Writing as Self-Realisation: Autobiography, Mysticism and Spirituality in Henry David Thoreau's Journal

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NIRMALA P. G.

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Department of English
School of Humanities
University of Hyderabad
HYDERABAD 500046

Dated: 25 Feb.97.

This is to certify that I, Nirmala P. G., have carried out the research embodied in the present thesis for the full period prescribed under Ph.D. ordinances of the University.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this thesis was earlier submitted for the award of research degree of any University.

Nirmala.

(Signature of the Candidate)

Name: Nirmala P. G.
Enrolment No: 91HEPH09

Alladi Uma 25.2.97

Signature of the Supervisor

Head of the Department

Dean of the School

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PREFACE

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), a representative of the American Renaissance, took to new paths in his exploration of individual and cosmic consciousness. His writings reveal a profound insight into the meaning and purpose of existence. At the age of twenty, he made the first entry in his Journal marking the beginning of a life-long quest for Truth. Written between 1837 and 1862, the Journal turns out to be an autobiographical record of a rare kind, influenced by and yet standing apart from the European and American autobiographical traditions. This thesis will examine and interpret Thoreau's Journal and bring to light its mystical and spiritual elements.

The first Chapter deals with the subjects of autobiography and journal and then focuses on the early European and American autobiographical works. The journals of the Quakers and Puritans in early America are spiritual narratives which trace the process by which the individual will surrenders to that of the divine. By the time of Benjamin Franklin, autobiography becomes a self-conscious art form, i.e., more attention is paid to the social, political, and ethical progress of man.

Chapter Two is a discussion of Transcendentalism in America. Under the impact of Romanticism, the Transcendentalists liberate the self from the theological confines of the Puritans and Quakers and make it more organically and vitally unified with the entire creation. The importance they place on Intuition or the faculty of Higher Reason enables an assertion of the selfs uniqueness. At the same time their concept of self stresses impersonality. In their autobiographical works Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman give expression to this concept of self. How Thoreau emerges as a link between Emerson and Whitman is discussed in this section.

Thoreau's use of the journal form and its relation to his philosophy of life are discussed in Chapter Three. Writing the Journal involves a process in which Thoreau, starting as an individual rooted in the manifested world, moves away from it to the unmanifested. Thoreau deliberately chooses an explicitly spatio-temporal and linear mode like the journal. He believes that the anchorage of the self in time and space — an immersion in time — is necessary to overcome time. Also, in the Journal he could focus on the "moment" which he believes is the link to eternity. In the Journal he could use the device of repetition — the repetition of the seasons — to celebrate the timeless unity. His preoccupation with the Higher Self, his attempt to read

transcendent meanings in Nature are discussed in this Chapter and this leads one to the subject of mysticism.

Chapters Four and Five deal with mystical and spiritual elements in Thoreau's Journal. His mysticism does not deny the body, mind and the senses, as he believes that only tangible perceptions could give him mystical visions. There is then a movement from the spiritual to the mystical in the Journal. Thoreau's preoccupation with the progress of the individual self through time makes his writing spiritual and the commitment to transcendent visions makes it mystical. The journal form with its dated entries could record the stages of growth. At the same time it could give expression to momentary mystical visions/ experiences without the need to explain them in terms of the past or future. Like all mystics, Thoreau also tries to overcome all dualisms — between the subject/perceiver and the object/ perceived in an experience of unity. The attainment of a mystical union with the Divine is seen to be his constant endeavour as it emerges in the Journal.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Early Writings

Hath any man hope that he is converted, and sanctified, and that his mind is endowed with true excellency and spiritual beauty, and his sins forgiven, and he received into God's favor, and exalted to the honor and blessedness of being his child, and an heir of eternal life; let him give God all the glory; who alone makes him to differ from the worst of men in this world, or the miserablest of the damned in hell.

(Jonathan Edwards, Selected Writings, 1978, 64.)

Man knows himself only in so far as he knows the world, and becomes aware of the world only in himself and of himself only in it. Every new object, well observed, opens new organ in ourselves.

(Goethe qtd. in Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography. 1960,47.)

Consciousness of self is the birthplace of truth.

(Hegel qtd. in Georges Gusdorf "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." Trans. James Olney. Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical. Ed. James Olney, 1980, 38.)

I

Autobiography as a literary genre has received a great deal of critical attention in the recent past. Its importance as a valuable means of self-examination, self-creation and self-regeneration has been recognized. Autobiography, indeed, provides a tremendous scope for self-evolution. It furnishes us with "models and mirrors that can help us to accept, celebrate, and transform our lives as individuals and as participants in the cyclical drama of incarnation and the dialectical drama of historical evolution" (Shapiro 421-422). The term "autobiography" was first used, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, by Robert Southey in 1809. Semantically "autos" means "self," "bios" means "life" and "graphe" means the "act of writing."[1] It is literally a person's recording of his own life through introspection and self-analysis. By reflecting and interpreting, the writer tries to create a meaningful pattern out of his varied past experiences. Broadly speaking, autobiography presupposes that an individual possesses a unique identity; the development of his self is projected as occurring in time; the narrative is in chronological order and is a factual, retrospective account of the writer's life.

Autobiography comes into being when the individual becomes conscious of his "self — the subjective, thinking and feeling entity distinguished from everything objective/external. This "self," the "I," as it becomes consciously aware of its own existence, "shapes and determines the nature of the autobiography and in so doing half discovers, half creates itself (Olney, "Autobiography" 21). The word "self can be subjected to various levels of interpretation and the nature of the autobiographical writing depends to a great extent on how one defines it. There can be two broad possibilities. The "self which knows, suffers, desires, remembers etc., may be termed the "lower self or the "historical self which is also a person's individuality or identity in time and space. And the "SELF" may be termed the "higher self or the a-historical, transcendental self when it is concerned with Pure Consciousness.[2] Autobiographies then can also be broadly classified into two types: (i) those that concern themselves with the historical self or the writer's identity in time and space, and (ii) those that deal with the historical self but at the same time attempt to transcend historicity. In the latter, writing becomes a process whereby the historical self is affirmed and eventually negated to give way for an expansion of consciousness. To "know" the individual "self," which is a limited whole, is to become the "knower" on another level. The autobiographical act thus becomes a positive effort to hint, to

suggest, to evoke the "SELF" those "aspects of the self that don't make it into the test, that resist transformation, idealization and narrative closure" (Harpham 49). As this "SELF" is not an element of personality, the writer takes his stand beyond the phenomenal world.

In his essay "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness," Karl J. Weintraub argues that autobiography as a genre developed its full potential only when Western man acquired a thoroughly historical understanding of existence (821). When viewed as a process of "unfolding" and self-improvement life is narrated only in relation to the outside world. In other words, the writer interprets the evolution of the self in its interaction with the world. The subject of autobiographical writing then becomes, as Mutlu Konuk Biasing points out, "the self becoming conscious of itself in and as history" (XIV). It is hence historical and dynamic in method, the writer imaginatively reorganizes his experiences and displays the various stages of self-improvement. But the consciousness of being rooted in history and the consequent expression of the "self in the world" is also an attempt to escape/transcend history, for witnesshood and observation of one's life in **time** puts the writer above the temporal: he places himself in the position of a witness taking

note of the fleeting personal experiences. Writing about his life demands that he be in a deeper sense a non-participating witness.

Self-examination enables the writer to seek an essence beyond temporal existence and thereby transcend historical circumstances. The act of writing one's life involves a detachment, a "standing apart" or "standing behind" the flux of narrated experiences. In his role as an observer, by taking the stand of the "observing self," the autobiographer steps out of history. The autobiographical mode being temporal enables him to narrate his personal history. But the narrative itself turns out to be an attempt to transcend personal history/rootedness in the temporal to gain a sense of timelessness. By talking about his life, by recollecting and ordering his experiences, the autobiographer simultaneously asserts the presence of the "SELF" that takes note of the life-process but is itself beyond the temporal. Indeed to "see the system whole, one would have to be outside the system" (Kawin 101). This attempt to "see the system whole," to see life as a whole and thereby transcend historicity, is also the deepest impulse of the autobiographer.

Autobiographical writings can take various forms like diaries, letters and journals. While the diary is an intimate record

of an individual's personal history and "affirms an inner reality of the writer" (Beauchamp 40), the letter concerns itself with a larger social context as it involves a relationship between two individuals. The day-to-day entries in a diary try to "catch the calms and tempests of a life, to see the stories it tells as they develop or disappear, to see the patterns and images it evokes and sometimes repeats . . ." (Gillikin 128). Like the diary, the journal too is a record of events performed, happening or recurring everyday. The writer is concerned with the thought-process and the mind's immediate reaction to the outside world. In scope it extends beyond the personal confines of the diary to relate the self to a larger context. One might say that the canvas of the journal is larger than the diary as it tries to liberate the narrated self from personal confines in order to relate itself to the world-at-large. This makes the journal form impersonal while the diary is not.

The journal is closer to lived experiences as mental states are recorded as they occu:. More than analysis or patterning or conclusion, what we get is a sense of life-process, of "fact-in-the-making."[3] Thus while the autobiographer tries to interpret life in totality, the journal writer presents the fragments that go to make

up the whole. Georges Gusdorf in his essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" points out in this connection:

> The author of a private journal, noting his impressions and mental states from day to day, fixes the portrait of his daily reality without any concern for continuity. Autobiography, on the other hand, requires a man to take a distance with regard to himself in order to reconstitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time. (35)

The journal is thus episodic and fragmented in structure as no attempt is made, as in autobiography, to select and organize events and experiences in terms of a unified vision/fixed perspective.[4] While the autobiographer reviews life, the journal writer presents life. The writer of a journal being closer to the events and experiences with regard to duration, can present them with greater accuracy.

II

The beginnings of autobiography can be traced to the impulse to write about vital religious experiences — to record the stages by which the individual loses his identity to celebrate God's divine power. The entire justification and exemplary instance of writing one's life to signify the self and its history, according to James Olney ("Memory and Narrative" 858) are offered for the first time in western literature in Saint Augustine's Confessions written in 399 AD. The Confessions is commonly accepted as the first major attempt to narrate individual experiences which revolve around or eventually lead to a vital religious experience or conversion. The book is organized into sections, each dwelling upon one particular stage in Augustine's life. After the conversion experience as a mature man he tries to recreate imaginatively his life through the stages of infancy, adolescence, youth and adulthood. He narrates the story of a quest — the story of the individual soul aspiring for Truth/God — culminating in the experience of conversion/illumination when the individual soul realizes its full potential in God. Accordingly, the work speaks of a process which involves the surrender of the individual will to the will of God. But Augustine also considers his personal experiences to be exemplary, something which could have a cosmic dimension. For instance, in Book Seven of the

Confessions Augustine records a significant religious experience, when with the "eye of his soul" he sees God's "Unchangeable Light." And then he adds, "He who knows the truth knows that Light, and he that knows the Light knows eternity" (117).

For Augustine the ultimate authority lay with a divine power beyond the individual's grasp; the grace of God alone could ensure him salvation. He makes this clear in Book Ten thus: "What I know of myself I know through the shining of Your light; and what I do not know of myself, I continue not to know until my darkness shall be made as noonday in your countenance" (176). Self-illumination, for Augustine, dawns as a consequence of direct perception of divine knowledge which he elsewhere refers to as "eternal Wisdom" (164). He gives details of the mental processes, the conflicts, and of the experiences he has, but they are all interpreted in accordance with the will of God. According to Henry Chadwick, at the heart of the experience that Augustine describes "lay the conviction that the finite creature has an insatiable longing for fulfillment that can be found only in what lies beyond itself and indeed beyond human capacity for definition or description" (23).

Saint Teresa's Life of Herself (1563-65), like Augustine's Confessions, is confessional in origin. It tells the story of her inward experiences and her encounters with the outside world. She subjects herself to a relentless self-examination. But self-analysis is valued not for its own sake but as a means of exposing the fallibility of humanity and affirming the ultimate authority of a divine knowledge.

Autobiography, as a distinctive form of literary confession, first emerged in the eighteenth century which saw the rise of ideologies like Individualism and Romanticism. Gusdorf remarks that the "theological mirror of the Christian soul is a deforming mirror that plays up without pity the slightest faults of the moral personality" (34). With the Renaissance and the Reformation, the writer started "seeing himself as he is without any taint of the transcendent" (34). The individual self was conceived as a psychological entity, unique and unrepeatable and hence there was greater introspection, self-awareness, doubt and psychological crisis. The writer gave free play to his personality without referring to a transcendent authority. The notion of God only served as an extension of the individual self s aspiration to infinity. What the Romantic autobiographer does is to give a picture from a specific viewpoint, of a "coherent shaping of an

individual past, reached by means of introspection and memory — wherein the self is seen as a developing entity, changing by definable stages and where knowledge of the self links with knowledge of the external world" (Mazlish 2). Thus private emotions and individual conscience replace some of the functions attributed to God in traditional theology. With this secularization of autobiography, self-examination turns out to be different from spiritual soul-searching. The individual self, being unique, had to be examined and affirmed in order that its full potential be revealed. This, in turn, meant raising the individual to a cosmic level. By glorifying the individual, romantic autobiography aimed at transforming the truth of a unique individual to a universal truth.

According to Roy Pascal in Design and Truth in Autobiography. Wordsworth is the first autobiographer to realize that each man constructs out of his world a unique framework of meaningful events and that the deepest purpose of autobiography is to compose the account of a life as a projection of the real self on the outer world. Wordsworth's purpose, is the evolution and self-recognition of the soul in its self-identification with mankind and the universe (45, 134). In developing the right response to Nature lies the path to ultimate truth. Wordsworth asserts a self

that draws its vital force from an organic connection with nature — a self which tries to project itself out there (in nature) and nature within itself. He asserts the ability of the individual self to transcend itself, as theological writers do, but establishes this on pantheistic and psychological grounds. He records the moment of vision when the highly evolved individual soul is caught up in a transitory experience of the unity of Man and Nature. To Wordsworth, it is the knowledge of this harmonious co-relation that leads to transcendence.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Confessions is usually held up as the first example of autobiography as a celebration of unique individualism. Rousseau tries to retrieve a sense of uniqueness by an obsessive search for his real self, without reference to the transcendent. The true object of his Confessions he explains, is to "reveal my inner thoughts" to narrate "the history of my soul" (262). To write the history of the soul, he continues, "it is enough if I enter again into my inner self, as I have done till now" (262). So also in his Reveries of the Solitary Walker (meant to be an appendix to the Confessions), he explains that the pleasure of conversing with his soul is something which no one can take away from him (32). Autobiography is important because, in his own words, "[i]f by meditating on my inner life I am able to order

it better and remedy the faults that may remain there, my meditations will not be entirely in vain" (32).

Rousseau is also writing to assert his private self. The recurring theme in these works is "his exile and alienation from a society in which his paranoid eyes see only negative images of himself (Grayson 81). The Confessions could be read as a dialogue between his private self and social self. Steeped as he was in the concerns of the highly artificial French aristocracy he tries to break free from them in an attempt to retrieve his natural innocence. This involves a return to the true natural order where "Love of self (the natural instinct for self-preservation) and not "self-Love" (selfish self-interest) predominates (France 19). By writing he is trying to empty himself of the false, deformed, social self and recognize and reveal his true self behind all the masks. He confesses thus in the Reveries: "Only when I had detached myself from the social passions and their dismal train did I find her [i.e. Nature] once again in all her beauty" (134). Finding "Nature" involves a return to solitude where he could converse with his uncorrupted self.

Writing about himself, is to Rousseau a sort of therapy whereby he could establish the lost harmony between his self and

the world. In Rousseau, then, there is less emphasis on God as a controlling force. For him, in that "simple feeling of existence" (88) with no past or future, no pleasure or pain or any other feeling, lie perfect happiness and a condition of being as self-sufficient as God. To experience the unity and harmony of creation, he believes in blissful self-abandonment, whereby he loses himself in the immensity of the beautiful order present in the universe. Autobiography, in the hands of Rousseau, is also a means to project an idealized self, filtered through the device of memory, for only the best and most significant aspects of his personality find a ground for expression.

In both Wordsworth and Rousseau self-expression thus means a celebration of the powers of the individual soul to expand and reach out to the external world so that it is in tune with the cosmic harmony. In Thoreau too it is a means to come to terms with the natural order. But while following the footsteps of his predecessors, he chooses the journal form to show the gradual stages of realization whereby he comes into contact with a higher reality.

III

Right from the beginning. Americans have felt the need to establish an identity, to assert themselves in a fluid and often hostile environment. American culture has thus been conducive to autobiography, especially to autobiography with a religious dimension.

American literature began with the rough, objective records of the explorers and settlers. They were documents mainly of politics and religion. Predominantly Protestant, these early writers, believed that man's duty was to glorify God and serve Him. Thus early American writings were based on the notion that the primary values of life are theological. The founders of American plantations and colonies regarded themselves as divinely appointed to increase the kingdom of Protestant Christ.

Colonial literature, in particular that of New England, being Puritan, projected man as an inherently sinful and depraved creature who could be saved only by the gift of divine grace. It was characterized by inwardness, and a concern for the symbolic significance of striking events. Historians like William Bradford,

John Winthrop and Edward Johnson kept journals in which they recorded special providences and gave a cosmic dimension to striking events. As Puritans, they placed a high value on Biblical and theological learning; the Bible for them was the revealed word of God and hence to be followed word by word. As writers of history, they based their record on a theological framework. History, they believed, was a long revelation of divine intentions. A few examples will substantiate this.

Edward Johnson wrote History of New England and The Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Savior in New England. The latter, as the title reveals, gives a statement of the Puritan concept of history. Factual events are recorded with the intention of proving that God was responsible for the success of the Bay Colony. History then, is theological history as it is Christ who "creates a New England" (Miller 144). Johnson also wrote that "the whole life of a Christian upon this Earth" is to "die to sinne and to live to holinesse and righteousness" (Miller 158). Another significant writer of the period, Cotton Mather, wrote the ecclesiastical history of New England — Magnalia Christi Americana. His aim, he explained, was to "Report the Wonderful Displays of this Infinite Power, Wisdom ..." (Miller 163). In her captivity narrative, Mary Rowlandson describes her traumatic

personal experiences. But she converts it to a story of an ordeal from which, through the grace of God, she emerges victorious, redeemed. All the events are interpreted in terms of the personal will of God. Rowlandson's narrative thus conforms to the Puritan belief in the all-pervading influence of God.

These early writings, in the form of letters, diaries, journals, recorded hardships encountered and overcome. In them, we find the rudiments of the American autobiographical consciousness. As Robert A. Lee remarks, "from its European settlement onwards America has shown itself subject to an endemic and at times positively startling self-consciousness" (9). In New England, the Puritans established the autobiographical tradition by recounting their religious and spiritual experiences. Their diaries gave details of their spiritual conflicts, and minute self-analysis, meditation and incessant soul-searching were employed in order to drive out sin. The goal was the union of scripture, reason and grace in a moment of supreme insight. Even though these writers chose the personal mode of keeping diaries, the focus was on the universal rather than the personal dimension of the self. The narratives of extra-ordinary spiritual struggle and physical endurance were given a cosmic dimension. In his essay, "Autobiography in the American Renaissance," Lawrence Buell

points out that "American autobiography of the early period tends to normalize its self-presentations so that the 'unique' histories of extra-ordinary spirituality, are rendered exemplary and typical" (52).

For the Puritans, autobiography thus became a ritual wherein is revealed the process by which the individual loses himself in the divine. The purpose of writing one's life chiefly rested on the desire to annihilate the "ego" or the individual self in order to assert the supremacy of grace/divine will. The life recounted had meaning and design in so far as it fulfilled the design of God. The individual self was an entity which must always relate to God and the individual's will had to surrender to that of the divine. The writer would "detect all makeshift 'rationalizations' to shatter without pity the sweet dream of self-enhancement in which the ego takes refuge from reality" (Miller 284). The autobiographer thus realized his potential and identity not by self-assertion but by submission to a transcendent God.

The writer valued his life only if it was associated with grace or providence. Growth in grace involved a progressive loss of the sense of one's self as an individual personality bound by human institutions. Daniel B. Shea Jr. in his insightful study on

Spiritual Autobiography in Early America observes: "The spiritual autobiographer [of the 17th and 18th century America] is primarily concerned with the question of grace: whether or not the individual has been accepted into divine life ..." (XI).

The Personal Narrative of Jonathan Edwards is a soliloquy that focuses on the work of grace in the soul and also records his conversion experience. He perceives divinity in every natural object after the experience: "The appearance of every thing was altered; there seemed to be … a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost every thing. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything . . ." (31). As the world of the senses was a direct expression of divine ideas, he beholds the glory of God in natural objects.

Like all Puritans, he believed in the depravity of man; self-fulfillment was possible only through divine grace. By stringent self examination and submission of the self to a theological pattern, he revealed the inner dynamics of the Puritan faith. Union with God was possible not by human will or action but through passive receptivity.

Like the Puritans, the Quakers too kept journals They gave a detailed account of the spiritual struggle involved in the surrender of the individual will to the "Inner Light" or the "Light of Christ in your Consciences." According to this doctrine of "Inner Light," each man contained the divine spark, the seed of his own salvation if he would submit to it. The Quaker journals followed a more or less uniform pattern, beginning with a record of divine intimations in childhood, passing through the spiritual conflicts of adolescence to adoption of Quaker beliefs and practices and finally conversion in which the will was surrendered to the divine call. The Quakers were concerned about leading an inward life, where the heart opens out in love and reverence to God the creator and learns to practice true justice and goodness to all.

The most important Quaker writer was John Woolman who affirms in his Journal the importance of submitting oneself to the divine will. He equates his personal history with Quaker beliefs and practices. The Journal was written to bring out the all-pervasiveness of the Inner Light in the particular events of his life. As Shea observes: "The self is indeed at the very centre of his Journal, but as a topic, or as an entity to which Truth must be related not as a personality to be expressed or anatomised" (45).

The emphasis placed by the Quakers on practical action, in carrying out their faith in day-do-day inter-action with the outside world, is also reflected in Woolman. Under the impact of divinity or as a manifestation of the work of God in him, he responds sensitively to human suffering. Thus Woolman's experience of God reflects the Universalism of Quaker doctrines.

By 1729, with the advent of Deism, the concept of the universe centred in God shifted to one centred in man. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines deism as "the individual's affirmation of his right to think for himself on all subjects . . . It is the affirmation of the principle of the oneness of humanity. It marks the rise of secularism and the beginning of modernity in theology" (335). Man's fate came to be considered as self-determined rather than one of instruction by a paternal God. Deism rejected revealed religion and insisted that the "Great Book of Nature" and the "Light of Reason" were better guides to knowledge of God (Walters 13). It glorified the natural powers of man; reason, experience, orderliness etc., were given importance. The Deists placed faith in the liberating power of human reason as the natural powers were sufficient to reveal the truth of things.

The advent of Deism with its shift from a God-centred universe to a man-centred universe, furnished a different context for autobiography in America. Benjamin Franklin, considered to be America's first great man of letters, changed the course of autobiographical writing in America by structuring it on secular and utilitarian lines. Unlike the Puritan and Quaker Journals with their anguished introspection and description of a close personal relationship with God, Franklin wrote about objective self-knowledge which in turn leads to demonstrable improvement in social and moral conduct. James M. Cox comments: "With Franklin came consciousness, total consciousness in the form of autobiography — a history of a self-made life written by a man who made it" (19). In his Autobiography, we see the conversion of the inner self/private self into a social and political self.

Franklin dramatizes the liberation of the self from prior allegiances, whether in the family or in religion. While promoting individual prosperity, he suggests that while pursuing it, the individual is also participating in a national pattern. Personal history is thus equated to national history. Franklin's story is held up as a model; his individual history becomes identical with the values, mission and destiny of the nation. Ruth A. Banes argues in "The Exemplary Self: Autobiography in

Eighteenth Century America," that eighteenth century American autobiographers (which include Franklin) attempted to efface their autobiographical selves by connecting individual history and identity with larger, secular American beliefs and values (237). Self-examination in Franklin, unlike the soul-searching of the early religious autobiographers, was to convert his private emotions into a public one, so that future generations could benefit by his revelations. Like the early writers, Franklin too rendered his life as typical/exemplary. But the sense of delight in his experience as such without attributing it to divine grace, and the value and significance as one trying to make a name and acquire fame in 18th century America, set his work apart from the spiritual autobiographies preceding it. Self-liberation, self-control, individual-freedom, social order — these were some of the values he tried to reconcile in his work. With him autobiography emerged as a self-conscious art form away from the traditional/theological framework of Puritan and Quaker autobiographies.

By the nineteenth century, the self — the "simple separate person" was freely celebrated in the writings of the Transcendentalists. European Romanticism, as noted, brought a fresh awareness of the spiritual possibilities in man and

encouraged the emergence of a new kind of religious individualism. Autobiography assumed prominence as the most important literary form during this period. The notion of self became more complex as its field of inquiry was not confined to a supernatural framework. With Transcendentalism, "spiritual self-examination, romantic self-consciousness and democratic individualism — converged for the first time in American history, with the result that the self became a more important entity . . ." (Buell, Literary Transcendentalism 267). The next chapter will be devoted to dealing with European Romanticism, its manifestation in America, and will discuss in detail Transcendentalism in America.

NOTES

[1] James Olney 's division in "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment. A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction." Autobiobraphy: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 6.

[2] In this thesis the "self is used to mean the individual "I" or the "ego," and the "SELF" to mean the principle beyond which is Pure Consciousness.

[3] Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1960) 16. He argues that by imposing a logical pattern on the past experiences, the autobiographer substitutes the completed fact for the "fact in the making."

[4] In Walden. for instance, Thoreau tries to create a meaningful pattern as he looks back and interprets the life he lived for two years and two months. On the other hand, his Journal makes no deliberate attempt to organize or pattern his experiences and as such implies an organic process.

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CHAPTER TWO

Transcendentalism

Adam in the garden, 1 am to new name all the beasts in the field and all the gods in the sky. I am to invite men drenched in Time to recover themselves and come out of time, and taste their native immortal air.

(R. W. Emerson, Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson An Organic Anthology. Ed. Stephen E. Whicher, 1957, 139.)

Strange and hard that paradox true I give,
Objects gross and the unseen soul are one.

(Walt Whitman, Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose, 1982, 360.)

That which is the subtile essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and thou, O Svetaketu, art it.

(Chandogya-Upanishad, The Sacred Books of the East Vol. 1. Ed. Max Muller, 1975, 105.)

The beginnings of American Transcendentalism can be traced to the liberal faction of the Unitarians in Boston led by William Ellery Charming. They advocated a liberal, rational religion without traditional dogma and ritual. The Puritans, as observed in the previous chapter, believed in the total depravity of man. Redemption was possible only through divine grace. Self-reliance without divine help would be of no use. To the Unitarians the soul of man contained the spark of God. Ralph Waldo Emerson went ahead to declare that the soul of man was God. He makes this very clear in a Journal entry dated 26 May 1837:

> A certain wandering light comes to me which I instantly perceive to be the Cause of Causes. It transcends all proving. It is itself the ground of being . . . in certain moments I have known that I existed directly from God, and am, as it were, his organ, and in my ultimate consciousness am He. (Whicher 62)[1]

The Unitarians under the influence of John Locke, believed that human knowledge was derived empirically through the senses; God and His laws could be apprehended by rational reflection on the natural creation and by the revelation of the Scripture. However, the radicals among them like Emerson, Amos Bronson

Alcott, George Ripley, Theodore Parker and others emphasised the faculty of "higher reason" which enables instantaneous perception of God. The concept of "higher reason" is at the heart of Transcendentalism. Religion for them is a matter of individual intuition or inspiration. In his "Essay on Transcendentalism," Charles Mayo Ellis explains: "Transcendentalism is predicated on the reality of the spiritual or religious element in man; his inborn capacity to perceive truth and right, so that moral and religious truths can be proved to him with the same degree of certainty that attends mathematical demonstration" (Miller, The American Transcendentalists 31).

For the Quakers, as observed earlier, the "Inner Light" enabled a mystical inward communication with God. The self was a passive vehicle of divine truth. The Transcendentalists replace the "Inner Light" with "Intuition" — the faculty of higher reason — which enables an assertion of the self s uniqueness to be a world unto itself. The highest spiritual essence is realised by inner intuitive contact, as intuition is a natter of direct knowledge or insight.

American Transcendentalism owes a great deal to European Romanticism. Romanticism seeks self-abandonment and merger to

something larger than the individual self, be it God or Nature. In the words of Uhland the "mystic manifestation of our innermost feelings in an image, this projection of the world spirits, this incarnation of the divine, in a word: the presentiment of infinity in our perceptions is what is romantic" (qtd. in Walzel 32-33). This includes a loss of self-identity. By relying on the powers of the imagination, the Romantics attempt to rediscover the Supreme Spirit of the Universe. Romanticism is thus characterised by a yearning for the Protean, for the Absolute. All this leads to a spiritualisation of the phenomenal world in the highest and purest sense. Arthur Schopenhaeur's definition of the concept of metaphysical desire may well be taken as the subject of the Romantic's quest. According to him, "the human soul would fain overlook the whole of experience in its deepest interrelations, survey all phenomena in their totality, and become aware of the unity which comprises them all" (qtd. in Walzel 11). In the initial stages, generally speaking, the Romantic writer becomes conscious of an alien self, removed from the phenomenal world. It takes on a cosmic dimension — a subject-object differentiation when he becomes acutely conscious of his subjectivity. He then moves away from it to a vision of unity — when all things that exist, the phenomenal, including his individual self are enfolded in harmony. Subject and object, mind and matter are unified in a common entity that is the Universal spirit.

Romanticism is in one sense a reaction to John Locke's theory that all ideas are either received through the senses or obtained by reflecting on the impressions received from them. Locke denied the possibility of a supra-mental/supra-sensual knowledge when he wrote in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding that the "knowledge of the existence of any other thing we can have only by sensation . . ." (228). The Romantics free the mind from the tyranny of the senses to make it a free, active, creative force possessing innate/original powers. They argue for the power of self-consciousness, of innate ideas, free will, immortality etc., and try to explore the mysterious relations to Time and Space, to God, to the Universe. The focus is on that "profound, interior and essential space" (Steele 28), the realm of spiritual insight, of meaning not derived through the senses.

Immanuel Kant, for instance, held that power was the original possession of the mind and that ideas were independent of sensation and reflection. In his Critique of Pure Reason he makes "a critical inquiry into the faculty of reason, with reference to the cognitions to which it strives to attain without the aid of experience . . ." (3). By "experience" Kant here refers to sense experience — the evidence given by the senses with regard to the objective world. He comes to the conclusion that it is possible to have a

"transcendent conception of the unconditioned, to rise beyond the limits of all possible experience from a practical point of view and thus to satisfy the great ends of metaphysics" (14). For this he makes a distinction between "things as objects of experience" and "things as they are in themselves" (16). Kant then goes on to emphasise the power of thinking objects as things in themselves (16). In this manner he places importance on a transcendent power beyond all sense-experience which cannot be reached either by observation or reflection. The term "transcendent" as used by Kant therefore refers to "qualities that lie outside of all 'experience', that cannot be brought within the recognised formularies of thought, cannot be reached either by observation or reflection, or explained as the consequences of any discoverable antecedents" (Frothingham 12). Kant places Reason/Intuition as the supreme faculty above sensibility and understanding. Samuel Taylor Coleridge also emphasises reason as the "power of Universal and necessary Convictions, Source and Substance of Truths above Sense, and having their evidence in themselves" (Potter 456).

From Kant, Emerson derives his "two truth" theory of knowledge — Understanding and Reason. The former means empirical truths known and dealt with logic and the latter, Absolute

Truths transcending sense-experience and directly perceived by intuition. Henri Bergson, in his Introduction to Metaphysics distinguishes between these two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing:

> The first implies that we move round the object; the second that we enter into it. The first depends on the point of view at which we are placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves. The second neither depends on a point of view, nor relies on any symbol. The first kind of knowledge may be said to stop at the relative, the second, in those cases where it is possible, to attain the absolute (qtd. in Kawin 110).

The first mode is analytical, while the second is intuitive. By relying on intuition, the Transcendentalists infinitely expand the bounds of the individual self and provide a concept of consciousness that extends beyond the grasp of analysis.

The Transcendentalists aim at discovering the infinite and the unconditioned in every form of finite existence. Knowledge of the external world is therefore essential. Alcott writes in his

Journal. "He who is seeking to know himself should be ever seeking himself in external things, and by so doing . . . explore his inmost light" (Miller, The Transcendentalists 79). The Transcendentalists were greatly influenced by Emmanuel Swedenborg's doctrine of "Correspondence," according to which, every natural object "symbolizes or corresponds to some spiritual fact or principle which is, as it were, its archetype or prototype, and that the Scriptures were written in harmony with these correspondences" (OED 1017). Nature thus becomes a language and not inert subject matter. The Transcendentalists see the Universe/Nature as a living book in which one can read the secrets of the soul. They believe that the natural world can draw forth the latent energies of the soul. In his "Oration on Genius," Sampson Reed explains:

> If we choose to express any natural truth in physical and definite vocal terms, and to convert these terms only into the corresponding and spiritual terms we shall by this means elicit a spiritual truth . . . in the place of the physical truth. . . . (Miller, The Transcendentalists 50)

The genius of the mind, interacting with the natural world — rivers, lakes, woods, sky — is able to draw out its inmost essence

and thus realise the Unity of Spirit and Nature. The natural world when carefully examined, thus assumes a metaphysical significance. In Jonathan Edwards' Personal Narrative, we get the sense of God's overwhelming presence in the soul and in nature. But because he was to a certain extent bound by the orthodox Puritan theology, he did not identify his soul with God or God with Nature. The Transcendentalists remove all dogmas and fuse God and Nature into the one substance of the transcendental imagination.

Swedenborg's insistence on the relation of mind to matter influenced Emerson also. Emerson writes in his Journal, "Still am I a poet in the sense of a perceiver and dear lover of the harmonies that are in the soul and in matter, and specially of the correspondence between these and those" (19). Nature becomes a metaphor of the human mind — the symbol of Spirit. And as Nature's law and Mind's law correspond, Emerson points out, the ancient precept "Know thyself and the modern precept "Study Nature" become one (66). In his essay on the "Transcendentalist" Emerson equates Transcendentalism with Idealism and differentiates it from Materialism. He points out that unlike the materialist who considers the world of the senses as final, the idealist views it as having a metaphysical basis — an invisible and

unsounded centre within man (192-195). The Materialist lays emphasis on facts, on history; the Idealist on the power of thought, inspiration etc. For the idealist, external facts are important only in so far as they are given a metaphysical basis. Nature, therefore, is for Emerson a symbol of the spirit.

To "Study Nature" is Emerson's aim but it excludes close description and observation. By observing the landscape, Emerson gains that tranquil sense of unity. As he writes in his essay on Nature, "the soul holds itself off from too trivial and microscopic study of the universal tablet. It respects the end too much to immerse itself in the means" (48). His descriptions of nature lead quickly and inevitably to theoretical observations. An entry in his Journal substantiates this:

> A few low mountains, a great many clouds always covering the great peaks, a circle of woods to the horizon, a peacock on the fence or in the yard, and two travellers no better contented than myself in the plain parlor of this house make up the whole picture of this unsabbatized Sunday. But the hours pass on, creep or fly, and bear me and my fellows to the

> decision of questions of duty; to the crises of our fate; and to the solution of this mortal problem. (10)

In yet another Journal entry, describing the effect of nature on him, he writes, "Frogs pipe; waters far off tinkle; dry leaves hiss; grass bends and rustles, and I have died out of the human world and come to feel a strange cold, aqueous, terraqueous, aerial ethereal sympathy and existence . . ." (88). Nature is thus a suitable place for self-recovery, for sublimal thoughts and this does not demand minute observation or description of natural objects. Joan Burbick also points to this aspect of Emerson's writings:

> Perception for Emerson often became equivalent to contemplation and necessitated the absence of both landscape and the objects of sight. He consciously avoided description and observation as obstacles to seeing correctly. Nature was mainly a symbol not a fact. (7)

We do not find a total immersion in the minute and concrete facts of Nature. His observation in a journal entry dated 6 September 1833 is significant: "I like my book about Nature, and wish I knew where and how I ought to live" (14). The Journal for him is thus not a form where he observes his progressive reaction to Nature. It

is more a receptacle of his ideas, his "Savings Bank" (16); here he enacts the self-created role of "Man Thinking" (65), i.e., the active soul. One might say that while Emerson is building up thoughts, Thoreau is building up experiences. Emerson's own remark on Thoreau in his Journal illuminates this aspect. He writes thus:

> Thoreau gives me, in flesh and blood and pertinacious Saxon belief, my own ethics. He is far more real, and daily practically obeying them, than I, and fortifies my memory at all times with an affirmative experience which refuses to be set aside. (327)

This also explains why the Journal for Emerson is a place where he experiments with ideas which later on find their way into an essay (where he deals with abstract notions). But for Thoreau the entries are important in themselves as statements of change and progress.

If for Emerson, Nature is mainly of symbolic significance his disciple Thoreau claims for Nature a factual existence. Emerson could write; "A leaf, a drop, a crystal, a moment of time, is related to the whole, and partakes of the perfection of the whole. Each particle is a microcosm, and faithfully renders the likeness of

the world" (40) Thoreau goes ahead to prove that studying minutely the peculiarities in Nature yields universal truths. Unlike Emerson, Thoreau is not in a haste to discover the universal in the particular. He believes that particular natural facts are important in themselves. His descriptions of nature therefore take on a scientific precision. His idealism then includes materialism as he takes into account the evidence provided by the senses. By reporting minutely the life of the senses the sights, the sounds, the fragrances, he projects his inner life. In Whitman we have the other extreme where the body/sensuous life holds the clue to the spirit and an encounter with the one brings the realisation of the other. In his poems he gives clear instances of the sensual leading to the mystical. It gives him a sense of immediate contact with his innermost self. This is brought out in "Song of Myself[1]:

> This is the press of a bashful hand .... this is the float and odor of hair,
> This is the touch of my lips to yours .... this is the murmur of yearning,
> This is the thoughtful merge of myself and the outlet again. (44)

Later, in the same poem, the use of the second person is dropped as the sense of his own bodily existence widens his consciousness or gives it an added dimension:

> I merely stir, press, feel with my fingers, and am happy,
> To touch my person to some one else's is about as much as I can stand.
> Is this then a touch? …. quivering me to a new identity. (55)

Transcendental insight and transcendence of the physical are gained after realizing in full the life of the senses. They lead him to that stage when he merges with the life of the Universe.

> O to realize space!
> The plenteousness of all, that there are no bounds,
> To emerge and be of the sky, of the sun and moon and flying clouds, as one with them. (328)

If a study of nature can alter the mind's perceptions, the individual's growth can be conceived of in organic terms — as a process of slow growth and unfolding. As Romantics, the Transcendentalists believe in "organicism" according to which all that exists is organically and vitally unified. The individual, to

them is the function of an inner essence that evolves itself in an organic process. To be an individual is to readjust oneself mentally and spiritually, to regard one's self as identical with the Self/Universal Spirit. Transcendentalism thus affirms the moral and spiritual value of the individual. As Emerson claims in his essay on the "Transcendentalism

> His thought, — that is the Universe. His experience inclines him to behold the procession of facts you call the world, as flowing perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded center in himself, center alike of him and of them, and necessitating him to regard all things as having a subjective or relative existence .... (195)

For the Transcendentalists, who stress the importance of the individual and celebrate the unique individual, autobiography is the best form of expression. The interaction between the self and the world, to "look at every object in its relation to [one]self (Emerson 16), can best be revealed through autobiography. "Every man," Emerson writes in his Journal. "[h]as his own voice, manner, eloquence, and, just as much, his own sort of love and grief and imagination and action" (8). Margaret Fuller's Memoirs also shows her preoccupation with selfhood as she subjects herself

to rigorous self-analysis. Like all Transcendentalists, she too seeks the sublime. In her Memoirs, she writes about her quest: "I believe in Eternal Progression. I believe in a God, a Beauty and Perfection to which 1 am to strive all my life for assimilation" (Miller Margaret Fuller 27).

Hence, the Transcendentalists are preoccupied with the affirmation and exploration of the self. By choosing autobiographical, confessional modes of writing, they write about the adventures of the self, its struggles in the quest for the one, the Unity that comprises the meaning of life.

As observed, life is conceived as a process of slow change and growth and so the journal form with its daily record of day to day events best suit their purposes. They recognise the importance of a record of spontaneous thoughts, the growth that comes through self-scrutiny and self-revelation. The journal communicates the sense of life itself as it traces the growth of the mind. Spiritual perfection is to be attained as a "slow result of years, of lives, of states, perhaps of being" (Emerson 14). By keeping a journal, the writer records his fluctuating moods and thereby orders his life better.

Following the tradition of the Puritans, the Transcendentalists stress the universal aspects of the individual's experience. The journal being both a private and public art form they can simultaneously project the private self and the universal self. Their concept of self stresses impersonality. As Sacvan Bercovitch points out, it was self-effacing, exemplary and self-transcending unlike the Rousseauesque self which affirmed the "I" as a discrete presence, essentially private and unique (qtd. in Eakin 13). The personal "I" is linked to the cosmic "I." This demands that they dissociate themselves from the personality, and take the stand of an observer. The journal, being an impersonal form, enables them to project this impersonal observing self. The personal Ego, the "1," is to be grounded in the universal. Emerson makes this clear in a journal entry:

> Culture, the height of culture, highest behavior consists in the identification of the Ego with the universe, so that when a man says I think, I hope, I find, — he might properly say, the human race thinks, hopes, finds . . . . (320)

The journal therefore assumes importance not to celebrate the personal but to reveal the impersonal behind it. In Thoreau's Journal this assumes the form of a tension between the universal

and the particular. And in order to dramatise the universality of the individual he emphasises the uniqueness of the self By choosing the journal form he could project an "I" that "explicitly or implicitly proclaims its boundlessness in relation to social and literary norms, its impatience with preexisting narrative frames, its inability to be typed and formulated even by itself (Buell 64).

Transcendentalism encourages introspection as both a spiritual endeavour and a literary strategy. But in many ways it challenges the assumptions underlying conventional autobiography. Robert E. Sayre rightly points out that the "democratic, romantic, and Protestant values of the transcendentalists demanded self-examination but also proscribed it and redirected it towards Universals . . ." (23). Also, one assumption made about autobiography is that time should be the most important dynamic of the development of the self. Towards the end of his life, as observed in the previous chapter, Rousseau submits himself to a rigorous and sincere self-examination and consciously reflects on some major events of his life. His Confessions and Reveries record the "succession of feelings" which have marked the development of his being (Confessions 262). Chronology is faithfully adhered to as he gives a retrospective account of the various stages in his life. For a writer like Rousseau this is the

only possible mode of self-expression as he sees things clearly only in retrospect. In his own words, "it is only in my memories that my mind can work. 1 have neither feeling nor understanding for anything that is said or done or that happens before my eyes ..." (114).

For Emerson the conditions of chronological time was not so important as he believed that the only knowledge worth having existed out of time altogether. In his Journal he explains that, "it is wrong to regard ourselves so much in a historical light as we do, putting Time between God and us" (8). Every moment of the existence of the Universe is considered a new Creation: in the present moment all is contained (8).

Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself celebrates a timeless existence:

> I know I have the best of time and space — and that I was never measured, and never will be measured
>
> (CP:82)

Written in the present tense, the "I" of the poem is not merely the personal "I" or the Ego, it is the cosmic "I" — beyond time and

space. The poem expresses a sense of expansion; the words are suffused by a mystic emotion. The poem is thus a song not of his "self but the "SELF" so that the reader participates in the vision that is celebrated. In the words of G. Thomas Couser, "(j]ust as the mystical union of body and soul releases the integrated self from chronological time, so it fuses the self with the cosmos and hence with others" (87).

Whitman's Specimen Days, unlike his poems, focuses more on the individual/historical consciousness as he gives glimpses of his childhood, youth and some significant experiences in his life. The work brings together diary-jottings, war-memoranda, nature-notes and other observations. Specimen Days then, unlike "Leaves of Grass" is more in the nature of conventional autobiography as it roots the writer in time and space. In his "Preface to the Reader in the British Islands" (London ed, June 1887), Whitman explains, "in the following book is a common individual New World private life, its birth and growth, its struggles for a living, its goings and comings and observations . . ." (Specimen Days I). The narrative shows Whitman as an individual fully and intimately involved as an observer of a war-torn America. In the descriptions of his loving association with the masses of people we find a reflection of his life-long urge (as expressed in his poems) to merge with the

humanity and to see life as a unified whole. As a record, Specimen Days transforms the common details of daily life (especially in the Washington hospitals) into a vision of the unit)' of all things.

Transcendentalism preferred to stress the present moment as the only reality and one that contained all of life's possibilities. In his autobiographical work Walden, Thoreau freely manipulates the conventional notion of time to express a sense of the self s transcendence. He explains in this work:

> 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)

The general chronological structure of Walden is not important as the focus is on the inner world — on truths that transcend time and space. The book starts with details of man's physical needs and culminates in questions about his spiritual upliftment. Truth is thus unfolded in stages of growth — the "winter of discontent" when he began the experiment gives way to the hope of new dawn at the end of it. In A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

as in Walden Thoreau stresses the importance of an inner voyage in the process of self-discover)'. On many occasions he interrupts the linear narration — both spatial and temporal — and explores those aspects of human experience that transcend history.

The concern with the present moment as being the timeless moment led him to writing the Journal. How the Journal communicates in a variety of ways Thoreau's vision of life will be taken up in the next chapter.

NOTE

[1]

All quotations from Emerson in this thesis are taken from Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson: An Organic Anthology. Ed. Stephen E. Whicher. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957.

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CHAPTER THREE

Thoreau's Journal

We can only know things in so far as they can be objects of our experience . . . space and time . . . are elements in that apprehension of things which we call perception.

(Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. [1934] 1969, XVII.)

We look upon it as established that the unconditioned does not lie in things as we know them, or as they are given to us, but in things as they are in themselves, beyond the range of our cognition.

(Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, [1934] 1969, 14.)

Past and future are what veil God from our sight.
Burn up both of them with fire! How long
Wilt thou be partitioned by these segments as a reed?

(Persian Sufi poet, in Whinfield's translation of the Masnavi, qtd. in Bertrand Russell, Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays, 1963,22.)

> The man of most science is the man most alive, whose life is the greatest event. Senses that take cognizance of outward things merely are of no avail . . . All that a man has to say or do that can possibly concern mankind, is in some shape or other to tell the story of his love, — to sing; . . . . (Thoreau Journal 6:725)

Thoreau's Journal is a labour of love. It is a testimony of his life-long search for absolute or "transcendent" meanings in Nature. He wrote 47 manuscript volumes between 1837 and 1862 spanning a period of 24 years. It is a personal diary, a record of scientific observations, a receptacle for his thoughts, and prewriting for his lectures, essays — all rolled into one. It is a "calendar of the ebbs and flows of the soul" (1:59)[1]. Thoreau experiments endlessly so that he can be spiritually alive and be in contact with the flowing and metamorphic life. The Journal provides him the right literary form to carry out the metaphysical quest for the "Real," the "Absolute," as he can record the moment to moment struggle without troubling about analyzing it. The main task before him is a relentless search:

> Let me forever go in search of myself, never for a moment think that I have found myself; be as a stranger to myself, never a familiar, seeking acquaintance still. . . . What temple, what fane, what sacred place can there be but the innermost part of my own being? (2:223).

As the journal can render life as lived, life and art coincide in this quest. The journal being a personal art-fonn minute details of day-to-day life could be recorded. But at the same time, what is important is not the record itself but what it points to or leads to — the gradual unfolding of the self. In Thoreau's own words: "A true poem is not that which the public read. There is always a poem not printed on paper, coincident with the production of this, which is stereotyped in the poet's life, is what he has become through his work" (1:57).

The autobiographical form, where personal revelation is possible, is chosen, because Thoreau believes that as a poet he is bound to write his own biography and the best work that he can do, is to keep a good journal (10:1211). As a poet he ought to watch the moods of his mind and report the phenomena of his

own life. In a journal entry he explains the importance of personal phenomena reported by the writer:

> Facts collected by a poet are set down at last as winged seeds of truth, . . . tinged with his expectation. Oh, may my words be verdurous and sempiternal as the hills! Facts fall down from the poetic observer as ripe seeds. (4:429)

The real facts of a poet's life, he realises, can communicate vital truths: the poet takes a fact out of nature into spirit and thus speaks without reference to time or place (1:37). Only by probing his personal life, his own being, he can exploit the organic and natural powers latent in him, which in turn can result in a transformation of consciousness. What suggests itself to a reader of his Journal is the idea that "his own life is a natural phenomenon worth recording and analysing. He is part of nature, and he too can be tracked, his activities and progress recorded for later perusal" (Marshall 467). By recording his personal history, Thoreau is also trying to expand consciousness beyond the limits of the ego. In the Journal he can show the stages by which as a poet he loses the sense of separateness or his individuality so that he can be in contact with a higher reality.

The existence in time, his personal history, demands that he root himself firmly to the earth. The New England landscape, for instance, is dear to him because it reminds him of his origin: "I am . . . so native to New England, methinks, as springs from the sand cast up from below" (3:298). The sights and sounds, the delight to the senses that the earth offers is enough to transport him to a higher state of existence. As he writes in an entry in March 1856:

> I am reassured and reminded that I am the heir of eternal inheritances which are inalienable, when I feel the warmth reflected from this sunny bank, and see the yellow sand and the reddish subsoil, and hear some dried leaves rustle and the trickling of melting snow . . . The eternity which 1 detect in Nature I predicate of myself also . . . . (8:986)

As a poet, he wishes to derive satisfaction and inspiration from the commonest events and everyday phenomena, so that what his senses perceive, his daily walk, the conversation of his neighbours — all find their way into the Journal. He realises that, "[t]he fall of each humblest flower marks the annual period of some phase of human life, experience." (2:252). Particular facts are recorded because he sees in them a symbol of his own

change. By putting down the day-to-day observations the journal reveals new modes of apprehending natural facts.

The documenting of facts with scientific precision corresponds to a documenting of subjectivity. "There is no such thing as pure objective observation," he writes, "Your observation, to be interesting, i.e. to be significant, must be subjective. The sum of what the writer of whatever class has to report is simply some human experience . . ." (6:725). The description of nature thus becomes a coded description of self. His long association/contacts with nature are described in concentrated natural notes of September and October 1851. They suggest that he is trying to establish some vital truth/correlation. The unsaid looms large in these long objective accounts as he deliberately avoids the charting of his subjective consciousness. But the stored up thoughts are later brought together to reveal the hidden/deeper significance of his observations. At the sight of the witch-hazel, he is provoked to make a celebration of eternal life:

> The witch-hazel here is in full blossom on this magical hillside, while its broad yellow leaves are falling . . . . by their color as well as fragrance they

> belong to the saffron dawn of the year, suggesting amid all these signs of autumn, falling leaves and frost, that the life of Nature, by which she eternally flourished, is untouched . . . I lie on my back with joy under its boughs. While its leaves fall, its blossoms spring. The autumn, then, is indeed a spring . . . This is a part of the immortality of the soul. (3:289)

The perception of a new natural fact is sweet only when it suggests infinite possibilities — worlds that "remain to be unveiled." The phenomena of the andromeda seen against the sun cheers him because in it he detects a principle which takes him beyond — it gives him an experience of inexpressible, infinite pleasure (3:384). Thoreau's vision thus tries to go beyond, to capture a spiritual realm that transcends the senses. The physical act of descending "round the corner of the grain-field, through the pitch pine wood into a lower field" is also an attempt to be "nearer to the origin of things" (2:203). In his essay, "Cape Cod: A Review," Thomas Wentworth Higginson rightly remarks that "no one else so laboriously verified and exhausted the facts; and no other mind rose from them, at will, into so subtile an air of .meditation, — a meditation too pure and lofty . . ." (43).

Phillipe Lejeune defines autobiography as a retrospective account in prose stressing the writer's individual life and the history of his personality (Olney, "Autobiography" 18) But Thoreau's Journal is not just an account of the development of his personality; it is for both author and reader "a spiritual experiment, a voyage of discovery" (Pascal 48) Thoreau could enjoy the advantage of autobiographical form — to emphasize the uniqueness of his self; he could at the same time, go beyond the personal by expanding the limits of the personal "I." While the Journal grounds itself in the personal, it also tries to convey impersonal truths. The Journal thus becomes "simply and profoundly personal history" (Stone 3). Out of the intensity of the consciousness of the individuality, by a strong assertion of it, he seeks to transcend it. He puts this idea in a paradox thus, "1 would fain keep a journal which should contain those thoughts and impressions which . . . would have in one sense the greatest remoteness, in another, the greatest nearness to me" (2:180). In the Journal he reveals the process by which starting as an individual rooted in the manifested world, he moves away from it to the unmanifested. His journal entry in late December 1853 substantiates this. As an individual, he feels the winter confines him and restricts his physical activities. But it paradoxically also helps him inwardly to expand to a sense of harmony with the entire creation. It clarifies his senses — in particular the faculty

of sound and he sees "clearly what at other times I only dimly remember. I get the value of the earth's extent and the sky's depth" (6:676). It is as if his, "microscopic vision contracts in order to expand. Just as a kind of universality emerges from the total subjectivity of Thoreau's "I" his vision expands at the far end of contraction" (Biasing 15).

Only by losing himself "amid reeds and sedges and wild grasses" (4:482) can he expand the bounds of the limited self and recognize the vaster, allied powers. The dream of toads and frogs in slimy pools are musical to him just because they awaken new and more glorious music with no known source to it. Dissolution is what he seeks — those "moments of divine leisure in which your life is coincident with the life of the universe" (4.508). In breaking away from the identification with his personal self, the individuality, lies the possibility of a higher existence. He makes this clear in an entry in August 1851: "1 strike the road at the cause way. It is hard, and I hear the sound of my steps, a sound which should never be heard, for it draws down my thoughts" (2:239). Only when he ceases to hear the sound of his steps, only when he stands still and listens with open ears, can he "hear the silence" of a "night in which silence was audible" (4:518). He explains further: "If the night is the mere negation of day, I hear

nothing but my own steps in it Death is with me, and life far away. If the elements are not human, if the winds do not sing or sigh, . . . my life runs shallow" (4:518). Life, then, for Thoreau, is the silence which the night gives — a communion with the ethereal and the spiritual. Throughout the Journal, he probes into the "infinite degrees of life, from that which is next to sleep and death, to that which is forever awake and immortal" (9:1107). Thus the journal form while providing him a context to write unique personal history, at once enables him to communicate the impersonal.

The choice of the Journal also reveals Thoreau's notions about establishing identity and different ways to transcend it. In her essay, "Self-Neglect in the Canon. Why Don't We Talk about Romantic Autobiography?," Kay K. Cook suggests that writers who choose journals do so because this form is conducive to recording the experience of a fragmented, dispersed self as opposed to the unified perspective of the formal autobiography (89). This view is applicable to Thoreau's use of the journal. It is difficult to find a conscious pattern or continuity in Thoreau's journal. He believes that the writer of a journal should not try to analyse his thoughts but try to make an accurate transcript of them. The journal form can accommodate random thoughts —

thoughts as they occur. This enables him to record his ever-changing moods and the different shades of meaning that he is constantly adding to his perception of natural objects.

Thoreau tries to make wholes of parts because, "[t]houghts accidentally thrown together become a frame in which more may be developed and exhibited" (3:328). He realises that the main value of keeping a journal lies in the fact that the writer can remember his best hours and thereby stimulate himself And having recorded at random a few disconnected thoughts and then by juxtaposing them, he is able to open up fresh perceptions. Thoreau's idea of totality/of wholeness is thus based not on a linear connectedness but on the breaking of it. He believes that each thought that the writer attains/draws in its train many divided thoughts or perceptions. Therefore, "it is only when many observations of different periods have been brought together that he begins to grasp his subject and can make one pertinent and just observation" (11:1424). In Writing Nature: Henry David Thoreau's Journal, Sharon Cameron also points to this fragmented structure of Thoreau's Journal, and writes that the Journal, "raises the problem of discontinuity in a number of contexts and that these discontinuities are epitomized by the problem of fragmented or partially hidden communications" (17).

One day listening to the "music" in the telegraph post, he wonders: "Is not all music a hum more or less divine? I hear something new at every telegraph-post I have not got out hearing of one before I hear a new harp Thoughts of different dates will not cohere" (3:346). The various experiences are united not by memory but, by a "supramental" or "higher coherence" where events and experiences dissolve into a unified consciousness. Coherence lies in the fact that these observations/ experiences form a chain in a non-linear sense, as they are all expressions of a transitory vision of a reality, of "a presence that could never be possessed" (Certeau 16). Keeping a journal also has this advantage that,

> [y]ou only need to make a faithful record of an average summer day's experience and summer mood, and read it in winter, and it will carry you back to more than that summer day alone could show. Only the rarest flower, the purest melody, of the season thus comes down to us. (5:642)

A journal renders life as lived, it contains a record of apparently incidental experiences, perceptions whose hidden significance emerges later as a larger pattern. In one journal entry, for instance, he writes how the sound of the woodpecker

assumes a significance. The entry records a recovery as the sound "heard further off it is very suggestive of ineffable associations which cannot be distinctly recalled, — of long-drawn summer hours, — and thus it, also, has the effect of music. I was not aware that the capacity to hear the woodpecker had slumbered within me so long" (10:1258). The journal writer is also free to skip from topic to topic, from one sentence to the next without making conscious efforts to arrange them. In an entry he writes: "Every man thus tracks himself through life, in all his hearing and reading and observation and travelling. His observations make a chain" (13:1571). Fragmentation thus does not lead to a chaotic situation; on the other hand, it is the only means to communicate a self free of patterns, the unfragmented consciousness that makes note of the temporal variations/ fluctuations.

An autobiography usually projects the development of the self as occurring in time. As such the writer employs the device of memory whereby the writer establishes his identity and continuity of existence/being across time. Janet Varner Gunn points out that autobiography, at the level of perspective, involves a certain mode of self-placing in relation to the autobiographer's past and from a particular standpoint in the present (16).

Perspective, (used here to mean the objectivity which memory or distance gives) is useful only in the representation of spatio-temporal reality or the selfs progress through time Thoreau, on the other hand, seeks essences or timeless truths. As such his focus is on the experience and not on the individual selfs relation to the experience. The immediacy of the journal form is conducive to record an ever new self and communicates the truth of experimental reality. As he writes:

> Give me the old familiar walk, post-office and all, with this ever new self, with this infinite expectation and faith, ... the constant endeavor should be to get nearer and nearer here . . . Here, of course, is all that you love, all that you expect, all that you are. (11:1383)

The immediacy is what mattered and he lives for the immediacy of the experience — for the frequent occurrences when he becomes aware of the intensified relationship between the natural phenomena and himself.

Thus the fixed perspective that we come across in an autobiography may be seen to be lacking in Thoreau's Journal

where the concern seems to be with the "moment" — that is, with the sudden illumination which enables him to see the fleeting instant as everlasting. He believes in obeying the spur of the moment: "If you neglect the moments, if you cut off your fibrous roots, what but a languishing life is to be expected? Let the spurs of countless moments goad us incessantly into life" (3:332). By keeping a record of the moments he assigns meaning to life Not completeness, but intensity of life is what matters to him In an early entry in the journal he points to the importance of the present: "Behold these flowers! Let us be up with Time, not dreaming of three thousands years ago . . . . Where is the spirit of that time but in this present day, this present line?" (1:112). Such moments, when time is tinged with eternity are cherished by him and the Journal alone could provide him with the literary context for recording such moments. He knew that as a poet he ought to "see present things as if, . . . also past and future, as if distant or universally significant" (13:1556) By keeping a journal he achieves both the disrupting, epiphanic moments that he values as the only genuine source of truth and a larger structure that binds them into coherent wholes (Adams 249).

The journal form can focus on the present and nothing is more important to Thoreau than a life lived in the present. As

"[t]he moods and thoughts of man are revolving just as steadily and incessantly as nature's," he cannot afford to postpone the recording of these: 'You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment" (12:1472). The present, for him was the only gateway to eternity, "the only time zone in which human beings experience the truth" (Mandel 64). One might go back to Saint Augustine and note what he has to say on time — past, present, future. In the Confessions towards the end of Book Eleven, he writes:

> It is now, however, perfectly clear that neither the future nor the past are in existence, and it is incorrect to say that there are three times — past, present, and future. Though one might perhaps say: 'There are three times — a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future.' (qtd. in Olney, "Memory and Narrative" 859)

In the above passage it is the experience of the present, the "now," that is projected as the sole reality. For Thoreau too the present becomes a dialogue between time and timelessness, between the historical and the transcendent. All this is strikingly brought out in a journal entry: "I go by Sleepy Hollow toward the

Great Fields. I lean over a rail to hear what is in the air, liquid with the bluebirds' warble. My life partakes of infinity" (3:362). The physical activities in the present are recorded and their very success lies in the fact that the expenence that they evoke are taken out of time. Joel Porte rightly remarks,

> Thoreau is par excellence the artist of the eternal present whose belief in doing the work before him with full intention and devotion helped him to feel that he had transcended time, that his beginnings would never end. (187)

Such a situation, with its inherent paradox can still be conceived of: an expenence in the present, with no past and future, is taken out of the realm of historicity. There is then a temporal as well as an atemporal dimension to this sort of experience. The present, here, is a realm which gathers together all time into an eternity. Therefore, in the endless moments (eternal 'Present') that are beginnings, continuities lose their relevance. Hence, for Thoreau, each season is an infinitesimal point and all the year is a spring. So also each experience is an absolute existence in itself. He explains this by using comparisons from the natural world:

> Our thoughts and sentiments answer to the revolutions of the seasons, as two cog-wheels fit into each other. We are conversant with only one point of contact at a time, from which we receive a prompting and impulse and instantly pass to a new season or point of contact. A year is made up of a certain series and number of sensations and thoughts which have their language in nature. Now 1 am ice, now I am sorrel Each experience reduces itself to a mood of the mind. (9:1154)

In the above passage, Thoreau suggests that there is a continuity/flow in the sense that the experience of the "eternal present" is one around which movement and time are organised. From the standpoint of this "eternal present," to be an ice and to be a sorrel are of equal importance as both are experiences out of historical context. By employing such paradoxes, Thoreau is able to hold the tension between time and timelessness, between historicity and transcendence — all the while trying to show the inability of language to communicate atemporal experiences. And so the journal form which can accommodate such contradictions, is chosen by him. The journal, like autobiography then, for Thoreau, offers not only "the pleasures of repetition and

resurrection of time past but the ecstasies of the transcendence of history itself (Biasing 20).

Thoreau deliberately chooses an explicitly spatio-temporal and linear mode like the journal. While the Journal grounds the self in time and space, it also expresses the possibility of transcendence of time and identity Keeping the Journal is important because, "[t]imc never passes so rapidly and unaccountably as when 1 am engaged in recording my thoughts," and he hopes that "[t]he world may perchance reach its end for us in a profounder thought, and Time itself run down" (3:344). An immersion in the flow of time is necessary to overcome time. One way to deal with the ineffable, as Bruce F. Kawin explains, is to enter time, to enter the fragmentary and accept its conditions so that one enters time in order to conquer it (106) This was exactly Thoreau's method. An entry in his journal shows how important to him is a sense of time as flowing — in a state of constant flux: "A day is lapsing. J hear cockerels crowing in the yard, and see them stalking among the chips in the sun. I hear busy feet on the floors, and the whole house jars with industry. Surely the day is well spent, and time is full to overflowing" (1:61).

Self-discovery, for Thoreau, is the product of knowing one's relation to historical time and to the natural world It is important to find spiritual meanings in Nature from the standpoint of embodied existence in time and space. He has to experience the changing seasons, the passage of time and in the Journal he can focus on the temporal and spatial phenomena as the centre of being. In a journal entry he explains the importance of an acquaintance with time through sense perceptions for attaining to the knowledge of eternity The passage begins with an experience in the present and then he goes on to make a general observation:

> I have just heard the flicker among the oaks on the hillside ushering in a new dynasty. It is the age and youth of time. Why did Nature set this lure for sickly mortals? Eternity could not begin with more security and momentousness than the spring. The summer's eternity is reestablished by this note. (1:108)

It is important to record the sights and sounds occurring in time because as he continues in the same entry:

> All sights and sounds are seen and heard both in time and eternity And when the eternity of any sight or sound strikes the eye or ear, they are intoxicated with delight
>
> Sometimes, as through a dim haze, we see objects in their eternal relations. . . . (1:108)

Here, time and eternity are juxtaposed As Gunn observes, in classical autobiography the self wins eternity but loses the possibility of meaning that resides in time (25). For Thoreau that anchorage in time alone is enough to take him beyond time. It is the sights and sounds and fragrances put together that convinces him of his immortality.

"The morning wind forever blows," he writes, "the poem of the world is uninterrupted, but few are the ears that hear it" (5:578). The song of the wood thrush "changes all hours to an eternal morning;* he "sings in a time, a heroic age, with which no event in the village can be contemporary" (5:601). It is infinite, eternal. To Thoreau, Nature thus gives sense of the timeless and hence an immersion in it is necessary to overcome time. The journal form can employ the device of repetition — the repetition of the seasons to celebrate the timeless unity. By choosing it, he

can evoke the timeless and assert the self that exists as a pure entity in a timeless condition Joan Burbick's views are illuminating in this context: "The historical events of nature do not merely move forward, like chronological time, toward death and decay, but have a more essential 'index' signalling cyclical renewal and regeneration" (37). Thus by observing Nature he is also trying to defeat chronological time. In the persistent vitality of the ferns, he finds an argument for immortality The song of the cricket heard throughout the journal gives that sense of continuity, of eternal life beneath the changing seasons. On various occasions this sound uplifts him from the confines of time to give a sense of timelessness. In one entry he observes.

> The first cricket's chirrup which I have chanced to hear now falls on my ear and makes me forget all else; all else is a thin and movable crust down to that depth where he resides eternally . . . With this elixir I see clear through the summer now to autumn, and any summer work seems frivolous . . . It annihilates time and space; the summer is for time-servers. (5:568)

Thoreau, then, as H. Daniel Peck puts it, is also aware of the fact that "he could not kill time without killing the body of the world

and the sound of its heartbeat as measured for example by the life-sustaining song of the cricket that pervades his Journal early and late" (6). On another occasion he observes that the song of the crickets is a glorifying of God and their "strain is as unvaried as Truth" (6:739). This preoccupation with sound, is thus an attempt by Thoreau to overcome time.

Self-discovery is also linked with discovery of fact outside of one's self. The course of his writing reveals a search for meaning in the slightest details of his natural environment. He makes this clear in an entry:

> Why should just these sights and sounds accompany our life? Why should I hear the chattering of black-birds, why smell the skunk each year? I would fain explore the mysterious relation between myself and these things. I would at least know what these things unavoidably are, make a chart of our life, know how its shores trend, that butterflies reappear and when, know why just this circle of creatures completes the world. (3:384)

In Nature, he seeks the unity and meaning and purpose of life. To explore the transcendental possibilities inherent in natural facts, it is important to deal with the surface of things. As he wonders again, "What are these rivers and hills, these hieroglyphics which my eyes behold?" (4:478). Simple facts and names and dates are significant to form a meaningful whole. The journal as a mode of self-expression best suited his purpose as it is more "allied to life" (3:334). Also it has the advantage of recording facts with greater accuracy as the writer is closer to the experience with regard to duration (unlike in an autobiography where the writer is looking back to a substantial portion of his life and can afford to present things/facts in a hazy manner). It is a rare qualification, Thoreau believed, to be able to state a fact simply and adequately; reporting experience without much lapse of time enables "the truth to pass through us living and intact" (3:295). Scientific precision is also important as it puts him on the road to the ideal — to transcendental perception. A man must see clearly before he can report things and in this way a fact truly and absolutely stated is taken out of the region of common-sense and acquires universal significance (3:295). Ordinary facts are elevated to become universal truths. His aim is, to "so state facts that they shall be significant, shall be myths or mythologic" (3:299). By keeping touch with the things of nature, with its temporal rhythms and its gifts to the senses, he is able to

apprehend more and more deeply its significance as a whole. In a very early entry in his Journal, he writes. "Nature will bear the closest inspection. She invites us to lay our eye level with her smallest leaf, and take an insect view of its plain" (1:41). Next month again, he writes, "[L]et the seer bnng down his broad eye to the most stale and trivial fact, and he will make you believe it a new planet in the sky" (1:41).

Thoreau affirms how external phenomena is equally glorious with the most inward experience so that the perception of surface will have the effect of a miracle to a sane sense. In a letter to H. G. O. Blake dated 27 March 1848, Thoreau writes: "I do believe that the outward and the inward life correspond . . . the outward in only the outside of that which is within" (Correspondence 214). He takes external facts, ordinary experiences and transforms and moulds them through an act of creative perception. Looking back in 1854, he observes, "I have spent a couple of years, for instance, with the flowers chiefly, having none other so binding an engagement as to observe when they opened; I could have afforded to spend a whole fall observing the changing tints of the foliage" (7:806). By giving full and undistracted attention to one single phenomenon he tries to see it flower into a "symbolical" presentment of the whole (Anderson 547) Nature thus becomes for him the basic for

perceiving, justifying and understanding himself It requires a full participation in the natural world. As he writes in June 1852 "with our senses applied to the surrounding world we are reading our own physical and corresponding moral revolutions" (4:432). The two characteristic features of Thoreau's writing then, as Peter A. Fritzell points out, are disinterested biological or geological science and personal or spiritual identity/ autobiography (3). Both mutually complement each other, as they come together in the Journal to reveal the hidden significance that emerges out of it. Yet another entry specifically points to the importance of such a correlation:

> The fall of each humblest flower marks the annual period of some phase of human life, experience. I can be said to note the flower's fall only when I see in it the symbol of my own change. When I experience this, then the flower appears to me. (2:252)

A Journal, in his own words is a "record of experiences and growth" and not simply "a preserve of things well done or said" (8:964). He continues in the same entry: "The charm of the journal must consist in a certain greenness, though freshness, and

not in maturity. Here I cannot afford to be remembering what 1 said or did, . . . but what I am and aspire to become'" (964). in the Journal, he projects an ever new self in various stages of growth and progress. The journal form can produce a literature of slow discovery and process (rather than the product). Time can be measured into days, hours and minutes and experiences can be recorded in fragments thereby indicating the progress of the subjective consciousness through time. The process of growth, of change, is of utmost significance to him — "A seed, which is a plant or tree in embryo, which has the principle of growth, of life, in it, is more important in my eyes, and in the economy of Nature, than the diamond of Kohinoor" (14:1748). Again, in a much earlier entry, he remarks "[t]hat we may behold the panorama with this slight improvement or change, this is what we sustain life for with so much effort from year to year" (11:1382). The journal form, as observed, can record the changes; with its dated entries, it can communicate history and point to progress and change. Towards the close of every month the entries record moments of greater insight and realisation. In these last entries of a month he speaks from a higher plane and records his spiritual experiences. They can be seen as a culmination — the result of a slow and gradual process. It is as if, in his own words, "[t]hought that was frozen up under stern experience gushes forth in feeling and expression . ." (6:688). A

few examples will substantiate this. In December 1851 his thoughts dwell much on friendship and he expresses a profound dissatisfaction with human companionship. As a loner, he then finds solace in nature. This is brought out in the entry of 31 December which also marks an important realisation: "The earth I tread on is not a dead inert mass It is a body, has a spirit, is organic, and fluid to the influence of its spirit, and to whatever particle of that spirit is in men" (3:315). The next year, in February 1852, seeing the "snow-covered landscape, the stiffened rivers," he feels a "crust" over his heart (3:352). By the end of the month, on 27 February, noticing the onset of spring, he recovers and wonders: "If rivers come out of their icy prison thus bright and immortal, shall not I resume my spring life with joy and hope?" (355). On another occasion, in an entry dated 30 January 1854 he sums up the meaning and message of winter thus: "The winter was made to concentrate and harden and mature the kernel of his brain, to give tone and firmness and consistency to his thought" (6:687). In an early entry dated 15 August 1851 he records:

> The cricket, the gurgling stream, the rushing wind amid the trees, all speak to me soberly yet encouragingly of the steady onward progress of the universe. My heart leaps into my mouth at the

> sound of the wind in the woods. I, whose life was but yesterday so desultory and shallow, suddenly recover my spirits, my spirituality, through my hearing. (2:242)

Such points of recovery — as he achieves greater spiritual insights — are recorded throughout the Journal. And out of this also emerges a pattern of change and growth in terms of perception and vision, as new dimensions are added. In the Journal he experiments with forms of perception in which he loses himself, without ordering or idealising his observations, and in this way he finds a more natural, unconscious way of being (Mclntosh 36).

Recovery, for Thoreau, means a sharpening of the sense-perceptions to be in tune with nature which in turn enables a contact with the spirit of the universe. As early as June 1851, he realizes:

> My pulse must beat with Nature. After a hard day's work without a thought, turning my very brain into a mere tool, only in the quiet of evening do I so far recover my senses as to hear the cricket, which in

> fact has been chirping all day In my better hours 1 am conscious of the influx of a serene and unquestionable wisdom_____(2:211)

The next year, in June 1852, he strikes a note of regret as he looks back, "Methinks I am less thoughtful than 1 was last year at this time. The flute I now hear from the Depot Field does not find such caverns to echo and resound in my mind, — no such answering depths" (4:436). The emphasis here is on the inability of the mind to respond to music — a certain shallowness as he feels himself alienated from the deeper melody that runs through life. However, the next year in May 1853, he finds himself more and more vibrantly responsive to nature. The wild evergreen-forest note evokes in him "a hundred associations" (5:561). When he is over-flowing with life and is rich in experience, every natural phenomenon assumes significance. In May 1854 there is a fuller participation as he internalises the landscape that he sees: "This earth which is spread out like a map around me is but the lining of my inmost soul exposed. In me is the sucker that I see" (6:740). The objective world is no longer alien but he sees it as his own being. Yet on another occasion, in August 1854 he looks back to remark that July has been a trivial month to him. Then, "soothed by the delicious stillness of the evening" he is able to achieve a concentration — a clarity of perception: "For the first

time for a month, at least, I am reminded that thought is possible. The din of trivialness is silenced. I float over or through the deeps of silence . . ." (6:770). And in the silence, he recovers his spirituality as "[t]he creaking of the crickets become clear and loud and shrill, — a sharp tinkling, like rills bubbling up from the ground" (770).

Thoreau also believes in retaining a child's vision of nature. In this he follows Emerson who wrote in Nature about the lover of nature as one whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even in manhood (23). In various journal entries Thoreau tries to show how important it is to see things with a sense of awe and wonder, as of a child's observation of nature. On 14 July 1851, he recalls in his Journal:

> In youth, before I lost any of my senses, I can remember that I was all alive, and inhabited my body with inexpressible satisfaction,. . . This earth was the most glorious musical instrument, and I was audience to its strains. (2:221)

These early influences of nature gives way to more detached observation. In December 1851 he clearly makes a distinction between surveying i.e. going places, observing the flora and fauna, being in the midst of nature and being himself— returning to his home and hearth and silently meditating, trying to bring together the composite things observed by him throughout his travels. He writes:

> I have been surveying for twenty or thirty days . . . and to-night, for the first time, had made a fire in my chamber and endeavored to return to myself. I wished to ally myself to the powers that rule the universe. (3:307)

Thus he is no more a "part and parcel of Nature" but "an observant of her" (3:369). He is conscious of a dualism — between his subjective self and objective facts. Later he realises that Nature can be reported not by conscious observation but in the fullness of life. In March 1853 he stresses the importance of an experiential relation to nature than taking the stand of a detached observer:

> Ah, those youthful days! are they never to return? when the walker does not too curiously observe

> particulars, but sees, hears, scents, tastes and feels only himself, — the phenomena that show themselves in him, — his expanding body, his intellect and heart. (5:547)

In such an experience there is no sense of duality — there is total participation in the rhythms of Nature. So he directs all efforts to constantly renew a sense of wonder at natural objects as if he is seeing it for the first time: "When I turn round half-way up Fair Haven Hill, by the orchard wall, and look north-west, I am surprised for the thousandth time at the beauty of the landscape, and I sit down to behold it at my leisure . . ." (10:1200). Thus what he seeks is total identification with Nature so that he sees no difference between the inner and outer. On 26th October 1857 he records a very significant realisation:

> These regular phenomena of the seasons get at last to be — they were <u>at first</u>, of course — simply and plainly phenomena of phases of my life. The seasons and all their changes are in me. I see not a dead eel or floating snake, or a gull, but it rounds my life and is like a tune or accent in its poem. Almost I believe the Concord would not rise and

> overflow its banks again, were I not here. (10:1214)

Here is a statement of the attainment of a maturity wherein he also gets back the child's grasp of reality. The Journal thus traces how after having lost this sense of harmony, he regains it later for a higher synthesis between the observer and the observed. In this way also he gives expression to the perfect correspondence of Nature to Man. To the unenlightened, mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers, to those seeking enlightenment, mountains are no longer mountains, rivers are no longer rivers, to the enlightened mountains are once again mountains, rivers are once again rivers. So goes the Zen Proverb. Throughout, Thoreau too is aiming at this absolute perception of the "thing" and this demands constant shifts and changes.

By observing one object from different points of view, on different occasions and in various moods, he arrives at the perception of the "whole" — intrinsic nature of the 'thing." A journal can record such observations without the need to explain them. Burbick aptly remarks that as it develops, "the Journal becomes for Thoreau the literary form in which he can extensively explore the use of a moving perceiver" (39). As

noted earlier, the Journal offers no fixed perspective, in the absence of which the relation of subject to object becomes discontinuous — subject to constant alterations. He presents discontinuities as they are to arrive later at the connecting link that holds the disparate experiences in a vision of unity.

According to Cook, "the strategic use of perspective or immersion in writing suggests differing ways of knowing and structuring reality, i.e., differing relationships to the world, differing attitudes. . . of the relationship between mind and object" (93). Perception, for Thoreau at first evokes a sense of separation between the object and the perceiver. Natural descriptions are analysed by focusing not only on the object perceived but also on the process of perceiving it. There is then, as Sharon Cameron also observes, an unstable mediation between the perceiving self and nature, and the entities are thus perpetually redefined with respect to themselves as well as to each other (35). This in turn helps him to depict a self free from pre-ordained patterns. Observations in his Journal on the above theme show how he moves towards a higher perception.

In an entry dated 1 November 1857 Thoreau tries to explain the relation between the perceiver and the perceived:

> Sometimes 1 would get a transient glimpse or side view of a thing than stand fronting to it, . . . for I know that the thing that really concerns me is not there, but in my relation to that. That is a mere reflecting surface . . . the point of interest is somewhere between me and them [i.e. the objects]. (10:1233)

This "side view of a thing" is significant to him as such a perception springs out of unconscious suggestions and is of real value. Earlier in August 1856 he had observed that by obeying the suggestions of the higher light, one can escape from the ego and see with the "unworn sides" of the eye (9:1062). Again on 1 November 1858, in a contemplative mood, he speaks of himself as a spectator of a familiar November landscape and realises that

> [w]e are independent on all that we see. The hangman whom I have seen cannot hang me. The earth which I have seen cannot bury me. Such doubleness and distance does sight prove . . . You cannot see anything until you are clear of it. (11:1382)

Only when the perceiver loses his subjectivity/individuality does he perceive objects as they are. Correct perception destroys all dualism between the self and the other. When he becomes a true "Seer," there is no distinction between the subject and the object. In the above passage as he attains to a perception of the intrinsic nature of the object (the object being the "hangman" and the "earth") all sense of multiplicity is abolished. The sense of separateness prevents the seer from a correct perception of the thing. When the walls that separate the "seer" and the "seen" collapse, he attains a vision of unity.

Thoreau believes that unconsidered expressions of delight that a natural object evokes are complete and final in themselves, and such unconscious affirmations can eventually lead him to absolute truth (14:1693). The journal form enables him to show the stages by which he attains to that transparency wherein the description of the object is inseparable from the experiencing subject. The object, when described rightly, reveals the "truth" of things thereby fusing spirit and matter into one common entity. The speaker becomes a sheer medium as he is absent from his speech. When the event/experience is thus described, it is taken out of time, to become an eternal presence. This explains why the Journal entries after 1860 show Thoreau giving greater

attention to empirical detail. In August 1857, he writes, "1 fear that the character of my knowledge is from year to year becoming more distinct and scientific; that, in exchange for views as wide as heaven's cope, I am being narrowed down to the field of the microscope. I see details, not wholes . . ." (2:246). He began, towards the end of the Journal, to study plants "with more method" (9:1091) given to memorizing names and collecting specimens. The poet, he believes, must emulate the "natural philosopher" and his poetry achieve the precision of science. When he started writing in the Journal it was with the hope that the fact will one day flower out into a truth (1:23).

It then becomes clear that absolute perception entails that the "commonest things are henceforth perceived at both the old and the new levels: a spade is still a spade, water is water, and a bridge a bridge; yet they are more than they were, for they are now seen through symbolic eyes enlarged by cosmic wandering" (Morris 36). "Cosmic wandering" or in Thoreau's terms "a true sauntering of the eye" (4:488) transforms all objects and enables the visionary to participate in eternal/transcendent life. Thoreau's desire is to perceive freshly, with fresh senses and to describe the most familiar object as if he saw it for the first time, "the novelty consisting not in the strangeness of the object but in the new and

clearer perception of it" (14:1694). Only when the doors of perception are cleansed, as Blake believed, everything appears to man as it is, infinite (qtd. in Underhill 288). Very late in the Journal, on 4 October 1859, Thoreau makes this very clear:

> If you would make acquaintance with the ferns you must forget your botany . . . you must approach the object totally unprejudiced. You must be aware that no thing is what you have taken it to be . . . You have got to be in a different state from common. Your greatest success will be simply to perceive that such things are . . . (12:1525)

What interests Thoreau is "a science which deals with the higher law" because, he confesses in the same entry that "[t]he fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist and a natural philosopher to boot" (5:529). In the Journal he tries to capture his momentary mystical experiences. A journal can focus on the present, the momentary interpretations of life. The next chapter will examine in detail Thoreau's mysticism.

NOTE

[1] All quotations from Thoreau's Journal are cited by the volume number, followed by the page number.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Thoreau and Mysticism

Seeing the immense design of the world, one image of wonder mirrored by another image of wonder — the patterns of fern and of feather by the frost on the windowpane, the six rays of the snowflake mirrored in the rock-crystal's six-rayed eternity . . . . Are not these the correspondences . . . whereby we may speak with angels?

(Edith Sitwell, qtd. in Joseph P. Strelka, Ed., Anagogic Qualities of Literature. 1971, 28.)

We are to seek therefore for some absolute truth capable of communicating to other positions a certainty which it has not itself borrowed; a truth self-grounded, unconditional, and known by its own light. In short, we have to find a somewhat which is simply because it is.

(Coleridge, qtd. in Colin Falck, Myth. Truth and Literature: Towards a True Post-Modernism [1989], 1991, 39.)

> Then idle Time ran gadding by
>
> And left me with Eternity alone;
>
> I hear beyond the range of sound,
>
> I see beyond the verge of sight, —
>
> I see, smell, taste, hear, feel, that everlasting
>
> Something to which we are allied, at once our
>
> maker, our abode, our destiny, our very Selves.
>
> (A Week: 140)

Thoreau's preoccupation with the higher self, untouched and apart from all externalities, makes his writing mystical. He gives expression to that tendency of the human spirit to gain a sense of complete harmony with the transcendental order. Thoreau's mystical endeavor takes on the dimension of a total life-process and is not just intellectual speculation. In two early entries in his Journal he makes his aim very clear. Listening to the "clear, liquid notes from the morning fields beyond," (1:97) he thinks of "that everlasting and stable something which is not sound, but to be a thrilling reality" (1:98). And he ponders, "What then, can I do to hasten that other time, or that space where there shall be no time, and these things be a more living part of my life, — where there will be no discords in my life?"

(1:98). In the other entry he confesses, "I find an instinct in me conducting to a mystic spiritual life, and also another to a primitive savage life" (1:114). The Journal is a record of such a total involvement and dedication to a life lived in the spirit and gives expression to the dynamic process by which he attains transcendental illumination.

"Mystical" in Greek means "hidden." "Mysticism" etymologically also means "to enter the mysteries." The Oxford English Dictionary describes the mystic as "one who . . . seeks by contemplation and self-surrender to obtain union with or absorption into the Deity, or one who believes in the possibility of the spiritual apprehension of truths that are inaccessible to the understanding" (175). The definition of "mysticism" reiterates the mystic range of activity as, "belief in the possibility of union with the Divine nature by means of ecstatic contemplation; reliance on spiritual intuition or exalted feeling as the means of acquiring knowledge of mysteries inaccessible to intellectual apprehension" (176). The mystical, then, refers to a supramental state of consciousness that goes beyond ordinary levels of experience. And by self-surrender or surrender of the Ego/ Individual self the mystic unites with a transcendent reality. "Mysticism," according to James Leuba, is "any experience taken

by the experiencer to be a contact (not through the senses, but 'immediate' •intuitive[1]) or union of the self with a larger-than-self, be it called the World Spirit, God, the Absolute, or otherwise" (qtd. in Slade "Introduction" 154).

That mysticism is beyond any particular religion, doctrine or institution is pointed out by Michel De Certeau in his essay on "Mysticism." The Absolute of the mystics, he believes, is "situated in the invisible and obscure, universal dimension of man perceived or experienced as a reality . . . hidden beneath a diversity of institutions, religions and doctrines" (14). Perhaps, the most comprehensive view regarding mysticism, which takes into account and isolates the common characteristics of mystical experience, is the one provided by Walter T. Stace:

> (1) The Unitary consciousness; the one, the Void; Pure Consciousness; (2) Nonspatial, nontemporal, (3) Sense of objectivity or reality, (4) Blessedness, peace, etc., (5) Feeling of the holy, sacred, or divine, (6) Paradoxicality, and (7) Alleged by mystics to be ineffable, (qtd. in Clark 60).

All these characteristics have been observed in Thoreau's writings as is explained in the previous chapter. His preoccupation with a timeless realm of existence, his minute observation of concrete facts and the emphasis on objective reality, the paradoxes he employs to suggest the ineffable nature of ecstatic/mystical experience - all this and more place him in the ranks of the mystics.

Hal Bridges defines mysticism in terms of a loss of self and Union with God. According to him, "Mysticism is selfless, direct, transcendent, unitive experience of God or ultimate reality, and the experiment's interpretation of that experience" (4). It becomes clear from the above definitions that mysticism is grounded in the belief that man has access to a source of transcendent knowledge, a spiritual domain/realm beyond intellectual cognition and hence not limited to time and space. Like all mystics, Thoreau too seeks direct communion with the spirit of the Universe. His "profession" he claims is "to be always on the alert to find God in nature" (2:262). "We are surrounded by a rich and fertile mystery," he wrote, and man's duty was to probe it and devote his life to the discovery of the divinity in nature (2:262). As the Journal reveals, day by day he probes the different layers of meaning in nature and gains fresh

insights into a comprehension of the Divine in Nature. It is a holy, mystical quest and not a superficial, transient interest in the passing phases of nature. It is an obsession as this Journal entry in February 1851 substantiates:

> My desire for knowledge is intermittent; but my desire to commune with the spirit of the universe, to be intoxicated even with fumes, call it, of that divine nectar, to bear my head through atmospheres and over heights unknown to my feet, is perennial and constant. (2:182)

This is, in other words, what Romain Rolland refers to as a longing for that "Sensation of the eternal," an "oceanic feeling" that could be described as a "contact" and as a "fact" (qtd. in Certeau 12). Thoreau believes that man has infinite capacity for a divine life and can in rare moments come into contact with the divinity in the universe. He makes this clear in an entry in April 1856:

> Was awakened in the night to a strain of music dying away, — passing travellers singing. My being was so expanded and infinitely and divinely related for a brief season that I saw how

> unexhausted, how almost wholly unimproved, was man's capacity for a divine life. (8:1004)

The experience of a transcendent Reality is personal, intimate and real to the mystic and he tries to communicate in words an experience that is in essence beyond expression. The experience involves an emptying of the Ego, or the lower self, as the mystic is provided a greater glimpse of the Divine. The culminating experience — that of mystical union according to the Encyclopedia of Religion involves "the unmediated, transforming experience of the unification of man or man's soul with the highest reality" (239). At the peak experience, man realises that he is no longer an isolated creature but one with creation — he unites himself with all that exists and partakes the glory of all that is. He perceives the unity of the universe and realizes that "All Things are One" (Greeley 74). As observed in the previous chapter, the realization of this Unity is important to Thoreau.

In the natural world he seeks signs and visions of a transcendent beauty. The beauty in the form or colouring of the clouds, the "red vision" excites him. It makes his thoughts flow and produces in him indescribable fancies. What they offer is a vision of transcendent beauty (3:313). True mystical experience

cannot be reasoned about or explained. "I think that the existence of man in nature" Thoreau writes, "is the divinest and most startling of all facts" (2:196). Thoreau also seeks "moments of divine leisure" — moments when he can find no distinction between his life and the "life of the universe" (4:508). As a mystic he believes in the all-round expansion of consciousness which results in "the dual power of knowing by communion the temporal and eternal, immanent and transcendent aspects of reality — the life of the All, vivid, flowing and changing, and the changeless, conditionless life of the one …" (Underhill 43).

To perceive and experience this transcendent Reality — to come into actual contact with Truth — one has to be "awake" to a higher life. In many journal entries, Thoreau stresses the need to be properly awake to a divine life, to have and keep alive an "uncommon" sense. Proper awakening, for him, involves "a double awakening, — not only from our ordinary nocturnal slumbers, but from our diurnal" because only then, "we burst through the thai 1 us of our ordinary life with a proper exciple, we awake with emphasis" (5:537). When thus truly awake and serene he can have memorable visions. As he wakes up with a sense of divinity, of beauty in the morning, he is reminded of "those undescribed ambrosial mornings of summer" when "a

thousand birds were heard gently littering and ushering in the light" (3:360). This sound aligns him to the divine and immortal m life. It is heard in that moment in the dawn when the senses are purer and have a luminous clarity and things are seen more truly than at any other time. Those mornings are cherished by him as sacred and memorable when he awakes with an atmosphere that is quite otherworldly, when he feels as if his spirit "had journeyed to its native place, and, in the act of re-entering its native body, had diffused an elysian fragrance around" (2:197). It is clear that Thoreau's idea of proper awakening is truly mystical and visionary in its content as it leads him to the "beyond." Two further examples from the Journal will substantiate this. In an undated entry, written before 1847, he writes:

> In whatever moment we awake to life, as now I this evening, after walking along the bank and hearing the same evening sounds that were heard of yore, it seems to have slumbered just below the surface.... All actions and objects and events lose their distinct importance in this hour, in the brightness of the vision, as, when sometimes the pure light that

> attends the setting sun falls on the trees and houses ••• • (1:130)

Here, he asserts a Presence beyond the phenomenal, that moment of illumination which reveals the hidden mystery of life. In another entry dated 26 January 1853 he explains: "There are from time to time mornings, both in summer and winter, when especially the world seems to begin anew, beyond which memory need not go, for not behind them is yesterday and our past life ..." (4:520). This is, for Thoreau, a morning which carries him back "beyond the Mosaic creation, where crystallizations are fresh and unmelted" (520). As the world seems to begin anew without reference to past or future, it is also the realm of the eternal "now."

The consciousness of the existence of a "timeless realm of eternity" is central to the mystic. The mystical experience is a timeless experience, as there can be no sense of time in a state of consciousness in which notions of past and future have no relevance. Mysticism thus concerns itself with the individual's relation to timeless truths. Thoreau is aware of this when he writes, "Anything that is called history of India — or of the world — is impertinent beside any real poetry or inspired thought which

is dateless" (10:1194). Mystics seek transcendental knowledge/ insight and therefore also try to overcome all sense of dualism between the self and the world. Time is therefore seen as a projection/creation of the mind, a bubble on the surface of Reality. If Reality/Eternity is conceived of as a vast ocean, the waves are the forms which have their existence in time and space. The content of the ocean and the wave is seen to be common — i.e., water. Mystics realize this truth and hence try to abolish time or realize the common ground of Reality. Thoreau, in a very important entry on 26 March 1842 observes:

> I am time and the world, I assert no independence. In me are summer and winter, village life and commercial routine, pestilence and famine and refreshing breezes, joy and sadness, life and death .. . Why does not God make some mistake to show to us that time is a delusion? Why did I invent time but to destroy it? (1:105)

This also explains why Thoreau chooses a spatio-temporal mode like the Journal. Time forms an integral part of the journal form. It is time which gives the journal its structure, meaning, continuity or lack of continuity. In the Journal Thoreau can thus "invent time" by writing about his personal history. At the same

time, he can "destroy" time i.e., transcend personal history by writing about the impersonal and the timeless.

To know that time is unreal, is to transcend all limitations and to realize pure consciousness which is the ground of all being. As Ken Wilber puts it, "[t]o live in unity consciousness is to live in and as the timeless moment" (62). Therefore what the mystic aspires to is a fusion of eternity with the instant. Eternity, it should be noted, is not "an awareness of Everlasting time, but an awareness which is itself totally without time . . ." (Wilber 62). In mystical experiences time appears to be suspended by a total immersion in the present so that the present becomes the timeless, the eternal.

Thoreau's total absorption in the present, the infinite possibilities that it offers, comes through in a journal entry of 27 January 1858. Early, the same month, he sets the mood when he writes, "these are true mornings of creation, original and poetic days, not mere repetitions of the past" (10:1242). This is how he describes the experience:

> You wander indefinitely in a beaded coat . . . sit long at a time, still, and have your thoughts . . .

> 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 cannot go home yet; you stay and sit in the rain. You glide along the distant wood-side, full of joy and expectation, seeing nothing but beauty, hearing nothing but music, as free as the fox-colored sparrow... (10:1248)

In this rapt mood he hears how "Steadily the eternal rain falls, — drip, drip, drip, —" (10:1248). Throughout the passage the avoidance of the first person "I" seems to be deliberate as Thoreau tries to convey that the experience somehow is not an element of his personality. It also seems to be an invitation to the reader to participate in the "moment." By thus living moment to moment, by abandoning himself leisurely to the magic of the present, he aspires to be the "lyre which the breath of the morning causes to vibrate with that melody which creates worlds" (6:740). In this way he participates in transcendent life.

To abandon himself to the present is what Thoreau desires* In one journal entry he expresses this sense of life lived: "What shall I do with this hour, so like time and yet so fit for eternity? .. . I like out indistinct as a heath of noonday. I am evaporating and ascending into the sun" (1:69). The same month again he writes, "I cannot tell you what I am, more than a ray of the summer's sun. What I am I am, and say not. Being is the great explainer" (74). Being is the great achievement of the mystic. To be is the mark of a real mystic, as it also involves a total absorption in the present. It means abandoning oneself to the experience of the moment without the need to analyze/explain it in terms of the past. Thoreau writes in an entry dated 4 April 1839: "Drifting in a sultry day on the sluggish waters of the pond I almost cease to live and begin to be . . . I am never so prone to lose my identity. I am dissolved in the haze" (1:37). Here, he also makes a distinction between "to live" and "to be." In "life" the opposite "death" is implied, while in "being" there can be no notion/sense of time or space. "Being" can thus be defined as "Pure Consciousness" or "Pure Awareness." It is also clear that "being" involves a loss of identity or personality — a fulfilling passivity in which loss of the self is accompanied by a sense of enlargement and union with the Spirit of the Universe. Thoreau's description of his experience also points to the expansive, formless and ineffable nature of the vision.

Thoreau's mysticism does not deny the body, mind and senses. "I never feel inspired unless my body is also," he writes. "The body is the first proselyte the Soul makes. Our life is but the Soul made known by its fruits, the body" (1:55). As Certeau explains, the mystics "receive from their bodies the law, the place and the limit of the experience" (21-22). To keep the bodily senses keen and alive is important as only those perceptions are valuable which are received with the total involvement of all the senses. The life of the body — the experience or life of the senses —gives him great moments of inspiration. By leading a purely sensuous life he seeks a tangible perception of a vision of Reality.

Thoreau understands the close correspondence the organic harmony between body and spirit. During mystical experiences, as Evelyn Underhill points out, "the actual physical perceptions are strangely heightened, so that the self perceives an added significance and reality in all natural things" (288). Thoreau records such heightened perceptions which takes him beyond the phenomenal. In an early entry in December 1839 he observes that "[t]he least creaking [of the crickets] doth whet all our senses and emit a tremulous light . . . over things" (1:44). Again, the telegraph harp stings his ear with everlasting truth. In it he hears

that which makes the world a lie. It exalts him: "When the zephr^ or west wind, weeps this wire, I rise to the height of my being" (4:575). Thus it is no ordinary sound that he hears in the telegraph wire. It leads him beyond to the very source of sound. As William James points out, such mystical states of being add a supersensuous meaning to the ordinary outward data of consciousness (338). In the right frame of mind, the voice of the bird, clarifies Thoreau's vision and enables that participation in transcendent life. He is able to overcome all societal/institutional barriers which cloud his vision of Truth. All this is explained in the entry of 12 May 1857:

> I ordinarily plod along a sort of white-washed prison entry, subject to some indifferent or even grovelling mood . . . I take incredibly narrow views, live on the limits, and have no recollection of absolute truth. Mushroom institutions hedge me in. But suddenly, in some fortunate moment, the voice of eternal wisdom reaches me, even in the strain of the sparrow, and liberates me, whets and clarifies my senses, makes me a competent witness. (9:1143)

The sound of the Heywood's Brook falling into Fair Haven Pond, has a purifying effect on Thoreau. On another occasion, at noon, sitting by the window he hears the sound of the cricket mingled with the sound of a distant piano. It gives him a rare experience as the melody attunes him to the universe and expands his being. His sense of sound achieves a clarity: "I am fitted to hear, my being moves in a sphere of melody . . ." (4:469). In such descriptions of heightened awareness/ consciousness he often refers to music. Thoreau believes that to the sensitive, sane man whose senses are pure, the world is a musical instrument. In all natural sounds, he recognizes the rhythm of his inmost self. Throughout the Journal Thoreau tries to capture this rhythm which gave him mystical visions. The Journal could record the variations of his soul, the different ways in which he responded to music in various natural sounds, and in this way also chart his own progress. By analyzing the various responses that music evokes in him, he could interpret his experience — its closeness to mystical truths. It is then clear that he realized that, "[m]usic is the element through which we are best spoken to by mystical truth" (James 333).

"What is there is music that it should so stir our deeps?" Thoreau wonders, and then adds, "In the light of this strain there

is no thou or I" (9:1108). Music elevates him above all dualities of "mine" and "thine" and offers a communion with the divine. It lifts him above the "dust and mire of the universe." How deeply music moves him is described in an entry : "The way in which 1 am affected by this faint thrumming (of the guitar) advertises me that there is still some health and immortality in the springs of me . . . It releases me; it bursts my bonds" (9; 1106). It is to the liberating effect of music that he places significance here. Music has its direct appeal to the heart and the listener is effortlessly transported to a feeling of enlargement and emancipation/ freedom. The commonest and cheapest sounds as the barking of a dog, the sound of the wind, rain, running water, the song of birds — all natural sounds — give Thoreau memorable visions. It is as if he "bathed his being," purified his sense, by attending to these sounds. Only by a self-forgetful attentiveness can one imbibe the true impact of music. To hear the liquid melody of the bobolink, Thoreau believes, we should contribute "all that we possess and are" (9:1152). On another occasion the song of the bay-wing brings about an "aboriginal contentment" and he sees "the world as through a glass, as it lies eternally" (9:1143). The opaque earth is then no longer opaque but "transparent," a reflecting mirror, reflecting eternal truths. William James describes the ontological effect of music in The Varieties of Keiiflimis Experience:

> There is a verge of the mind which these things haunt; and whispers therefrom mingle with the operations of our understanding, even as the waters of the infinite ocean send their waves to break among the pebbles that lie upon our shores. (334)

The impact of music is thus quite other-worldly; under its impact man communicates with something "larger-than-self."

Music intoxicates Thoreau. It charms him and transforms the mundane world. To him the aeolian harp and the woodthrush are the loftiest preachers left on earth because they elevate him. He blissfully abandons himself in a self-forgetfulness, for that effacement of the "self-in-the-world": "Where was that strain mixed into which this world was dropped but as a lump of sugar to sweeten the draught? I would be drunk, drunk, dead drunk to this world with it forever*' (6:676). Those mornings are memorable to him when on waking up he feels his body transformed as a musical instrument — the organ and channel of melody.

It becomes clear that there is in Thoreau a movement from the spiritual to the mystical. He tries to derive the spiritual

significance of the life of the body i.e. the sense-experiences. This in turn leads him to a stage beyond to an experience of mystical union with a transcendent Reality. The Journal traces the various stages of spiritual awareness leading to mystical visions. This clearly emerges in the descriptions of the impact of music and how the sensation leads him on to a profound mystical communion. By contemplating on the spiritual impact of music he also reaches that stage of mystical realization when all external sound is internalized so that he is in communion with the Divine.

The mystical merging of the "self in the 'SELF' under the impact of music is well described by H. P. Blavatsky in The Voice of the Silence:

> He who would hear the voice of Nada, the 'Soundless Sound,' and comprehend it . . . when he has ceased to hear the many, he may discern the ONE — the inner sound which kills the outer . . . For then the soul will hear, and will remember. And then to the inner ear will speak — THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE . . . . And now the self is lost in SELF, Thyself unto THYSELF, merged in

> THAT SELF from which thou first didst radiate* (qtd. in James 33)

Thoreau too has such a profound sense of the importance of a silent communion where the mystic is in contact with the Higher Self. Such experiences are described in the language of contradiction/paradox. The reference to "Soundless Sound" and "THE VOICE OF SILENCE" by Blavatsky can only mean that while the activity of the senses are hushed with regard to the external world, the experience opens up an intense internal "activity" — an "aliveness," a "vibration," in harmony with the Reality, the Source of all sound. This silence then is not an absence of sound but refers to a positive sensation, an experience that is more than sound. In a passage on "Silence" written in 1838, Thoreau explains that, "Silence is the communing of a conscious soul with itself. If the soul attends for a moment to its own infinity then and there is silence" (1:34). This silence is positive as he explains: "Those divine sounds which are uttered to our inner ear — which are breathed in with the zephyr or reflected from the lake — come to us noiselessly, bathing the temples of the soul, as we stand motionless amid the rocks" (1:34). True silence then produces intense spiritual activity as the individual self loses its hold in the external world and communes

with the SELF. Such experience is also accompanied by an access to divine music.

> The creaking of the crickets seems at the very foundation of all sound. At last I cannot tell it from a ringing in my ears. It is a sound from within, not without. You cannot dispose of it by listening to it. In proportion as I am stilled I hear it. (2:221)

Here it is the "inner sound" that he is attentive to.

In another long passage he describes the impact of music — how he sat for hours on rocks and "wrestled with the melody" (6:740) which possessed him. He is then attentive to "a positive though faint and distant music, not sung by any bird, nor vibrating any earthly harp." (6:740) The music he describes here has no known empirical source. By attending to the "Soundless Sound" with no known source, he allies himself to the SELF. It gives him boundless joy:

> I lay long on the rock, foundered like a harp on the seashore . . . **You** say on the earth as on a raft, listening to music that was not of the earth, but

> which ruled and arranged it. Man should be the harp articulate. (6:740)

It is clear that in this experience he transcends the limits of the ego as indicated by the use of "I," "you" and "Man." Mystical experience, as noted earlier, is complete only when it "involves the definite emergence of the self from 'the prison of I-hood' which requires an act of concentration on the selfs part as the complement of its initial act of expansion" (Underhill 236). This kind of total participation, paradoxically requires a "standing apart," a witnesshood, which Thoreau makes clear in one entry thus,

> However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me which, as it were, is not part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking not of it, and that is no more I than it is you. (4:473)

To be a "competent witness" is thus to be a "spectator," which in turn is to be the "higher self as it is "no more I than it is you," and beyond death: "When the play — it may be the tragedy of life — is over, the spectator goes his way" (4:473).

In her essay "A Definition of Mystical Autobiography" Carole Slade distinguishes between "mystical" and "spiritual" autobiography. She analyses thus;

> While the spiritual autobiographer writes from a human perspective, the mystical autobiographer takes the vantage point of the divine ... the mystic portrays the interior life as a relationship of the transcendental eternal self with God rather than as introspection actively conducted by the historical, empirical self for the purpose of coming to know God. (228)

In the light of this broad distinction it can be argued that Thoreau's Journal emerges both as "mystical" and "spiritual" autobiography. One major aspect of mysticism as noted in the definitions is the assertion of an intuition which transcends the temporal categories of the understanding. It is intuition that proves the "mind's cosmic connection with the life force and supra-consciousness of the universe" (Negri 24). Through immediate intuition one is able to experience/attain direct knowledge of God or Spiritual truth. As Bridges points out, the favorite themes of the mystics, are "innerlight, the ultimate unreality of this world, the existence of a timeless realm of

eternity, and the apprehension of mystical truth beyond reasoning . . ." (6). Intuition is important to Thoreau who gives in to a mystical acceptance of intuition as the final. By listening to the "inner voice," he believes that one may reinstate oneself on "the pinnacle of humanity" (1:62). By obeying the call of intuition, the higher light, one can escape the ego — transcend the limits of the individual and "travel totally new paths" (9:1062). And a liberated perception of things demands a sense which is not common, but "rare in the wisest man is experience" (A Week 314). Thus in various ways Thoreau tries to explain the importance of intuition. In the words of Bertrand Russell, "the first and most direct outcome of the moment of illumination is belief in the possibility of a way of knowledge which may be called revelation or insight or intuition . . ." (14). Thoreau realizes that this insight alone can perceive that "immortal melody that could be heard morning, noon, and night . . ." (2:227). However, like all Transcendentalists, Thoreau takes a human perspective stressing the potential in each man to contain within himself, through his intuition, the whole range of experience. The divine spark, i.e. intuition is present in every individual and by developing it alone he can gain access to God: "Each natural being and each event contained the all, and each was therefore the source of sacred power" (Albanese 169).

Also, the "mystical" element in Thoreau's works arises, as explained earlier, out of his preoccupation with the transcendental self. At the same time, his work can be seen as an autobiography which assumes the self to be a historical, private and, finally transcendent modality The choice of a private/ autobiographical form like the journal, which is also at the same time impersonal, reveals this. Growth, and change, as explained in the previous chapter, is important to Thoreau and the journal form with its dated entries can best communicate this. To him, there is no more glorious condition of being than from impure to becoming pure. It is almost desirable, he feels, to be impure that he may be the subject of this improvement (2:223). He is aware of the fact that mystical visions often demand long periods of waiting and preparation: "One moment of life costs many hours, hours not of business but of preparation and invitation" (4:508). Again he points out how spiritual growth entails a gradual progression and need not be related to a linear notion of time:

> Here I am thirty-four years old, and yet my life is almost wholly unexpanded. How much is in the germ: There is such an interval between the ideal and the actual in many instance that I may say I am unborn ,.. My spirit's unfolding observes not th**e**

> pace of nature . . If life is a waiting, so be it. (2:223)

Transcendental time was inner rather than outer, "the time of the self in progressive unfolding" (Albanese 160). Inner evolution and progress is important and the journal form with its flexibility can record the flux, the changes. Transcendent life, for Thoreau, is thus linked to life in history. What he hopes for is immortality now, that it be in the quality of his life. He believes that a man should be worthier at the end of the year than he was at the beginning. Change or growth of consciousness is essential to a vision of Reality. The journal form can trace the progress of his historical consciousness.

The journal form has the advantage of recording a definite development of his whole self, conscious and unconscious, a remaking of his personality on high levels in the interest of the transcendental life. When he started making entries in his Journal he confesses, "My desire is to know what I have lived that I may how to live henceforth" (1:20). When any real progress is made, according to him, "we unlearn and learn anew what we thought we knew before" (1:24). The journal form being "open-ended, inclusive and unfocussed gives a kind of

validity to experiences, positive and negative" (kelleher 187). And since the writer is not bound by the demands of consistency,: he can grope towards solutions (Kelleher 187). In the Journal Thoreau records the moment to moment struggle and tries to refine his experiences to reach out to the ideal itself. All his efforts are directed at expanding the actual to the ideal.

For Thoreau, it is important to write while "the heat" is still in him because, "the writer who postpones the recording of his thoughts uses an iron which has cooled to burn a hole with. He cannot inflame the minds of his audience" (3:347). Marsanne Brammer's comment that mysticism is grounded in lived experiences and practices that are heterogeneous, non-linear, particular and nondiscursive (29) applies to Thoreau's Journal.

Thoreau's Journal emerges both as "mystical" and "spiritual" autobiography. The preoccupation with the transformation of the self through time makes his writing "spiritual" in human terms. And the commitment to transcendent visions (because the mystical experience as such calls for a "beyond") makes it mystical. The mystical experience itself can be interpreted only in terms of paradox. This is clearly brought out by Certeau again:

> It is impossible to identify mystical experience with a particular instant in time because of what it awakens in the memory and because of all the life experience that emerges in that particular moment. By the same token, it is also impossible to reduce it to the product of a long preparation, since it happens unexpectedly, as a "gift," and is unforeseeable. (18)

Let us turn to Thoreau's description of his experience in a journal entry dated 21 November 1850:

> Some distant angle in the sun where a lofty and dense white pine wood, with mingled gray and green, meets a hill covered with shrub oaks, affects me singularly, reinspiring me with all the dreams of my youth. It is a place far away, yet actual and where we have been . . . It was like looking into dreamland. It is one of the avenues to my future. Certain coincidences like this are accompanied by a certain flash as a hazy lightning, flooding all the world suddenly with a tremulous serene light which it is difficult to see long at a time. (2:171)

The experience comes close to Certeau's description. As always Thoreau relates the experience to a clarified perception of concrete facts outside. Then he points to the unpreparedness, the unexpected nature of the vision. The experience he describes is also transitory by nature — the luminous presence is something which cannot be possessed. Also, the experience he has is an enlightening one as referred to by the strong visionary light. And in that mystical moment — that momentary visionary gleam — past, present and future coincide.

NOTE

For Emerson, as for Thoreau, the awakenings of the higher powers constitute the best moments of life. This means a loss of body-consciousness as he explains in a journal entry dated 27 March 1838:

> I am cheered by the moist, warm, glittering, budding, melodious hour, that takes down the narrow walls of my soul, and extends its life and pulsation to the very horizon. That is morning, to cease for a bright hour to be a prisoner of this sickly body, and to become as large as nature (86)

To become "as large as nature*' also involves a transparency wherein "causes and spirits" (43) are seen through the objects. And this happens when "the axis of vision is coincident with the axis of things" (55). Emerson's description of his experience in his essay on Nature brings out this aspect of his mysticism. It gives expression to a sense of self-loss or loss of identity for merger with the "all." This in turn includes abolition of all dualisms between the seer and the seen. He writes:

> Standing on the bare ground, — my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, — all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; 1 see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God. (24)

It is significant to note that unlike in Thoreau, it is sight rather than sound that often gives Emerson mystical visions. In Nature again he describes one such experience thus:

> I see the spectacle of morning from the hilltop over against my house, from daybreak to sunrise, with emotions which an angel might share. The long slender bars of cloud float like fishes in the sea of crimson light. From the earth, as a shore, I look out to that silent sea. I seem to partake its rapid transformations; the active enchantment reaches my dust, and I dilate and conspire with the morning wind. (27)

By perceiving beauty in natural forms he is tit tune with the rhythms of Nature.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

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.

(Thoreau, The Journal of Henrv David Thoreau Eds., Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen, 1962, 36.)

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is

(Wallace Stevens, qtd. in William W. Bevis, Mind of Winter: Wallace Stevens. Meditation, and Literature, 1988, 22.)

As pure water poured into pure water remains the same, thus, O Gautama, is the Self of a thinker who knows.

(Katha Upanishad, The Sacred Books of the East Vol. XV, Ed. MaxMuller, 1975, 17.)

Throughout his life, Thoreau strives to realize the sacred dimensions of daily activities. What he attempts is to show man's ability to transcend historical circumstances. Writing is a means, a process to discover unknown heights and depths. His language "is not a means to relate his history so much as it is itself his very essence — the literal translation of his being into symbol" (Cox 10). And the result is the Journal. It becomes one of his challenging quests for a form that would express his deepest personal convictions and at the same time bring him into vital communication with the world at large.

Thoreau stresses the importance of lived experience in his Journal "Who was the traveller? How did he travel? How genuine an experience did he get?" (3:320). Experience is indeed the core of mysticism — direct experience in which the ordinary senses and the individual self, the ego, are transcended. The mystic "reports his experience as a supreme source of knowledge, more cogent and convincing than the experience either of sense or of reason" (Clark 63). To "know" reality then, is to "experience" it. As such the mystics find the bases of their method not in logic but in life; in the existence of a discoverable "real," that spark of true being within the seeker (Underhill 28). Thoreau believes that the true artist is one whose life is his

material so that "every stroke of the chisel" enters "his own flesh and bone" (1:55).

In the Journal he arrives at an understanding or explanation of his life by recording, to use Elizabeth Bruss's expression, the "fleeting data of consciousness" (qtd. in Cook 91). This internalizing of the whole mystery of the connection between the mortal and the spiritual makes writing in Thoreau a form of meditation. The word "meditate" is derived from Latin "meditari" which means continued reflection or a concentrated dwelling in thought. Meditation is the medium through which the mystic passes through the various stages of spiritual consciousness and attains to a state of "pure consciousness" or "pure void." The

> act of perfect concentration, the passionate focusing of the self upon one point, when it is applied in 'the unity of the spirit and the bonds of love' to real and transcendental things, constitutes in the technical language of mysticism the state of meditation or recollection: a condition which is peculiarly characteristic of the mystical consciousness, and is the necessary prelude of pure contemplation, that

> state in which the mystic enters into communion with Reality." (Underhill 58)[1]

Very early in the Journal Thoreau stresses the importance of withdrawal/contemplation: "Completely silent I will be this hour, and the next, and forever" (1:57). He continues in the same entry: "The most positive life that history notices has been a constant retiring out of life, a wiping one's hands of it. . ." (57). In another entry he explains how a cloudy afternoon is sober and favourable to reflection. As it concentrates his thoughts, his sense of sound achieves a keenness and a clarity so that he hears the "crickets plainer" (3:291). Much later in the Journal he explains the impact of a meditative mood on him thus:

> My thoughts are concentrated; I am all compact. . . The sound of a wagon going over an unseen bridge is louder than ever, and so of other sounds. I am compelled to look at near objects. All things have a soothing effect; the very clouds and mists brood over me . . . My attention does not wander. The world and my life are simplified. (8:934)

In the Journal he makes short entries which may be called an act of meditation as he focuses on a particular phenomenon; later he

returns to the same phenomenon with an added significance. These entries then, put together, form an extended meditation because meditation involves methodical reflection. An attempt is made to still the ordinary thoughts of the human mind.

Meditation also involves deep religious thought on eternal truths and hence becomes a religious exercise. The goal is to break through the bounds of the finite into the infinite. By perceiving the Divine in the finite/visible Nature, the self reaches out to the infinite/Absolute. So Thoreau writes, "I would fain improve every opportunity to wonder and worship, as a sunflower welcomes the light. The more thrilling, wonderful, divine objects 1 behold in a day, the more expanded and immortal I become" (9:1063-64). For Thoreau meditation means this "beholding" — a paradoxical state of activity in inactivity or vice versa. This spiritual perception involves seeing things with the "unconscious side of the eye" (5:592); the true significance of an object emerges not when he faces it directly but when he is apparently engaged in other occupations. Knowledge that comes unawares without conscious effort is really worthwhile and enduring. Thoreau refers to this on various occasions in the Journal. In an entry dated 27 July 1852, he observes: "The slight distraction of picking berries is favorable to a mild, abstracted, poetic mood, to

sequestered or transcendental thinking. 1 return ever more fresh to my mood from such slight interruptions" (4:466). The next year, he reiterates this. When abroad "sauntering," he realizes that in a favourable frame of mind, rare sights are offered not by direct gaze but with "the unconscious side of the eye" (5:592). It has a purifying effect as dews descend to purge the mind of dross: "There is a coolness in your mind as in a well" (5:592). By seeing with the side of the eye, the poet can get visions which deliberate effort cannot. To explain this further Thoreau writes about his experience on 30 April 1856.

> I was trying to get the exact course of a wall thickly beset with shrub oaks and birches, making an opening through them with axe and knife, while the hillside seemed to quiver or pulsate with the sudden melody. Again, it is with the side of the ear that you hear. The music or the beauty belong not to your work itself but some of its accompaniments. (8:1010)

Thoreau believes in the novelty and significance of pursuing simple occupations such as picking cranberries, because they are the path by which he climbs the heights of being. The act of

building a fence or surveying a farm is important because these are the true paths to perception and enjoyment.

It is not enough to see things scientifically as a naturalist sees things. Meditative states/concentrated attention makes the mystic a Seer — a Sage who sees into the reality of things. As the Upanishads point out: That principle which is seen through the eye, is the Self. It is reflected in the five elements. He who sees through the eye, knowing that he sees realizes the Supreme. Thoreau's aspiration also is to be Seer as he makes clear in one entry: "Man cannot afford to be a naturalist, to look at Nature directly, but only with the side of his eye. He must look through and beyond her" (5:539). Only the visionary can see directly into the heart of nature and gain that self-knowledge that enables him to transcend his temporal condition. In meditative states of consciousness there is not only a sharpening of the senses, but also a "self-merging, a real communion*' (Underhill 360) between the subject and the object. Standing in a bare November landscape, Thoreau's description of a vision of small colourful birds is quite otherworldly:"It is only necessary to behold thus the least fact or phenomenon, however familiar, from a point, a hair's bream aside from our habitual path or routine, to be overcome, enchanted by its beauty and significance" (8:941). He feels

himself transported momentarily out of the earth and the "great winter itself looked like a precious gem" (941). Thus by total absorption, by imaginatively recreating the present, he feels himself translated as he goes on: "My body is all sentient. As I go here or there, I am tickled by this or that I come in contact with, as if I touched the wires of a battery" (941). Marsanne Brammer's view that mysticism more closely resembles a mode of cognition or experience than a belief system, thus applies to Thoreau too (34).

Writing about the Christian mystics Underhill comments that "they aspire to infinitize life and to define Infinity. The obstacle in their path is not consciousness in general, but self-consciousness, the consciousness of the Ego" (209). In meditative states of consciousness, as observed earlier, there is extinction of the ego or "self-loss" where the border between the individual self and the external world is blurred or destroyed. Thoreau records such ineffable and non-conceptual experiences as the autobiographical form has the advantage of grounding meditation in experience. As early as in August 1838, he records a rare experience:

> If with closed ears and eyes 1 consult consciousness for a moment, immediately are all walls and barriers dissipated, earth rolls from under me, and I float … in the midst of an unknown and infinite sea, or else heave and swell like a vast ocean of thought without rock or headland, where are all riddles solved, all straight lines making their two ends to meet, eternity and space gambolling familiarly through my depths. I am from the beginning, knowing no end, no aim. (1:31-32)

Thus by meditating on the formless he enters a mystical experience which involves self-loss only to give him an infinite sense of freedom and expansion. It lifts him out of the phenomenal plane as he loses all sense of time and space. And the very vagueness of his description points to the ineffable quality of the experience. In another important entry of 31 December 1853 he records a mystical experience:

> The contact of sound with a human ear whose hearing is pure and unimpaired is coincident with an ecstasy. Sugar is not so sweet to the palate, as sound to the healthy ear … These things alone remind me of my immortality, which is else a fable.

> I hear it, and 1 realize and see clearly what at other times I only dimly remember. I get the value of the earth's extent and the sky's depth. It, as it were, takes me out of my body and gives me the freedom of all bodies and all nature. I leave my body in a trance and accompany the zephyr and the fragrance. (6:676)

In both of the experiences he is transported outside himself and hence it may be said that Thoreau is recording an event best described by the word "ecstasy." Ecstasy can be defined as a short and rapturous trance with well-marked physical and psychical accompaniments (Underhill 207). In this state the mystical/contemplative loses all consciousness of the phenomenal world, and is caught up to a brief and immediate enjoyment of the Divine Vision (207). Certeau characterizes ecstasy as a "birth** that

> draws from man a truth that is his without coming from him or belonging to him. Thus, he is outside 'himself at the very moment that a Self is asserted. A necessity is aroused in him, but under the sign of

> a melody, a spoken word, or a vision coming from elsewhere. (18)

It is through the faculty of sound that Thoreau has visionary experiences on various occasions.

According to William W. Bevis, "Thoreau stands almost alone in American literature before 1950 as a conscious spokesman for meditative experience" (48). Bevis distinguishes between meditative experience and ecstatic experience; the former is a passive mystical condition with no emotional content while the latter involves an excited self-loss accompanied by definite feelings and physiological excitement. Ecstasy is seen as beyond thought but not beyond feeling; deep meditation as beyond both thought and feeling (50). When viewed in this light, Thoreau's descriptions may indeed be seen as being detached and impersonal with less of stress on individual emotions.

The mystical vision that Thoreau seeks thus denies the ego or the individual self. As the individual self exists only in relation to the world, the negation of one is the negation of the other. But, because the earth is "transformed" by a superior cognition, he is not left in a confused or blank state; he reaches

on the other hand, a higher, positive and affirmative state where in all paradoxes are resolved.

The core of mystical states is the experience of union between subject and its divine object because the experience of God, the "mutual correspondences with the Over-World are felt by the mystic to be as objectively real, as genuinely a subject-object relationship — a self experiencing an Other . . .** (Jones 263). In an entry of 18 March 1858, Thoreau describes the experience he has on Fair Haven Hill:

> Every third tree is lit with the most subdued but clear ethereal light, as if it were the most delicate frost work in a winter morning, reflecting no heat, but only light. And as they rock and wave in the strong wind, even a mile off, . . . they are alternately light and dark, like looms above the forest, when the shuttle is thrown between the light woof and the dark web … At the sight of this my spirit is like a lit tree. It runs or flashes over their parallel boughs. (10:1258)

In the above passage, the light outside coincides with the light from within, the outer and inner merge. Thoreau is also faithful to the external details, i.e., in recording minute phenomena. The significance lies not in the subject/perceiver alone or in the object/perceived considered isolatedly, but in the meaning that emerges from an interaction of both. The "Uncreated Light" that "manifests Itself in and through created things" (Underhill 231) becomes one with Pure Consciousness or the "SELF' in the perceiver, fusing them in a common identity. The experience described transcends the dualism of subject and object in a higher experience of identity. In this state of being all

> sense of a subject/object dualism is abolished, for nothing is experienced as alien to the mind; but, neither are boundaries dissolved for a process of differentiation accompanies that of identification. Self-transcendence becomes self-fulfillment.
>
> (Kelleher 185)

Joel Porte writes that "the natural world is the source of Thoreau's intense delight, which finds its perfect end in the moment of illumination — the final stage in Thoreau's mystic quest, when the heat of ecstasy has been transformed totally into light" (166). Light, indeed, plays a very important role in

Thoreau's visionary experiences For example in an entry of 28 October 1857 he writes at length of a serene, elysian light, transitory but intense and tries to decipher its meaning, "It was but a transient ray, and there was no sunshine afterward, but the intensity of the light was surprising and impressive, like a halo, a glory in which only the just deserved to live" (10:1215). The impact of the vision is such that "every recess was filled and lit up with this pure white light*' (1215) so that it gives him a sense of liberation. These transient gleams, he realizes, are a language to be heard and understood. In a much later entry "myriad sparkles of brilliant white sunlight on a rippled stream*' almost transform the appearance of the world (13:1630).

"I set out once more to climb the mountain of the earth,*' Thoreau writes, "for my steps are symbolical steps, and in all my walking I have not reached the top of earth yet" (5:537). The mountains are dear to him as they are the stepping stones to heaven. They are the "undisputed territory between earth and heaven** and are "valuable to mankind as is the iris of the eye to a man. They are the path of the untranslated** (563). On another occasion, at sunset, as he beholds the forms of the mountains in the horizon he tries to commune with something grander than man. In mysticism, the border between waking and dream is

blurred. For Thoreau it is not important whether his visions are a waking thought or dream remembered. What matters to him is the subject of the vision, the truth alone On 29 October 1857, he writes of those early morning thoughts which occupy a debatable ground between dreams and waking thoughts. One might say that these are his visionary experiences. He writes of the mountain which he ascended till he lost himself "quite in the upper air and clouds . . . into a superterranean grandeur and sublimity . . . awful, grand. It can never become familiar; you are lost the moment you set foot there" (10:1217-18). And then he confesses that it is only in dreams that he is shown this height. The pleasure of ascending the mountain is mixed with awe, his thoughts are sublimed, purified and he feels himself translated. In the same entry, Thoreau puts it in verse thus:

> For ever in my dream and morning thought,
> Eastward a mount ascends;
> But when in the sunbeam its hard outline is sought,
> It all dissolves and ends.
>
> It is a spiral path within the pilgrim's soul
> Leads to this mountain brow;
> Commencing at his hearth he climbs up to this goal
> He knows not when or how. (10:1218)

NOTES

In the Indian philosophical system this may be described in terms of the four stages of "mantra-sadhana." ("Mantra-Sadhana** can be defined as a spiritual exercise whereby deep concentration on one single sound takes the aspirant in slow stages to a perception of the Reality beyond.) The first is Vaikhari or physical sound; the second, Madhvama or thought-form, the subtle perception which takes note/reacts to sound; the third Pasvanti or the Meaning or Idea behind of which Madhvama is the form/expression; the fourth and the last stage being the Para or the Absolute, beyond language. It then becomes clear that the real object of meditation is the mystical contact with the Absolute, beyond all mentations/conceptions.

Thoreau's description of his experience in the entry (dated 31 December 1853) also comes close to the "samadhi" experience — "a fourth kind of consciousness" which is "beyond the states of waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep,** when the experiencer "appeared to have fallen into a kind of trance*' (Christopher Isherwood, qtd. in Michael Comans, 19. "The Question of the Importance of Samadhi in Modern and Classical Advaita Vedanta " Philosophy East and West 41.1 [1993]: 19-

38). It is also clear, from Thoreau's description that the experience is known and defined in relation to another state (of which "samadhi" is the transcendence). "Samadhi" is thus only a "state" when a new view is added to consciousness.

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NOTE

[1] This bibliography includes only those books and articles which are related to the present study.