

On Walden

In *Walden*, Thoreau spends his time in nature digging and delving past superficial things – institutions, weeds, ice, water – to find truth and reality. He believes that this submersion is necessary to truly understand the Earth and subsequently understand the Heavens through ascension. In one way, he does this through his removal of the weeds so that he can “[make] the earth say beans instead of grass” (Thoreau 148). He uses the downward digging to create an upward motion in the form of beans. Somewhere through his time in semi-isolation, his thinking changes from needing to control this ascension to realizing that the earth or mankind will naturally express the downward or inner truth through upward or outer motion. His revelation of this natural – and real – motion comes around the time when he sees the thawing sand and notices how “perfectly the sand organizes itself as it flows, using the best material its mass affords to form the sharp edges of its channel” (287). He sees just how the earth expresses itself and how man is the same, each in a unique way.

I’m going to take you through two paragraphs in *Walden’s* “Conclusion”. Thoreau begins by stating that there are those who believe people in this generation “are intellectual dwarfs compared with the ancients, or even Elizabethan men... A living dog is better than a dead lion” (305). Even though a lion has much more prowess than a dog, dead it can do nothing. Today’s generation may not live up to the standards set by older thinkers, yet it is here and alive and that is what matters. Someone alive today should not “hang himself because he belongs to” a generation that seems inferior (305). He should instead excel in what he does. This returns back to the idea Thoreau has that each man expresses his own truth in a unique way. This is done by delving within yourself and

“endeavor to be what [you were] made”, allowing that to blossom outward (305). Joseph Boone, in his “Critical Essays on Thoreau’s Walden” furthers this statement with “we are shaped by our essential personality, which in turn makes us the only true creator of the plans of our lives” (Boone 169) While our inner being is being expressed, we cannot actively do so; it is done naturally and in its own time. We are not active creators.

Thoreau, I believe, then questions his own actions with: “Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed...?” (Thoreau 305). He is stating that desperately trying to find your reality is done in vain. Everyone finds their reality in their own time because they “hear a different drummer” (305). Thoreau says, “Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured of far away”, showing how one’s inner truth will come naturally and of its own accord. I think that Thoreau sees how the changing of the seasons is the “music” to the Earth (305). It is really able to begin expressing itself once springtime comes around. I think each individual has their own time when they express their inner truth – their own springtime – and it is not important when this comes about.

He goes on to further question attempts to find truth: “If the conditions of things which we were made for is not yet, what were any reality which we can substitute?” (305). If it is not time for one’s truth to be revealed, then it cannot be done; just like one cannot prematurely “turn spring into summer” (305). Thoreau realizes that the only reality found will be false and “vain” (305).

Thoreau goes on to discuss the found false reality as “a heaven of blue glass over ourselves” (305). This is a sort of distorted replica of what is really true. Glass is also see-through, so “we shall be sure to gaze at the true ethereal heaven far above, as if the former were not” (305). I think he is trying to make two points with these statements: that

through the false reality we can see a distorted image of the truth and also that our false reality also expresses the truth. Glass creates a distorted image of what is behind it, so this false reality may display a glimmer of truth behind it. At the same time, it makes you think a false reality is true and keeps you from seeing the actual truth. This could be connected to the pond. It creates a distorted image of reality and of the transcendental, keeping you from facing true reality.

A more positive reading would be that one's false reality actually expresses truth just like everything else around him. If reality comes from the inside out, then even false reality will express some sort of truth. I think these two ideas go together; it's not enough to just replicate the reality, some sliver of truth has to be involved for it to be a convincing false reality. It is also necessary for it to express truth, for eventually the "spring" will come, allowing full realization of reality.

Through this segment of the "Conclusion", Thoreau connects his thoughts to the remainder of the book. To begin, I think Thoreau may have believed our generation is made of "intellectual dwarfs" at the start of his journey (305). He seemed to think of himself as an exception, feeling superior to those around him and his readers. He probably includes this in here to emphasize that he did feel this way at one point, but has changed his ways. He began, thinking that he was going to find the way to reality for everyone and become this unique intellectual mind of the generation. Yet he comes to realize that every single person in this generation is playing a part, just like the "ancients" (305).

Yet he does not deny that this generation may be intellectually inferior to generations before. He does not use this as a reason to be discouraged though. He just

says to be the best you can be. I think, at this point, he no longer truly thinks he is superior to the rest of his generation. I think he uses the “man... [being] the biggest pygmy that he can” as a metaphor for himself (305). He is just using his person skills to find his own reality.

He then shows how he used to try so hard to succeed. He failed because he tried so hard to find reality himself. He discovers through the thawing sand that reality will reveal itself at its own pace and that it does so from the inside out. I think this is the moment when he connects all the dots and reaches the conclusion he has here. The earth has its own rhythm, and he realizes that he also has that rhythm.

The sand thawed during spring – when his truth was revealed – and it came naturally. It did not need to be prodded or poked or delved into. It just happened when it was meant to. Thoreau now knows that trying to find reality too early will result in distorted and false realities.

In this moment he sees the false realities he himself had had: the beans, for example. He created this reality by forcing the earth to express itself in a certain way, and it worked. The beans grew upward, expressing some sort of reality, yet it was not the reality meant for that moment. It still contained truth to it, though. The beans still express some sort of reality, just a distorted one.

I think Thoreau finished *Walden* feeling like he accomplished something. I don't think this was entirely the same thing he meant to accomplish though. He truly did find a sort of reality; he found the truth about reality. Throughout the entire “Conclusion” he discusses the ways in which going about to find reality, most saying to just allow it to happen. I think he was happy with the fact that he discovered this.

Another truth I feel he discovered is that everyone's reality is different. When trying to find an ultimate reality, he discovers that each of us have to find our own. Yet we should not worry about the details and just let it happen in its own way and time. We just need to keep exploring ourselves and eventually our reality will be revealed.