I have never made this soil for thy feet, this air for thy breathing, these rocks for thy neighbors. I cannot pity nor fondle thee here, but forever relentlessly drive thee hence to where I am kind. Why seek me where I have not called thee, and then complain because you find me but a stepmother? (640-41)

Thoreau denaturalizes Nature here by seeing it as a human, mutable construct--at times the kind alma natura, at other times a cold stepmother, in all cases the product of human intervention and so conceptually limited: thought and understanding cannot serve him in the face of "Vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature"; "His reason is dispersed." For

Thoreau the loss of reason here is correlated with a loss of "some vital part," figured viscerally as escaping through the ribs, and the loss of both mind and body equates to the loss of "some of his divine faculty"--a faculty the possession of which seemed to sustain the benevolent illusion of our kinship with a Nature that smiles on us, pities and fondles us. Thoreau is shocked into disillusionment here, "caught" in a disorienting first recognition of contiguity, "more lone than you can imagine," and discovering that familiar mother Nature is "but a stepmother." Quoting Paradise Lost following this passage, he reaffirms the inadequacy of reason atop Mount Katahdin, having met instead "Chaos and ancient Night" and witnessed what seems to him to be the actual wilderness beyond the mediation of human intellect, beyond the order of naming: "this was primeval, untamed, and forever untamable Nature, or whatever else men call it" (645).

The physical "loss" of body that Thoreau perceives accompanying the loss of reason in the face of a wilderness untamable and unnamable is actually the same estrangement, in microcosm, he felt from "Nature" as a whole. He recognizes this some pages later, having

descended Mount Katahdin:

I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one,--that my body might,--but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries!--Think of our life in nature,--daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it,--rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the solid earth! the actual world! the common sense! Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we? (646)

The profound disorientation expressed in this passage, in a syntax and language increasingly halting, scrambling for resolution, and urgent to the point of panic, marks the beginning of Thoreau's revision of the Transcendental relation between self and world. For Thoreau's mentor Emerson, Nature and the Soul come together in his famous summation, "Nature is the symbol of spirit" (Nature 20); for the wise man who knows this "miracle," "the universe becomes transparent, and the light of higher laws than its own, shines through it" (24-

25). Thus when Emerson goes to the woods, he fantasizes an omniscient self so divorced from the NOT ME of material phenomena, including his own body, as to render useless all organs of sensual contact. "I become a transparent eye-ball," he exclaims, barely sustaining a conceit of perception in the image of a single, near-phantom organ, only to eliminate the material entirely in the next stroke: "I am nothing; I see all" (10).

But Thoreau's description of his experience at Katahdin, so insistently sensual and material, does not so much dismiss Emerson's wisdom as it does invert it. "Talk of mysteries!" Thoreau exclaims, alluding to those accounts of immanent divinity that lay the foundations for Transcendentalist reclamation of Christian miracles, indeed as if to set aside entirely the very mystery of immanent divinity, the spirit that possesses Nature. Here is a greater mystery, he tells us--that this other "Titan," his own body, part of the great NOT ME of Nature, has possession of his spirit. Think of our daily life, he says, bound by our bodies to an unending chain of contact with "the solid earth! the actual world! the common sense!" and think how little we know of the solid and the

actual, that it might actually "pilfer[] him" of that "divine faculty" of Reason that tried to tame Nature into a symbol. For Thoreau, it is "Contact! Contact!" with a Nature only provisionally amenable to our understanding that urges the questions "Who are we? where are we?"

Epistemology and ontology converge at Katahdin for Thoreau; how the NOT ME of Nature is known is determined by a revised sense of the ME. A loss of reason accompanied Thoreau's discovery of discontinuity with the NOT ME, but at the same time he glimpsed another order of relation in the "common sense" of contact with nature. For Thoreau to resolve the crisis of knowing he faced at Katahdin and, in Walden's terms, to redeem his self, both mind and body, he must somehow account for this contact among strange, awesome, fearful "bodies," his own and all others in the realm of "Nature." As with the mystery of friendliness, Thoreau must consider another order of reason that takes account of the world, a way of knowing seen now as bound by the common sense of both his own "strange" body and the strange body of Nature.

And we must consider, as a consequence, that Thoreau's passionate, reiterative, erotic addresses to

natural phenomena, his falling in love with shrub oaks, for example, are much more than evidence of perverse "affairs." Rather, they are representations of that "Contact! Contact!" beyond the bounds of reason, ecstatic responses determined instead by love, by the same operation of continence and superfluity that Thoreau sees governing human love and friendship. Though Thoreau begins with the Transcendentalist division of self and other, his ME becomes at once sensual and imaginative, a self whose ontological continence induces an erotic relation with the NOT ME, "both nature and art, all other men and my own body." What Thoreau seeks through Nature is not, as Daniel Peck reminds us, the "universal law" or will of God, but his own creative capacity. As "love does not analyze its object," so Thoreau looks not to a symbolic world but to a dynamic world of sensual contact, where the entire aesthetic circuit between the ME and the NOT ME constitutes at once, like Yeats' dancer, a phenomenon. Among the discontinuities of his Journal, Thoreau the poet "writes the history of his body"; what bridges these discontinuities is the dance of his writing, "creations of another order."

7. Consanguinity

I have discussed how Thoreau's revision of sympathetic love envisions another order of relations designed to sustain the Eros of being-in-love as its own telos. Furthermore, Thoreau asserts a sympathetic relation with nature that is the same as his relations of love and friendship; and as we have seen, Thoreau discovered the requisite "contenance" both of his self and of a nature recognized as "wild," outside the bounds of human ratiocination. But what exactly could a sympathetic relation with nature mean? Or, indeed, to consider further what Perry Miller dismisses, what could an erotic one mean? In love and friendship with another person, sympathy signifies in part similitude or like-mindedness. Regarding nature, however, what serves as a mind? Or, alternatively, what serves as the point of similitude between nature and humankind?

In certain early journal passages, Thoreau approaches this consideration by creating parallels between youth and other "natural" phenomena:

We are not apt to remember that we grow. It is curious to reflect how the maiden waiteth

patiently, confiding as the unripe houstonia of the meadow, for the slow moving years to work their will with her,--perfect and ripen her,--like it to be fanned by the wind, watered by the rain, and receive her education at the hands of nature.

These young buds of manhood in the streets are like buttercups in the meadows,--surrendered to nature as they. (1: 94; 5 Nov. 1839)

Thoreau establishes in this passage a relation between youth and nature by first sexualizing the youth, then evoking a complex of Romantic conventions regarding innocence and experience to characterize his notion of human "growth": youth--the maiden and the young men--enjoy a close relation to nature, innocently "confiding" and "surrendered to nature" to achieve a certain education. We, presumably older, "are not apt to remember" our youthful surrender, so that "It is curious to reflect" on a relation too easily forgotten with age, experience and the acquisition of rational knowledge. The growth under Nature's tutelage in this passage relies specifically on figures of sexual maturation; Thoreau casts the maiden as

"unripe houstonia" and young men as "young buds of manhood in the streets," evoking the sexuality of the figure of the blossom. Our forgetting our growth--our forgetting the innocence of our surrender to another, sensual order of knowledge--is countered by the youth's receptivity to nature and to its power to induce a maturation at once sexual and intellectual: the maiden "waiteth patiently," she is "confiding" in nature, she "receives her education," and the young men are "surrendered to nature," all states of receptivity that might simply be read as passive were it not for Thoreau's governing reminder that "We are not apt to remember that we grow." Read against the Romantic forgetfulness that comes from age and experience of the social world, however, the maiden's patience and confidence and the young men's surrender emerge as an active receptivity of which we are all capable and which is necessarily sensual in character; in this regard, Joel Porte remarks that "Unlike Wordsworth, who believed the child blessed because of its still fresh intimations of immortality, Thoreau thought the child fortunate for reasons closer to Locke than to Plato" (147), and he cites this Journal entry in evidence: "The

senses of children are unprofaned. Their whole body is one sense" (2: 291; 7 July 1851). Thoreau thus believes that we may accede to another order of knowledge predicated on our sensual life, a growth that, as we have seen in another context, would transform the self-dissipation wrought by social exchange into the self-expansion or growth brought by continent, sympathetic receptivity. Receptive to the force of sympathetic love, "we grow" as youths mature sexually; our "common sense" with nature continues to "perfect and ripen" us.

The idea of growth in this passage comprises both mind and body, and is clearly, familiarly sexualized: the figure of the maiden's sexual maturation in the first part of the passage is translated in the second part into the fact of young boys in the street and their beauty, "like buttercups in the meadows." The boys are, not are like, "young buds," approaching sexual maturity to which they are "surrendered." Elsewhere, however, Thoreau compares children and, by extension, humankind, to fungi, using a figure for growth that is not as manifestly sexual as flowers, yet evokes another important erotic mode for Thoreau, one of superabundant vitality:

I was not aware till to-day of a rising and risen generation. Children appear to me as raw as the fresh fungi on a fence rail. By what degrees of consanguinity is this succulent and rank-growing slip of manhood related to me? What is it but another herb, ranging all the kingdoms of nature, drawing in sustenance by a thousand roots and fibres from all soils. (1: 94; 7 Nov. 1839)

As the reminder in the previous passage was that "we grow," here Thoreau is made aware that some grow or are "rising," and some have grown or "risen." The growing, rising generation is of children, "raw as the fresh fungi," maturing into "slip[s] of manhood" that are "succulent and rank-growing," strongly suggesting excess, vigor and fertility, such as in the phrase "rank weeds" or "rank earth"--full of potential for extravagance. "Succulent" suggests a juicy, even visceral force, a manhood filled with potent, potential life-giving fluid, though here cast in an image not of blossoms but of the sexually-unclassifiable fungi, evoking some kind of vital principle outside the bounds circumscribed by a sexual

reproductive order.

Thoreau's important question at this relatively early date (age 22), and in reference to a recognition of a force at once virile, visceral, yet asexual, seems to concern his share in this force--whether he is of the rising or risen generation, whether he remembers the youthful knowing that precedes rationalized experience: "By what degrees of consanguinity" is this "related to me?" On a literal level, Thoreau is evoking the degree of separation between him and fungi in the hierarchy of the plant and animal kingdoms--or rather, he is asking the very question under debate at the time once the static Scale of Being had been displaced by a dynamic conception of nature (Eiseley 6). But the real point of comparison is the human child, still full of vigor and potential for growth. By collapsing fungi and children together, Thoreau's figure leads to a collapse of the hierarchy of all living things, so that "it"--child, fungus--is "but another herb, ranging all the kingdoms of nature, drawing in sustenance by a thousand roots and fibres from all soils"--in short, all enjoy a relation of consanguinity. The idea of "degrees of consanguinity," then, becomes not

a measure of hierarchies of nature, but rather a sign of vital relation in its capacity here to signify literally "blood" and figuratively some "vital fluid" which is drawn in "from all soils." Thus Thoreau's question is, to what degree does he share in the vigor of vital fluid, how rank-growing and succulent is he? He answers by concluding that all life--children, fungi, herbs, Thoreau--is leveled on the plane of nature, all are equal in their "drawing in [of] sustenance by a thousand roots and fibres from all soils." Thoreau thus envisions his self in nature in the same manner that he envisions his self in love: not as a place holder in a vertical, transcendent chain of being, or as a player in the larger, social grid of romance, but rather, by virtue of his consanguinity with natural phenomena, as one sharing the "common sense" in Hocquenghem's horizontal "group mode" of erotic relations.

Thoreau might equally ask here, and answer for himself, "By what degree of sympathy is this related to me?" That is, insofar as he is bound to his body, what is the point of similitude that marks his relation to nature --to the earth, to other bodies? His questions regarding his relation to nature run parallel with his questions

concerning the nature of the love relation, and as we saw in the previous chapter, the two relations converge: "As I love nature . . . I love thee, my Friend." As sympathetic love precludes subordination, ranging among discrete, continent selves, so too the collapse of nature into a single whole in the above passage precludes botanic subordination, grouped only by the consanguinity that ranges among all living things. "Consanguinity" thus provides a material (and, as we shall see further, imaginative) correlative to sympathy; and as we understand Thoreau's vision of the eros inherent in his revised sympathy, so we may begin to understand Thoreau's vision of eros embedded in a consanguine nature with which he is both a part and apart, both two and one.

Consanguinity as a point of similitude between sense-bound Thoreau, nature and other bodies acquires a clear erotic valence as a figure for interpenetration, the mark of mingling bodies, the conduit of self-dispersal and the agent of rank, extravagant growth. What Thoreau imagines as the ideal schema for self and affectional relations acquires with nature a fertile, visceral, erotic correlative. In certain late journal passages, for

example, Thoreau recognizes sympathy with the soil that in the above passage sustains our consanguinity with nature:

Such an appetite have we for new life that we begin by nibbling the very crust of the earth. We betray our vegetable and animal nature and sympathies by our delight in water. We rejoice in the full rills, the melting snow, the copious spring rains and the freshets, as if we were frozen earth to be thawed, or lichens and mosses, expanding and reviving under this influence. (12: 113-14; 4 April 1859)

This journal entry appears during the approach of spring, when "our vegetable and animal nature," the evidence of our consanguinity, emerges in a sympathetic response to the change of season. This sympathy, however, urges an appetite we have seen asserted elsewhere in reference to nature but only approximated in friendship: there, we want "the fruit and flower," the superfluous fragrance of some continent man; with nature, "we begin by nibbling the very crust of the earth" in our desire to incorporate it into our own bodies, to embowel the vigor or "new life" of the earth in a veiled allusion to the classic metaphor of the

bowels as the seat of sympathetic affections. As the passage continues with the extravagant flow of "the full rills, the melting snow, the copious spring rains and the freshets," Thoreau, speaking for the "group," imagines us as earth itself, "or lichens and mosses" even, sympathetically receptive to the flood of nature in the spring, so that we are "expanding and reviving" like that other "succulent and rank-growing slip of manhood," much in the same way that sympathetic relations were seen to influence the growth of self. This second image seems the converse of the first; that is, the passage begins with our eating the earth, and ends with our becoming the earth. In this daisy-chain of consanguinity, however, our bodies are imaginatively dispersed and reconstituted in sensual pleasure once we accede to "our vegetable and animal nature." This is the queer erotic effect that Marcuse envisions in an order of sensual knowledge, and that Hocquenghem argues is the mode of "homosexual" "annular" desire.

And as Thoreau (as well as Marcuse and Hocquenghem) argues, we must be in a condition of receptivity, like the unripe houstonia-maiden or the young buds of manhood, in

order to enjoy this relation. For Thoreau,

You must love the crust of the earth on which you dwell more than the sweet crust of any bread or cake. You must be able to extract nutriment out of a sandheap. You must have so good an appetite as this, else you will live in vain.

(10: 258; 25 Jan. 1858)

If the previous passage testifies to Thoreau's appetite for the earth, this one speaks more Walden-like of the condition of the appetite. Echoing still, at this late date, the "lives of quiet desperation," Thoreau cautions here that "you will live in vain" unless your response to nature is such that you desire to embowel it, again to eat the earth and "to extract nutriment out of a sandheap." It is not a simple matter of eating the earth in order to love it; "You must love the crust of the earth" in order to eat it. As we have seen regarding friendship, any prescriptions Thoreau may give, in Walden or elsewhere, regarding relations, address our condition to receive. Regarding our relation with nature, if it is properly--continently, sympathetically--a relation of love, then our recognition of similitude, of consanguinity with nature

will urge the sensual, bodily receptivity that "appetite" suggests.

As we have seen, Thoreau's reiteration of "appetite" in these passages, built upon his perception of consanguinity with nature, injects a sensual, corporeal valence to his love of nature, imaged as physical incorporation or commingling, that brings us closer to familiar notions of erotic relations. As Thoreau likens himself to sexually maturing youth, to lichens, to earth, to a body hungry to embowel the earth, he effects an imaginative collapse of the whole of Emerson's NOT ME, including his own body, into a single, polymorphously eroticized body, with consanguinity representing the sympathetic relation. In another late entry, Thoreau describes again the attraction of the earth: "There is nothing more affecting and beautiful to man, a child of the earth, than the sight of the naked soil in the spring. I feel a kindredship with it" (13: 144; 13 Feb. 1860). It is specifically as "a child of the earth" that the "naked soil" is "affecting and beautiful" to Thoreau; the figure of an autochthonic self allows Thoreau the poetic scope to ascribe to the earth any of those qualities encompassed by

our other source and "kin," the human body. That this soil is "naked," then, suggests more than bare soil; it carries the image of a naked body, than which "nothing [is] more affecting and beautiful." His various desires to eat the earth and be the earth thus carry a particular and peculiar erotic force in the correlation here and elsewhere of the earth, or of any phenomenon regarded as part of nature, with the body. Through the knowledge of the senses, the imaginative ME conjoins aesthetically with the body of the NOT ME.

Thoreau thus expands the organicizing "systole and diastole of the heart" that Emerson uses to describe the dynamic of love ("Friendship" 343) to include a peristaltic, literally incorporative rhythm of emboweling, tumescence and disemboweling, capturing a corporeal, sensual correlative where desire is imaged as appetite-- both oral and anal--and sympathy returned to its classical locus as seated in the bowels. Thoreau's "perverse" eroticization of his relation to natural phenomena to include anal images of sympathy, receptivity and self-dispersal allows him to imagine an order of erotic love that coordinates the whole of the NOT ME into an orgy of

consanguinity, precluding the subordination of object to self and thus suspending the telos of heteronormative, object-specific eroticism--essentially capturing the "group" mode of queer desire.

Understanding Thoreau's strong visceral troping on his love of nature, how it figures a specifically erotic self-dispersal that effects a union among the NOT ME of nature, allows us to reconsider the "shrub oak" affair dismissed by Perry Miller. In ecstasy--understood to mean the suspension of reason or Transcendental "understanding" and in turn the decentering or exstasis of an integrated self--the body insofar as it is imaginatively constitutive of self disintegrates, allowing for Thoreau the imaginative dispersal of parts or viscera and the discovery of sympathetic union--consanguinity--with natural phenomena. In the specific case of the shrub oak, we may see this erotic evisceration in certain sentences elided by Perry Miller in his note. Thoreau's "obsession" for the shrub oak, as Miller puts it, is actually governed in part by his question, "What cousin of mine is the shrub oak?" (9: 146; 1 Dec. 1856) as if falling in love with natural phenomena, as Thoreau tells us he does with the

shrub oak, becomes a matter of blood relation, of consanguinity. And as Thoreau continues the entry, we indeed find blood in his love:

Well named shrub oak. Low, robust, hardy, indigenous. . . .How many rents I owe to you! how many eyes put out! how many bleeding fingers! How many shrub oak patches I have been through, stooping, winding my way, bending the twigs aside, guiding myself by the sun, over hills and valleys and plains, resting in clear grassy spaces! I love to go through a patch of shrub oak in a bee-line, where you tear your clothes and put your eyes out. (9: 147-48; 1 Dec. 1856)

Thoreau's attraction to the shrub oak is contingent in part upon a visceral relation, but in this instance in terms of its power to wreck or rend him, to cause him to bleed. He allows himself to be torn--desires this, in fact--by going "in a bee-line" through a patch sometimes rather than carefully wending his way to avoid harm. So the attraction Thoreau feels for the shrub may indeed seem even more perverse than Miller lets on, but this must be

understood as a rather stunning autobiographical testimony to what Thoreau so strongly and persistently figures in his imagery: the requisite consanguinity that serves as the mark of sympathetic love between Thoreau and natural phenomena.

As Thoreau's ideal of human love and friendship grew increasingly elusive and frustrating, predicated as it is on the sympathetic union of a specifically sensual aesthetic response, in nature he finds a point for both sensual union and erotic ecstasy in his translation of "sympathy" to the consanguinity of all phenomena. The erotic, ecstatic displacement and dispersal of self that Thoreau sought in human love occurs with nature when the rational ordering of nature is abandoned; sensual effects thus become inordinate, extravagant, superfluous. The consanguine, ecstatic body transcends the body as an organized unit of self, and it is in this regard that consanguinity is tantamount to the sympathy that marks the divinity in human friendship:

the gods have really intended that men should
feed divinely, like themselves, on their own
nectar and ambrosia. They have so painted this

fruit, and freighted it with such a fragrance, that it satisfies much more than an animal appetite. Grapes, peaches, berries, nuts, etc., are likewise provided for those who will sit at their sideboard. I have felt, when partaking of this inspiring diet, that my appetite was an indifferent consideration; that eating became a sacrament, a method of communion, an ecstatic exercise, a mingling of bloods, and [a] sitting at the communion table of the world; and so have not only quenched my thirst at the spring but the health of the universe. (1: 372; 1845)

Though he determines that "my appetite was an indifferent consideration," he "freights" the passage with sensual detail enough to underscore the place of the body in the ecstatic experience. Fruit is "so painted" and "fragrant" that it appeals to the "animal," certainly, via sight and odor, even though "it satisfies much more." So even though the animal appetite seems to be surmounted, its evidence is asserted in plenty; Thoreau gives us a cornucopia of this fruit--"grapes, peaches, berries, nuts" and the overflowing "etc." Eating this fruit leads to "a method of

communion, an ecstatic exercise, a mingling of bloods" so that, at least in imagery, the animal--the bodily--can never figure indifferently: blood and body remain at the core of ecstatic experience, torn out of rational order into the superfluity of love's effects.

8. Fertility

To this point I have focused on the corporeal and consanguine as essential elements emerging in Thoreau's sympathy with a continent nature. I find a specifically erotic suggestion in the insistent sensual and imaginative conjunction of his body with the phenomena he perceives and loves in nature, following Marcuse's idea of eros unleashed in the aesthetic dimension once the mind's rationalizing domination of nature is suspended. But what I read as erotic concerns also the way Thoreau tropes on the body's capacity for superfluity--for fertility, generation and excess--to talk about nature itself, his relation to nature and what he calls "poetic genius." I turn then to a more detailed examination of Thoreau's use of generative and visceral figures; and though the generative tropes, because they are sexual, are more easily understood as erotic, I will maintain that the visceral images are erotic as well though in a queer way, serving to represent a polymorphously perverse expansion or, better, recovery, of what Marcuse calls the "erotogenic" body. These images, as we shall see, provide Thoreau the imaginative scope to describe not just the

writer's generative and creative art, but specifically the eros of the writer's relation to his theme and, ultimately, to his reader.

Returning then to images of lichens, we find Thoreau maintaining a close relation between the fluid vitality of lichen images and fecundity, both physical and imaginative. In another lichen passage, Thoreau compares the effect of a rain storm on lichens to its effect on his imagination:

It is so mild and moist as I saunter along by the wall east of the Hill that I remember, or anticipate, one of those warm rain-storms in the spring, when the earth is just laid bare, the wind is south, and the cladonia lichens are swollen and lusty with moisture, your foot sinking into them and pressing the water out as from a sponge, and the sandy places also are drinking it in. You wander indefinitely in a beaded coat, wet to the skin of your legs . . . and have your thoughts. . . .You could hug the clods that defile you. You feel the fertilizing influence of the rain in your mind. The part of

you that is wettest is fullest of life, like the lichens. You discover evidences of immortality not known to divines. You cease to die. You detect some buds and sprouts of life. Every step in the old rye-field is on virgin soil.

And then the rain comes thicker and faster than before, thawing the remaining frost in the ground, detaining the migrating bird; and you turn your back to it, full of serene, contented thought. (10: 262; 26 Jan. 1858)

In form and content, this passage bursts with a profusion of interrelated erotic effects among nature, Thoreau's imagination, his body, and his reader. The syntax and rhythm of this passage recapitulate for the reader Thoreau's spring walk and the change wrought by the imagined rain storm; as he saunters in the first sentence, so does the sentence saunter, wending its way through a path of phrases that qualify the sensuality of wet spring: bare earth, south winds, lichen "swollen and lusty" like Thoreau's thoughts, big with both memory and anticipation, swelled into the sentence we read. Thoreau transforms the sauntering "I" along the way into an anonymous "you,"

grouping Thoreau and reader in the reception of spring's influences. As the passage continues, the sentences come thicker and faster like rain in the simplicity of their construction, and the insistent "you" witnesses the erotic arousal of our body and our thoughts. Ourselves "wet to the skin," soaked like the lichens we sink our feet into, feeling "the fertilizing influence of the rain," we become like lichens, and we know "immortality not known to divines" because it is real and present in the earth--we know the mystery of contact! that surpasses all other mysteries.

Thoreau's idea of earthly immortality coincides with the revolutionary ideas emerging in natural history at the time. Loren Eiseley concludes his study of evolutionary thought with the observation that "In Darwin's century the unique and unreturning nature of the past began early to evince itself" through such achievements as Kelvin's second law of thermodynamics, Cuvier's vertebrate paleontology, and the novelties of selective breeding. The struggle for existence found at the core of evolutionary thought came to be seen "as a creative mechanism. . . .man was adjusting himself, not just to time in unlimited

quantities, but rather to complete historicity, to the emergence of the endlessly new" (330-31). Thoreau, in love with nature, so erotically "grouped" as part of the consanguine whole of nature and so dispersing his "I" among the "you" of indefinite, unlimited readers, has found in nature the "heart forever inexperienced" that he sought in human love. As we saunter, as we read, we step anew onto soil at once cultivated and virgin and so rest in the fertile present of "serene, contented thought" filled with life. Thoreau thus fills the expletive "It" that begins the passage with the liminal occasion "that I remember, or anticipate," where self is dispersed into an erotic web of receptive relations, where we become the lichens we touch, where we swell with the jouissance of the rain and "cease to die."

Thoreau thus translates this newly-secularized idea of the creative mechanism of nature into an erotic force that at once fertilizes our minds and brings us to a state of sustained pleasure; it is not surprising that his Journal, which he calls "a place to contain all your joy, your ecstasy," is filled with similar images of a strikingly, excessively fertile and fertilizing nature. He

writes again of a thunderstorm:

I hear [thunder] in mid-afternoon, muttering,
 crashing in the muggy air in mid-heaven . . .
 Nature has found her hoarse summer voice again,
 like the lowing of a cow let out to pasture. It
 is Nature's rutting season. Even as the birds
 sing tumultuously and glance by with fresh and
 brilliant plumage, so now is Nature's grandest
 voice heard. . . .All the pregnant earth is
 bursting into life like a mildew, accompanied
 with noise and fire and tumult. Some oestrus
 stings her that she dashes headlong against the
 steeples and bellows hollowly, making the earth
 tremble. She comes dropping rain like a cow with
 overflowing udder. The winds drive; the dry
 fields milk her. (8: 349; 20 May 1856)

This passage captures an extravagance of sensual effects
 in the profusion of phenomena in nature--thunder, cow,
 birds, earth, mildew, fire, estrus, rain, milk--all
 confounded to demonstrate a prodigal nature that cannot
 signify monolithically. "Nature" here is evidenced by her
 voice, thunder, but the "nature" which the voice

represents becomes dispersed in an array of sensual figures. The thunder is "like the lowing of a cow" which "Some oestrus stings" so that the cow "dashes headlong against the steeples"; the thundering nature-cow's udders are overflowing with the milk-like, vital rain of the shower. But embedded in the rutting cow image is earth, posed as cognate with both "nature" and the cow metaphor: "All the pregnant earth is bursting into life." What is more, pregnant earth, like the cow, like the thunder, is as well like a mildew--another of Thoreau's fecund fungi. The accretion of images offered to represent "Nature" makes it difficult to image nature as a single, unified system; rather, for Thoreau, what is "nature" is that which is pregnant, bursting, flowing with sensuality and creativity--and acting on itself, so this body of rutting metaphor is autoerotically--continently--charged. Rain fecundates earth while at the same time earth feeds on rain, "the dry fields milk her," thus the extraordinary, excessive image of the fertile fertilizing the fertile and of the pregnant feeding on the fertile.

Though his journal is filled in part with detailed, detached observations, in many passages like this Thoreau

recapitulates the revolutions in theories of nature as a unified system in favor of the imaginative play of the continent, autoerotic mind that tropes on the occasion of nature as an endlessly creative force, that spins out accounts of nature's effects in ways that the old "botanies" and other created, superimposed orders have failed to provide. From the disorienting "Chaos and ancient Night" of Katahdin, Thoreau arrives at the creative force in nature's "noise and fire and tumult." As both lover and writer of nature, Thoreau recognizes that he must be in a condition to recognize and receive this fire and tumult as fertilizing inspiration in order to write about it:

Do nothing merely out of good resolutions.
Discipline yourself only to yield to love;
suffer yourself to be attracted. It is in vain
to write on chosen themes. We must wait till
they have kindled a flame in our minds. There
must be the copulating and generating force of
love behind every effort destined to be
successful. The cold resolve gives birth to,
begets, nothing. The theme that seeks me, not I

it. The poet's relation to his theme is the relation of lovers. It is no more to be courted.

Obey, report. (3: 253; 30 Jan. 1852)

The "relation of lovers" in this passage is the relation of Thoreau's peculiar lovers who may not court each other, or the relation that Thoreau himself seeks with nature--torn and ecstatic, for example, following no path but the inexorable bee-line in the patch of shrub oaks--all relying on the kind of blind evolutionary matches that result in a chaotic world of prodigal, sensual, generative effects whose only path runs along the inexorable production of the endlessly new. For Thoreau, will and intention must be suspended in all acts of love: as we have seen with friendship, "woe to him who wants a companion" and woe to "two friends explaining"; with nature, "Why seek me here where I have not called thee?"; with writing, "The cold resolve gives birth to, begets nothing." Much in the way that Darwin arrived at a theory of natural selection predicated on accidental variations that "could not be reconciled with the idea of a plan of creation" (Ospovat 72), so Thoreau is disposed to "yield to love" and its "copulating and generating force" for an

inspiration irreconcilable with any plan of "chosen themes" or paths of expected, accepted behavior.

This is only one of many passages where Thoreau casts the imagination as a material and creative force¹⁶, and it helps to foreground not only the erotic relation I see Thoreau establishing between the ME and the NOT ME, the sense of self and its love relations that make the world phenomenal, but also the function of metaphors of fertility in describing an erotic imagination. When Thoreau imagines his body as part of the consanguine group of nature, he suspends the western, rational plan of a ME unified and reified by the body, so that his relation to nature may follow his model for love and friendship: his imaginative self (his Emersonian ME) is continent because discontinuous with that which we imagine "Nature" to be; by virtue of this body, however, he enjoys an actual sympathy with nature, cast in terms of a unifying

¹⁶ In this regard we find, I believe, Thoreau's most assiduous application (or embracing) of the Eastern thought that otherwise appears in his writing in a rather desultory, unsystematic manner. Central to Indian spirituality and its accounts of consciousness is the view that "man's body, as well as his 'states of consciousness' and even his 'intelligence,' are all creations of one and the same substance" (Eliade 21).

consanguinity; and as in ideal friendship, the enjoyment of this love relation is an enjoyment of the superfluous effects of a prodigal nature, a nature understood not in terms of human ratiocinations but instead as, paradoxically, continent (discontinuous) and incontinent (untamable, wild)--the same paradoxical condition of love, where through continence lovers at once remain two yet become one. It is by virtue of his body imagined under the NOT ME of nature, though imagined by a ME in constant sensual contact with nature, that Thoreau can claim the kinship of consanguinity with the rest of nature, the rest of the NOT ME, and thereby conceptualize a sympathy with nature and the attendant enjoyment of nature's fertile effects.

Thoreau's idea of his body as part of the consanguine group of nature enables him to strike an aesthetic--imaginative and sensual--union between the ME and the NOT ME, between his self--his Transcendental spirit--and nature. In a Katahdin sense, following Thoreau's inversion of Emerson's dictum, nature becomes not so much the symbol of the spirit as the schema of the spirit. Judith Butler, in her queer articulation of Bodies That Matter, points to

Aristotle in this regard:

For Aristotle the soul designates the actualization of matter, where matter is understood as fully potential and unactualized. As a result, he maintains in de Anima that the soul is "the first grade of actuality of a naturally organized body." He continues, "That is why we can wholly dismiss as unnecessary the question whether the soul and the body are one: it is as meaningless to ask whether the wax and the shape given to it by the stamp are one, or generally the matter [hyle] of a thing and that of which it is the matter [hyle]." . . . In the Greek, there is no reference to "stamps," but the phrase, "the shape given by the stamp" is contained in the single term, "schema." (32-33)

Thoreau's "primeval, untamed, and forever untamable Nature" is Aristotle's "fully potential and unactualized" matter; and it is Thoreau's "peculiar" schema of love, the mind-soul of a lover, that actualizes nature as erotically-manifest phenomena:

Fain would I stretch me by the highway-side

To thaw and trickle with the melting snow;
 That mingled, soul and body, with the tide,
 I too may through the pores of nature flow.

(Excursions and Poems 409)

"Nature" signifies confusingly in this passage unless understood in terms of the Aristotelian schema--or Thoreauvian love. Note that Thoreau desires to flow, like the melting snow, "through the pores of nature." This makes sense if "nature" here signifies simply the earth; taken as the aggregate of the NOT ME, however, we wonder how melting snow, body and tide may flow through itself, just as we wondered how the "nature" of a rainstorm could be at once pregnant, fertile, fertilizing, lactating and menstruating. But in these instances "Nature" does not represent all of the phenomenal universe per se outside the ME, but rather a schema or frame, in the present passage a penetrable body itself that groups the whole of consanguine phenomena. Note also that it is both Thoreau's soul and body that would mingle with the tide, so that even though it is his body that provides the point for sympathy with the body of nature, soul (or self, or imaginative ME) is attendant as the creative, actualizing

force that imagines the body of nature. As there are discrete "bodies" or phenomena in nature coordinated into the frame or "body" called "nature," so for Thoreau he is at once in possession of and possessed by "this Titan," the collection of corporeal phenomena called a "body" that is coordinated into the idea of a "self" or ME. This self --the cognizant, desiring "I"--comprises the soul and body that Thoreau would join with the body of nature.

We are led again to the gap between the ME and NOT ME that divides self from nature, the gap between perceiver and perceived the bridging of which, as we recall, Peck identifies for Thoreau as a "phenomenon." In Thoreau's perceptions he is offered the occasion for effecting the union between self and nature that is not merely imaginative but aesthetic, predicated on sensual reception; indeed, to conceive of the conjunction of the self and the phenomenal world via a sensualized imagination is, as Marcuse has argued, an erotic act in itself, the experience of at once losing self and gaining self which marks erotic ecstasy. In Thoreau's love idiom, the body's capacity for growth and reproduction, and those other extravagant capacities Thoreau may claim by virtue

of his consanguinity with other material phenomena (e.g. the "rank" growth and reproduction of fungi), are tantamount to the mind's processes of growth and creative effort.

Thus it is Thoreau's schema for love as a fully aesthetic force that permits the erotic conjunction of thought and sensation, mind and body, self and world. This is the subject of a lengthy journal entry dated May 20, 1851:

[As it is with plants, s]o is it with the human being. I am concerned first to come to my Growth, intellectually and morally (and physically, of course, as a means to this, for the body is the symbol of the soul), and then to bear my Fruit, do my Work, propagate my kind, not only physically but morally, not only in body but in mind. (2: 202)

Though this passage seems to introduce human intellectual and moral growth as analogous to organic growth, Thoreau quickly strikes a symbiotic relation between the two. Thoreau again maintains the Transcendental principle that Nature--in this instance his body--is the symbol of the

Soul, but this leads him to look to organic growth not only "as a means to" effecting the growth of the mind, but also as the only effective means of representing what Thoreau perceives as moral life. And again, it is Thoreau's understanding of the body as another schema in microcosm of the soul that leads him to organic fertility and its queer extrapolates as the language of the soul.

"Schema," Butler asserts,

means form, shape, figure, appearance, dress, gesture, figure of a syllogism, and grammatical form. If matter never appears without its schema, that means that it only appears under a certain grammatical form and that the principle of its recognizability, its characteristic gesture or usual dress, is indissoluble from what constitutes its matter. (33)

If nature is the schema of the soul, then the rendering of nature in language becomes "indissoluble from what constitutes its matter"; conversely, one's natural history--the history of Thoreau's body, for example, the writing of which makes him a poet--becomes equally indissoluble from, is the stamp of, one's moral and

intellectual life.

For Thoreau, this is an eroticized life; the passage continues:

One half of the mind's development must still be root,--in the embryonic state, in the womb of nature, more unborn than at first. For each successive new idea or bud, a new rootlet in the earth. The growing man penetrates yet deeper by his roots into the womb of things. The infant is comparatively near the surface, just covered from the light; but the man sends down a tap-root to the centre of things (2: 203)

Though the mind's development is introduced as embryonic, embedded in the womb of nature, it acquires for the growing man a queer erotic force as an insistently penetrative development--sexual yet not mutual, classically Greek, in a sense, in its erotic disregard for a procreative telos,¹⁷ so that one half of the imagination

¹⁷ I have in mind queer work on Greek homosexuality that ascribes to the classical world another order of sexuality than the modern homo/hetero order. David Halperin in One Hundred Years of Homosexuality, for example, describes a sexuality in classical Athens as "conceived to center essentially on, and to define itself around, an asymmetrical gesture, that of the penetration

is always rooted in the pleasure of the body of the world while the other half, as the passage continues, "flashes" its ecstasy in ideas:

That is, the most clear and ethereal ideas (Antaeus-like) readily ally themselves to the earth, to the primal womb of things. They put forth roots as soon as branches; they are eager to be soiled. . . .The thought that comes to light, that pierces the empyrean on the other side, is wombed and rooted in darkness, a moist and fertile darkness,--its roots in Hades like the tree of life. . . .

No thought but is connected as strictly as a flower, with the earth. The mind flashes not so far on one side but its rootlets, its spongelets, find their way instantly on the other side into a moist darkness, uterine,--a low bottom in the heavens, even miasma-exhaling to such immigrants as are not acclimated. . . .

(2: 204-05; 20 May 1851)

of the body of one person by the body--and, specifically, by the phallus--of another" (30).

This passage captures the same redemptive descent of the mind into the body that Thoreau calls for at the end of "Higher Laws." Thoreau describes the life of his ideas not in absolute terms--thus the need to caution himself to admit "No thought but is connected as strictly as a flower"--but rather as contingent upon another perspective, that "separate intention of the eye" that looks instead to the pleasure of creation rather than to its purpose. For the unacclimated, the moist, fertile, uterine darkness that feeds the imagination affords not pleasure but the poison of a "miasma-exhaling" bottom. The acclimated, however, are Thoreau's lovers who yield to love's "copulating and generative force" rather than look to "chosen themes," the telos of creative effort, with "cold resolve."

Thoreau will find poetic genius in the accidental variations that emerge from a fertile, eroticized imagination relieved of order, purpose or intent; this is the life that surpasses the descriptive power of any "botany":

I witness a beauty in the form or coloring of
the clouds which addresses itself to my

imagination, for which you account scientifically to my understanding, but do not so account to my imagination. . . .You tell me it is a mass of vapor which absorbs all other rays and reflects the red, but that is nothing to the purpose, for this red vision excites me, stirs my blood, makes my thoughts flow, and I have new and indescribable fancies, and you have not touched the secret of that influence.

(3: 155-56; 25 Dec. 1851)

Natural science is "nothing to the purpose" of Thoreau's imaginative life because it is bloodless, is not "eager to be soiled," is not rooted like Thoreau's imagination in the eros of the sensual world. When Thoreau witnesses beauty, his body responds like a lover's--he becomes excited, his blood stirs, his "thoughts flow" like ejaculate to create "new and indescribable fancies." Human accounts of the order and purpose of the world "have not touched" the eros that is "the secret of that influence" because they do not touch, they do not encompass the experience of "contact" and the "common sense" of sensual knowledge in an aesthetic dimension outside the bounds of

rational order. Rational knowledge alone is impotent;
sensual knowledge is fertile.

9. Genius

We have seen how an erotic relation with the world captures for Thoreau the life of the imagination, and I have briefly suggested that for Thoreau, eros is the "secret" of creative genius. What is more, this erotic relation occurs in the "aesthetic dimension" of thought and feeling conjoined, so that for Thoreau the expression of this relation always carries a sensual, material correlative. As Richard Sattlemeyer points out, this is "Thoreau's extension of the Transcendental theory of language" where words "were literally as well as figuratively true to life" (91). And as Thoreau looked to etymologies in this regard, so we may believe that he understood the root of the word "genius": from the Latin genius, deity of generation and birth, guardian spirit ("Genius"). When Thoreau imagines a relation between the intellect--the perceived seat of the "I"--and the body, the conjunction of body and thought, in order to imagine his relation to--conjunction with--nature, he does so according to his schema of love, where the continent self creates a condition of receptivity so that the effects of nature, as the effects of friendship, are seen as

superfluous, serving no other end but to be enjoyed in themselves. It is specifically the sensual reception of nature, and the condition of the receptive self, that determines his relation to nature. And we find in certain passages that it is this other order of knowing nature that determines poetic genius and that, in turn, leads us to the eroticism--the loving, fusing, relation-making power--of his own poetics.

We may see the same dynamic of love that was argued for friendship at work in the following Journal passage from July 11, 1852, written in the midst of Walden's major revisions (and partially incorporated into "Higher Laws" [496]), which addresses the complex of relations formed between nature, sensual reception and imagination. Thoreau begins:

What is called genius is the abundance of life or health, so that whatever addresses the senses, as the flavor of these berries, or the lowing of that cow, which sounds as if it echoed along a cool mountain-side just before night, where odoriferous dews perfume the air and there is everlasting vigor, serenity, and expectation

of perpetual untarnished morning,--each sight
and sound and scent and flavor,--intoxicates
with a healthy intoxication. (4: 218-19)

We see again in the first sentence the familiar syntactic strategy Thoreau uses when he talks about what he loves, be it friend or nature, where he revels in the very sensuousness that is the substance and condition of his love in a complex of simile and qualification, as if to resist the grammatical conclusion of the idea and of the experience. Here he gives us his definition of "genius," the Romantic, Transcendental faculty of poets attuned to the sublime. For Thoreau, genius involves a reception, indeed a self-condition, of superfluity, an "abundance of life or health" large enough to encompass the barrage of sensual contact that we live through every moment of life. As he continues his qualification, he rhapsodizes upon "whatever addresses the senses" as if to evade the grammatical predication that the phrase reasonably requires. What does "whatever addresses the senses" do for genius? Before Thoreau tells us, he leads us through "whatever addresses the senses"--the taste of berries, the lowing of a cow, the coolness and dimness and sweetness of

mountain twilight--as if suspending predication means suspending time, and resting in sensual pleasure means enjoying "everlasting vigor, serenity, and expectation of perpetual untarnished morning," the ideal condition of love that, as we recall from Friendship, is the very condition that leaves the heart "forever inexperienced" and thus forever desiring. Finally, after distilling the scene into the epitome of all of nature's effects on the sensual self, expanding the experience into the enjoyment of "each sight and sound and scent and flavor," he tells us that "abundance of life or health," the corporally-inflected mark of "genius," admits a "healthy intoxication."

This "healthy intoxication" is the specifically redemptive ecstatic experience of the mind descending into the body. As Thoreau continues this passage, he describes the redemptive action of a genius predicated on abundant, superfluous, sensual receptivity:

The shrunken stream of life overflows its banks, makes and fertilizes broad intervals, from which generations derive their sustenances. This is the true overflowing of the Nile. So exquisitely

sensitive are we, it makes us embrace our fates,
and, instead of suffering or indifference, we
enjoy and bless. (4: 219)

The "abundance of life or health" that marks genius marks the difference between the shrunken streams of the familiar "lives of quiet desperation" and a life whose banks overflow, a life that, in receiving the abundance of nature, can only return abundance, an excessive, superfluous economy uncontained by the more familiar economies of exchange that we subscribe to while "denying the possibility of change." The result of this overflowing is generative: when we know how "exquisitely sensitive" we are, our life "makes and fertilizes broad intervals, from which generations derive their sustenances," we become fertile and perpetuate the conditions of "everlasting vigor, serenity, and expectation" for the benefit of all living things. Finally, this superfluity of sensuous effects transforms perpetuation into the ecstasy of timelessness and intransitivity, the condition so resisted syntactically in the preceding sentence: now, simply, "we enjoy and bless."

Again, as the passage continues, this "healthy

intoxication" and the genius that admits it are predicated on continence: "If we have not dissipated the vital, the divine, fluids, there is, then, a circulation of vitality beyond our bodies. The cow is nothing. Heaven is not there, but in the condition of the hearer" (4: 219).

Echoing his experience atop Katahdin, where he sensed a loss of at once "some vital part" and "some of his divine faculty," Thoreau now warns against our having "dissipated the vital, the divine, fluids." At Katahdin he presumed to "know" nature, and experienced as a result the loss of his vitality--or what is the same, his divinity; Nature chastised him for this hubris. Now, in this passage, he asserts a relation with nature predicated on a genius defined as a necessarily sensual knowledge that, rather than risking dissipation and estrangement, keeps us continent and so, paradoxically, allows "a circulation of vitality beyond our bodies." This parallels precisely the distinctions Thoreau makes regarding human love, where the "getting after things," including friends, is "dissipating." The order of rational knowledge pits intellect over nature and our bodies and predicates this dissipation, determines that the cow is a cow, that heaven

is there, that indeed the lover is there to be got in exchange for a piece of ourselves--indeed, all phenomena are classed and divided against ourselves. Now, only in the condition of sensual genius does the cow low, and heaven is not there but in our sensual receptivity, our vitality, our divinity.

Thoreau concludes:

I am thrilled to think that I owe a perception to the commonly gross sense of taste, that I have been inspired through the palate, that these berries have fed my brain. After I had been eating these simple, wholesome, ambrosial fruits on this high hillside, I found my senses whetted, I was young again, and whether I stood or sat I was not the same creature. (4: 219)

This then is the redemption we achieve when we allow the "mind to descend into the body and redeem it." This does not mean a rationalizing and governing of the body by the intellect, but precisely the inverse; Thoreau means to conjoin the action of sense and intellect, an aesthetic conjunction predicated on sense perception that leads to our inspiration, a literal enthusiasm, an admittance into

ourselves via the senses of the divinity the Transcendentalists saw immanent in the universe. What is more, this redemption effects a conversion; when Thoreau concludes that, after having whetted his senses, "whether I stood or sat I was not the same creature," he has found the possibility for change that Walden's desperate lives deny. The effect is that he is "young again," finding through sensual knowledge, and through pleasure in pleasure, the heart that in love is "forever inexperienced."

The erotic valence immanent in Thoreau's relation to nature, in the play of an imagination effected by nature, and, as we shall see further, in the play of his poetic practice, further intensifies when we consider the specifically generative effect he imagines this relation to hold. We saw above how a continent sensuality leads to a life that "overflows its banks, makes and fertilizes broad intervals, from which generations derive their sustenances." Here the fertilizing capacity of such "healthy intoxication" derives from the metaphor of "the true overflowing of the Nile." In many other passages, some of which we have already examined, Thoreau asserts

the imaginative and poetic capacities that result from sensual knowledge by employing an elaborate vocabulary of fertility and procreation. Indeed, in the connections Thoreau establishes between the effects of nature on his imagination and the rendering of this imagination in poetic practice, we will find an important distinction drawn between the prosaic habits of mere intellect and the poetic genius that overflows from sensual knowledge.

Some of this discourse of fertility, or fecundity, we have already seen in this chapter in terms of establishing both his consanguinity with nature and the wild, excessive, inundating effects of a nature indomitable by human intellect--recall the profusely fertile and fertilizing thunderstorm. When we turn to his imagination, we find he claims the same fertile force. As is to be expected, this is predicated on continence: for example, he writes, "I have not yet imported my humdrum thoughts, my prosaic habits, into it to mar the landscape. What is this beauty in the landscape but a certain fertility in me?" (2: 77; 31 Oct. 1850). The thinking "I" in this passage is discrete, separate from the landscape, following the principle of continence as the basis of

sympathetic love. Yet he is fully capable of penetrating, altering and dominating--marring--the landscape by importing "my humdrum thoughts, my prosaic habits," the habits of intellect. But before this might happen, he sees the "beauty in the landscape," and he and it have become one: the beauty there is "a certain fertility in me" that connotes generative potential and the chance for perpetuity. Unfettered (in that moment) by conventional, rational, cultural ordering of nature, related instead only by virtue of consanguinity, Thoreau is able to align nature's generative aspect with the operation of his own extravagant imagination, activated by bodily, sensual receptivity.

We recall Thoreau's desire toward the conclusion of Walden for "Extra-vagance!" and his desire "to speak somewhere out of bounds," noting that "it depends on how one is yarded." Many critics, notably Sharon Cameron, have asserted that Thoreau's Journal just such a place for extravagance--and at this point it should be clear that for Thoreau "extravagance" aligns with ecstasy, superfluity, indeterminacy, irrationality, ateleology--all those states that counter rational thought. So in his

journal Thoreau writes: "My Journal should be the record of my love. I would write in it only of the things I love, my affection for any aspect of the world, what I love to think of" (2: 101; 16 Nov. 1850). If we consider that writing for Thoreau is a record of at once the poet's love, joy, body and imagination, and knowing that imagination for Thoreau represents a fertile, generative, erotic relation with the phenomenal world, for Thoreau to call his journal "the record of my love" suggests, extravagantly, that it is at once, at least, the evidence of erotic union with "the things I love"; that the Journal is his offspring, the product of the generative force of his "affection for any aspect of the world"; that it exists because of the fertile potential of "what I love to think of." Thoreau follows the specifically fertile, generative potential of journal-keeping as a record of love as the passage continues:

"I have no more distinctness or pointedness in my yearnings than an expanding bud, which does indeed point to flower and fruit, to summer and autumn, but is aware of the warm sun and spring influence only" (2: 101; 16 Nov. 1850). As Sharon Cameron notes that the Journal as a site

for "extravagance" and speaking "out of bounds" allows Thoreau to disregard the narrativistic demands of a publication such as Walden, so Thoreau here describes the indeterminacy of his "yearnings" that "have no more distinctness or pointedness . . . than an expanding bud." He evokes the maiden houstonia cited earlier that "waiteth patiently" for her tutelage by nature; like her he "does indeed point to flower and fruit"--fertility, sexual capacity, generation--"but is aware of the warm sun and spring influence only."

But the passage in fact poses a dilemma: though his Journal should be the record of his love--a determinate end of a sort in itself--his present yearnings are cast as adolescent, again like the maiden houstonia, rather than matured, tutored by nature. It is the lesson of nature he awaits as he concludes the passage: "I feel ripe for something, yet do nothing, can't discover what that thing is. I feel fertile merely. It is seedtime with me. I have lain fallow long enough" (2: 101; 16 Nov. 1850). I have read the condition of fertile potential that Thoreau ascribes to his imagination in sensual relation with nature as an end in itself; here he seems to want, or look

for, something more, contrary to his model of love; has "lain fallow long enough." Some other practice should bear the fruit of his fertility, and that is writing, his Journal.

Little more than a year later, Thoreau reaffirms, indeed rediscovers--now in terms of his writing--that "end" for which he feels ripe. He describes the (re-) productive force and evidence of his imaginative fertility that the Journal, the record of his "peculiar" love of nature, has become; and as with his model of human love, the value is superfluous, arising by accident: "Each thought that is welcomed and recorded is a nest egg, by the side of which more will be laid. Thoughts accidentally thrown together become a frame in which more may be developed and exhibited" (3: 217; 22 Jan. 1852). Again, it is his assumption of natural force as fertile and generative, captured here in the image of his journal-keeping as a laying of eggs, that the profusion and superfluity of poetic effect holds force. Thus, as the passage continues, he is able to re-imagine the "habit" of writing into a practice of genius that, along the order of sensual thought, transcends the prosaic:

Perhaps this is the main value of a habit of writing, of keeping a journal,--that so we remember our best hours and stimulate ourselves. My thoughts are my company. They have a certain individuality and separate existence, aye, personality. Having by chance recorded a few disconnected thoughts and then brought them into juxtaposition, they suggest a whole new field in which it was possible to labor and to think.

Thought beget thought. (3: 217; 22 Jan. 1852)

The "value" Thoreau recognizes in writing nature accords with the value granted to any expression of his "peculiar" love; it has no terminal exchange value, but rather turns back on itself with an endlessly generative effect. What is more, the infinite generative potential that the "thoughts" themselves hold, as with himself in love, is predicated, again, necessarily, on continence: the thoughts "have a certain individuality and separate existence, aye, personality" that is the precondition for the generation of yet further thought, which is to say of more love. That they are "disconnected thoughts" "juxtaposed" "by chance," creates the condition for the

accidental, profuse, superfluous generation of more love. In short, "Thought beget thought," so that the very practice of thinking and writing contains the erotic force of sexuality without being vitiated in an economy of purposeful procreation.

There is an alternate, erotic economy, however, to the round of sensuality that leads to imaginative fertility, and the poetic practice that renders that imagination into words, predicated on the multiplicity of fertile images and effects in nature. This is an alternate erotic economy of imagination and poetry in that images of nature's fertility that we have seen thus far, and the generative force they evoke in Thoreau, clearly transgress the dominant culture's view of sexuality in terms of gender and thus thwart cultural mandates for determinate purpose to generative effects. That is, purposeful procreation, and the model of (hetero)sexuality necessarily built up around it, relies upon the same conception of sexual dimorphism that was reified in nature (or rather, and what is more important to Thoreau, in natural history--the stories and narratives constructed to explain nature) by the Linnaean system of botanic

classification (the nineteenth-century supersession of this system notwithstanding). When Thoreau poses the self-stimulating, fertilizing force of nature on his imagination and poetic practice, distinctions of gender--a "necessary" masculinity for himself, a "necessary" femininity for nature--become confounded. He may trope freely on any natural, sexual element irrespective of gender, so that we have no--need no--consistently gendered Thoreau or Nature, only the erotic capacity of an imagery freed of cultural impositions of sexual use and telos.

For example, many of the passages we have read in the chapter seem to suggest at once a feminized nature,--in one context "but a stepmother," in another context profusely ovulating, menstruating and lactating a thunderstorm--and (paradoxically, but only so if we hold to an erotic imagery predicated on heterosexual order and telos) a feminized Thoreau, receiving the fertile power of nature via the senses and, as a chance result, laying the eggs of his imagination--a sympathetic mimesis of imagery that is literally homo-sexual. But his use of images of gendered sexual capacity for both nature and his poetic imagination may take on as well a "heterosexual"

organization, if I may call it so without evoking a foundational heterosexual order, as in the following passage:

What a faculty must that be which can paint the most barren landscape and humblest life in glorious colors! It is pure and invigorated senses reacting on a sound and strong imagination. Is not that the poet's case? The intellect of most men is barren. They neither fertilize nor are fertilized. It is the marriage of the soul with Nature that makes the intellect fruitful, that gives birth to imagination. When we were dead and dry as the highway, some sense which has been healthily fed will put us in relation with nature, in sympathy with her; some grains of fertilizing pollen, floating in the air, fall on us, and suddenly the sky is all one rainbow, is full of music and fragrance and flavor. The man of intellect only, the prosaic man, is a barren, staminiferous flower; the poet is a fertile and perfect flower. (2: 413-14; 21 Aug. 1851)

At initial glance a "barren landscape" reads as a barren nature. We recall, however, that the beauty of a landscape arises from his imaginative faculty which is "but a certain fertility in me," so that the question of barrenness or fertility in a nature too easily presumed feminine reverts back to the state of Thoreau's imagination, with its feminized fertility generalized in the passage as "the poet's case." And indeed the capacity for poetic genius is asserted again in the now-familiar terms of an aesthetic, sensual knowledge, where the "pure and invigorated senses" operate in conjunction with the imagination--a conjunction described by Emerson as the "marriage of the soul with Nature" and now literalized by Thoreau. The effect is cast in terms similar to the metaphor of the overflowing Nile; once "dead and dry," we enter a relation with nature, via the senses and clearly specified as sympathetic, so that "the sky is all one rainbow, is full of music and fragrance and flavor."

As Thoreau's reception of Nature is itself feminized in this passage, so does Nature in this instance suddenly become gendered masculine: in sympathetic relation with nature, his senses are not just fed but inseminated by

nature, by "some grains of fertilizing pollen, floating in the air." And once again, this fertilization is figured as accidental, the superfluous effect of sexual dispersal-- the grains of pollen "float" in the air and happen to "fall" on our senses. This "healthy" feeding of the senses points to the condition of the perceiver, who if healthy-- whole, continent--may be put in relation with nature and in turn "give birth to imagination." Thus again it is through continence that Thoreau arrives at the poetic genius of a unified sensibility, recovering for the idea of aesthetic knowledge both meanings of the word "aesthetic", the conjunction of sense and intellect.

This nature, in this instance gendered masculine, represents--provides the occasion for--only one inflection of the trope of sexuality spun onto a nature ultimately wild, unnamable, unclassifiable. When we return to the imaginative force effected by Thoreau's relation with an inseminating nature, we find neither a masculine nor a feminine Thoreau, but instead a poet as "a fertile and perfect flower," that is, hermaphroditic; not merely staminiferous--barren--like the prosaic man, but, like nature, capable of containing a multitude of sexual

capacities and generative effects. Thus it is clear that, for Thoreau, "fertility" is a fertile metaphor; it holds multiple signficatory potential in terms of gender, agency and teleology. We have seen his use of the idea of fertility as a metaphor for imaginative production primarily in terms of female fertility; through a special sensual awareness and receptivity, the poet's intellect is fertilized and gives birth to imagination, which in turn gives birth to art. But, given his image of the poet as a perfect--that is, hermaphroditic--flower, we might expect Thoreau's poet to hold a seminal, equally creative force.

As an imaginative trope akin to the figures of female fertility, and as we might expect with Thoreau, images of seminal fertility are cast in terms of chance, accident and superfluity; consider the following journal passage which describes Thoreau's imagination in perception:

I am like a bee searching the livelong day for the sweets of nature. Do I not impregnate and intermix the flowers, produce rare and finer varieties by transferring my eyes from one to another? I do as naturally and as joyfully, with my own humming music, seek honey all the day.

(2: 470; 7 Sep. 1851)

Seminal fertility in this passage operates at one remove from Thoreau; here he is not talking about his own seminal force but the accidental insemination or generative force his perceptions achieve--a masculine counterpart to the spontaneous generation of thought begetting thought in the nest of the Journal. Thoreau compares his vision as he walks in the woods to a bee's search for honey. By accident rather than by intent, the bee pollinates flowers; so too does Thoreau look for the sweet honey of flowers, and in the process effects an imaginative cross-pollination where he "impregnate[s] and intermix[es] the flowers, produce[s] rare and finer varieties" by naturally, joyfully--merely--"transferring my eyes from one to another." Here mere pleasure--the same condition as erotic love relieved of procreative intent--is the natural goal and reproduction the incidental effect, involving not an expense of seed per se but rather the profuse, excessive dispersion of seed on Thoreau's part; by maintaining the dissemination of fertility as the superfluous effect of pleasure, he is able to remain at once chaste, fertile and sexual.

While the metaphor of the bee holds up an imaginative Thoreau as an inseminating, though not seminal, go-between ranging among "the sweets of nature," other passages more clearly refer to Thoreau's own seminal force. And while images of seminal fertility apply equally to the generative force of Thoreau's imagination, they tend also to be used more to describe Thoreau's poetic practice, capturing a different erotic valence and significatory force than the images of feminine fertility, a "staminiferous" counterpart to receptive fertility that together describe the "perfect flower" that is the poet. In the early years of his journal, Thoreau writes:

My Journal is that of me which would else spill over and run to waste, gleanings from the field which in action I reap. I must not live for it, but in it for the gods. . . .They are my correspondent, to whom daily I send off this sheet. . . .It is always a chance scrawl, and commemorates some accident,--as great as earthquake or eclipse. (1: 206-07; 8 Feb. 1841)

Though in the extended passage the overarching image for his journal record is leaves, his "gleanings from the

field," his fluid rendering of these gleanings into "that of me which would else spill over and run to waste" suggests the vital fluid that, as we have seen, he is so concerned to conserve via continence. In this instance, his figure for avoiding the waste and spillage of his imaginative and generative fertility relies on the vehicle of seminal fluid and an evocation of the then-contemporary discourse against masturbation (e.g. Sylvester Graham's Lectures to Young Men noted in Part One). Yet in his re-valuation of this cultural economy, the weight his language carries is not so much anti-masturbatory (after all, he is discussing his pleasure, the evidence of what he reaps "in action") as it is anti-onanistic, decrying the waste of seed--or rather decrying an order of thought that would consider a "chance scrawl" wasteful. That is, following the lesson of sympathetic love, Thoreau must reconceive the affections and pleasures that the self "gleans" through the daily round of "contact" in the field of perceptions into something other than fungible tokens in an economy of exchange--affection for domestic and social stability, labor for gain, pleasure for production, sperm for reproduction. Thus Thoreau envisions the Journal

as the superfluous effect of sensual continence, of an integrity that averts expectations for exchange and return, so that "that of me which would else spill over and run to waste" is re-conceived through journal-keeping as the evidence of jouissance, as he comes to understand the Journal to represent "a Journal, a book that shall contain all your joy, your ecstasy," the very superfluous effect of poetic practice.

This becomes clear when Thoreau asserts that "I must not live for it, but in it for the gods." He reaffirms this other order of conceiving pleasure for pleasure's sake, living in the pleasure of his journal-keeping practice, rather than for the Journal; this creates the god-like condition that elsewhere, as we have seen, characterizes continent lovers, where lovers become "as gods to one another." Though Thoreau might seem to assert a metanarrative or goal--an end--to his journal project by living "in it for the gods," this goal is in fact the goallessness of Thoreau's erotic ideal, the condition through which he may achieve a condition of sustained pleasure. As we have seen, the god-like condition among friends comes about through sympathy, the relation where

two people are one in their similitude yet two in their own continence--no willed, purposeful exchange is admitted in this relation. So too when Thoreau says he wants to live in his journal for the gods, he means that by perpetuating the condition of his ejaculatory perceptions he enters the same god-like condition as that of his ideal lover, the sublime, transcendent, ecstatic state of erotic love, and he may then "correspond" with these gods.

In other words, the journal becomes Thoreau's evidence for an eroticized aesthetic life which aims toward no finality, which has neither a productive nor an unproductive goal. Like the bee's pollinating gleaning of honey, it--the journal and the alternative eroticism it stands for--is something at once natural, accidental, and sublime "as great as earthquake or eclipse," his "chance scrawl" still having the incidental, productive, generative effect of begetting more thought.

As the above passage suggests, Thoreau figures his journal as fertile with ejaculatory potential, yet queerly, even within the metaphor, in a way other than determinately procreative. He recognizes his seminal vitality, another mark, as we have seen, of his

consanguine relation with the rest of a generative nature, and contours the signifiatory force of his physical relation in terms of the sympathy of love, so that he may oppose the "waste" of seminal fertility otherwise channeled into purposeful sexuality into the sustained, goalless pleasure of continent love. In this way, and particularly during the years of his major revisions to Walden, Thoreau cultivates the symbiotic relation between his model of human love and friendship and its sensual counterpart, his love of nature, into an alternative erotics of writing as an account of "perfect"--hermaphroditic--poetic genius.

I have suggested that Thoreau's use of seminal imagery in describing poetic practice serves him differently, carries a different erotic valence, than the images of feminine fertility and receptivity. This is due in part to the dominant culture's highly economized discourse of purposeful use of seed, an anti-erotic discourse that Thoreau must subvert in order to re-eroticize creative force. As the Walden project drew to a close, Thoreau made the following observation:

From the experience of late years I should say

that a man's seed was the direct tax of his race. It stands for my sympathy with my race.

When the grain chiefly is nourished, and not the affections, the seed becomes merely excremental.

(6: 483; 28 Aug. 1854)

We know from Resistance to Civil Government that Thoreau will deny his tax to "any incorporated society which I have not joined" (402). A man's seed, however, his seminal vitality, is the consanguine, generative coin that allies the society of the human race, like blood, eggs and viscera. His semen marks Thoreau's similitude with other living things, "stands for my sympathy with my race." But just as the question of how his tax is spent, and more important his complicity in the collecting and spending of this tax, lays the argument of Resistance, so here the question of how his seed is spent determines how it might serve as the sign of his "sympathy" with his race, that is, how it might serve at once his continence and the superfluous, generative force of his poetic practice.

To re-envision the spending of seed, Thoreau tropes on the multiple significations of "seed" as embryo as well as semen; that is, it refers to the potential plant life

contained by a seed. In this turn, a man's seed is grain, the fruit of his labor, part of which is used to pay the tax which his society enacts. As others return part of their labor, so does Thoreau, his labor being "the experience of late years" or the writing of Walden, and the fruit of this labor being the book itself. This seed, now metaphorized as grain, is potentially food--and as such eventually excremental. What would make the grain more than excremental, for Thoreau, depends on how it is nourished. Man's fertile--productive, generative--potential will remain "merely excremental" if man's physical appetite chiefly is nourished, if his "grain" is nourished--inflected, determined--for value in an economy of trade and consumption. When the affections are nourished, however--when we attend to our love and suspend the dissipating "getting after things"--our seed becomes more than excremental; it conserves its incidental, superfluous yet profusely generative force, sustaining our sympathy with humankind. By the time Thoreau writes this passage, having finished Walden, he understands better not just the social relation entered by writing the book, but his erotic investment in his labor, the value accorded it

as an act of sympathetic affection.

Two years before his death, we find Thoreau still translating his love of nature into an erotics of writing, sustaining the conjunction of seminal production, writing and sympathy. He writes in his journal:

The fruit a thinker bears is sentences,--
statements or opinions . . . I occasionally
awake in the night simply to let fall ripe a
statement which I had never consciously
considered before, and as surprising and novel
and agreeable to me as anything can be. As if we
only thought by sympathy with the universal
mind, which thought while we were asleep.

(13: 238; 1 Apr. 1860)

Thoreau's nocturnal emission of sentences comes "by sympathy with the universal mind,"¹⁸ understood by now to be an erotic relation, so that waking to let fall his fruit is "as surprising and novel and agreeable to me as

¹⁸ This idea strongly prefigures the pragmatic "it thinks" of William James in The Principles of Psychology (1: 224-25), a phrase that not only encompasses the stream of consciousness but also "cover[s] sensation and thought indiscriminately" (1: 185-86)--the entire aesthetic circuit of constant "Contact!" with the world.

anything can be." If the images don't seem to correspond here--that is, if Thoreau is troping on the effect of a wet dream but discharging fruit-sentences rather than semen-sentences--it is because he has converted again his idea of his own seed from seminal to embryonic. Thus his seed is fully viable in a way other than by conjunction with a female gamete; indeed, the point is that it is viable on its own, emerging as an effect of sympathy, without needing anything else to complete it.

The round of relations that comprises Thoreau's writing of nature, relations between, on the one hand, nature and Thoreau, and between Thoreau and imaginative production on the other, are clearly predicated on an elaborate imagery of sexual fertility that thwarts dominant cultural codes of determinant sexuality. Instead, Thoreau grants his imagination a polysexual, polysemic capacity that is, importantly and necessarily, given his model of "peculiar love," ancillary--attendant, accidental, superfluous--to the polymorphous eroticization of the continent body and its senses, the only precondition for productive genius. In terms of human aesthetic life, the perception of nature--the

inevitability of Contact!--holds only fertile potential. It is the qualification of nature--its natural histories, its poetic rendering--that marks the human self's full erotic relation with nature.

I return again to Thoreau's question cited earlier, "What is this beauty in the landscape but a certain fertility in me?" I hope in this discussion to have characterized his certain fertility. In the following discussion, I would like to consider the first part of his question, "What is this beauty in the landscape," understood now to mean, "What is this love he writes? What is this beauty in the text?" And what happens to us when we read Thoreau's writing of nature, or more precisely, when we witness his erotic engagement with nature and receive his pleasure? Though by all accounts Thoreau's efforts to find "some continent man" were frustrated during his life, his writing carries the sensual knowledge learned by nature's tutelage back into human relations, to a way of knowing men:

As is a man's intellectual character, is not such his physical after all? Can you not infer from knowing the intellectual characters of two

which is most tenacious of life, which would die the hardest and will live the longest, which is the toughest, which has most brute strength, which the most passive endurance? Methinks I could to some extent infer these things.

(2: 414; 21 Aug. 1851)

Thoreau's thought in this passage follows the path of descent familiar from Walden, where Thoreau searches for "bottoms" and we are advised to let the mind descend into the body. The intellectual character he refers to evokes the distinction drawn between prosaic intellect and poetic genius. The character he values in this passage runs parallel with his idea of love--vigorous, vital, strong and receptive--so that in an inverse of his more common formula, where a healthy sensuality yields poetic genius, here poetic genius points to a healthy sensuality. That we might "to some extent infer these things," might recognize this sensuality in a man by his intellectual character--in other words, that we might recognize an ideal lover who is at once continent and sympathetic--transforms the practice of reading the fruit of such an intellect, as we shall see, into the occasion of our own sensual, erotic, self-stimulating recognition.

Part Four: Poetics

. . . ye fools, the theme is nothing, the life is
everything.

(Journal 9: 121; 18 Oct. 1856)

I began this study with the proposition that Thoreau's writing project provides an account of what he calls his "peculiar love." In brief, his writing reflects the cultivation and practice of an order of thought predicated on an erotic engagement with the world, a love relation with the whole of the Emersonian "NOT ME" comprising nature, art, other men and one's own body. This is an alternate, erotic order of knowing the world that Thoreau poses counter to a system of knowledge endemic in Western culture governed by the intellectual, rational "understanding." Thoreau's alternate order of thought seeks to avert the purposeful, intellectual ratiocination, containment and domination of natural "phenomena" (in its broadest construction) as well as the social systems and cultural practices built upon this domination. In its

place, Thoreau envisions an engagement of mind (or, equally, self or Emersonian ME) with the world that operates within what Herbert Marcuse in Eros and Civilization calls "the aesthetic dimension," the space where mind and matter, sense and sensibility, intellect and affection are not divided in a bid for domination, but rather merged into a unified sensibility. Marcuse posits this as a necessarily erotic engagement with the world, effected by a re-eroticization of the body's sensual capacities that have been repressed and cathected into the service of culture-building structures, e.g. those designed to perpetuate human reproduction and labor. By drawing parallels between Marcuse's cultural critique and Thoreau's in Walden, I argued that the redemptive ideal posed by the liberation of Marcuse's eros is the same redemption Thoreau poses in Walden for the famous "lives of quiet desperation." What is more, though Marcuse sees this redemption as only an ideal, contemporary queer theory provides an alternate perspective for viewing such "peculiar love" as one epistemological consequence of lives--experience, identifications of self--that run

athwart a naturalized heterosexual order, providing the scope to consider Thoreau's Journal project of self-accounting, his very poetic practice, as witness to a queer erotic aesthetic.¹⁹

From this preliminary understanding of eros and of Thoreau's perspective, I have sought to trace the terms and method of his "peculiar love" as it operates in two modes: human affectional relations and Thoreau's relation

¹⁹ Marcuse's erotic-aesthetic dimension is clearly utopian; indeed, as I have noted, he denies any real manifestation under current conditions of the free Eros except as neurotic. What passes for neurosis in Marcuse, however, translates for Hocquenghem into a paradigm for "homosexual" desire and brings us closer to a way of considering Thoreau's poetic practice as queer. Even with Hocquenghem, however, the premise of a "free Eros" and the condition of a universal "desire" is questioned in queer theory. So, regarding Marcuse, Michael Warner in "Walden's Erotic Economy" cites criticism "by Foucault and others for implying an intrinsically liberating sexuality, a pure culture of the polymorphous" and asserts that "the question remains open as to whose erotics will count as Eros" (158); the identical critique could be made of Hocquenghem's liberationist rhetoric. (Judith Butler, in turn, in Gender Trouble, finds Foucault maintaining "an unacknowledged emancipatory ideal" in his own theory [94]). Nonetheless, what Warner in his article and I in this discussion assert through Marcuse and Hocquenghem, though to different purposes, is not Thoreau's recovery of but rather his idea of a utopian, redemptive erotics and its attendant themes "that find their full theorization in writers like Marcuse" (158) and Hocquenghem.

to nature. I have shown how these two kinds of relations share the same dynamic, where a condition of sustained erotic pleasure is sought (with human lovers) and achieved (with nature) via a sympathetic relation shared among continent entities--Thoreau, lovers, nature.

With regard to human love relations, I understand Thoreau's ideal of continence to signify a private, individual, first-person integrity of self unmediated by social claims, countering the vitiating effect of a conventional love placed in the service of a culture-building marriage, or conventional sympathy placed in the service of reform--in short, countering love placed in the service of another end rather than love for love's sake. In this way, lovers may both offer and enjoy a sensual, aesthetic relation with each other, may share each other's "fruit and flower" as the gratuitous, superfluous effect of a continent life unconstrained by social claims on the affections--an enjoyment of love for love's sake. Thoreau characterizes this mutual enjoyment as "sympathy," now understood to be the chance affinity shared between like-minded, like-continent people, whereby they become at once

"two and one."

Continence of self necessarily yields a view of phenomena apart from the self as equally continent and thus known only in terms of the relation established between perceiver and perceived. In this regard, Thoreau recognizes and receives a Nature beyond the bounds of human intervention, "wild, untamable" and ultimately unnamable--"denaturalized" and superfluous when relieved of man-made "natural" economies, systems and orders. Nature then becomes a wild, potent, fertile force, and its effects are received--in continence--through a specifically sensual knowledge (within Marcuse's "aesthetic dimension") as beauty for beauty's sake, pleasure for pleasure's sake. Unlike the difficulties encountered in finding "some continent man" unburdened by a "barren" "prosaic intellect," with whom Thoreau might share the pleasures of sympathetic love, Nature offers Thoreau a world of sensual pleasure unburdened by the self-imposed "desperation" or blind allegiance to the "factitious cares" of the "common mode of living" he sees in human life around him. He shares a sympathy with nature

by virtue of his consanguinity with nature, by virtue of his body's vital, sensual receptivity. The only bar to enjoying this sympathy is the culturally-mandated subjugation of body to intellect; by letting "the mind descend into the body and redeem it," as he advises in Walden, and thereby allowing the "knowledge" of the senses to conjoin with imagination, Thoreau transcribes his pleasure in the world, putting forth the "chance scrawl" of his writing as jouissance, a record of his love, the mark of "poetic genius."

In considering the eros of Thoreau's poetic project I will focus on the relation-making capacity of a writing practice that foregrounds continence and its extravagant effects; for as we have seen, the same forces that for Thoreau induce and generate love among lovers, and love between the perceptive self and nature, Thoreau writes into his expression of themes that have come to him unsought, with all the "noise and fire and tumult" of the phenomenological world relieved of rational order, and which have "kindled a flame" in his mind with the "copulating and generating force of love." In the

following I will discuss how Thoreau's poetic practice recapitulates the continence he establishes for himself and his themes, and I will argue that his ideal reader enters his texts in continence, so that not only does reading become for Thoreau erotic, the relation Thoreau seeks with his reader is as well the erotic relation enjoyed among his peculiar lovers.

We have seen Thoreau advise writers "only to yield to love" rather than to write on chosen themes; this position urges the same eroticized receptivity as Thoreau's continent "great and solitary heart" that will "love alone, without the knowledge of its object." The epigraph above restates this disregard for the object per se of our affections, whether it be a human lover or a theme devised for nature, though in this instance Thoreau is now addressing the condition of the reader:

All that interests the reader is the depth and intensity of the life excited. We touch our subject but by a point which has no breadth, but the pyramid of our experience, or our interest in it, rests on us by a broader or narrower

base. That is, man is all in all, Nature
 nothing, but as she draws him out and reflects
 him. (9: 121; 18 Oct. 1856)

Again it is not, finally, the theme that is important, and certainly not Nature per se, but the very practice--the life--of words and our reading them that contains "the depth and intensity of the life excited." In this readerly relation, as with all of Thoreau's other love relations, our ability to receive this "excitement" is predicated upon our continence. When Thoreau maintains that "We touch our subject but by a point" he evokes the "perfect sphericity," the wholeness and integrity, of his figure for continence. No continent entity can lose part of its self and maintain its perfect wholeness; as a sphere, then, we would only "touch our subject but by a point which has no breadth." The "point" in this passage, though present otherwise in the contact of continent "spheres," is figured as the tip of "the pyramid of our experience, or our interest in it" which "rests on us by a broader or narrower base." The point is the point: in continence we do not trade, exchange, admit or substitute any part of

our integral self, our experience for another; through continence we--our experience, our life--is "all in all, Nature nothing" but a schema for our love, "as she draws him out and reflects him." When we disregard the object of our interest and consider instead, continently, the condition of our interest--our being-in-love--it matters little whether we are talking to a friend, basking in a summer scene, writing a journal or reading Walden; we are all grouped together by our continence and the awareness of sympathy that continence induces, and the relations we establish in continence are enjoyed as the receptivity of love.

Such continence on the reader's part would lead to something akin to the Romantic "Negative Capability" offered by Keats, where we are "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (193). Upon initial consideration "Negative Capability" might suggest a capacity diametrically opposed to continence; how could an integrity of self admit the unfamiliar? But again this is precisely the paradox and virtue of continence: it is the

"irritable reaching after fact and reason" that betrays a measure of self-abnegation, where we give up our integrity for a system of "fact" and "reason" that ultimately serves not our pleasure but another (transcendent) end, or another's power to dominate, that leads again to the "lives of quiet desperation" that think there is no other way to live. Rather suspend the "mere intellect" that sustains only half a life--"staminiferous and barren"--and open our being entire--mind and body--to the "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts" and unimagined pleasures of the extravagant world.

Just as sympathetic love requires the suspension of cultural scripts for human affections, and just as love of nature requires the suspension of scripts for natural economy, so too must Thoreau and his reader suspend the "fact and reason" of writing and reading, conventions of and expectations for cohesion and unity--a seamless transparency--in narrative and poetic practice. This has proved a difficult challenge in the history of Thoreau criticism, beginning with Emerson's comment that to read Thoreau, particularly "his old fault of unlimited

contradiction" left him feeling "nervous and wretched" (Journals 9: 9-10). Yet this particular comment has influenced the direction of much of the critical attention paid to Thoreau's poetics over the past twenty-five years (in conjunction with the rising current of post-structuralist analysis), beginning most famously with Stanley Cavell's The Senses of Walden (1972) and later Walter Benn Michaels' "Walden's False Bottoms" (1977). Certain critics since then--H. Daniel Peck and Sharon Cameron among them, as we have seen--have tended to depart from a tradition of formalist accounts of Thoreau's poetic unity initiated by F.O. Matthiessen in American Renaissance and have focused instead on the nature and function of Thoreau's difficult, sometimes jarring and contradictory style, his inducements to nervousness and wretchedness.²⁰

²⁰ Much of the criticism from the 1970s and 1980s collected in Harold Bloom's two anthologies, Henry David Thoreau, Modern Critical Views (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) and Henry David Thoreau's Walden, Modern Critical Interpretations (New York: Chelsea House, 1987) reflects this perspective; so too, for example, do Richard Bridgman in Dark Thoreau (Lincoln, NE: U of NE P, 1982), Barbara Johnson in "A Hound, a Bay Horse, and a Turtle Dove: Obscurity in Walden," A World of Difference (Baltimore:

None of these critical accounts, however, has considered how Thoreau's aesthetic--his relations of perception, affection and imagination--is shaped by his love, what it means for both reader and writer to "yield only to love," that to yield requires the sensualization of thought, and that this must necessarily inform Thoreau's poetic practice. My intention thus far has been not only to illustrate Thoreau's peculiar schema for love and its extravagant implications, but also that its very peculiarity, importantly the estranging effects of continence, are paradigmatically queer, so that the nervous and wretched feelings readers continue to witness arise in part in response to an extravagant, alien, discomfiting erotics. I wish then in this final discussion to bring forth the queer erotic valence inherent in recent

Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), and Henry Golemba in Thoreau's Wild Rhetoric (New York: New York UP, 1990).

Some license, it should be noted, has been taken with Emerson's comment. It appears in his journal entry dated August 25, 1843 in reference to Thoreau's essay "A Winter Walk," an early piece. Still, Thoreau's "old fault of unlimited contradiction" (9) was, if anything, nurtured rather than limited in subsequent work, particularly in Walden.

discussions of Thoreau's poetic practice.

Cavell's study of Walden as a book concerned primarily with its own writing, and our own reading of it, is remarkable not only in its far-reaching consideration (extravagant, even, I would say, in a sexy, Thoreauvian way) of the function of Thoreau's poetic and narrativistic paradoxes, but also, to my mind, for framing certain moral implications of Thoreau's writing and our reading as predicated on Thoreau's view of language as continent. Indeed, Cavell's study invokes the very paradox of the at-once continent and extravagant, circumscribed and superfluous, that we have seen at the heart of Thoreau's peculiar loves. At first, in the section "Words," Cavell seems to describe Thoreau's reliance on language as a closed system of determinate meanings, one that would preclude imaginative conjecture and the possibility for extravagant meaning:

Every word the writer uses will be written so as to acknowledge its own maturity, so as to let it speak for itself; and in a way that holds out its experience to us, allows us to experience

it, and allows it to tell us all it knows. (16)

But as we have seen with Thoreau's continent love, where it is not, finally, the object of our love that carries love's significance, as is it not Nature as "symbol of the spirit" that carries Nature's attractive force, so it is not language as, finally, symbol, that holds significant force, but our own relation-making capacity derived necessarily from continence that holds the life--the eros--that using words occasions. Thoreau's practice as a poet, Cavell argues, begins with "his acceptance of this fact about words, his letting them come to him from their own region"--allowing them their continence as he does his orbiting star-lovers, or floating island-lovers--"and then taking that occasion for inflecting them one way instead of another then and there, or for refraining from them then and there; as one may inflect the earth toward beans instead of grass, or let it alone, as it is before you are there" (28). Though writing does in fact provide the occasion and freedom for our conjecturing a writer's meaning, that is not its end; rather it is the very "raising up" of words, "to the light, so to speak, [that]

is the whole thing he does, not the adornment of it." As Marcuse's erotic being circumscribes its own telos, so for Cavell, for Thoreau, "The manner is nothing in comparison with the act" (28). This view of Walden's words as providing the occasion for a mode of being rather than determining an end means that "reading is not merely the other side of writing, its eventual fate; it is another metaphor of writing itself" (28). As for both writer and reader "the theme is nothing, the life is everything," so reading for Thoreau is tantamount to writing, a shared mode of being among writer and reader; and as we have seen Thoreau invest--inspirit, enthuse--his writing with the eros of continent, sympathetic, sensual genius, so may our continent, sympathetic, sensual reading share this eros.

One of Cavell's overarching "senses" of Walden is as a "heroic book," at once epic and scripture, bespeaking Thoreau's effort toward the "bringing of language" to a new nation (13). Thoreau must necessarily view this language as continent; "Until we can speak again," Cavell reads, "our lives and our language betray one another; we can grant to neither of them their full range and

autonomy; they mistake their definitions of one another" (34). Until we are able to grant our lives and our language their continence and realize an autonomy literally "extra-vagant," as Thoreau terms it, in reference to the limits imposed by our rationalizing confusion of knowledge with fact, we will read, if not follow, the exhortations of Thoreau's scripture in part as a prophet's "mandate to create wretchedness and nervousness" (20). Cavell thus describes a poetics of wretchedness and nervousness, one calculated to challenge readers' rational, incontinent expectations for language and narrative, one marked by paradox, ambiguity, extremity, precariousness, radiation, spillage, irreconciliation,²¹ one that will make us, as it has for

²¹ Cavell observes, "the puns and paradoxes, etc., are tips or goads to us to read with subtlety and activity" (28); "This mode of controlling ambiguity shows that our mind is chanced, but not forced, by language" (67); "keep in mind . . . the extremity and precariousness of mood in which he writes" (87); he notes "the powers of affinity among [economic terms] and their radiation into the remainder of language. . . .the spillage of these words over our lives as a whole" (89); "The form of doubt [about Thoreau's writing] is caused partly by the depth of the book's depressions and the height of its elevations, and more nearly, by the absence of reconciliation between them, which may seem evasive or irresolute of the writer"

Emerson and others since, "nervous and wretched to read."

Not coincidentally, considering, as I have, the manner and extent of Thoreau's erotic investment in his writing practice, Cavell's description of Thoreau's poetics aligns strikingly with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's description of the queer. In her essay "Queer and Now," Sedgwick attempts to define (though always provisionally, always indeterminately) the term "queer": "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (8). Read alongside Cavell, Sedgwick's "open mesh" shows the same figures as Cavell's sense of Walden. She seems to describe a poetics of queerness, one which thwarts monolithic signification and which, in doing so, might leave (as, historically, it has left) "readers" feeling "nervous and wretched," a reaction as erotophobic as it is Emersonian. It may seem specious to pair Emerson

(110).

and erotophobia in so brief a context, but I argue that the same expectations for narrative and poetic cohesion that Emerson and others have sought in Thoreau are tantamount to a heterocentric culture's expectations for a seamless, naturalized heterosexuality.

To approach the queer senses of Thoreau's poetics, then, let us consider again one of Sedgwick's qualifications:

There are important senses in which 'queer' can signify only when attached to the first person.

One possible corollary: that what it takes--all it takes--to make the description 'queer' a true one is the impulsion to use it in the first person. (9)

Nowhere in Walden does Thoreau state "I am queer"; on the other hand, Walden itself is queer. A first-person peculiarity governs Walden emphatically from the first page, where Thoreau tells us that "In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference" (325). Thoreau takes care to establish from the outset a

measure of his continence; his point that all narrative implies a first person, whether or not the I is admitted, makes the important suggestion that all representation comes from a particular mind grounded in a particular position and perspective such that omniscience, or, in Sedgwick's terms, monolithic signification, is illusory: "it is, after all," he says, "always the first person that is speaking" (325).

As soon as he announces the inevitability of the I, however, Thoreau troubles this first-person condition. He continues, "I should not talk so much about myself if there were any body else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience" (325). With these lines the reader is faced immediately with Thoreau's play on dissonant and excess meaning. Though "any body" expressed as two words conforms to contemporary usage, the resulting emphasis on "body" captures the peculiar epistemological node we have seen Thoreau rely on in cultivating sensual knowledge; and indeed in Walden it has important epistemological consequences for his subsequent account of

the accounting self. The possibility of knowing any "body," his own as well as an other's, becomes a fundamental consideration in Thoreau's experiment with the self and its relations, notably, as I have considered, at the conclusion of "Higher Laws" where the reader is called upon "to let [the] mind descend into [the] body and redeem it" (500), and importantly, as we shall see, in the chapter "Solitude" where the body becomes "the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections" (429).

Likewise, in the second sentence, Thoreau inflects the word "unfortunately" for excessive and ambivalent meaning. On a level of social exigency embedded (ambivalently, according to Cameron) in Walden as a public narrative, the word seems calculated to signal an apologetic appeal to the reader; however, this "unfortunately" moves in multiple, confusing ways: it is ambiguous in that we do not know if it is unfortunate that he is confined, or unfortunate that his experience is narrow; it is strange in that the inevitable I necessarily confines him or anyone to his or her own experience, as he has already argued; and finally it negates itself, is not

an apology after all if taken literally. That is, it is un-fortunate, it is not by chance or fortune that he offers his own experience in Walden, but rather by choice that Thoreau gives a sincere, first person account rather than sustain an illusion of omniscience. Thoreau emphasizes this choice:

I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men's lives; some such account as he would send to his kindred from a distant land, for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me. (325)

And here again, Thoreau's words are double-edged. An initial gloss might read a sarcastic lament over the dearth of sincere lives in Concord. But the phrase is sincere as well: one who lives and speaks sincerely speaks alone, continently, at a remove from the influence of others. Here, and as with all of his contradictions and paradoxes, Thoreau inflects and tropes a language viewed as continent, autonomous of human life--a language that,

as such, encompasses for Thoreau fact and the real--that, if read in continence, will yield not nervousness and wretchedness but the exquisite, ecstatic pleasure of the petite mort:

If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimeter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career. Be it life or death, we crave only reality. (Walden 400)

Thoreau's "old fault of unlimited contradiction," as Emerson saw it, fronts us, in fact, with sweet, penetrating fact; in its continence--real, autonomous of human life, fact offers us extravagance:

We should offer up our perfect thoughts to the gods daily--our writing should be hymns and psalms. Who keeps a journal is purveyor for the Gods. There are two sides to every sentence; the one is contiguous to me, but the other faces the gods, and no man ever fronted it. When I utter a

thought I launch a vessel which never sails in my wave more, but goes sheer off into the deep. Consequently it demands a godlike insight--a fronting view, to read what was greatly written.
(Miller 212; 13 Jan. 1841)

Thoreau's "perfect thoughts" even at this early date take on the character of continence and its extravagant potential. As his Journal becomes the place to contain all his joy and ecstasy, as he offers those chance scrawls to the gods with a love that makes friends like gods to one another, so his perfect thoughts, his records of autonomous fact, are extravagant. "Extra vagance! it depends on how you are yarded," Thoreau exclaims toward the conclusion of Walden (580). Here his perfect thoughts are un-yarded, without sail, "a vessel which never sails in my wave more, but goes sheer off into the deep"--unless fronted by the god-like insight of a continent lover/reader, who will yield to the penetrating glimmer and sweetness of the fact of Thoreau's jouissance.

Walter Benn Michaels finds Thoreau's craving for a reality autonomous of human life figured in Walden by the

many "bottoms" that Thoreau persistently searches for. In his landmark essay "Walden's False Bottoms," Michaels deconstructs the formalist cohesion of Walden argued by Matthiessen and others by focusing on the characteristically ambivalent uses Thoreau makes of the figure of the bottom. The contradictory assertions of solid, accessible bottoms, bottoms impossible to reach, and bottomlessness altogether emblemize for Michaels Thoreau's search for a point d'appui in nature:

she is an authoritative point d'appui only insofar as she is truly "behind," first, separate, and other. Thus, through most of Walden, when Thoreau is addressing himself to the problems of his search for a cogito, a political and philosophical hard bottom, the human and the natural are conceived as standing in implicit opposition to each other. Nature has a kind of literal authority precisely because she is not one of men's institutions. She serves as the location of values which are real insofar as they are not human creations. (136)

This "opposition" between the human and the natural is precisely the epistemological dilemma that Thoreau witnessed at Katahdin, that Marcuse (through Freud) identifies at the heart of modern western discontent and that Thoreau subsequently, through his poetic practice, urges recognition of in the hearts of his "lives of quiet desperation." For Michaels, however, this paradox of "our ability to recognize something" as "real"--a solid bottom in Nature--but "which is defined precisely by its strangeness to us"--its bottomlessness (137-38)--is impossible to resolve, thus presenting us with a craving impossible to meet, a desire impossible to satisfy. "No wonder," Michaels concludes, "the game makes us nervous" (146).

The resistance to resolution that Michaels finds in Walden leads him to consider Cavell's readerly resolutions of Walden's contradictions as simply a permutation of the old formalist cohesion: "the unity which was claimed first for the personality of the author, then for the formal structure of the text itself, now devolves upon us the reader" so that "the coherence that the formalists

understood as the defining characteristic of the text becomes instead the defining characteristic of the reader, and the unity which was once claimed for the object itself is now claimed for the reader's experience of it" (144). Though Michaels recognizes with Cavell that Thoreau breaks down hierarchies into contradictory alternatives in order to show readers not only that we have choices, but to insist upon our making them, Michaels insists that Cavell simply reinscribes these hierarchies in Walden's readers. Though we are forced to choose--to read figuratively, according to Cavell--the breaking down of hierarchies that necessitates choice "serves at the same time to undermine the rationale we might give for any particular choice. If there is no hierarchy of values, what authority can we appeal to in accounting for our decisions?" (145)

My answer, it should be clear, is that Thoreau appeals to another order of value predicated, as we have seen, on a superfluous anti-economy of love that is gratuitous, whose "accounts are kept by single-entry," where the only authority is the continent heart of a reader who loves "without the knowledge of its object."

This is a queer love, requiring a queer reader, requiring Thoreau to queer his reader. Cavell helps us to see how yielding to Thoreau's contradictory poetics reveals the autonomy of language and so disengages it from service to any kind of communal standard or, by implication, any accepted metanarrative. Thoreau sets up Walden as a purely idiosyncratic expression or inflection of language, and he asks of readers "that none will stretch the seams in putting on the coat, for it may do good service to him whom it fits" (325). The seams will inevitably be stretched, of course, (nervously, wretchedly) by those readers who expect from Walden a prescription for living. The coat of Walden, however, is not seamless, cannot represent a universal antidote to desperate living but rather one singular perspective the very writing and reading of which will gap, showing lapses and excesses of meaning, if stretched to conform to a general standard of value.

In this sense, and as all of Cavell's senses of Walden assert, both the writing and reading of Walden foreground its/our own performativity; in this sense,

Thoreau performs the kind of anti-foundationalist queering that Judith Butler applies to gender in Gender Trouble. Butler argues that "The injunction to be a given gender," like the assumed injunction that Thoreau cautions readers against to be like him at Walden, to wear his coat, "produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated" (145). These failures are inevitable, as Thoreau, like Butler, is well aware: so for Butler the political "task" her study concludes with "is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (148); likewise, the task that Cavell reads Thoreau setting before us, "at once philosophical, religious, literary, and . . . political" is to displace the norms--the transparency--of language and narrative, "To get us to ask the questions" regarding how we spend our time as we read, and, faced with a text that poses a radical proliferation of choices, to find ourselves alone, estranged (47-49). From this displaced

position we may feel nervous and wretched, or we may realize "that what is most intimate is what is furthest away; the realization of 'our infinite relations,' our kinships, is an endless realization of our separateness" (54). Walden is true only in the continence of its language, in the estrangement this language induces, in the performativity of its writing and our reading that our estranged condition necessitates, and in the most intimate relations this continence establishes--all of which is to say, Walden is true only in its queerness. To know not nervousness and wretchedness but the pleasure of Thoreau's text, to enter the most intimate relation when we read, we must be as well continent, peculiar, queer readers.

Sedgwick notes that "'Queer' seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation" (9). This, rather than prescribing good living, is much more the undertaking of Walden, a task which the event of reading Walden replicates. The I of the first page indicates the particularity of Walden, and both the experiment at Walden

and the writing of Walden stand as performative acts of self-perception. This aspect of Walden becomes clear in the passage cited earlier, where in "Solitude" Thoreau casts his body as "the scene . . . of thoughts and affections." Here, Thoreau considers the condition of self-perception that, as we have seen, governs so much of his journal record of his reception of nature: "I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another" (429). Thoreau divides his self here into scene, instanced by the body and its sensual capacity, and the resulting thought and affection for which his self as scene holds place. Importantly, as a preface to this account of doubleness, Thoreau notes in Walden that "We are not wholly involved in Nature" (429), so that, as if replicating his profound, seminal recognition atop Mount Katahdin, thought and affection are in effect denaturalized, animating a performance for which the self-as-body is the scene.

As his Katahdin experience was a disturbing

preliminary to a fruitful recognition of the contenance of nature, so in this passage Thoreau continues with a generative disruption of identity--a definitive queer move--in shifting instead to a consideration of perspective: "However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it; and that is no more I than it is you" (429). Once again, we are presented with a paradox: Thoreau seems here to contradict the univocal I of the first page as well as the solitude of the chapter, suggesting that the account is given by a spectator-Thoreau who has taken note of the Walden experiment and who is no more Thoreau than you or I. In yielding authority over the account to the spectator who takes note of the experience, Thoreau opens himself to a filiation of readership in a daisy-chain of analogy: Thoreau's accounting is to his experience as our reading or spectatorship is to his experience of accounting. The result is a collapse of value-granting hierarchies through a queer grouping of reader/lovers, where subjectivity is

not so much shared as one, but rather pulsates between reader and writer, where the idiosyncratic subject of Walden admits the reconstitution of his experience through the experience of the reading subject.

There is an eros to this filiation of readership that is precisely the fertile, generative effect of poetic genius--indeed, it is the "creation of another order" that Thoreau erects in the gap between the sensing I and the reading I. The passage on the doubleness of self-accounting was translated verbatim from a journal entry dated August 8, 1852 into the fourth draft of Walden, a draft which marks a striking departure from the more straightforward account of life at Walden which characterized the initial drafts, to a richer engagement with questions of self-accounting, representation, and the narrative demands of readership.²² In the same journal

²² J. Lyndon Shanley's invaluable The Making of Walden suggests this kind of revision, though with some ambivalence. Although Shanley acknowledges that "Walden is the result of a gradual re-creation of his experience rather than simply a recounting of that experience as he had entered it in his journal when it happened" (5), he views the revision of Walden as enlarging a house from within, "without destroying the fundamental character or any considerable portion of the original" (6).

entry, immediately prior to this passage, Thoreau describes his experience reading the Persian poet Sadi, which I quote at length:

I know, for instance, that Sadi entertained once identically the same thought that I do, and thereafter I can find no essential difference between Sadi and myself. He is not Persian, he is not ancient, he is not strange to me. By the identity of his thoughts with mine he still survives. It makes no odds what atoms serve us. Sadi possessed no greater privacy or individuality than is thrown open to me. He had no more interior and essential and sacred self than can come naked into my thought this moment. Truth and a true man is something essentially public, not private. If Sadi were to come back to claim a personal identity with the historical Sadi, he would find there were too many of us; he could not get a skin that would contain us all. The symbol of a personal identity preserved in this sense is a mummy from the catacombs,--a

whole skin, it may [be], but no life within it. By living the life of a man is made common property. By sympathy with Sadi I have embowelled him. In his thought I have a sample of him, a slice from his core, which makes it unimportant where certain bones which the thinker once employed may lie; but I could not have got this without being equally entitled to it with himself. The difference between any man and that posterity amid whom he is famous is too insignificant to sanction that he should be set up again in any world as distinct from them. Methinks I can be as intimate with the essence of an ancient worthy as, so to speak, he was with himself. (4: 290; 8 Aug. 1852)

Schematized through the metaphorical lens of anal eroticism, this remarkable passage foregrounds the erotic issues inherent in Thoreau's project of self-accounting and filiation, to use Sedgwick's terms, issues which characterize a queer perspective: a decentered self, polymorphous eroticism, alternate modes of filiation,

self-generation, place of the body, collapse of identity, collapse of the distinction between public and private. As we saw in the spectator-double passage which followed this paragraph, self is bifurcated into body on the one hand as generic "scene," and thought and affection on the other, so that the practice of conjoining thought with scene becomes as constitutive of self as it is constitutive of phenomena. Thoreau seems to arrive at this schema through his experience receiving the poet Sadi's thought. Since thought can be received, in this case by reading, so, then, can self; only the scene is shifted. The notion of personal identity--personal "scenes"--which separates writer and reader collapses, so that Thoreau ecstatically finds "no essential difference between Sadi and myself"--they become as lovers in Hocquenghem's group erotic mode. For Sadi to have made his thought available to another is an act of self-preservation--or, better, an act that perpetuates pleasure--by definition an effect of eros: "By the identity of his thoughts with mine he still survives." Thus the filiation established by reading results in a kind of alternative generativity which stands in for

procreation; through reading, Sadi is engendered in Thoreau. That "It makes no odds what atoms serve us" means that it does not matter which of them serves as the scene of thought and affection. This displaces the body as constitutive of individual identity while at the same time preserving its erotogenic force. Thus Thoreau can trope freely on the body as the site of erotic union, as he does when he figures nature and his reception of it in his writing, and charge his expression with the body's sensual knowledge and polymorphous erotic potential, so that Sadi can "come naked into my thought" entirely, with "no more interior and essential and sacred self" held in reserve, "no greater privacy or individuality than is thrown open to me"--a way for Thoreau to know "any body."

This is not to say that there was no private Sadi or that there is no private Thoreau; after all, he tells us he went to Walden "to transact some private business" (338). Rather, to say that "Truth and a true man is something essentially public, not private" speaks of the condition of speaking, or of writing, just as Walden is about the condition of living, thinking, perceiving,

writing; to assess something as "truth" or someone as a "true man" requires an intersubjective experience, the effect of continent "fact" published and shared, offered and received, written and read. Thoreau describes this intersubjectivity as sympathy, classically seated in the bowels, so that when he says, "By sympathy with Sadi I have embowelled him," he figures Sadi's naked entry as anal penetration, the sweet edge of Sadi's truth penetrating his heart and marrow and resulting in a collapse of identity, a conflation of scenes--ecstasy and jouissance. True to Thoreau's penetrative poetics, though, the figure of the bowels gleams ambivalently over the passage: to embowel means as well to disembowel, to gain from Sadi "a slice from his core" in a marvelous flash of the scimitar along the daisy-chain of filiation. With this figure he remains suspended at the threshold of pleasure, "improving the nick of time" (Walden 336), eating, so to speak, his Sadi and having him too. Sadi's self is re-engendered or regained in Thoreau; to have "a sample of him, a slice from his core" in Sadi's thought renders the text tantamount to a lover's body, making it unimportant

where his real, dead body may lie. And that he "could not have got this without being equally entitled to it" suggests that the identity of thought, the like-mindedness which allows this intercourse is literally, though queerly, "homosexual," the erotic union of like to like.

In the end, Thoreau summarizes the condition of reading: "Methinks I can be as intimate with the essence of an ancient worthy as, so to speak, he was with himself." Given the erotic relation established between reader and writer expressed in this passage, Thoreau implies here that the writer's relation with himself is similarly intimate, similarly erotic. This suggests the erotic force behind the self-spectatorship of double consciousness in the passage's subsequent paragraph. His self-perception as "the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections" summarizes his decentering, ecstatic project where his pleasure becomes presenced, and as his reading of Sadi suggests, such ecstasy would place his body in a state of erotic excitement. The accounting of this experience, as we have seen already in terms of writing nature, becomes for Thoreau "A journal, a book

that shall contain a record of all your joy, your ecstasy" (4: 223; 13 July 1852), and his mediation of the experience, the publication of thought which Walden represents, becomes an erotic invitation to the reader.

The erotic interpenetration that Thoreau figures for his reading of Sadi, like lovers placing their fingers into each others' private coffer, urges serious consideration of the eros attending Thoreau's broader desire to penetrate bottoms in Walden. In "Thoreau's Bottom," Michael Warner specifically correlates the imagery of penetrating bottoms, along with the irresolution that Michaels finds this imagery posing, with an alternate, impossible "erotic economy" where

A number of related but different pressures come to bear on the fantasy-bottom. Because of the way self has been phenomenologically broadened, the possibility of shared subjectivity seems doubtful. The anus of the other can therefore represent a barrier against that possibility, an organ that regulates the other's integrity. Meanwhile, because self is construed as a

possession, a necessarily private right, such a barrier seems to its possessors more desirable than ever. It becomes not just another of the body's functions but an example and metaphor of self-possession. But insofar as a self must be recognized to be valued, the privacy of that barrier seems inhibiting, and the desire for shared subjectivity invites its transgression. In a not merely metaphoric sense, the anus is a key scene for these competing wishes because the body is the site and image for the self's integration and its boundary problems. Under such conditions, the organ that makes the body "continent," to use one of Thoreau's favorite words, becomes the site of the warring imperatives of self and other. It acquires a new fantasy investment, a new organization. Sodomy would never be the same. (77)

True, the anus and its figures provide a key scene for Thoreau's desires, as we saw in the passage describing lovers' access to each others' private coffers, but as I

have shown throughout this study, Thoreau's insistence that continence enables extravagant pleasure, ecstatic self-dispersal, and an erotic conjunction that maintains both two and one, would make the "shared subjectivity" that Warner claims Thoreau desires beyond consideration in Thoreau's schema for love. Warner finds Thoreau's wishes "competing" and "warring" insofar as shared subjectivity is doubtful. But as we have seen, Thoreau seeks not a shared subjectivity but rather an intersubjectivity, e.g. when lovers behold one summer scene and their perceptions become not one but two "bent and double." Indeed, sodomy has never been the same; the erotic economy that Thoreau's continence enables aligns much more closely with Earl Jackson, Jr.'s queer account of gay male sexuality, where

self and other intermesh . . . such that the ejaculation 'lost' is 'regained' in the partner, and vice-versa. Gay male lovemaking is a pulsation of inter-ruptions of subjectivity, of irruptions into the subject's somatic extension of his imaginary selfhood by the subject whose object he has ecstatically become. . . .If the

heterosexual male imaginary includes a defense against ejaculation as loss of self, risk of non-meaning, or abyss of meaning, gay male sexuality (with the anal drives restored) is a circulatory system of expenditure and absorption, of taking/giving and giving/taking.

(118)

Jackson is describing here a scene where partners alternately penetrate one another, but the model applies as well to Thoreau's vision as both reader and writer: as Sadi's thought is regained in Thoreau, object becomes subject; as Thoreau perceives himself, subject becomes object; as Thoreau's thought is regained in us, object becomes subject--"a pulsation of inter-ruptions of subjectivity." That the anal drives are restored is crucial for this model of alternate sexuality; Jackson invokes here Hocquenghem's model of male homosexual desire in which anal eroticism serves to counter official, public heterosexuality as an alternate or queer erotic mode. In Hocquenghem's words:

Every man possesses a phallus which guarantees

him a social role; every man has an anus which is truly his own, in the most secret depths of his own person. The anus does not exist in a social relation, since it forms precisely the individual and therefore enables the division between society and the individual to be made. . . .the anus is over-invested individually because its investment is withdrawn socially. (97)

To invest the anus in a social relation, that is, to recuperate anal eroticism, leads to a collapse of the notion of the individual and the public/private distinction which a socially withdrawn anus upholds. With Thoreau, we see such distinction collapse in terms of personal identity; he is at once public and private in Walden, and he comes to this point not just through his shifting narrative and polysemous poetics but through the metaphor of anal eroticism which charges this poetics. Jeffrey Weeks, in his preface to Hocquenghem's work, acknowledges critics who fault the literalness of Hocquenghem's anal model (clearly, anal eroticism is

neither a necessary component nor the exclusive practice of gay male sexuality) but asserts that its metaphoric power persists:

His theory does . . . have the useful function of challenging the centrality of reproductive sexuality: the anal may be seen as a metaphor for this, and it leads to some suggestive insights. He argues that when the anus recovers its desiring function (i.e. when the Phallus loses its centrality), when laws and rules disappear, group pleasures will appear without the "sacred difference" between public and private, social and individual. (39-40)

Sustained by the same metaphoric power, Thoreau's erotic vision of readership, of filiation through shared thought, emerges in a poetics which does not align with the laws and rules of stylistic propriety or conventional narrative, with narratives of progress and their mirror in heterosexual procreative intercourse, nor with any figure of strictly phallic male homosexuality, but with the metaphoric power of anal eroticism not only as a

denaturalized pleasure divorced from public utility and intentionality but also as a figure for, simply, pleasure. Or perhaps, not so simply, bliss: on this point, and in considering Emerson's reaction to Thoreau's writing, we come as close as ever to Roland Barthes' "text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (14). These are the same assumptions which mark Thoreau's "lives of quiet desperation" (329), and the solution he proposes is annular: "So thoroughly and sincerely are we compelled to live, reverencing our life, and denying the possibility of change. This is the only way, we say; but there are as many ways as there can be drawn radii from one centre" (331).

The journal passage on Sadi suggests the signficatory force of anal eroticism subtending Thoreau's self-perception and its implications as an alternative order of expression and readership, and the ecstasy or

bliss which this aesthetics urges clearly has the power to unsettle and discomfort, as Emerson and critics since have borne witness.²³ Though the anal eroticism is deeply embedded in the metaphor of the journal passage, other instances persist in Walden itself, as Michael Warner's study has otherwise so brilliantly brought to light. Warner describes an erotic economy to Walden based on a "dialectic of self-integration and self-dissolution" which "can be summed up in two economic imperatives: have no waste; enjoy your waste" ("Walden's Erotic Economy" 163), and the anus, metaphorized in images of bottoms and their sounding (such as a pond's bottom) becomes the displaced locus of this erotic dialectic--"the anus as an organ of privacy" or self-integration and anality as a "metaphor[] for self-dissolution" ("Thoreau's Bottom" 72-79).²⁴

²³ Margaret Fuller expressed the same discomfort. As editor of The Dial, she complained in a letter to Thoreau about his essay "The Service": "[T]he thoughts seem to me so out of their natural order, that I cannot read it through without pain. I never once feel myself in a stream of thought, but seem to hear the grating of tools on the mosaic" (Harding, Correspondence 42). Again, this, like the object of Emerson's discomfort, was an early piece (1840).

²⁴ This erotic economy also leads Warner to comment on

Problems of "shared" subjectivity aside, Warner rightly recognizes the conversion of waste to pleasure as counter to the cultural mandate, the accepted economy, which prescribes sexual release for procreative intent and proscribes the wasting of seed. Indeed, this conversion--or redemption as Thoreau might term it, and which a queer perspective enables--seems to be the modus operandi of Thoreau's poetics in Walden: have no waste, enjoy your waste, convert your quiescence to desperation, your desperation to joy, make your privacy public, keep your publicity private, lose your self, regain your self--convert the nervous and wretched feelings of thwarted expectation while reading Walden--its paradoxes, its lapses, its excesses--to ecstasy.

the narrative structure of Walden: "Walden, after all, does not move from summer to spring. It moves from "Economy" to concluding images of flooding and metamorphosis, from the imperative of having no waste to the imperative of enjoying one's waste" ("Walden's Erotic Economy" 164).

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