

WALDEN: A SACRED GEOGRAPHY

By

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Dear H,

Could I have spent my time better than digging in this dirt?

Fondly, J

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ABSTRACT

In this study, I explore Walden as a place of pilgrimage. Walden Pond is located in Concord, Massachusetts, a place associated with Henry David Thoreau, a 19th century icon of American environmentalism. The site of his simple dwelling (and the focus of his book by the same name) is now a state park and national landmark that receives over half a million recreational users and tourists each year, in addition to visitors with a particular interest in Thoreau's life and writing. I took two approaches to Walden's sacred geography, using phenomenological methods to explore the poetics of pilgrimage and a hermeneutic reading of the landscape to interpret Walden's sacred space. In-depth interviews of ten Walden pilgrims provided the basis for a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to eliciting themes of pilgrim movement and connection. I further explored the themes of journey, ritual and stillness; and person, place and text in the pilgrim experience. I approached the politics of place through a critical hermeneutic reading of the historic and contemporary landscape. Here, Chidester and Linenthal's conception of the production of sacred space provided the basis for reading Walden's sacred geography in terms of ritualization, interpretation and the contested politics of place. The theme of person, place and text was taken up again from the gatekeeper perspective. This dissertation contributes to the literature of pilgrimage and place by bringing the perspectives of poetics and politics together in the study of Walden. By drawing on both a hermeneutics of suspicion to explore the production of space, and a

hermeneutics of recollection to recover the phenomenal experience of pilgrimage, we move beyond the mystical naiveté of a purely poetic perspective and the nihilism associated with a solely political approach to understanding sacred space.

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CHAPTER 1

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Heaven is under our feet, as well as over our heads.

Thoreau, Walden

Prelude

In late September, Walden Pond looks just like its picture postcard. The woods surrounding the shoreline present their fall array of colors, the deep red, yellow and bronze of turning leaves mingled with the steadfast green of tall pines. The display is amplified by the trees' reflection in the still waters of the Pond, a deep clear blue that reflects the sky. Earth mirrors heaven, a pattern which suggests that nature's value lies in its ability to refer us beyond itself, creation pointing to Creator. Our upward gaze affirms the hope that, although our feet may be mired in clay, we are surely heaven bound.

But Thoreau wasn't looking at reflections when he asserted that "heaven is under our feet, as well as over our heads."¹ He was at the Pond in winter and, having "cut through a foot of snow, and then a foot of ice,"² Thoreau was pondering the watery habitation below. If Thoreau was right, if heaven *is* under our feet, then our sacred journeys may not lead us out of this world. If heaven is under our feet, the places we inhabit may not be left behind, vacated in the quest for a higher realm. If heaven is under our feet, we may need to be more careful where we step.

At the heart of this exploration of Walden's sacred geography is a spiritual question about the relationship between earth and heaven, our material surroundings and our spiritual ideals. It is a question that has profound implications for our own posture toward the place we all inhabit, and obvious consequences for the world beneath our feet. I've chosen to explore this question through the conceptual framework of sacred geography, a stance that assumes a connection between the values we hold and the places in which we dwell. My guide through this territory is the pilgrim, one whose travel combines a material road with a spiritual pathway.

Although the underlying question is broad and universal, my approach is focused and particular. The questions which I chose to pursue are aimed at understanding the power of place through the relationship of pilgrim and place. I began with a particular place of pilgrimage to study, and drew on the stories of particular individuals, my own included. The inquiry has an academic context located in the overlapping fields of geography, anthropology, and religion, rich ground where interest in place and pilgrimage intersect. And the study is not without merit for those with an interest in visiting and managing sacred places. But the deeper motivation and context for this work is a spiritual quest, one fired by experience of the more-than-human world as a revelatory participant in the celebration of the Divine.

Overview

In a given year, half a million people come to a certain park in the eastern suburbs of Massachusetts, most of them for ordinary recreational pursuits. A minority of these visitors come to Walden Pond State Reservation with a man in mind, recognizing Walden

as the site of Henry David Thoreau's former dwelling and the focus of his written testament, Walden, or Life in the Woods. These people are pilgrims, making an intentional quest to an out of the ordinary place in search of a valued ideal.³ That Walden is sacred space may come as no surprise to those who journey from afar to pay homage to Thoreau. To speak of the sacred is to have reference to a breadth of phenomena that surpass the bounds of formal religion. The implicitly religious nature of ecological movements, as well as Thoreau's establishment as a 'green saint' through literary canonization, lend support to the customary perception of Walden as sacred ground in American environmentalism.⁴ Understanding why pilgrims are drawn to Walden, as well as what they find when they arrive, can enhance our understanding of the experience of pilgrimage and the power of this place.

This study explores the sacred geography of Walden in order to understand the ways that pilgrimage both shapes and reveals the power of place. Two related questions form the focus of inquiry: What is the pilgrim experience of place? And how does the perspective of pilgrimage inform an understanding of place? The mutuality of person and place expressed in these questions is integral with my conception of sacred geography, the understanding that human values and beliefs shape particular places even as certain places shape our ideals and responses.⁵

The questions and approaches to this study are located within, and seek to inform, a varied and growing literature of place that spans several disciplines, including humanistic geography; cultural, ethnographic, and religious studies; as well as aspects of history, philosophy, and architecture. In the following paragraphs, I outline several key

strands of the literature on place that have influenced the questions and course of this study. The implications of my epistemological approach for the format and style of the research writing are also discussed.

The Matter of Place

Place is more than mere location in the sense of this study and of the literature which it seeks to inform. Although geographic coordinates are related to the host of physical and cultural forces that shape the attributes of a place, other factors are much more fundamental aspects of place. The substance of place consists both in the material forms through which our social relations are worked out, and the sense of place that we develop through time by means of our lived experience.⁶ Places and people are necessary to one another, and we might think of place as an environment in dialog with human narrative.⁷ Place can be defined as a localized and unique ensemble of nature and culture, a changing and emergent focus within a larger area of meaning and experience; and yet place is a concept better understood through perceptual experience than by means of objective description.⁸

Place is sometimes defined in contrast with space, where space is extensive, geometric and abstract, while place is “always tangible . . . specific and relational.”⁹ To gain an experiential sense of the difference, Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that if “we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement [making] it possible for location to be transformed into place.”¹⁰ Although each term may be best defined in relation to the other, they often resonate divergent values with respect to environmental change. Place has carried connotations of cultural richness,

belonging, and history, and often excites or accompanies concerns about loss and preservation. Many geographers, ethnographers, and anthropologists, as well as artists and writers, have made the description and evocation of a sense of place central to their work of understanding or influencing culture. On the other hand, space has been closely linked with quantitative methods and technological achievements. From Cartesian coordinates to global positioning systems, with their infinite divisions of the world, spatial analysis has focused primarily on position in relation to a universal grid. This perspective achieves its powerful ends by excluding attention to the subjective or sensuous world.

One has only to walk into a local planning board hearing to encounter the contrast of space and place. You know the overgrown orchard across the road as a quiet place to walk on frosty mornings, the spot where cardinals always nest in summer, the vacant lot that kids use to build their forts and campfires. This place holds the land's agricultural history and evokes the rural character of your road through its regularly spaced old apple trees and stone walls. But this place goes unrecorded on a blueprint rendered by the developer of a proposed subdivision except as a blank and seemingly empty space divided by regular lines into house lots, roads, utilities. With time and habitation, the envisioned houses may become homes and the new street a neighborhood. Space was used to 'dis-place' the old orchard, a pattern for environmental change that seems linked to the increasing scale, pace and technological facilitation of what we generally refer to as 'development.'

The interest of 20th century cultural geographers in the subject of place was perhaps spurred by similar experiences, threats of the loss of place sparking interest in naming and describing the value of what seemed to be disappearing. The “tentative first steps of a geography of place” have been located early in the post-World War 2 era,¹¹ a period when shifting values and an emphasis on “mobility, centralization and economic rationalization” were reflected in rapid demographic and landscape change.¹² One thread of the literature on place that informs this study has focused on the lived experience of place, a concern with placelessness, and the recognition, design and preservation of place. The humanistic approach of these cultural geographers and other scholars generally asserted the values of rootedness and sense of place in the face of an increasingly displaced society.¹³

But in recent decades, the scope and scale of the erosion of place has been accompanied by another thread of concern. The challenges of post-modernity’s critique of traditional narratives and cultural assumptions have called into question the power relations served by the preservation of place and the stigmatization of rootlessness. I may feel more at home in a place with open land, old houses and large lots; but the policies that sustain this sense of rural heritage can also serve to exclude others, unwittingly or not. Whose cultural stories are supported in place, and which groups are marginalized by the maintenance of the social structures bound up with place? This conceptual challenge has turned attention to the experience of uprootedness and disempowerment, implicating the role of place in cultural oppression and political domination. Place is no longer

naively viewed as a vital anchor for a cultural ethos, but is also recognized as contested space through which broader power struggles are worked out.¹⁴

These two key strands in the literature of place, what we might call “sense of place” and “contested space,” reflect tensions that permeate this work, tensions between individual sensibility and cultural habituation, between the pilgrim’s inner and outer worlds, between the sacred as experienced and the sacred as socially constructed. The strength and particular contribution of my work lies not in an attempt to resolve these tensions, but in the adoption of seemingly divergent approaches to the study of place. My initial desire to investigate the power of place through pilgrim experience alone became weighted by a concern for what a purely individual and inner view might conceal; while the risk of nihilism posed by a deconstructive approach to place was balanced by the sensuous affirmation of the world fostered through attention to lived experience. When two parts are properly linked, tension can strengthen rather than divide a whole.

One way to approach such integration in approaches to sacred place is by considering the pilgrim as an essential intersection between the politics and poetics of place. Through the places they go, the routes they take, the rituals they perform, and the stories they tell, pilgrims both create and reveal landscapes of the sacred. Pilgrimage suggests a possible link between the politics and poetics of place, because pilgrimage is both a form of embodied engagement with the landscape, as well as an assertion of the particular meaning of certain sites. Therefore, pilgrimage serves both to reveal and to establish the power of place. In this study, consideration of the various meanings of

place that pilgrims encountered, contested and constructed informed the sense of Walden from a critical perspective, while attention to the pilgrim voice fostered understanding of the ways in which the power of place was compounded, or confounded, by the sensuous experience of place.

There is a third thread in the literature of place that contributes to weaving the context of this study, in addition to the “sense of place” tradition and the perspective of “contested space.” The former might be seen as a protective circling of wagons against the loss of place, the latter thread as a crucial pause to question the established boundary and the respective moral ground of insiders and outsiders. The third strand in the literature of place that informs this study might be thought of as another kind of circle, the gathering around a campfire to listen to each others’ stories, with attention to the role of language and narrative in the knowledge, construction and experience of place.¹⁵

Attention to narrative is embedded in the study design, and directed the form and content of the dissertation. The outline of chapters reflects the experience of pilgrimage, from considering the meaning of a place to planning the journey to reflections on the threshold and at the place of pilgrimage as well as upon the return home. My own pilgrim narrative also contributes to the research, and is present primarily in the form of “preludes” or essays that evoke the experience and concerns that are central to each chapter. Throughout, the dissertation relies on careful and evocative description, intended to draw the reader into the place of the pilgrim. The narrative style of this work is an attempt to use what Belden Lane has called the art of “lyric geography” to communicate the sacred experience of place.¹⁶

Travel Guide

The first three chapters of the dissertation provide an introduction to the research and the research participants, including the methodology and the results of the interview portion of the research. Through this introduction I have articulated the questions at the heart of the study, and sketched the broader context of the research in the literature of place. In the next chapter, “Research as Pilgrimage,” I provide a more specific review of the literature of place in relation to the approaches and methods of this study. The following chapter, “Walden Pilgrims: Their Stories,” is where I elaborate on the role of narrative with respect to place and pilgrimage, and present the pilgrims’ own stories of place. In reading Chapter 3, you will get know the people whose experiences shaped much of the content of the dissertation. The way their stories are presented also serves to exemplify an important aspect of the methodology, the thematic summaries that resulted from in-depth interviews.

The poetics and politics of Walden are then considered as ‘stand alone’ perspectives, one through a critical historical reading of place and the other through a phenomenological reading of the pilgrim experience. In Chapter Four, “Making Space,” I examine the production of sacred space through a reading of environmental history. In Chapter Five, “Making Pilgrimage,” I consider the broad themes of journey, ritual and stillness in a more holistic interpretation of place experience that emerges from the pilgrim stories. Then, in Chapter Six, “The Place of Pilgrimage,” I bring together the politics of place and the poetics of pilgrimage under the rubric of person, place and text, exploring the common ground and complementary insights of these two approaches to

the study of sacred space. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I reflect further on the tensions and promises inherent in this two-handed approach to the exploration of the sacred geography of Walden.

In addition to this outline, it may help the reader to bear in mind two things: a sense of the goal of the study and a sense of the process. The aim of the study is a deeper and more explicit understanding of this place, Walden, as a place of pilgrimage. The route to this goal is spiral rather than straight, requiring us to look at Walden from first one perspective and then another. Moving forward by means of circling our subject will engage us in the necessary and perhaps fruitful tensions between pilgrim and place, between poetics and politics, between phenomenology and hermeneutics. As with most pilgrimages, our study will be permeated with pilgrim stories. And, at journey's end, we are likely to find ourselves with new questions rather than pat answers, at an open door inviting us to further conversation and reflection.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH AS PILGRIMAGE

Prelude

Pilgrimage begins with a place pictured in the mind's eye, or viscerally felt, that calls and compels the pilgrim. Born of story and imagination, this image can exert a power to move us even before we have been to a place. For years my sense of Walden was a vague collage of Thoreauvian quotations, colored by a passing glimpse of sunlight on water and tainted by disparaging remarks about crowds, litter and erosion. To begin my Walden pilgrimage, I need a bit more to go on. I choose a paperback copy of Walden suitable for a pilgrim – plain, portable, and unencumbered by annotations. I read slowly, wading sincerely through thick prose, and underlining with delight a familiar phrase or a new revelation. As long as the text alone is my guide, Walden retains the purity of distance, a place known through Thoreau's experience and seen through the filtered light of my imagination.

While I read, I can postpone the moment of departure. The threshold of imagination and action is a critical juncture for one who has lived life as a dreamer rather than a doer. Pilgrimage prompts questions and demands decisions. Certain issues become manifest through movement, revealing concerns about the meaning and significance of my choices. One such decision involves my mode of travel. Pilgrims move in many ways: they dance, they walk on their knees, they “measure the length of their bodies in

prostration.”¹⁷ A journey of 30 or 40 miles lies ahead. Will I walk? Hitchhike? Bicycle the distance? Walking to Walden has a strong appeal, carrying as it does both Thoreau’s own blessing and the stamp of simplicity. Before, I had dreamed only about the goal. Now I am faced by questions that are spiritual as well as practical, about the value of suffering, the authenticity of my attempt, and the importance of the journey in relation to the pilgrimage as a whole. Will driving to Walden in a mini-van along commuter beltways invalidate my experience? Without a tradition to follow, a path to mark the way, or a company of fellow pilgrims to emulate, I am left to my own devices.

On a personal level, walking to Concord might link me in spirit with Thoreau and with pilgrims of all ages and places who made their way, staff in hand and pack on back. I can imagine time and motion conspiring together to create a mobile kind of sacred space in which I might ponder and prepare as I journey toward Walden. I am never more easily absorbed in thought than when walking a familiar trail. But the terrain between here and there, the dense suburbs and high-speed highways of the urban fringe, is no place for solitary reverie. I would have to make my own path, and watch my own back. Such a journey would require time and focused attention, as well as the particular energy that an introvert must summon for public encounters; resources I want to reserve, at least this time, for Walden itself. Who knows what rituals of movement might be mandated or motivated by Walden once I am there? But first I must arrive.

In the end, or rather the beginning, I elect to drive to Walden, heading east from my central Massachusetts home toward the Pond. I wander a roundabout route, leaving the interstate for a narrower way that winds past the mills of Hudson, Stow and Maynard;

working my way into Concord by criss-crossing the Assabet River. I take Main Street east through the town proper, turn right on Thoreau Street, then right again onto Walden Street, making a slow, clockwise spiral toward the goal of my pilgrimage.

Overview

the·o·ry (thēr'ē), n. contemplation or speculation...<Gk *theōria* a viewing, contemplating...

Webster's Dictionary

The origins of the word 'theory' highlight the link between sight and insight, seeing and understanding. *Theoria* was also the official term for pilgrimage in ancient Greece, suggesting a parallel between pilgrimage and research.¹⁸ My journey to Walden provoked a stream of questions and revelations, leading me to see that pilgrimage is a path to understanding that involves travel and strangeness, attention and response, discovery and interpretation. As I began this study, pilgrimage emerged as more than the subject of my inquiry. It became a metaphor for the research process itself.

In any wayfinding process, a few key elements are desirable right at the start, the research equivalents of the map and compass. To stay on course, the pilgrim needs a compass or guiding star against which to check her direction. For this endeavor, the lodestone was the broad question, "How does place matter?" The question has two sides, and my journey led me to contemplate alternately one side and then the other. "What is the pilgrim experience of place?" And "how does the perspective of pilgrimage inform my understanding of place?" Like a compass, the questions reveal little about the terrain

through which one travels; but do provide a way to re-orient oneself when paths diverge or the view ahead is obstructed or obscure.

A map of the terrain is also helpful to the traveler. Although research is intended to uncover new territory, the field of discovery generally lies within or on the edges of a landscape already mapped by others. I needed to know where others had gone, and how they had gotten there. In the process of developing my view of the field of sacred geography, I read the literature of sacred space and pilgrimage, with necessary forays into the broader conversation on place and space; and with an eye to the research traditions and methods that accompanied various philosophical and disciplinary perspectives. Boundary setting is also an important cartographic decision. Although the psychological disciplines have contributed insight to people and environment interactions, I chose to center my field of inquiry in human geography with its diversity of place-sensitive approaches.

A broad view of the landscape helps the traveler to map a route. In choosing among the many possible research pathways, I sought those that would provide the perspectives on place and pilgrimage most relevant to my questions. The research involved a dual approach to researching sacred space at Walden. I sought to explore the pilgrim experience of place, drawing on the personal encounters of Walden visitors as well as my own. And I attempted a cultural reading of the landscape of Walden in order to see it primarily as a place of pilgrimage. The interpretive act is primary in both these perspectives on understanding place and pilgrimage. In the first case, human experience

provided the text for interpretation. In the second, the cultural landscape served as the text. For each approach, the principles of hermeneutics contributed to the methodology.

Before setting out on a journey, it's also helpful to determine the scale of your map. A smaller scale map encompasses a larger area, but shows less detail. A larger scale map covers less ground, but reveals more features. In terms of the scale of the research, a case study allowed me to balance the universal breadth of my underlying questions with the depth of insight available through focused study in a local landscape. As Clifford Geertz has noted, "place makes a poor abstraction."¹⁹ I chose one particular place of pilgrimage, one small enough that its boundaries can be sauntered in a morning. In relation to the human scope of the project, the exploratory nature of my questions indicated that in-depth interviews with a small number of pilgrims would better meet the research aims than would a broad sample.

A map and compass are good tools for the journey. But these instruments may convey a sense of independence, and a notion that the traveler moves over an inert landscape. Although the journey of the doctoral dissertation requires solitary effort and decision-making, it is never a trip undertaken alone. The course of my journey, as well as what I was able to see along the way, was shaped and enlivened by those who participated in the research, pilgrims and gatekeepers as well as fellow scholars and academic advisors. And from the beginning, the place itself excited my interest and encouraged further exploration.

In this chapter I sketch the map of the research journey by outlining the methodological pathways of the research process. The travelogue begins with a

discussion of the study site and its selection. Next is a review of the dual approaches to understanding sacred space, the poetics and the politics of place, and a broad introduction to the methods for interpreting place and place experience. From there the path diverges as I focus first on interpreting pilgrim experience, then on interpreting place. The chapter includes an outline of the methods that fostered the exploration of the experience of pilgrimage through interviews with pilgrim visitors. And it concludes with a review of the resources which supported a reading of the landscape as a place of pilgrimage.

Site Selection

A key decision in any research journey is the choice of a study site. Often the researcher begins with an exploration of the theoretical landscape, seeking a conceptual home for her questions before going in search of an appropriate site to investigate. Rather than taking a theoretically derived question to a study site, my inquiry developed in dialog with a particular place. Early in my explorations of sacred geography, I made a journey to Walden, considering it as a likely site of environmental pilgrimage. This wooded lake is located in the historic town of Concord, Massachusetts, and is the focus of a book by Henry David Thoreau, a 19th century writer, activist and naturalist noted for his influence on American conservationism. My research interests and questions were subsequently informed as much by my personal experience of Walden pilgrimage as by the academic literature.

Putting myself physically in place drew sensory and kinesthetic energy into the theoretical consideration of pilgrimage. First, I read Walden, then journeyed there to try its potential as a place of pilgrimage. More skeptic than devotee, I put my agnosticism

about Thoreau on hold and tried to proceed with an open mind. Finding my way around an unfamiliar space provoked new questions and nourished personal insight. Particular encounters and intriguing opportunities encouraged my experimentation with various perspectives on sacred space. Through writing reflectively about my journey, I experienced the value of telling one's story, and recognized the richness of Walden's potential to support further inquiry. The research questions are the outcome of interaction between my physical and emotional experience of Walden, and my intellectual engagement with the literature of sacred space.

What makes Walden a productive field for research? Walden is rich in natural and cultural features relevant to the study of pilgrimage, open to research activity, amenable to my limitations as a researcher, and fertile to my imagination. A National Historic Landmark and a state park, Walden is now billed as the "birthplace of the conservation movement."²⁰ Walden Pond is a 60-acre kettle pond, a deep lake fed solely by groundwater, in the midst of over 2000 acres of protected woodland. The landscape offers natural diversity, including bogs, wet meadows, hemlock woods and shrub swamps; and paths that lead up to both broad vistas of the Pond and secluded coves. My initial exploration revealed a cultural richness as well, including features you might expect to encounter at pilgrimage sites and evidence of ongoing pilgrim activity. The House Site and cairn suggested a shrine, and the path around Walden Pond implied circumambulation, a traditional pilgrim activity. Even the gift shop, a frequent staple of popular pilgrimage places, revealed the activity of groups who seek to protect and interpret the site. In my visits, I also noted evidence of a rich politics of place at Walden,

signs of conflict and controversy about the use and management of a site visited by many other people than pilgrims.

The site was inviting in practical aspects as well. Access to the site was not a major issue, since Walden Pond is within a state reservation and much of the surrounding land is also open to the public for use. A researcher who spent time walking, journaling, taking photographs, or simply sitting and observing the activity around her was not likely to attract scrutiny, nor encounter undue personal safety issues. Gatekeepers at the site, such as park staff and personnel who work for associated organizations like the Thoreau Society, were also amenable to this research activity, offering interest and information insofar as their schedules and resources permitted.

Another issue regarding site selection touched on cultural and personal aspects of my inquiry. Researchers today are more conscious of their position with respect to the people and places they study. An academic tradition of studying the “other” must be balanced against the pressing need for self-scrutiny in any study of environmental values, particularly given the impact of mainstream American culture on local and global environments. By placing myself at Walden, I have for the most part worked with people who are of similar cultural background. That Walden lay within 50 miles of my own home was also an important consideration. For many researchers, field work is time apart from everyday life, but my research time was very much embedded in everyday realities and relationships. Detaching myself from place in order to do research far from home, in a time frame that would disrupt enduring commitments, was not a choice I

wished to make at the time. My research journey was very much intermingled with and informed by my roles as mother, wife, teacher and community member.

Running through all these considerations was the appeal of the place itself. The slope of the land, the curve of the shoreline, the lure of deep, clear water led me in and on. Unexplored trails beckoned and each change of weather or change of season brought a new discovery: lap swimmers emerging from the morning mist, a scarlet tanager bright against boughs of white pine, a toddler stripping to wade on a chilly November day, a golden carp idling in a shallow cove. The dissonance of my experiences, the promise of discovery, the conviction that more and still more could be known, made me eager to return. Simply said, Walden called to me.

Approaching Walden

In this research project I addressed two associated questions about place and pilgrimage in relation to Walden. What is the pilgrim experience of place? And how does the perspective of pilgrimage inform an understanding of place? Underlying these focused questions is a broad assumption about the power of place, that, just as human beliefs and actions can shape particular places so can special places influence human responses. Another way to emphasize this mutuality of person and place is to phrase the research question as follows: How does Walden both shape and reveal patterns of pilgrimage?

Two approaches to the research were adopted. One approach was based in the traditions of human science research, and focused on developing insight to the pilgrim experience of place through narratives of that experience. In other words, people who

had made intentional and meaningful visits to Walden were asked to reflect upon and talk about that experience. Their stories, and that of my own pilgrim journey, formed the basis for discerning essential themes of Walden pilgrimage. This approach to understanding Walden as a place of pilgrimage is rooted in the interpretation of human motives, movements, and memories. In some ways it reflects the perspective of the believer, one who seeks special meaning or significance in relation to the sacred place. This approach is referred to as the poetics of pilgrimage.

The other approach to the research was based in traditions of textual research, and focused on developing an understanding of Walden as sacred space through material and documentary sources, particularly those found on site or originating with interested groups and agencies. If Walden is sacred space, that particular interpretation must be asserted and contested amidst its other uses and meanings, such as recreational facility, haven of biodiversity, or historic landmark. Cultural features such as signs and structures, maps and photographs, promotional literature, and historical records formed the basis for assessing how Walden is revealed or concealed as a place of pilgrimage. This approach to understanding Walden as sacred space reflects a cultural perspective, in which the meaning of a place never stands apart from the ongoing advocacy of human agency. This approach is referred to as the politics of place.

This two-fold approach to the study of place is an attempt to respond to gaps in the literature of sacred space and pilgrimage. With few exceptions, these two approaches are by and large segregated in studies of religious place.²¹ To the critical reader, the exclusion of any consideration of politics when the focus is on poetics might be seen as a

tendency to romanticize sacred experience. And although researchers who draw on the political approach more often include attention to the poetics of place, their questions seem to focus on the ways that politics shape the poetics, revealing a presumption that “all human relations, meanings and practices are grounded in power relations.”²²

A review of the literature reveals that the divide between politics/poetics is also evident in recent scholarship on pilgrimage. Two publications stand out as self-consciously distinct approaches to the study of pilgrimage, both of them linked by the same interdisciplinary conference on the subject in 1988. The essays in Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage, edited by John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, emphasize the politics of Christian pilgrimage places.²³ Simon Coleman and John Elsner take a more poetic approach in Pilgrimage in World Religions, presenting picture sections as an aesthetic aid, inviting readers to “construct their own paths of interpretation” through comparison of the texts and images.²⁴ An explicit dialogue takes place through the editorial sections of these texts, as Coleman and Elsner use their epilogue to challenge the categories of study established in Contesting the Sacred, and Eade and Sallnow make a rebuttal in the introduction to a second edition of their work.²⁵

There are a few notable examples of the integration of poetics and politics in the recent literature on pilgrimage. Adrian Ivakhiv’s study of New Age pilgrims, Claiming Sacred Ground, exemplifies the use of multiple methods.²⁶ Under the label of a “cultural geographics” of place, Ivakhiv draws on the resources of cultural studies, spatialization, and eco-criticism, including in his toolkit methods as varied as hermeneutic phenomenology, discourse analysis and environmental history. Although Ivakhiv was

primarily concerned with issues of human power, particularly competing discourses about Earth forces in an era of globalization, he also used pilgrim interviews and his personal participation in ritual to gain insight to the experience of believers with regard to the natural features and metaphysical meanings of his study sites of Glastonbury and Sedona.

Another study that includes attention to both the poetics of personal experience as well as the politics of power at sacred sites is Jill Dubisch's anthropological study of the shrine at Tinos.²⁷ In a Different Place provides a thick description of the devotional practices of women at this Greek Orthodox shrine, and includes as well a discussion of the political significance of this particular pilgrimage in relation to Greek national independence. But an even more compelling story of the politics and poetics of research is narrated through Dubisch's own reflections on her work and field experience. She unpacks the politics of position by considering what it means to be "in the field" during an era of changing consciousness about the ways in which anthropology has historically "othered" its research subjects. She also articulates what it means to be a woman in the field of anthropology in light of questions around voice and perspective raised by feminist critiques of the research stance.

The literature on place and pilgrimage points out several avenues for advancing research in the field and suggests the necessity for more holistic approaches to the study of sacred place to address three essential dichotomies. Researchers of pilgrimage are encouraged to look beyond traditional religions to the roles of secular sites and beliefs in their research focus, to acknowledge reciprocity in human~environment relations in their

research approach, and to integrate politics and poetics within the scope of their research.²⁸ This study of Walden addressed these concerns by bringing the lens of pilgrimage to a place unallied with formal religion, yet rich in historic and cultural significance. The research remained explicitly open to the reciprocity of place and pilgrim in the Walden experience through its epistemological framework and its methodology. And it brings together politics and poetics in the study of sacred place and pilgrimage.

This inquiry into the sacred geography of Walden embraced both poetics and politics by incorporating two complementary questions about the experience of pilgrimage and the interpretation of place and by engaging multiple research methods. The primary question, “What is the pilgrim experience of Walden?” suggests an insider’s view of pilgrimage, an embrace of the spiritual power of place that is consistent with a poetics of pilgrimage. The secondary question, “What does the perspective of pilgrimage contribute to an understanding of Walden?” suggests an outsider’s view of place in which spiritual experience is suspect, a view more consistent with a politics of pilgrimage. Although the literature implies the difference and distance between these two approaches to the study of place, the following methodological outline suggests common ground.

Making Sense of Place

We use the phrase “wandering in circles” to describe the experience of being lost, implying that knowledge and purpose are linear pathways. But the pilgrim way is both circular and intentional, including ritual circumambulation around a shrine as well as the broader circle of departure and return. Going in circles is an apt metaphor for iterative

research. Like walking a labyrinth, engaging in research is a spiral journey toward the focus of inquiry, made over time, through iteration, and engaging particular perspectives that are repeatedly encountered with varying distance and accumulated experience.

The notion of a circle or spiral also informs hermeneutics, a method of interpretation that has been simply described as “the art and science of making sense.”²⁹ Originally developed in the 18th century as a method for the interpretation of Biblical texts, hermeneutics was later extended to the study of meaning in activities beyond written texts, such as works of art and landscapes. More recently, a hermeneutic approach to research has been taken up in humanistic geography, and its emphasis on “interpretation, open-mindedness, and a critical, reflexive sensibility” has been of particular interest to those engaged in the poetics and politics of representation.³⁰

How can a hermeneutics of place serve as an approach to both the politics and poetics of sacred space at Walden? A politics of sacred space recognizes that the power of place is bound up with cultural metanarratives. The politics of place may therefore draw on a hermeneutics of suspicion as it seeks to discern the ways that ideas about the meaning of place are mapped out or restricted in terms of contested societal discourses of nature, place and the sacred. Although potentially providing necessary revelation and criticism regarding the human power at play in sacred space, this approach also “invites nihilism...in relations with...the environment.”³¹ The deconstruction of power relations may be a good starting place for an exploration of sacred space, but it is important to move beyond suspicion.

Drawing on a hermeneutics of recollection which “seeks to uncover a plenitude of coexisting meanings,” the poetics of place is located in a tradition that is amenable to the embrace of memory and mystery in the experience of place.³² A poetics of the sacred is open to stories based in the individual experience of place that affirm meanings other than those constructed or imposed on place by society. Initially defined and described by Paul Ricoeur, these “two interpretations of interpretation,” the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of recollection, support our two different theoretical stances to the questions of place and pilgrimage.³³

This study of the poetics of place brings together hermeneutic interpretation with approaches based in the traditions of phenomenology. Phenomenology is the study of way we experience any aspect of our perceptual world, including particular responses, such as wonder, or the lived quality of a place, such as home. Contemporary methods are rooted in a tradition associated with continental philosophers like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Phenomenology offers three necessary openings to the study of the pilgrimage experience of Walden. First, by taking ‘phenomenon’ as its subject matter, phenomenology allows us access to the full range of human experience, including the experience of the sacred. Secondly, phenomenology allows us to explore the activity of place itself in sacred experience. Rather than dichotomizing person and world as subject and object, phenomenology embraces the inter-animation of people and place, potentially availing us of the voice of place itself. And because phenomenology invites consideration of the embodied experience of place, it provides an insider’s approach to considering pilgrimage as a way of knowing place.

In this study, the sociological approach of Alfred Schutz and the hermeneutic-phenomenological method outlined by Max van Manen guided the recollection and interpretation of pilgrims' Walden experience.³⁴

One way to consider the relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics is to ponder the distinction and complementarity of two more familiar activities: description and interpretation. Description is an essential aim of phenomenology. Description may sound like a mundane and straightforward task, until we consider how much of our lived experience is unreflected and unarticulated. We all have a sense of what it is to be a stranger, or to return to a place where we feel at home. Phenomenology aims to describe what such experiences are like in a way that "is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience."³⁵ Phenomenological description provides revelatory insight to familiar ground.

Interpretation is an essential aim of hermeneutics. Interpretation has been thought of in a variety of ways: as the attempt to understand the meaning of a text as well as (or better than) its author; as understanding not just the text itself, but the world that is revealed by the author's text, or even our very own "possibilities for being in the world;" or as engaging in a cross-cultural conversation in which the author speaks from one place and time as we respond from our own.³⁶ Whereas hermeneutic approaches suggest the social context of human understanding in language and culture, phenomenological approaches seek the essence of experiences that may be hidden from outward appearances.

Although phenomenology and hermeneutics are distinct methods, the activities of description and interpretation are more difficult to separate in practice. In the work that follows, the *interpretive* reading of Walden as a place of pilgrimage is illustrated throughout by *descriptions* of the physical, historical, and experiential aspects of the land. The phenomenological understanding of Walden pilgrimage is based in *description* which involves the *interpretive* use of language.³⁷ Hermeneutics and phenomenology are used as complementary approaches to understanding the meaning of the place and the activity of pilgrimage. By drawing on both approaches, we can uncover inner meanings that are hidden because they are so often unreflected and unspoken; and we can expose cultural meanings which, through our own embeddedness in the assumptions of that culture, may be taken as necessary rather than contingent. This combined approach to the study of Walden, which draws on both hermeneutics and phenomenology, allows us to hold in tension outer worlds and inner worlds of social context and individual experience.

The scholarly traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology provide the epistemological foundations for this study of the place of pilgrimage and the pilgrim experience of place. A hermeneutics of suspicion better enables us to understand the ways that claims on meaning can also be a bid for power; and can guard us against an uncritical reading of sacred space or an “analytical naiveté [. . .] in the form of theological dogmatism or mystical intuitionism.”³⁸ A hermeneutics of recollection allows us to affirm that there is more to the world than what we make of it. The methodological particulars that evolved from this epistemological framework are further

detailed and documented in the following sections on the poetics of pilgrimage, and the politics of place.

The Poetics of Pilgrimage

Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?...I know of no other reading of another's experience so startling and informing as this would be.

Thoreau, Walden

The Walden Pond park supervisor was subtly curious about the value of pilgrim stories to a research program. Through working at Walden, she had gathered a lot of these stories, but didn't think of them as "something you record as a hard factual event." Pilgrim stories make a "big impact," but "what do you do with them?"³⁹ This question is difficult to address if we think about knowledge only in terms of hard facts or numerical data. To explore a topic like the pilgrim experience of Walden requires a methodology which is open to all kinds of lived phenomena, and one that fosters the ability to make interpretive sense of human experience.

Hermeneutics offers one approach to the interpretation of meaning in the study of human experience. Wilhelm Dilthey recognized that the human sciences required a different approach than the natural sciences, one that was open to the existence and value of meaning. Although hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, had fostered methods for the interpretation of texts, Dilthey argued for the extension of hermeneutics to other meaningful resources, such as art, tools, and even landscapes.

Whereas hermeneutics offers a method to interpret human meaning, phenomenology presents a path for recollecting and evoking human experience. With origins in the continental European philosophies of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, and developed in a sociological context by Alfred Schutz, the purpose of phenomenology is the study of the ‘life-world.’ This approach aims not to “explain and/or control the world” but to offer insights that “reunite [us] with the ground of our lived experience.”⁴⁰

To say that phenomenology is open to lived experience means that intangible realities such as memory, imagination and emotion are valued as much as are more tangible aspects of human being such as where, when, and how a person moves through space. Through retrospective reflection on lived experience, this method seeks to describe the “lived quality and significance” of our experience with depth and richness. Phenomenology is poetic in that it attempts to evoke the life-world through “language that reverberates the world,” authentically [speaking] the world rather than abstractly speaking of it.⁴¹ This systematic and inter-subjective approach requires attentive and thoughtful engagement with one’s own or others’ experiences of a particular phenomenon.

In Researching Lived Experience, Max van Manen outlines an approach that he calls hermeneutic phenomenology.⁴² This approach suited the research question, “What is the pilgrim experience of Walden?” in several ways. First, it allowed me to begin at the scale of the individual and the particular, rather than the general and the abstract. Since my exploratory question was aimed at developing understanding, rather than

developing a theory or testing a hypothesis, I needed a method that was grounded in personal experience. Second, van Manen's systematic approach explicated a process for writing and reflecting that allowed me to move the question to a deeper level. This human science approach is open to the experience of place and the phenomenon of pilgrimage, and particularly appropriate for engaging other pilgrims in reflection on Walden.

The Pilgrim Experience of Place

Researching the poetics of pilgrimage at Walden is a lot like walking around and around the Pond. Each vantage point provides a particular view of the place, yet the Pond cannot be seen in its entirety from any place along the path. Complementary and contradictory impressions overlap with each circumambulation of the Pond and the accumulated perspective of previous journeys adds texture and depth to one's experience of place. One gradually develops an impression of the whole without ever losing the sense that there is something more to be revealed, just around the next curve. In a metaphorical sense, I walked around Walden with each pilgrim who shared a story, attempting to understand their experience of this place. In this section, I retrace the paths I took in seeking to understand the pilgrimage experience of Walden.

The spiral journey of this research was open-ended and exploratory, but not without structure. The path of hermeneutic phenomenology is marked by a recurring pattern of conversation, reflection, and writing. In-depth interviews with individual pilgrims fostered the recollection of each person's experiences of Walden. Following the conversation, I sought to uncover the themes of each pilgrim's experience and to convey the essence of their sense of Walden through a written narrative. Then I went back to

each pilgrim participant, asking each to reflect with me on the adequacy of the narrative, and rewriting as appropriate. Finally, I considered all the narratives, seeking patterns in these pilgrim experiences of Walden. These broader themes shape and inform some of the chapters which follow.

Three methodological concerns guided my research on the poetics of pilgrimage. The first was identifying and inviting research participants to share with me in this inquiry, Walden pilgrims whose experiences and abilities met the needs of the research questions and approaches. The second concern was learning from others' experience, designing and conducting an interview process that would foster and focus the recollection of each pilgrim's lived experience of Walden. A third concern was the content and the form of my writing, and how to write so as to reveal the "lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner."⁴³ Each of these methodological concerns is addressed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Engaging pilgrims

One concern in choosing potential participants for this study was defining what it means to be a "Walden pilgrim." Another concern was outlining what personal qualities enable participation in a research study using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. In seeking participants, I needed to identify people with both the experience and the eloquence to contribute to the questions and the methods of the study.

The category of "pilgrim" can encompass a variety of motivations, movements, and meanings. In this exploratory research, my intention was to maintain openness to previously unrecognized forms of Walden pilgrimage, rather than keeping to a narrow

and exclusive definition. By drawing on the experiences of people who perceived themselves, or were perceived by others, to be Walden pilgrims, I could explore with somewhat greater breadth the motives and actions through which pilgrims brought meaning to, and found meaning in, this place. I sought out visitors whose journeys were motivated by a deep interest in Thoreau, or by a search for ideals they felt Walden might embody, or whose actions and activities were directed by the spirit of a quest. The recommendations of selected nominators, people who knew the place and its visitors well, helped to direct my attention to individual pilgrims as well as to other potential categories of pilgrims. Some types of pilgrims, though recognized, were not included in this exploratory, but not exhaustive study. Thoreau and Walden inspire imitative pilgrims who are moved to dwell in Thoreauvian simplicity in other places, imaginary pilgrims who never travel to Walden, and pilgrims from many places outside the United States, all categories of experience that are worthy of further study.

The selection of study participants was designed to be an on-going process of purposive sampling informed in advance by the literature on pilgrimage, yet open to new conceptions of Walden pilgrims as they emerged through the study. Some pilgrims identified themselves as such, some responded positively to my suggestion about the relationship of their experiences to a particular definition of pilgrimage, and still others were suggested to me by nominators. In general, the study participants were people who had been to Walden at least once, people for whom the motivation or the meaning of the place is more than mundane, those who seek some kind of connection at Walden, and for

whom Thoreau is likely, though not necessarily, a significant aspect of their interpretation or experience of Walden.

The method of hermeneutic phenomenology also demanded thoughtful, reflective and articulate people, participants who were able to recall, consider and express their experience of place and their own understanding of that experience. Ideally, the participants were motivated by their own interest in the research question. They were willing to collaborate with me in seeking a deeper understanding of their Walden experience. Participants also agreed to be interviewed on tape, to undertake several review tasks and possibly follow-up interviews, and to publication of this material in the dissertation. In short, I was seeking Walden pilgrims who had the time, interest and ability to work with me to get to the essence of their experience, and who were open to sharing their stories with a larger audience.

One way to find potential participants is to recruit one or more people to serve as nominators. A nominator is someone who understands the research question and, in this case, has enough familiarity with Walden to know who is, or who might be, a Walden pilgrim. At the initiation of the study, I approached two people who are knowledgeable about Walden and who have regular contact with Walden visitors. Jeff Cramer, the curator at the Thoreau Institute's Henley Library in Lincoln, Massachusetts, corresponds with many people who have an interest in Thoreau as well as receiving visitors to the Institute. Denise Morrissey has worked at Walden Pond State Reservation for more than ten years, first as the Education Director and currently as the Park Supervisor. She knows many of the regular park visitors, and works with outside organizations and individuals

who co-sponsor programs about Thoreau. Each of these nominators suggested specific individuals that I might contact, as well as types of visitors that might be considered within the category of pilgrim.

In addition to formally recruited nominators, several people I met throughout the duration of the research recommended prospective participants. Through participation in Thoreau Society gatherings and events hosted by the Thoreau Institute, as well as by spending time at the State Reservation, I was able to listen, observe and connect with potential participants. Word about my research interests was also spread through communities at a distance from Walden. As a result of a conference presentation, a classroom lecture, or even a casual conversation, people would volunteer their own stories or recommend someone with whom I might want to talk. By design, the selection of study participants was iterative rather than decided in advance, allowing me to direct my search for participants sequentially in response to emerging themes or revealed gaps in the study. Most people who have been to Walden have a story to tell about their experience, and the stories I heard encouraged me to think further about the boundaries and relationship of pilgrimage with other ways of coming to Walden. As the research progressed, an interest in gaining a variety of types of pilgrims and pilgrim experiences directed the selection of participants.

Once a prospective participant was nominated or encountered, my consideration of a pilgrim's interest and suitability was furthered through a preliminary interview. This step involved providing more information about the research question and methods to the prospective participant, so that they could consider whether their own experience was

relevant to the questions and whether they were willing to commit time and effort to the study. In turn, I assessed the significance of the person's Walden experience to them, their ability to communicate competently about their experience, and whether the prospective participant might offer a unique perspective to the research. As the study progressed, and in consultation with members of the dissertation committee, the qualities for participation were made more specific in order to develop greater diversity among participants.

When it was agreed that participation would be fruitful to the study and welcome to the prospective participant, the date, time and location for an in-depth interview was arranged. A letter to the participant was sent along with a consent form confirming the interview appointment and requesting the participant's signature. A copy of the "Research Summary" can be found in Appendix A; Appendix B includes a sample "Letter to Participant;" the "Participant Release Agreement" is in Appendix C; and Appendix D is an "Interview Guide."

Because a large amount of material results from each interview, the number of participants in a study of this type is necessarily limited. Over the course of a year, I approached several dozen prospective participants in response to nominator suggestions. Ten pilgrims became engaged with the study, men and women ranging from recent college graduates to retired people, each of whom had made at least one memorable visit to Walden between 1940 and 2004.

Conversing with Pilgrims

The method of hermeneutic phenomenology involves sensitivity to the ground of experience, and requires both authentic speech and true listening.⁴⁴ The aim of the interviews was to ask “what is this kind of experience like?” as a first step in the dialogue. The response required the pilgrims to engage in recollection, and my role as interviewer was to encourage them in a phenomenological reflection on their experience of place. The interviews that comprised the heart of my research into the poetics of pilgrimage involved careful listening to their experiences, with attention to the silences as well as the stories.⁴⁵ I often began the interview with a prompt based on information the participant had shared during the preliminary interview, asking them to tell me the story of their first or most meaningful visit to Walden. Further questions were intended either to clarify relevant information about their experience, or to encourage further reflection and expansion on aspects of their pilgrimage. Of particular interest were the participant’s actions and reactions in response to particular sites.

The interviews lasted from three quarters of an hour up to two hours; and in one case took more than one session. Each interview was recorded using a standard cassette tape audio recorder. After transcribing the audiotape, I asked each participant to review the typed transcript of our conversation and to edit or elaborate on the conversation. Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time, but no one chose to do so after the in-depth interview. Anonymity was offered to all participants, and granted to the one participant who did not wish to be known by name.

Several concerns attend any study that draws on participants' own accounts of their experiences. One concern relates to the unevenness of human memory. We may be able to give detailed information about some things, yet fail to recall or even "misremember" other things.⁴⁶ The temporal distance between pilgrims' first visits to Walden and their interview ranged from under a year to over sixty years. And each interview made it clear that some aspects of each pilgrim's experience stood out vividly, while others were so hazy as to be indescribable. Although immediate accounts or even "play-by-play" narrations would provide one kind of accuracy compared to remembered accounts, they are neither sufficient nor appropriate for an inquiry of this type. Descriptions, no matter how close in time to an event, are never entirely coincident with experience. Since the pilgrim "cannot reflect on lived experience while living through the experience," phenomenological interviews necessarily involve recollection.⁴⁷ However, retrospection offers the advantage of giving a participant "an opportunity to reflect back on the experience and to integrate it consciously and fully," thereby providing a more meaningful account during the interview.⁴⁸

Another concern facing the researcher is whether participants "fill in" their memory gaps with "confabulations," even unconsciously.⁴⁹ There were a few instances in this study where the information given in the interview conflicted with an account written by the participant closer in time to the pilgrimage. For example, in the contemporaneous version this pilgrim noted the presence of another couple at Walden Pond on the day of his visit. Thirty years later, despite having re-read his journal prior to our interview, the participant "remembered" being alone at Walden. In such a case, the

experience as remembered by the pilgrim may be more significant than the actual details.⁵⁰ Van Manen suggests that it is the plausibility of an account, rather than its factual accuracy, that is of primary concern.⁵¹ Where questions arose, the way the pilgrim remembered the events and told their story was treated as the authentic account.

Pilgrim Stories

Writing was an integral aspect of the research process, rather than a matter of conveying results at the end of the study. More than a reporting of results, writing is a way into understanding of phenomena. Putting thoughts on paper lends a certain distance from lived experience, an act that provides an opportunity to reconsider what might be at the heart of that experience. One aim of this research was to create a phenomenological text that provides a description of the essence of the phenomenological experience of pilgrimage. These descriptions can uncover more about the phenomenon than we are able to recollect through memory, or share through conversation. They are meant to take us deeper into the experience by evoking both “the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner.”⁵² How do we tell if we’ve succeeded? The phenomenological text should be compelling, but also insightful, revealing what ordinarily remains hidden to us in our own experiences.

The development of these descriptions used a process of hermeneutic phenomenology that included reflection and writing on each of the interview conversations, then further conversation with the participants, then more writing. The first task was to work with each pilgrim interview, drawing out themes in that pilgrim’s experience of Walden. The second step involved writing a thematic summary from each

interview and seeking feedback from the interviewee concerning the accuracy and adequacy of the summary. Once thematic summaries had been written, reviewed and rewritten as needed, all these descriptions were considered together to discern patterns in the pilgrim experience of place. The end result was yet more writing about the common experiences that emerged from the individual and essential themes of Walden pilgrimage.

Phenomenological reflection requires the researcher's immersion in the whole interview text, rather than a distanced assessment of particular words or phrases. The process involved listening carefully to each taped interview several times, then transcribing the interview, then reading the interview transcript again and again. Recommended techniques for developing thematic statements vary from using one phrase to capture the meaning of a whole text, to detailed sentence by sentence elucidation of meaning. I chose a middle road between wholeness and detail, using a selective approach that involved reading and re-reading the transcript as a whole, then highlighting the phrases that seemed to reveal something of the essence of the pilgrim's experience.⁵³ A qualitative research software program helped me to keep track of notes and insights, and to cluster passages that related to emergent themes.⁵⁴

Themes are necessarily simplifications, an attempt to capture the essence of the experience we want to understand. "Articulating themes is not just a skill or a cognitive process that can be described and then learned." Van Manen describes themes as "knots in the web of experience," a way for us to give "shape to the shapeless."⁵⁵ I wrote thematic summaries from each pilgrim interview, creating a set of phenomenological texts that informed further reflection. Rather than simply listing and describing themes, I

wrote these summaries in the form of pilgrim stories, embedding the themes within a narrative that included biographical detail and sequential events. One reason for writing the themes as pilgrim stories was to contribute to the sense of understanding of each pilgrim's experience. Another was to honor the role of story in the pilgrimage tradition, to give these stories back to the participants as a gift in return for the generosity of their participation; to give them a "voice" in the research. Phrases from the participant's own story were incorporated as much as possible into the names of the themes, especially when such words and phrases were evocative of the experience.

The completed thematic summary was then sent to the participant with a request for comments, additions and changes; inviting the participant to reflect further on their own experience. Each participant was asked to consider whether the summary adequately described the essence of their Walden experience. Through follow-up conversations in person, by phone, or by email, the participants commented on the substance of the phenomenological descriptions. By and large, they affirmed the substance of the thematic summaries. The ten thematic summaries, or pilgrim stories, are included in the next chapter.

A further step in the process of researching the pilgrim experience of Walden was to work with the thematic summaries, using these texts as the basis for reflecting on essential themes of Walden pilgrimage. Where did pilgrim experience diverge, and what might they have in common? How did the themes cluster into broader patterns of experience and meaning? Which structures were essential to the pilgrim experience, and which were incidental or essential in the experience of only one or two individuals?

Several promising patterns emerged from this reflective exercise; and two were selected for exploration through further hermeneutic phenomenological writing. One of these patterns involved embodiment, particular ways of moving, and is explored in Chapter 5, “Making Pilgrimage: Journey, Ritual and Stillness.” Another centered on the pilgrim experience of connecting the place of pilgrimage with the texts and or the person who inspired the pilgrimage. This structure of Walden pilgrimage is elaborated in part of Chapter 6, “The Place of Pilgrimage: Person, Place and Text.”

The Politics of Place

Sacred space anchors more than merely myth or emotion. It anchors relations of meaning and power that are at stake in the formation of a larger social reality.
Chidester and Linenthal

That cultural icon of the solitary life in nature, the image of a cabin in the woods, has been shaped by many influences, Thoreau’s Walden among them. In the Walden of the mind’s eye, the woods of our imagination are considerably deeper and darker than those of Thoreau’s 19th century Concord retreat. In contrast to the mature oak and pine that cloak the shores of Walden Pond today, the environs of Thoreau’s house comprised a patchwork of saplings, sumac and scrub; an early successional stage replacing a pitch-pine barren that had succumbed to fire and axe. Not only nature’s replenishment, but decades of land protection and millions expended in restoration efforts have gone into producing the contemporary landscape. “Nevertheless,” one pilgrim reflected, “when you see Walden now, it seems properly forested,” noting with irony that “only today does our image of Walden Pond kind of square with the imaginary landscape.”⁵⁶ This

pilgrim's comments remind us that the sacred landscape is also a cultural product, an intentional result of human choice and action.

From the perspective of a politics of place, the power of a pilgrimage site is bound up with broader cultural narratives of value and meaning. It's no accident that images evoked by Thoreau are now mirrored, to some degree, in today's forested hillsides. The thick growth along the shoreline, the mature trees on the slopes, even the secluded pathways are recent developments at Walden, intended to embody the conservation values that many associate with Thoreau. A hundred years ago "Lake Walden" was home to an amusement park that served large parties who traveled to Concord by train. Fifty years ago the popular freshwater beach was complemented by filling stations and hot dog stands along the roadside. The primary marker of Walden's Thoreauvian past was a small heap of stones beside the granite markers at the cabin site. Over the last century and a half, Thoreau's "place" at Walden has been lost and lamented, reclaimed and restored, resisted and resented.

Ideas about the meaning and purpose of Walden Pond have been asserted and contested in and through the landscape. Who has laid claim to space for Thoreau at Walden, and how has his connection with the place been revealed, reasserted and restricted by those who interpret Walden for its pilgrim visitors and others?

Understanding Walden's sacred geography requires attention to the politics of sacred space and includes reading the landscape and associated texts with a "hermeneutic of suspicion" about the interests served by the signs, structures and stories of this place. The methods and resources of this task are outlined below.

Reclaiming Space

One way to think about the politics of place at Walden is to examine its history from the perspective of the sacralization of space. Where and how has space been delimited and defined in relation to Thoreau? How do historical changes such as the location of monuments, the development of ritual, and the interpretation of Walden's values reveal assertions on behalf of its Thoreauvian meanings, and connect with broader cultural narratives of humanity and nature? Considering Walden's history in the theoretical light of the cultural production of space is one key to reading Walden as a place of pilgrimage today.

Several sources of general historical information were invaluable in providing overviews of Walden's history at various times and different scales of detail. Thoreau's own writing provides descriptive specifics that lend a sense of landscape and land use during his years at Walden. The current park brochure provides a sweeping overview of subsequent changes, emphasizing the recreational development and use of Lake Walden beginning in the late 19th century. Resources in the Special Collections at Concord's Free Public Library include tourist guides to the area from years past, as well as contemporary articles and reports about Walden's ecology and local controversies over land use.⁵⁷ The timely publication of Barksdale Maynard's book, Walden: A History, provided a detailed chronological overview.⁵⁸ These sources gave me the historical fabric with which to develop my own inquiry.

Early on in the study I became fascinated with one particular figure, Roland Wells Robbins, who had written a detailed first person account of his excavation of Thoreau's

House Site in 1945.⁵⁹ As a result, I chose to orient some of my historical reading of Walden around Roland Wells Robbins and to focus my interpretation of the production of sacred space on the rediscovered House Site. Thanks to a fellowship from the Thoreau Society, I explored the Robbins collection at the Thoreau Institute's Henley Library. The archive there includes his journals and logbooks about the excavation and resulting memorial, his correspondence with Thoreau Society co-founder Walter G. Harding; and material artifacts recovered from the excavation. Another recent publication, Donald Linebaugh's biography of Robbins, The Man Who Found Thoreau, provided a welcome and timely resource for understanding Robbins' Walden work in relation to his life history and his contribution to historical archaeology.⁶⁰

As a place of pilgrimage, Walden's significance extends beyond the literary community and has deep connections with the development of environmental thought and identity. My own interests and field of study led me to see and to seek Walden as a place of pilgrimage that might particularly attract those with environmental interests. Reading Walden's history through changes at the House Site sparked my own dialog with the changing perception of nature and environment in American culture over the last century and a half. In Chapter 4, "Making Space: Ritual, Interpretation and Negotiation," I explore Walden as a place of pilgrimage by drawing on themes in American environmental history as well as theory concerning the production of sacred space.

Power and Place

I also wanted to consider how Walden presents itself to pilgrims today through further exploration of the contemporary landscape. In their examination of places of Christian pilgrimage, Eade and Sallnow acknowledge the contested nature of pilgrimage places.⁶¹ Pilgrims and gatekeepers may hold different views about the meaning of a place, and seek to gain or limit access to certain sites or activities in place. Pilgrim goals may also conflict with the values or agendas of local residents and tourists, or may differ significantly among various sects of believers. Conflict doesn't end when a place is recognized as a place of pilgrimage. The interpretation of pilgrimage places includes attention to the politics of place, the power to assert and maintain particular views and values of place through position and property, exclusion and exile.⁶² This aspect of interpreting Walden as a place of pilgrimage drew more on the methods of participation, observation and interview than on documentary research, and included attention to the discourses of Walden's interpreters and the signs, structures, and material artifacts of the place.⁶³

The hermeneutic spiral was again evident in this process, as I wandered around and around the park, and circulated among participants at Thoreau Society gatherings; as I read comments in the visitor log at the Thoreau House Replica and talked with the bookstore manager, as I read brochures and trail maps and listened to a park interpreter with a group of school children at the House Site, as I interviewed the Park Supervisor and conversed with staff members of the Thoreau Institute. To uncover the politics of place through attention to these texts, it was important to consider not only what was

said, but to reflect on what was not said, to read the graffiti as well as the rules and the regulations; to observe what groups were welcomed, who was excluded and how Thoreau was used to justify agendas, attitudes and actions. My reading of Walden as a place of pilgrimage was rendered through a reflective narrative, in which my observations initiated dialog with theory on the politics of place. Chapter 6, “The Place of Pilgrimage: Person, Place and Text,” outlines some of the ways that the history and values of Thoreau are expressed and suppressed in and through the play of power at Walden.

Thoreau’s life and work extended far from the shores of Walden Pond. Likewise, the activities of non-profit organizations with an interest in Thoreau and Walden, map broader boundaries than those of the state reservation as their locus of concern and advocacy. But for the purposes of this study, the research area was delimited as the boundary of Walden Pond State Reservation. The exploration was directed toward people and problems that were primarily associated with this site. Any interpretive reading of place is bound by time, culture and perspective. The hermeneutic aim is to expand our understanding, rather than to exhaust the possible interpretations of place. Although this reading may provide enlightenment about the politics of place at other sacred spaces, this approach is not designed to generalize, but to inquire deeply into one place of interest and concern.

Reflection

In this chapter I shared the development of the inquiry, from the broad questions at the heart of the matter to the particular questions I explored, outlining the epistemological approach I took and the methods I used to guide the research. I

emphasized the exploratory nature of the project, and aimed to invite your participation in this journey of discovery through your own reading and reflection. In the next chapter I extend the presentation of methodology and share the results of the research by including the phenomenological texts – the pilgrim stories.

CHAPTER 3

WALDEN PILGRIMS: THEIR STORIES

Prelude

A threshold is a place of decision. It is at the doorway that we say who we are, announce our mission, or name the person we've come to see. On my arrival at Walden, I see signs in the parking lot pointing variously to "Main Office," "Visitor Information," and "Thoreau House Replica." The last seems to best address my particular quest. As I follow the arrow, the parking lot gives way to a carpet of red-brown pine needles. Branches form an airy canopy overhead. In a small grove of white pine trees, between the paved lot and the busy road, I find a small clapboard house. A single door stands open above a stone step. This neat building, no larger than many pre-fabricated sheds found for sale at building supply stores, is a "Thoreau House Replica."

Neither birthplace nor burial place, the House Replica seems to have little claim as a Thoreauvian shrine. At first glance, nothing about this object connects me to the images evoked by Thoreau's own writing about his homely handiwork. Missing are the logs of white pine "still in their youth" cut and shaped with a borrowed axe; the cellar hand-dug from a wood-chuck hole, making the cabin merely a "porch at the entrance of a burrow" the crowding in of plant life, sumach, "strawberry, blackberry and life everlasting."⁶⁴ The size and shape alone mimic Thoreau's "tight-shingled and plastered

house, ten feet wide and fifteen long.”⁶⁵ But, like an icon, the House Replica invites entry and active contemplation. Shedding my suspicions, I enter in.

Inside the threshold the house has an appealing ambiance. The room is lent spaciousness by the presence of light and the absence of clutter. White walls and large windows reveal plain furniture: a high desk with chair, a low table, a neat bed no larger than a camp cot. The solid hearth opposite the doorway is occupied by a woodstove. A simple straw broom stands in the corner behind the door. Finding a guest register open on the desk, I search for clues to my fellow pilgrims. Today’s list includes a dozen or so visitors from places near and far. I sign myself in as “a seeker.” Prompted by the spirit of pilgrimage to try the possibilities of this place, I set aside the visitor log and sit down at “Thoreau’s” desk to write. The act of reflection brings me not to Thoreau’s past, but my own.

The most satisfactory hours of childhood were those I spent quietly making my own small places. The wild avenue of a treeline swale between mowed lawns and plowed fields yielded ingredients for countless concoctions of fragrant onion grass and smashed walnuts, stirred together on a flat rock. Campsite margins offered material for miniature houses and nutshell bowls, dwellings peopled by my plastic trolls with their neon-colored hair. In the woods, a fallen tree draped in vines sheltered rock seats and stump tables, and housed the manufacture of “leather” from brown paper bags. To center oneself in a chosen place, to establish the terms and boundaries of living, is more profound than play, more holy than experiment. Finding a gap in the hedge for a door, wrestling a rock into place for a hearth, choosing a hole in the ground for a foundation – the location of a

sacred center is the founding of a world.⁶⁶ What Thoreau created in wood and in words, I constructed through childhood ritual and imagination.

These handmade dwellings, Thoreau's and mine, had in common with one another a porosity to nature, a continuity with and transparency to their surroundings.

Hear the ingress of wild things in Thoreau's "Sounds:"

. . . squirrels on the roof and under the floor, a whippoorwill on the ridge pole, a blue-jay screaming beneath the window, a hare or woodchuck under the house...⁶⁷

On any given day, the out-of-doors permeated his dwelling.

No yard! But unfenced Nature reaching up to your very sills. A young forest growing up under your windows, and wild sumachs and blackberry vines breaking through into your cellar; sturdy pitch-pines rubbing and creaking against the shingles for want of room, their roots reaching quite under the house.⁶⁸

What separate worlds are joined here? The permeation of nature into the man-made spaces of Thoreau's cabin, the childhood art of playing house in the outdoors, each constitute a lessening of the distance, a softening of the boundary between daily living and the more-than-human world. This dissolution of the boundary between "inner" and "outer" has a spiritual counterpart for me. My clearest childhood vision was that of living alone in a cabin in the woods. In my mind's eye I saw a sunny clearing knee-deep in meadow, the surrounding trees a hedge against the world. In these daydreams I always stood in the doorway looking out, broom in hand.

The power of this personal image of a woman poised between work and reverie, dark and light, takes on new meaning for me as I sit in Thoreau's cabin. I see that the sanctuary of solitude is where I am most myself, that the threshold provides a place to open my inner space to nature's untroubled gaze. Desiring to reassert that childhood

power to make a place for myself, I rise from the desk, take the broom from the corner and sweep the threshold. Perhaps by ritually embodying that youthful vision, “poised in the doorway, broom in hand,” I can begin again to act on my dreams.

Overview

Life as we live it is a collage of impressions, decisions and encounters running together into a wash of experience left behind us in the wake of time. Life, as we “remember” it requires some separation in the continuous flow, a sorting of the material of our experience. We make sense of life in retrospect. Looking back, the flow of experience has receded, leaving a distillation of separate beads: sunlight shining through a doorway, the call of a jay, a sudden blush of confusion on thinking you’ve taken the wrong turn. In order to share our experience with another, and to make meaning of it ourselves, we string beads together into a tale to tell. It was only through looking back that my Walden pilgrimage, a series of discoveries, questions and choices, came to make sense in the context of my life journey.

To be human is to make meaning. And we make meaning by telling stories. Never examined, never told, the material of my Walden pilgrimage may have lain dormant like so many shells brought home from the beach, then added to the midden long after their provenance and significance were lost to memory. It was the obligation and desire to tell my story, my stirring and sorting of the beads of experience, that kept the pool of Walden memories open for inspection and reflection. It was through writing about my pilgrimage that the journey emerged as a meaningful whole. A story is more

than a sequence of events, it is an opportunity to fashion and find the meaning of our lives.

This chapter provides a space for stories, and a place to consider the role of reflective narrative in relation to place and pilgrimage. In the introductory chapter, I touched on the role of language in valuing the environment. In the second chapter, I expanded on the role of narrative in hermeneutic phenomenology. Here, I explore the relationship of narrative to the activity of pilgrimage and the making of place, conversations that buttress the broad center of this chapter which is given over to the Walden pilgrims. Their own stories are included in the form of the thematic summaries created from our in-depth interviews.

In one sense, this chapter presents the results of the pilgrim research and the narratives that follow can be viewed as research texts. These stories lay the foundation for succeeding chapters by providing an overview of the individual themes of pilgrimage and place that emerged from our conversations. But the primary reason to make these accounts central to the dissertation, rather than reserved to an appendix, is to acknowledge the role and the voices of these pilgrims, each of whom can be heard in the context of his or her own story. This is your chance to meet the pilgrims, and this is the place where all these voices come together for the first time. Once the stories are told, we'll reconsider what it means to be a pilgrim and explore what these narratives reveal about the relationships of pilgrim stories and pilgrim places.

Literature

Several avenues in the literature of pilgrimage and sacred space inform this chapter's focus on the relationships of pilgrimage, narrative, and place. One thread in the pilgrimage literature focuses on what constitutes and contributes to the "place" of pilgrimage. Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan emphasize the various sacred histories that contribute to the making of places of Christian pilgrimage in Europe, where the life histories or material remains of saints contribute to the origin and drawing power of places of pilgrimage.⁶⁹ But new sites of pilgrimage continually emerge, only to be officially recognized (or not) after decades of devotional use, a phenomenon which emphasizes that pilgrims as well as saints have a primary own role in establishing places of pilgrimage. In the studies of Pilgrimage in Popular Culture brought together by Ian Reader and Tony Walter, the presence of pilgrims seems to be the key to defining places as varied and secular as Graceland and Disneyland as sites of pilgrimage.⁷⁰ In addition to geographical location, Victor and Edith Turner suggest that we can also conceive of pilgrimage in terms of its social location. They propose that pilgrimage functions as liminal space, a place where pilgrims can move "outside" of the social roles and conventions of home.⁷¹

If the activity of pilgrimage contributes to the identification and definition of pilgrimage places, how do we understand who is a pilgrim? Not all pilgrims carry the identifying marks of backpack, shell and staff that provide the insignia for some who take the road to Santiago de Compostela. The literature that focuses on framing distinctions and continuities between pilgrims and tourists highlights one direction that this question

has taken.⁷² The Latin origins of our word “pilgrim” denote travel, visitation and wandering, suggesting that movement or journey is one key to defining pilgrimage. Most researchers also include two other factors: a religious or idealistic motivation, and a sacred or deeply desired goal – be it a physical place or a state of being. For Simon Coleman and John Elsner, “A pilgrimage is not just a journey; it also involves the confrontation of travelers with rituals, holy objects and sacred architecture.”⁷³ Nancy Frey suggests that pilgrimage signifies the coincidence of “an inner and an outer journey, a means of finding transformation.”⁷⁴ And Alan Morinis recognizes that the term might be appropriate “wherever journeying and some embodiment of an ideal intersect.”⁷⁵ The struggle to define the activity of pilgrimage, evident in the literature, provided both guidance for discerning Walden pilgrims as well as an openness to variety that encouraged exploration of the experiences of ‘prospective pilgrims’ whose relationships with Walden might at first have seemed beyond the pale of a more rigid definition of the category.

In regard to the role and value of pilgrim stories, Coleman and Elsner provided an overview of how integral narrative is to both the tradition and the activity of pilgrimage in their fine introduction to historical studies of pilgrim narratives.⁷⁶ Frey’s follow-up work with Santiago pilgrims shed experiential insight to the role of story-telling in pilgrims’ own sense of the meaning of their journey and their identity as pilgrims.⁷⁷ And Jill Dubisch’s research with women pilgrims to a Greek Orthodox shrine lent critical perspective on power relations with respect to the voices of pilgrims and researchers, reminding me that “Writing always positions – it positions the writer, the reader, and

those written about.”⁷⁸ Her work was also a welcome model of a researcher telling her own pilgrim story in a way that informed, and was informed by, the larger project.⁷⁹

In addition to literature on pilgrimage places, pilgrimage definitions, and narrative and pilgrimage, the influence of particular writers on my understanding of the relationship of narrative and place should not go without mention. The work of Keith Basso to map connections between the places and stories of one particular cultural landscape both exemplified the depth to which place and story create one another; and led me to wonder how pilgrim stories can contribute to the understanding of Walden as a place of pilgrimage without a story-telling community or a space in which to be heard.⁸⁰ The essays of Belden Lane about his own experience of sacred space modeled the relationship of place and story on a personal scale; and, in his introduction to Landscapes of the Sacred, he asserted the necessity of narrative renderings for experiences of the sacred.⁸¹ Lane warned that those who study sacred geography “will be driven simultaneously to cartography and poetic insight, to geographics and narrative.”⁸² The kaleidoscopic array of questions relating to place with which Philip Sheldrake introduced Spaces for the Sacred included a focus on narrative and place that highlighted the importance of meaningful narrative to our sense of identity and community, as well as to our sense of place, ideas he traces in the work of Paul Ricoeur.⁸³ “Without narrative...we undermine a key element of human solidarity.”⁸⁴

Walden and Pilgrimage

Alan Morinis defines pilgrimage broadly as “a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal.”⁸⁵ In this

light, Thoreau's sojourn at Walden might itself be considered a pilgrimage. Although Thoreau's birthplace and burial place are both in Concord, the site of his Walden cabin has been a focus of pilgrimage since shortly after his death. Notable visitors in those first decades included Bronson Alcott and John Muir; and a broad cross-section of prominent people, from foreign dignitaries to contemporary rock musicians, continue to mark Walden's status as a place of pilgrimage.⁸⁶

In addition to these illustrious pilgrims, there have been other visitors to Walden whose vocations and avocations reveal a searching connection with the Thoreauvian landscape. Herbert Wendell Gleason, an early 20th century photographer active in the National Parks movement, documented through maps and photographs the places that Thoreau visited and mentioned in his writing. Roland Robbins, an amateur archaeologist, took it upon himself to research, locate and excavate the foundations of Thoreau's Walden cabin in 1945. Thereafter he built and sold replicas of the cabin. Perhaps these ardent people who "tracked" Thoreau's lived places are also a kind of pilgrim.

It may be that some Thoreauvian pilgrims don't come to Walden at all, but enact Thoreau's own simple life in the woods. Lawrence Buell suggests that Walden provides a "prototype for imitation," observing that a more fitting Thoreauvian pilgrimage may be enacting another place "Thoreau's own disassociation from organized society," and citing homesteading experiments as examples of these symbolic pilgrimages.⁸⁷ And what of the allegorical pilgrim? There are those who visit Walden in their imagination, but avoid traveling to the place itself out of concern that the present day reality might destroy their ideal of the landscape.⁸⁸ And sometimes the recognition of a journey as a pilgrimage

comes only after the fact, suggesting that pilgrimage can also be realized retrospectively.⁸⁹

Knowing and Telling

Pilgrimage appears to conclude with a return home, but the end of the journey is often the place where the story begins. The telling and retelling of stories is part of the process of pilgrimage, and pilgrim narratives are a continuation and completion of the pilgrimage. Reflecting, writing and talking about the pilgrimage shapes the pilgrim's ideas about the meaning of the experience. At the same time, these narratives reveal and establish the teller's identity as a pilgrim.⁹⁰

In her study of pilgrims, On and Off the road to Santiago, Nancy Frey noticed that travelers who made this trip along a medieval pilgrimage route in northern Spain sometimes recognized their recreational journey as a pilgrimage only as they went along, or came to that realization after the return home.⁹¹ Indeed, Frey's own experience of walking this popular pilgrimage route included a shifting sense of her identity, from observer to participant to pilgrim.⁹² When she conducted an in-depth study of Santiago pilgrims, she found that the retelling of their stories was "an important part in the return whereby one is able to reinterpret, process the experiences, and create oneself as a pilgrim."⁹³ In telling stories about our lives, our own "agency and imagination determine what gets included and excluded...how events are plotted, and what they are supposed to mean."⁹⁴ Since it would be impossible for a pilgrim to share all the events and meanings of a journey, "what pilgrims share on return is selective and interpretive." In telling and

retelling their tales, pilgrims find that the “meanings of the journey continue to emerge.”⁹⁵

“Stories create order” out of the abundance of our experience “by translating knowing into telling.”⁹⁶ Through reflection and narration, pilgrims edit and interpret the story of their journey, coming to understand both their experience and themselves in the process. The way pilgrims tell their stories is not divorced from who they understand themselves to be. Constructing a narrative is a way of constructing a life, and pilgrim narratives not only describe but also define what it means to be a pilgrim.⁹⁷ Through their stories, Walden pilgrims may come to see themselves in relation to Thoreau, distinguish themselves from tourists, or interpret their actions as having particular meaning and significance. Through our participation in their story-telling, as active inquirer or attentive audience, we contribute to a shared understanding of what it means to be a pilgrim, and what it means to be a Walden pilgrim.

Pilgrim Participants

The participants in this study of Walden pilgrimage spoke freely about their experience, and were very generous with their time. Their interest in my questions and the thoughtfulness of their responses resulted in rich accounts of place and pilgrimage. Although the following summaries draw on their own words and experiences, the discernment of themes and the organization of their reflections into a narrative structure are the result of my reading, reflecting, and writing about their interviews. Although the participants reviewed and generally approved these summaries as consistent with their own accounts, the summaries cannot capture all the fullness of their lived experience of

Walden. Nor can these written reductions do more than suggest the spirit and ardor that enlivened their memories and our conversations. Each summary begins with a brief introduction to the participant, followed by a narrative that roughly chronicles the pilgrim's experience. Each account is divided into three to five themes that emerged through the phenomenological assessment of the interview, and each theme is titled. The pilgrims' stories are presented in the order in which the interviews took place. The participants' real names and vocations are used, except as noted.

Fred's story

Fred is a teacher and writer living in New England. Now in his mid-fifties, he came to know Thoreau's work about the time he left college. His pilgrimage to Walden was made around 1990, during a mid-life change in his career focus and while he was in Concord participating in a conference on saving Walden Woods. Fred went to Walden intending to write about his experience there, and had completed an essay for publication prior to our interview. We spoke in a quiet classroom at the Antioch New England campus. In the following account, "Doug" is a pseudonym for the person who accompanied Fred on his Walden visit.

Primed for encounter: A story of expectation and disappointment. Fred arrived at Walden "primed for a powerful encounter," carrying high expectations for the visit. The conference had gotten him "thinking about [. . .] the value of [Walden] in our inner sense of commitment and vision as environmental writers." Still "early in [his] career of nature writing," Fred was "eager to write about pilgrimage to Walden." So, "the day was loaded for [him] already."

The walk in to the Thoreau House Site promised an affirmation of these expectations. “It was warm, it was spring [. . .] the sun was sparkling on the water,” “the scent of the pines” reached him. Fred was “touched” with the “special feel” of the place. But his experience at the House Site developed in contrast with the strength and particularity of his expectations. Fred “wanted something significant to happen.” Rather than “feeling all the more inspired by Walden” and “a sense of what a powerful place this is,” Fred “just sort of felt ho-hum.” It may be that this responsiveness to the place was, as he himself suggested, a result of having been “overstimulated” and “overloaded by the conference.” But Fred’s description of the place was as dry as his response, noting little more than “that sort of chain link [. . .] rope around the outside” of the cabin site.

Instead of the inviting sensory richness of the walk along the pond, Fred noted the sounds and activities of other visitors that disturbed his attempts to “pay attention to his own inner state.” “[I]t was Earth Day, so there were a lot of other people coming.” Distinguished by their behavior from the community of conference participants, these people “were tourists that were there [. . .] snapping pictures, and sort of chatting. There wasn’t a kind of reverential tone” about their behavior. Sharing the House Site in this way “didn’t help” Fred attain the personal experience of “profound encounter” that he sought. Resenting their intrusion, Fred lamented, “I wanted my powerful experience of Walden.”

The story of Fred’s pilgrimage was “partly a story of expectation and disappointment.” Fred wondered “if some of the reason why [he] wasn’t inspired at the [House Site] was because [he] came with that expectation [to write about the experience

later].” Fred’s experience raised for him an interesting question about pilgrimage: “How does one go with intentionality and yet at the same time openness?”

Fred began his pilgrimage already primed for encounter. He poured his desire for “something significant” into the House Site. It was in the reversal of his expectations that their power and particularity emerged. Through the disappointment of his desire, Fred was emptied of the weight of expectation. It was at this point in the pilgrimage that Fred’s journey really began. Relieved of his expectations, and prompted by the invitation of a companion, Fred moved on from the House Site.

Moving beyond the boundaries: A place less populous. If expectation and disappointment were thematic of the first stage of Fred’s pilgrimage, how did he move beyond the place of disappointment? Two gifts of the conference helped to shape and spur the next phase of Fred’s pilgrimage. One was the re-mapping of Thoreauvian geography to include ‘Walden Woods,’ land that “hadn’t yet been preserved and that needed attention.” This notion of a sacred landscape beyond the proximity of the Pond and House Site was ready at hand for Fred when a fellow traveler from the conference suggested that they “go exploring.”

Until this point, Fred’s journey had taken him over familiar terrain toward a known destination. He “walked in [. . .] to the site of the cabin” on a clearly marked and well-travelled trail. His journey now turned outward to a landscape more wild, and his pilgrimage took on a wandering quality. The companion’s knowledge that ‘there’s really some lovely country in the woods on the far side of the track” resonated for Fred with the conference theme of “Walden Woods as a something beyond the boundaries of Walden

Pond itself.” Moving away from the House Site and the Earth Day visitors, the pair “go exploring in the wood a bit” to “see what we find out away from the trail.” Instead of walking in along a path, they were exploring, moving out, crossing “the famous railroad tracks.” The pilgrims “walked on [. . .], we wandered and wandered.” Although they had moved away from the Pond and the House Site, for Fred the crossing of the Concord rail line brought him a new sense of what he was seeking. “Because [Thoreau] himself was such a wanderer and explorer [. . .] to be on the other side of the railroad track [. . .] in a place that was much less populous [. . .] represented [to Fred] the wildness that Walden had [. . .] for Thoreau.”

In this part of Fred’s pilgrimage, movement and place had a particular complementarity in establishing Fred’s sense of connection with Thoreau. Earlier in life, “Thoreau’s adventuring spirit [. . .] had spoken to me quite profoundly [. . .] when I was looking for my place in the world. [W]riters like Thoreau [. . .] really inspired me to..follow new paths and explore new territory.” Now, when Fred is actively exploring his place in the world of nature writing, the act of adventuring in the landscape of Thoreau is particularly significant for him.

The place of genuine engagement: Blessed with the presence of Thoreau. The pilgrims’ journey through the broader Thoreauvian landscape was not aimless. Although the two “wandered and wandered,” they “eventually went up over the rise of a hill, and came down and saw before [them . . .] a couple of little ponds.” Surrounded by hills, centered on water, this place mirrored the geography of Walden Pond. Spatially distinct within the pathless terrain of their wandering, the Andromeda Ponds became the locus for

a change in the pilgrims' activity. No longer wanderers, they stopped to sit for a while by the ponds. Their turning aside marked a shift from movement to meditation.

The place was rich with sound and color and, as Fred's companion revealed, resonant with Thoreau's words. Just as cresting the hill marked a new sense of place, so did the sounds of nature announce a new sense of time. Earth Day was behind them. Here at the pond "it was spring peeper time, and the peepers were just goin' at it." The plants which give the ponds their name "were bright red from the previous fall, so the scene [. . .] was beautiful." Compassed about by sound and color, Fred's companion told "how the Andromeda Ponds were one of Thoreau's favorite places to visit." Fred's guide "explained to me about Thoreau's fascination with this place," quoting Thoreau's description of delight at the sunlight shining through the red leaves of the Andromeda Pond." The two pilgrims "sat there in silence" as "the sound of frogs just pulsed in [their] ears."

This place of turning aside, rich in color, sound and story, became for Fred the place of encounter with Thoreau. "Out of the experience of having this friend explain to me what the Andromeda Ponds represented to Thoreau [. . .] having the experience of being there, apart from other people [. . .], hearing the frogs [. . .] all I can say is, it happened [. . .] I felt a deep sense of connection to the wildness of that place in a way that enabled me to feel blessed with the presence of Thoreau." For Fred, tears were one measure of this "profound experience [. . .] a sign that I had moved to a place of genuine engagement with the place of pilgrimage." The "spontaneous overflow of powerful

feeling” that for Wordsworth was the “source of poetry [. . .] happened to me there, and it was rich.”

In Fred’s story, authenticity and surprise each play a role, as does an undefined “something beyond.” Disappointed in “not having felt that sense of quickening at the site of the cabin of [Walden] Pond,” Fred crossed the railroad tracks and found in the less populous and protected landscape a representation of “the wildness that Walden had for Thoreau.” For Fred, the historic location of Thoreau’s writing place had less to do with its authenticity for the pilgrim than had Thoreau’s walking space. Exploring the land across the tracks, “it almost felt as if I was meeting Thoreau on his own turf, his own terms, because he himself was such a wanderer and explorer.” At the Andromeda Ponds, this sense of authenticity was anchored by the historical fact of Thoreau’s acquaintance with the site, and reinforced by the congruence of Thoreau’s words with Fred’s experience of “sunlight shining through the red leaves.”

Fred also acknowledged that “the journey across the tracks would not have been so powerful [. . .] had I not first gone to the Pond and the cabin with the intention of honoring Thoreau there.” The journey of discovery that took Fred from Walden Pond to the Andromeda Ponds was also a journey from intention to openness. “[I]t was almost that I needed to be surprised by something I wasn’t expecting in order to move to that deeper place.” Ascribing agency to the place itself, Fred confessed, “there was something about that place apart from the place of Walden itself, that moved me to a different place.”

What is it about this space that moves Fred “to a different place?” The place of genuine engagement is marked by a partially enclosed and distinctly centered topography, rich in sensory textures, and has a revealed connection to Thoreau’s actions and worlds. The receptive posture and activity of the pilgrim, and his deep emotional resonance, led Fred to a place of connection with Thoreau.

Guide for a pilgrim: Natural impetus, important knowledge. Fred’s pilgrim journey was not undertaken alone. There were several ways in which the larger community of Walden visitors shaped Fred’s experience; and the role of other people in sacred experience was a question he himself raised. His participation in the conference influenced Fred’s ideas of the shape and significance of Walden. His encounter with tourists at the House Site compounded his disappointment at a “ho-hum” response to that place. Of primary significance, however, was Fred’s changing relationship with someone who “had been to Walden many times” and who served as “mentor” and “guide” to Fred on his pilgrimage.

The role of one person emerged as particularly important in influencing the shape of experience of Fred’s pilgrimage. Through the course of their journey together, this man went from being “one of the folks from the conference,” to someone identified by first name - Doug, to being called “friend,” “mentor,” and “guide for a pilgrim.” What made Doug a guide for a pilgrim? In the course of his narrative, Fred noted certain qualifications and actions that seem to characterize Doug’s unique role, including the sharing of “important knowledge” and the provision of a “natural impetus” to the journey.

One key to Doug's role as guide was his ability to integrate two kinds of knowledge about the place of pilgrimage. One kind of knowledge concerned the physical landscape around Walden, its parts and pathways. Fred notes that Doug "was from the Boston area and so had been to Walden many times." The other kind of knowledge was Doug's familiarity with Thoreau's life and words. But Doug's knowledge was more than topographical or literary. He was conversant with the Thoreauvian geography of Walden: where Thoreau went in this landscape, and what he wrote about these places. Through his ability to connect person and text with place, Doug's knowledge helped Fred develop his own sense of Thoreauvian place on their shared journey.

Another key to Doug's role as guide was his presence with Fred in the shared experience of the journey. Doug was not just a walking, talking guidebook, but a companion on the way. Already present with Fred at the conference, and again at the House Site, Doug invited a mutual exploration of the Thoreauvian landscape. Fred repeatedly recounted Doug's invitation: "Let's go exploring in the woods," "Let's see what we find," "Let's just explore;" providing Fred with a "natural impetus" for extending his pilgrimage beyond the House Site.

Although Doug apparently knew this place quite well, Fred still experienced their walk together as open-ended exploration of the landscape. As a fellow wanderer, Doug distinguished himself from a tour guide, fostering a manner of moving through the landscape which was important to Fred's connection with Thoreau's own exploration. Doug's way of companioning Fred did not appear to direct Fred's experience, but allowed Fred to move into making his own connections with Thoreau, and with the

particular place of the Andromeda Ponds. In Fred's framing of his experience at the ponds, Doug's presence was included as contributory. "[B]eing there, apart from the other people, just the two of us, hearing the frogs, all I can say is, it happened."

The pilgrim guide contributed both "important knowledge" and "natural impetus" to Fred's experience of place. Fred reflected that other people can play a positive role in pilgrimage, as when someone like Doug "offers a perspective or suggests a path that we wouldn't have plotted ourselves." "Doug provided an important piece of knowledge for me by knowing there was a woods over there [. . .] without him saying we can get there by going this way and providing a natural impetus..I might not have found my way to those particular ponds [. . .] and known what they were [. . .] So he was really a kind of mentor for me [. . .] a guide for a pilgrim."

Brian's story

Brian is a medical professional and father of four living in southern New England. He first read Thoreau as a high school student in the 1960s, and came to Walden on pilgrimage shortly thereafter. At the time of his pilgrimage he wrote an account of his excursion. In addition to seeking the spirit of Walden in the woods close to home, he now returns to Concord for the annual meetings of the Thoreau Society. Many of the annual meeting programs take place at the Masonic Lodge in Concord, Massachusetts, where Brian and I talked about his Walden experiences.

Substantiating Thoreau: Seeking solid ground. Brian came of age in the "latter half of the 1960s and the very early 70s," in the midst of the "turmoil with the Vietnam conflict" and emerging calls for a greener America. His introduction to Thoreau in high

school helped “bring into focus” some of the “cultural milieu” of the time, and he went on to read Walden on his own. Thoreau’s work provided substance for the development of a personal philosophy in an era when social values were openly questioned, and at a time of life when individual decisions could affect the whole of one’s future. The pilgrimage to Walden was a way for Brian to test out what he had recognized in Thoreau’s writings, to substantiate its validity as he began his own life’s journey.

“Introduced to nature at a very young age” through fishing and camping with his father, Brian was also active in the Boy Scout movement. The values instilled through those childhood activities later mingled with burgeoning ideals of the sixties. “When my generation came along..there was a rebelling against the idea that you spend your whole life in pursuit of making money. [To] examine yourself [. . .] find your vocation, pursue it even if it means not becoming wealthy [. . .] fit in very nicely with the Thoreauvian theme of marching to the beat of a drummer that you hear, building your castles in the air [. . .] and then doing what is necessary to put your foundations under them [. . .]Thoreau, through his writings, helped to crystallize some of that, helped to really bring it into focus.”

Thoreau provided both vision and substance to such seekers. “Like all generations of subsequent readers, we were reading Thoreau through our eyes and we were taking of Thoreau what we identified with. [We] used that to sort of whittle out a philosophy of life for ourselves [. . .] feeling that there was an element of truth here, something you could put your finger on and stand on it [. . .]. It was solid and it felt right.” Thoreau’s words

and example had an appealing concreteness. “You know where he stands, because he tells you where he stands. He draws the line and you can see the line.”

The importance of clarity, of finding solid ground on which to stand and a truth that felt right to him, was heightened for this 18-year-old by the military draft. “I was morally opposed to the war in Vietnam [. . .] I did some soul-searching, and I was not a pacifist. I examined myself and I didn’t feel as if I could put myself wholly as a conscientious objector and be honest about it [. . .]. I wasn’t opposed to serving my country, but I did not want to serve my country in a capacity where I would be responsible for killing other people.” Faced with a low draft lottery number, Brian chose to withdraw from undergraduate school and enlist. “I made a conscious decision to enlist in the Coast Guard because it would fulfill my military service obligation and at the same time [allow me to] be of service to others.”

At the time of his pilgrimage, Brian seems to have been actively developing his own philosophy of life, plumbing the advice of others and seeking solid moral ground for making independent choices in the face of shifting social ideals. His motivation for pilgrimage suggests a testing of the worth and suitability of Thoreau’s ideas to his own developing philosophy, at a critical juncture in his life. “[M]y excursion to Walden was a direct offshoot of being introduced to Thoreau and identifying with his ideas [. . .] then wishing to follow up on that in some way [. . .] to help substantiate it [. . .] to stand where he stood, walk some of the paths that he walked, [to] vicariously experience that and to help bring it home.” Thoreau’s words provided ideas for “whittling out a philosophy of life,” but the journey enabled the pilgrim to test the solidity and substance of the

message, to feel it's rightness for himself and to incorporate it into his own life experience – to “bring it home.”

Pulling place and text together: Reflection, reminiscence and reverie. Brian left his home in Pennsylvania, bound for Concord in a VW bug, and stayed with relatives at several places along the way. His journey to Walden exemplified a Thoreauvian economy; and he kept accounts of his expenses and experiences in a journal. The pilgrim arrived at Walden on a misty fall morning and found his way to the pond. Using Thoreau's map of the pond in his own copy of Walden, Brian oriented himself to the landscape and found the House Site. The alignment of the Walden map with the Walden landscape was the first in a series of connections between text and place in this pilgrim visit.

Brian's time at Walden focused on making a circuit of the Pond during which place and text each evoked the other through the activities of reflection, reminiscence and reverie. “It almost became a step back in time to that era [. . .]. I was being drawn into [the experience of Walden] through the record that Thoreau had left [. . .]. I was physically present at the Pond and I was observing things at the Pond, but at the same time I was thinking of various passages that I had read in Walden and I was sort of pulling the two together.” But Brian also found that the power of place to evoke the past could be disrupted by incongruous and unanticipated experiences.

Reflection. At some places the pulling together of text and place was the result of studied intention, as when Brian visited the House Site. He sought correspondence between the present surroundings and the landscape made known in the text: “I

remember looking around to try in my own mind [to] decide, where was his beanfield?" Here, he spent time "reflecting on things [. . .] in particular the passages where [Thoreau] describes the construction of the house, gathering the materials, felling the pines, planing the pieces that he's using for the uprights and the rafters and the beams." The pilgrim actively recalled parts of the text that related to the place where he was standing, imaginatively rebuilding the vanished cabin. These particular features, Thoreau's cabin and bean patch, were no longer tangibly apparent in the landscape, and the pilgrim initiated the work of pulling place and text together. But elsewhere the active reflection of the pilgrim was complemented by a sense of the place itself as initiator of remembrance.

Reminiscence. At several places along the path around the Pond, Brian encountered sights and sounds that reminded him of Thoreau's words or experience. The passage of a train, the sight of a loon, the evocative color of the water each acted to recall the text to the pilgrim. When a train went by at the west end of the Pond, Brian found it very reminiscent [. . .] of the sort of things Thoreau must have been familiar with." These sights seemed to exert their own power on the pilgrim, pulling him into the past: "I did see a loon that day and I thought immediately of Thoreau's story of the loon, so I was being pulled into that." Qualities of the landscape which were reminiscent of Thoreau's description of the place stood out in a particular way. "I remember looking down and seeing the greenish blue of the water and [. . .] being struck by the color because of the descriptions that Thoreau has in Walden."

Reverie. This state of being in two worlds at once, both physically and imaginatively present to Walden/Walden, is described by the pilgrim as a kind of reverie. The depth of this experience was drawn into relief by an episode which disrupted it. As Brian was “being pulled into” the story of the loon, standing on the shore and looking across the water, he suddenly saw the “large structure of the bath house [. . .] at the other end [of the Pond]. I had no idea that it was there, and I was totally unprepared for it [. . .]. I remember being almost shocked by it.” As he made his way farther around the Pond, the path obscured the unwelcome sight, and “so I was sort of drawn back into my reverie. [T]he sensation I had was first having been pulled into this reverie where I was experiencing the Pond directly and also at the same time through Thoreau, and then moving to the point where all that had fallen away and I was just experiencing the Pond as someone in 1971 looking at a relatively modern day bathing facility.”

Through spontaneous reminiscence, the pilgrim entered a state of reverie where past and present merged through the legacy of Thoreau. The experience of incongruity between text and place disrupted this meditative walk, which the pilgrim then acted to restore. “After I passed through [the beach and boat ramp area . . .], I was able to block that out of my mind.” A further sign of this intentional blocking of unsought landscape features was the visual record made by the pilgrim. “I did take a couple of [photographic] shots out across the Pond, none of which included the bath house [. . .] and was able to capture some of the foliage and some of the mist on the water.” In Brian’s pulling together of place and text, the landscape exerted “pull” by evoking through sensory resonance Thoreau’s own story of place. And the pilgrim “pulled” text

and place together through active recall of passages related to certain places, and through imaginative editing of the landscape to set aside incongruous features.

The phenomenon of place and text pulling together played a key role in the overall goal of Brian's pilgrimage. Brian recalled his feelings upon seeing the blue~green water of the Pond: "when you read a description of a physical place, then have an opportunity to actually visit and stand in that place and make the same observations, it sort of crystallizes the integrity of the work. You [. . .] can believe what this guy said. He wasn't making this up, at least not on this level [. . .] and that helps to substantiate the integrity or the honesty of the author." Finding links between his own experience of place and the testimony of Thoreau substantiated for Brian more than the physical characteristics of Walden. Seeing the blue-green water also pointed to the trustworthiness of Thoreau's message on a deeper level.

Touched by Thoreau: The pull back to place. Brian did not return to Walden again for 20 years. But recently he has begun to attend the Annual Gathering of the Thoreau Society which meets every July in Concord, Massachusetts. No longer searching for solidity and substantiation, the returning pilgrim speaks in watery images about renewal and re-invigoration. "[C]oming to the gathering is a way of refreshing part of my soul [. . .]. We have to deal with the nuts and bolts of life on a day to day basis, and it's important periodically to go back to the well, and get a good, long, drink of clear, cold, spring water and refresh yourself." Although he acknowledges that Walden is not the only place where one can find this kind of restoration, he does suggest that "those of us who have been touched by Thoreau [. . .] and have made an excursion to Walden, get

the feeling that this is a well. [W]hen you come here, you know that the spring will be flowing, and that on some level, you can refresh yourself.” In addition to refreshing the soul, returning to this particular well provides the opportunity for Brian to connect with a pilgrim community, others who have been “touched by Thoreau.”

Although the academic presentations of the meeting hold varying degrees of interest for Brian, reconnection with particular participants enhances his experience of return. The gathering provides a social space for these relationships to become established and maintained through conversation and the sharing of stories. “[H]aving met them, and spoken with them, and listened to their stories,” Brian resonates with those who are “drawn here for [. . .] the same reasons that I feel I am [. . .]. There’s something about Thoreau that clicks with them.” The qualities that first attracted Brian to Thoreau are echoed in his descriptions of these people. “The folks that I’m drawn to are folks that have attempted in some way to follow their own genius [. . .]. They’ve incorporated some of Henry into their lives. [W]e seem to share common values [. . .] following your own vocation, being true to yourself.” The endurance of these values over the intervening years suggests that one goal of Brian’s initial pilgrimage, “to help bring [Thoreau’s ideas] home,” has been realized.

Walden Pond figures largely in Brian’s actions and reflections on these return journeys, and he still feels “the pull” of the place. “Whenever I come to Concord for one of these gatherings [. . .] one of the very first things I do is either walk or drive out to the Pond. I usually can’t wait to get out there and [. . .] just look things over. I think that’s the pull back to place.” A daily morning swim is also a regular practice on these visits.

The power of place to connect Brian with the awareness of the present is now as vital as its former role in connecting him with the past. “One nice thing about Walden the Pond, not the book, the book you can pick up and read anytime, but when you come to the Pond, it’s a living, physical thing. [Y]ou can take off your clothes and immerse yourself in the water, you can feel the water on your body [. . .] and it draws you into present reality. You always have that link with the past, but you’re in the present when you’re there, and I think that’s the draw.”

This link of past and present is less about Thoreau than a re-connection with Brian’s own wisdom. “[I]n my own life I find that I learn things, then I forget them, and then I have to go back and re-learn them.” The physical return to Walden evokes these acts of remembrance, states of knowing that are themselves conceived as places. “[A] lot of times when I relearn [these things], in the act of re-learning them I say, ‘but I was here before, I know this, I knew this, what happened? Why have I been away from this?’ ” Immersion in the Pond restores the pilgrim to his own integrity and vision. “[I]t pulls you back in, it refreshes you, it reminds you [. . .] it invigorates you. [I]t allows you to put things into better perspective in your own life, when you go back to wherever it is that you came from to make the pilgrimage here.” The Pond literally draws him in, and serves as a physical and symbolic center of his refreshment.

Brad’s story

Brad is an independent scholar living in New England. He first became acquainted with Thoreau’s work in high school, but it was some years later that he made his first visit to Concord and to Walden Pond. He is intimately familiar with Thoreau’s

writing, and has edited several collections of Thoreau's work. Active with the Thoreau Society, Brad currently edits the Bulletin. Shortly after our interview he wrote an essay entitled "So What?" about the value of place and pilgrimage. We spoke in an empty science lab at Antioch New England about Brad's interest in Thoreau and his experiences at Walden.

The landscape I was expecting. By the time Brad made his first visit to Walden, he was intimately familiar with some of Thoreau's writing. From high school, through military service, college and graduate studies, Thoreau had been influential in his intellectual and philosophical development. He came to Concord to attend the Annual Meeting of the Thoreau Society, an emerging scholar already conversant with the literary landscape. But his visit to Walden revealed a number of incongruities between what he expected and what he found in place.

In high school, Brad found the assignment to read Walden challenging, and sought out shorter works by Thoreau, such as journal extracts and essays. As he became a more adept reader, Brad realized that Thoreau was "doing something more than simply telling a story." He became engaged and interested enough in this man's work to memorize passages. "I had quotes in my head [to bring into conversations. . .]. I thought that was pretty cool." Later, during military service, Brad drew on Thoreau while facing court martial and attempting to forge his own identity and beliefs. "I was trying to figure out what he was saying so that I could figure out who I was and what was important to me." Brad credits Thoreau with his intellectual awakening: "Thoreau was the one who woke me up to [. . .] a life of the mind." After going through college on the GI Bill with

a major in literature, Brad seized the opportunity to “pay Mr. Thoreau back” by writing his thesis on the essay, “Life Without Principle.” At the completion of his master’s work, the trip to the Annual Meeting provided entrée into a community of Thoreau scholars. “That’s when I met Walter Harding [. . .] and some of the other big scholars [...and] really came into the academic world in a serious way.”

As well as entering a scholarly community, Brad was entering a landscape that was both new and familiar. This was his first visit to the East, and he was alert for points of connection between the literature and the land. “I remember driving into the Concord area [and...] thinking ‘This must be like the landscape that Thoreau was familiar with.’” “As we got closer and closer [to Concord...], I started seeing things that I recognized from the journal [such as place names]. I started recognizing where I was on the Gleason map. I was really getting quite excited.” Brad’s expectations were based on a number of historical documents with which he was familiar. As well as Thoreau’s published descriptions and surveys, the countryside had been mapped and photographed by Herbert Wendell Gleason in the early 20th century. “[T]he resources I had were texts and some pictures [. . .] which were taken during the early part of the last century. [. . .]. That’s the landscape I was expecting.”

But turning onto Route 126, the road that runs by Walden Pond, Brad’s sense of congruence between the literature and the land changed considerably. “I remember [. . .] looking on the left and there was [. . .] the Concord town dump. And I remember thinking, ‘This is not right.’ [. . .]. And then there was the Trailer Park, and I thought, ‘This is really wrong.’ So I had something in my head that the actual landscape was not

conforming to at all [. . .] and it really discombobulated me.” After parking in a lot already full of cars, he “went down to Walden itself” and found “boom boxes and suntan lotion [. . .and] kids yelling. It was just incredible. I was just expecting something totally different.” Brad realized that the old maps and photographs speak of “a landscape that’s no longer there.”

This discrepancy between the landscape he was expecting and the place he was experiencing continued to widen as he reached the House Site. Here, Gleason’s 1904 photograph is a primary referent here, a picture of a “pristine and beautiful place with bushes growing even right around the cairn.” But “then you go there and everything’s been trampled.” Brad sensed that the alteration in the landscape was due to the impact of visitors. “There’s no grass growing within fifty feet [of the House Site and cairn] because the world goes there,” a perception enhanced by the presence of “crowds and tour groups” at the time he visits. The pristine quality of the landscape in Gleason’s photograph is also belied in Brad’s own experience of the site. Evidence of “drainage ditches” show that “some park rangers had come in here [. . .] and public works had done things, and this was a highly manipulated environment.”

Brad’s initial experience of Walden brought “ideas” into juxtaposition with “reality” in a way that challenged and changed his sense of place. “I had it in my head” that this is the way..things should be, [but] “when I went to Walden I was [. . .] mortified by what I saw.” The lack of congruence between his ideas, gleaned from documentary evidence, and the reality of the Walden landscape on a summer weekend in the early 1980s “wasn’t traumatizing” but nevertheless did require “doing a big time reality

check.” The discrepancy between expectation and experience resulted in a sense of dissatisfaction with Walden Pond and the House Site as a locus for pilgrimage. “This is not the environment that Thoreau was familiar with [. . . and for me] it’s very unsatisfying. One reason is that the idea [I] had in my head based on text and pictures was not reflected in what I was seeing in front of me. The other reason is that what I was seeing in front of me [. . .] indicated very clearly in particular with the House Site, that this was a very manipulated environment.” Trampled by crowds of tourists, manipulated by park managers, the place failed to reflect the historical documents which were the basis for the Brad’s expectations of Walden.

Looking for other things. Unsatisfied by his visit to the House Site, Brad moved on. His actions and reflections said more about what he sought at Thoreauvian places, as well as what he sought to avoid. An ongoing search for alternative places of pilgrimage revealed something of his sense of the relative importance of the literary and physical landscapes. Through his search for other things, the ultimate goal of his quest came to light.

Brad preferred to “get away from the House Site.” He “was looking for things outside the major pilgrimage site,” seeking instead “an alternate pilgrimage site.” On his first Concord visit, the trip to Walden became “a pilgrimage to Heywood’s Meadow,” an unmarked place mentioned in Thoreau’s journals. Few visitors to Walden would seek it out, because “you had to know where it was.” But Brad had an historic guide to the landscape: “because I had the Gleason maps [. . .] I knew where it was.” Brad’s pilgrim impulse was to leave the beaten path in search of places that “have not changed that

much,” places that are “more remote,” and especially places that “other people wouldn’t go to,” that “most people don’t know about.”

Why did Brad prefer these places? One reason had to do with his activity at these places of pilgrimage. Once arrived, Brad wanted to “get away and [. . .] commune with a site by itself.” Describing visits to other memorialized historical places, Brad noted that he avoided the “beautiful displays [. . .] where all the tourist buses stop.” Instead, he looked for places that had “the same kind of [historical] value,” but were open to his own “imaginative experience.” Before traveling, this pilgrim conducted his own research, so that historical learning was not his primary activity at a destination. He went to places to extend his research by imagination, asking “what must it have been like [here, in that event of the past]?” For this pilgrim, “it’s hard to think about [questions like] that when you’re sitting in the middle of a tour group.” Brad avoided interpretive facilities. “If it’s something that I care about, I don’t want to hear what other people think. I really don’t.” As a pilgrim, Brad did not want to be a passive consumer of information, a recipient of someone else’s discoveries. “If it’s something I know nothing about, then I’ll be interested in talking with an expert. But there’s no pilgrimage aspect to it at all.”

A surplus of scholarly attention could also dampen Brad’s interest in a place of pilgrimage. “Your average pilgrimage [consists of] going into a known environment, [one] that’s [. . .] probably been overly studied.” For example, “we know almost everything about the House Site [. . .]. People have been studying this for decades. There’s nothing new to learn here [. . .], it’s just a dead site.” Pilgrimage sites were dead for Brad when “their significance [had] been [determined] already.” What made a site

live for Brad was the potential for further discovery, so a library was just as likely to become a pilgrimage site as was a landscape. “My pilgrimages tend to be to manuscripts, not to sites [. . .]. [M]anuscripts contain gems and discoveries and clues to things that are endlessly fascinating.” To some extent, Brad’s shift from the land to the literature was an outcome of his disappointment at the House Site. “When I first went to Walden it was just a [. . .] conventional pilgrimage, and it was mightily unimpressive for me. So [. . .] I tended to [. . .] put my emotional eggs in the basket of the manuscripts. To go and see the “Walking” manuscript in the Concord Free Public Library [was. . .] for me a hell of a lot more interesting, and satisfied me in a much better way.”

For Brad, pilgrimage was a journey of discovery, looking for “things that are significant, but nobody knows they’re significant.” Pilgrimage involved “not just a visitation, saying ‘got it, been here,’ but more like detective work.” “For me, the pilgrimage is more the recovery of something that’s not sufficiently known.” This sense that “sites of pilgrimage are where you want them to be, not necessarily where the world tells you they are,” suggested that the pilgrim landscape is one that has yet to be mapped and that, for Brad, the pilgrim quest was primarily one of exploration. In this sense, Brad’s life of scholarship has been one of pilgrimage, a continual seeking out of new places of significance in a broad Thoreauvian landscape.

Discovery and recovery: The recontextualization of place. Brad’s pilgrimage can be conceived as an ongoing journey of discovery rather than a one-time visit to any particular site. Manuscripts were an essential aspect of the terrain through which Brad journeyed, and puzzles about the past motivated him to seek out lost and forgotten places.

The “recovery” of places through the “recontextualization” of their significance was thematic of his pilgrim impulse. The act of bringing text to place, “freight[ing] my little pilgrimage sites with lots of context,” added significance to his experience of place and enriched the larger pilgrim community.

“Context” is historical material that enabled Brad to enter a landscape that was not evident to the average pilgrim. One such feature lay near Thoreau’s “bean field” at Walden, a path long abandoned as a result of changing transportation infrastructure. Brad goes there “to recover [. . .] that path.” And if vegetation obscures the shallow depression that marks the landscape, he “can go back to Thoreau’s early surveys” for verification. Brad’s “pilgrim impulse” was to bring the documentary evidence together with the site in a particular ritual. “I will walk that path that’s no longer there [. . .], this path that nobody’s walked in decades and decades. Yet this is the path that Thoreau walked on.” This pilgrim wants to know “not just where is it now, but what was it like back then.”

Recontextualizing a site included discovering a place through manuscript research, seeking that place in the landscape, and then re-enacting in some sense Thoreau’s experience of that place. The ritual exploration of sites went hand in glove with Brad’s manuscript research. Reading Thoreau’s notes of a visit to Wharf Rock in which the author recorded that he had “walked in the water along the [. . .] north shore of Flint’s Pond,” and found “ground nuts strung along the shoreline,” Brad was prompted to make his own visit. “I wanted to go out there on [the same] date, take my shoes off and walk exactly [where Thoreau had walked. . .], and then see if I could find ground nuts.”

This scholar-pilgrim also contributed to the “recovery” of sites by bringing them to the attention of a larger community, sometimes involving others in the process of discovery. Once found, Brad or another Thoreauvian will “write an article about [the place . . .], essentially making a new pilgrimage site for a smaller [. . .] non-generic type pilgrimage.” But once a site became “common knowledge,” Brad was “no longer interested” in it. “We’ve recovered that from the past [. . .]. My work in a sense is done. I’m going to go on to the next unknown site of pilgrimage.”

Brad compared his recovery of sites to staking claim to new territory, and saw his role in the pilgrim community as akin to that of an explorer. “My job is to claim that territory, it might be a landscape feature, it might be a manuscript sitting in a library, and give that to people.” To explore and map uncharted territory was “like giving it as a gift” to your culture, “but then going on. My role is to go on to the next potential gift, and make it a gift [. . .] and pass it along to everyone else.” His loss of interest in a place once it has been “recovered” doesn’t detract from the significance of a place, but is a marker that he has completed a particular stage in his journey and is ready to move on. “The discoverer doesn’t settle what he discovers.”

Valuing the Man: Connecting with Thoreau. For Brad, the pilgrim path included both manuscript and landscape features as sites on the quest for connection with Thoreau. His ongoing pilgrimage led him to new discoveries because Thoreau himself was the object of the quest. By tracking the man through manuscript and landscape, by a painstaking reading of physical signs even to noting linear depressions in the land surface

or “looking at pin perforations in the margins of manuscripts,” this pilgrim sought to put himself in the places of Thoreau as a way of achieving insight to his life and work.

What motivates a pilgrim? For Brad, pilgrimage was about connection. Pilgrims “want to [. . .] have a closer sense of relationship or a tighter connection to something that’s important to them.” Brad revealed how the literary landscape of books and manuscripts took precedence over the physical landscape of routes and places in forging his sense of connection with Thoreau. In Brad’s experience, “Thoreau’s true legacy is in those manuscripts [. . .] not in a particular site out there in the woods.” Manuscripts are “still alive,” places open to exploration to “find out what really happened here.” By triangulating the temporal alignments of the books Thoreau read, the places he went, and the documentation he kept, Brad developed an intricate understanding of Thoreau’s work. He could tell “in almost excruciating detail how [Thoreau] worked [. . .], the way he read his books [. . .], how he indexed his journal, how he [put] a manuscript together.” This “manuscript work” brought Brad a sense of physical connection with Thoreau, in which he feels “almost like I’m looking over his shoulder.” At these moments, the boundaries of space and time seem permeable. “The discoveries that are most important to me are the ones that come from Thoreau. I have my insights through him, or even in him to some extent.”

Brad admitted that the “land itself can be powerful” particularly when “supported with a [. . .] lot of other connections.” But, next to manuscripts, places receded in importance as places of connection with Thoreau. When he went to the Hemlock Grove near Walden Pond to read there what Thoreau wrote about that place, Brad made it clear

that the importance of the site flowed from the value he held for the man himself. If a place was important to Thoreau, “somebody whose achievements I respect and in a sense have given my life over to studying,” that place became important to Brad “by virtue of [Thoreau’s] relation with the landscape.”

In some ways, Brad’s own work mirrored his sense of Thoreau’s work. Because “Thoreau paid close attention to such things,” Brad was able to trace Thoreau’s paths in the landscape, to find the same plants growing in the same places,” exhibiting in his scholarship a similar “close attention” to detail. Brad also noted Thoreau’s love of the local landscape, suggesting that Thoreau “lived to make Concord significant [. . .], he wanted to know everything about that place.” In this activity, Brad’s work might also mirror Thoreau’s, as he discovered and recovered the significance of those Thoreauvian places. But Brad clearly saw how his own work departed from Thoreau’s own unimaginable love of the local landscape. Brad’s work, and his goal as a pilgrim, shifted away from “the valuing of [Thoreau’s] work, to a valuing of the man.” His tracking of Thoreau was intended to connect with, not to emulate, Thoreau. “Thoreau’s true legacy is in those manuscripts...not in a particular site out there in the woods.” “In a very un-Thoreauvian way, I study Thoreau the way he studied the landscape.”

Laura’s story

Laura is a college professor working in the mid-Atlantic region, with several books on men of science to her credit. Laura’s first visit to Walden coincided with her debut as a Thoreau scholar at the 50th anniversary gathering of the Thoreau Society. Her own deep love of the outdoors and interest in literature led her to study Thoreau in the

context of the emergence of scientific study in the 19th century. Over the years she came to know Walden well, and our conversation revealed some of the ways that her relationship with this place has changed over time. We spoke at her kitchen table, looking out over her own background wilderness.

First Impressions: “I remember vividly.” Laura “discovered Thoreau” as a teenager who was “deeply alienated” from high school culture after a summer in the Alaskan wilderness. She recalled sitting on the grass behind the school building, reading “Life without Principle,” and getting hooked on Thoreau. Laura went on to read Walden, and then to skip her senior year, entering college early. “Thoreau spoke to me profoundly. He gave me permission to be the person that I wanted to imagine myself being, and to turn my back on high school.” Interested in both science and English, she did independent study on the ecology of the Pacific Northwest, then completed a Master’s essay on Thoreau. Later in life, she undertook doctoral study in the literature of science, returning to Thoreau as the focus of her research. “My dissertation was just taking shape when I made my pilgrimage to the Pond.” This first trip to Walden coincided with participation in the Thoreau Society’s 50th anniversary meeting, Laura’s “first big entry” into the community of Thoreau scholars.

Laura’s first impressions of Walden Pond are marked by a sense of the unexpected and the experience of vivid clarity. Her first sight of the Pond came amidst the distraction of negotiating unfamiliar routes in a borrowed car. She remembered being “on the back roads and trying not to get lost” when she came to a break in the woods and “suddenly you see this water opening up.” She recalled “being all excited [. . .] just this

feeling of disbelief.” Although it was some time later before Laura was able to stop and walk around the Pond, her first visit carried a similar intensity of emotion. “I was in such a strange mood [. . .], every little thing leaped into importance. I remember vividly, there was some insect on a leaf, looking at it and thinking [. . .] it would have looked” just like that to Thoreau. In the midst of all that was “going on, all the events and the Jubilee” that demanded Laura’s attention, these first experiences of place made deep and indelible impressions.

Laura continued to mark connections between the place and the author. But as she continued her pilgrimage at Walden, Laura’s experience was increasingly marked by contrast between her experience with Thoreau’s texts and her lack of knowledge of New England ecology. Yet Walden is a place to which she returned again and again, fostering a familiarity that influenced her ritual approaches and gradually changed her sense of place at Walden.

Landscape, text and ecology: ‘This sense of what he writes.’ Laura’s motive for going to Walden was connected with her developing role as a Thoreau scholar. Although she was intimately familiar with Thoreau’s writing, she felt “embarrassed, I guess, because I’d never seen Walden Pond. It didn’t seem right to be writing this dissertation about Thoreau and not have a sense of the New England landscape.” Her visit to the Pond came mid-way through the Jubilee gathering, as the conference location shifted from Worcester to Concord, Massachusetts. Her first visit brought moments of recognition, as the experience of Walden’s landscape deepened her insight to Thoreau’s Walden writing.

But she was also plagued by a sense of estrangement engendered by her lack of familiarity with the local ecology.

Laura's first impression of the Pond contradicted her expectations, being much larger than she had envisioned. But in other ways, the Pond and its setting deepened this pilgrim's sense of Thoreau's Walden, aptly illustrating his descriptions of the place. Laura perceived the way the Pond was "so contained," "embedded in these hills surrounding it." The landscape affirmed the author's reliability. "Thoreau has it exactly right, this sense of [. . . Walden] almost being an alpine lake" with "that quality of being embedded in the landscape." As Laura walked around the Pond, she gained a sense of space and mystery that confirmed Thoreau's idea of Walden as a self-defined cosmos. "[T]here was always some part of it that was hidden from view. You could never see the entire Pond complete. There was always a mystery, a cove [. . .] that gave you a sense of space." Laura's experience of the landscape elicited a new recognition of the authenticity of Thoreau's sense of Walden. She was "enormously impressed" by "this combination of space and mystery, with this marvelously little pocket universe [. . .] I just didn't get it until that moment."

For Laura, exploring the Pond's topography generated a new sense of understanding of Thoreau. At the same time, her encounter with place created an unexpected and unwelcome sense of divergence from the author of Walden. Laura had a long-standing familiarity with the ecological community of her home region of the northwestern U.S. Her experience of the outdoors had been accompanied by an intimate intellectual and experiential knowledge of the plants and animals that co-inhabited her

home territory. Visiting in New England for the first time, even common plants seemed strange to her. “I remember particularly taking pictures of sweet fern, because [. . .] I had no idea what it was [. . .]. It was such an exotic looking plant.”

Recalling her early reading of Thoreau’s work, Laura realized that she has been “sort of substituting” the plants and animals familiar to her for Thoreau’s catalog of species. Chickadees and pines had solid counterparts in her experience, but tall oak trees and high-bush blueberries required local surrogates. “I was substituting what I was looking at [. . .], creating a picture in my mind’s eye of a sort of northwest version of Walden Pond, without thinking about it, just doing it, to create my own sense of space.” Laura’s internal sense of Walden now conflicted her physical experience of the place, giving rise to a “sense of unfamiliarity that bothers” her.

Due to her ecological sensibilities, the text and the place of this “very place-centered [New England] author” failed to come together for Laura, creating an alienating effect. Even after she gained a greater familiarity with the Northeast, Laura still didn’t feel “that intimate knowledge that you do when you grow up with something.” “I know the literature, I know that he says things about these plants, but I don’t know these plants.” She felt a “sense of estrangement,” realizing that “[Thoreau] knows things that I don’t know [. . .]. I don’t know this place. I can’t get inside this place,” and that feeling created “a real sense of tension with the text.”

Laura’s experience of Walden Pond’s topography instilled a moment of insight into Thoreau’s work through the complementarity of place and text. But her experience of Walden’s ecology has almost the opposite effect. “The moment before I saw the Pond,

I felt like I had an inside sense of the text, because I was making these [ecological] substitutions. As soon as I saw he was looking at a completely different landscape, that all the plants, all the animals, the entire ecology was radically different, I felt this sense of estrangement.” The familiar text becomes strange as she encounters qualities of place that were alien to her.

Stones and circles: “Ritual gestures.” The local ecology is not the only disturbing impression that Laura received at Walden. Visiting in July, “the first sight of the Pond is cars stretched all down [Route] 126, the parking lot mobbed, and [. . .] seeing thousands of people [. . .], it was noisy and crowded.” Laura differentiated herself from the recreational visitors through ritual gestures that featured Walden’s sacred geography, a landscape of pilgrim paths and places. A visit to the House Site, ritual engagement with the cairn, and circumambulation of the Pond were highlights of her first journey to Walden, and these places and actions continued to shape her subsequent visits.

Once at Walden, the House Site was this pilgrim’s goal. The granite posts that mark Thoreau’s foundation, and the inscription over the hearth stone, provide a focus for attention and examination. But the space is public, and Laura felt “self-conscious” with all the “people coming and going.” Another source of unease is the heap of stones she finds there, a cairn to Thoreau’s memory, of which Laura had been unaware. Having no rock to place on the cairn, she felt “out of sorts with the ritual.” “Still, I had to make the gesture, so somewhere a couple hundred yards uphill” she found a “little pebble” and added it to the cairn, making a mental note to “do this better at some point.”

And years later, she did so, bringing a “beach-worn rock” from a place special to her, a beautiful wilderness area on the Pacific coast. This time her dilemma is what, or whether, to write on the stone. “Finally, I just got very self-conscious about it. Why would I write something? It would be for other people to read, and I don’t want other people to read it. I just want to make this gesture from my home to Henry’s home.” This act of return and offering brought closure to her first journey. “I felt I had completed the gesture at that point.” But Thoreau’s cairn continued to hold ritual significance in subsequent visits.

A decade after her initial pilgrimage, now a published Thoreau scholar, Laura was again back at Walden. Temporarily residing in the area, she received word that her new work on Emerson was to be published. “I wanted to celebrate, [. . .] so, to honor the occasion I walked up to Emerson’s Cliff,” a steep rise on the southern shore of Walden Pond. There are also cairns at Emerson’s Cliff, “not just big piles of rock” like Thoreau’s cairn, but vertical stone stacks. “They had collapsed, and I rebuilt them, and took one of the stones from Emerson’s cairn, walked around the Pond, and placed it on Henry’s cairn.” Again feeling self-conscious, Laura nevertheless asserted her desire to do what “felt like the proper thing to celebrate this event.” By “taking this stone from [Emerson’s] monument to Henry’s,” she saw herself as “sort of making an offering connecting the two.”

Laura’s rituals at Walden also included walking. The pilgrim posture begins with a certain orientation in the landscape that reveals the direction of one’s values. “I turned my back to all the bathing beach goings-on and walked out the pathway to the House

Site.” After her ritual at the cairn, Laura went on to “walk around the rest of the Pond” rather than returning the way she came. During her first visits, she always walked counter-clockwise around the Pond, “because you walk down to the beach and you head out first to the cabin [House Site].” But changing circumstances at the Pond, then growing familiarity with the landscape, initiated variations in this pattern. “One time the water was so high that the pathway was covered with water [. . .], so I just hiked up my skirt, and kicked my shoes off and waded, which I thought was special.”

During the period when she was working at the Thoreau Institute, near the park boundaries, she “would come to the Pond from all sorts of odd angles” and “started going clockwise around the Pond more often,” now her preferred route. “The other side of the Pond, the side that’s not on the House side, is lonelier” and offers more choices. “You can cut up to Emerson’s Cliff, you can go on a side trip, or just drop down into the woods [. . .]. It feels more appropriate to spend some time wandering on that side of the Pond.” But these longer, lonelier walks also encompassed the House Site. “When I’m ready to leave, I’ll finish the journey by coming back to the main path and heading back with, always with kind of a touch of the cap to the House Site.”

“Known as a Thoreauvian:” “A much more familiar relationship.” As Laura became more familiar with Walden, her sense of place was transformed. Several years after her original pilgrimage, she began to make annual visits to the Pond in conjunction with Thoreau Society meetings. But substantial changes in her relationship with Walden result from a short period in residence nearby. “Before then, every visit was very ceremonial and rather self-conscious [. . .] It’s now a much more familiar relationship.”

Contributing to this shift in the sense of sacredness were her broader familiarity with the Pond's environs, proximity to the Pond, and contact with the Pond in a variety of times and seasons. Laura walked somewhere every day when she was living near the Pond. As she got to know the trails through the woods, and became acquainted with the stone walls and neighboring ponds, "the Pond settled into [. . .] not just [. . .] one site with this unknown landscape around it," but "became one feature in a whole landscape of features." Through close and frequent access, "the Pond became kind of this back yard feature, almost cozy in a way, like a friendship, a close relationship. And so now when I go, it's lost that sense of deep ceremony." It's like "saying hello to an old friend."

Laura has seen the Pond at high water and when its shoreline is exposed by drought. She has canoed into Heywood's Meadow, and stood at the center of Walden Pond on winter ice. She's walked the trails at night, without a flashlight. Replacing the vanished sense of sacredness is an intimate sense of familiarity. She knows the Pond's seasons and its "moods." "I've seen it in summer, in the winter [. . .], I've seen it frantically busy with horns honking, sirens and all kinds of bustling, litter on the beach, and everything. And I've seen it when it was just absolutely deserted."

This changing sense of place was echoed in Laura's altered roles and relationships with other Walden visitors. The expectation of solitude was one marker of this difference. On her initial visit to the Pond, crowds at the beach raised "contradictory emotions." "It was very emotional for me to finally see the Pond [. . .] in a very private way, and yet here were all these people for whom the Pond was nothing but a swimming hole." Although she felt a sense of "exhilaration of having the Pond loved by so many,"

Laura also “wanted it to be quiet and still, and wanted to be away from all of them.” The intimate desires of that first moment were later balanced by the patience of a long-standing relationship. “It doesn’t matter whether I’m alone or not anymore. The Pond will wait for me.”

On her initial visit, Laura was a solitary pilgrim, unrecognized and moving among strangers. “I didn’t know anybody at that point, so I wouldn’t have recognized other Thoreau Society members.” She observed others without interacting. “I was fascinated by looking at how other people were there,” whether they were “alone and quiet” or “spread out [. . .] families with towels,” radios booming Italian opera out across the water. But later, when she goes to Walden, she has “conversations with various people [. . .], some of them interesting characters.” There is a sense of mutual recognition, a shared status in relation to this place. “They may have seen me at various points and strike up a conversation. They know that I’m a Thoreauvian. We sort of identify each other.”

Laura’s role has changed from lone pilgrim to recognized Thoreauvian to a guide or mentor for others. She told the story of being asked by “a kid in the army who had just 24 hours in Boston” to take his photograph, documenting for his buddies that he had “made it” to Walden. “For some reason he picked me, ran up and said would I like to take his picture?” And she has “taken people who’ve never seen the Pond [. . .] and shown them [Walden], people who’ve wanted company.” Laura has also demonstrated a sort of proprietary concern for the place. When walking around the Pond, she “almost always” stops at the House Site. “Sometimes you look and you see there’s a group of obvious tourists and you’ll think about what led them there. Others times there’ll be

some very solitary looking person [. . .] and I'll see them there, and I won't disturb them. Just [. . .] sort of checking up on things." Her concern for Walden carries beyond its borders, as she tries to communicate a sense of the place to her students. "And, of course, now I've put a Walden Pond sticker on my car." For this former pilgrim, Walden is no longer a strange and sacred place, but a material aspect of her being. "It's become, oh, part of my life now too."

David's story

David teaches high school students in a well-to-do suburb on the eastern seaboard. He has integrated his respect for Thoreau with his interest in spirituality, and has thought and taught about Thoreau as a Transcendentalist. His pilgrim role has changed through the years, as he has moved from being a pilgrim himself to leading his own students on pilgrimage to Walden; from walking with Walter Harding around the Pond to guiding others on their first visit to the House Site. David understands Walden pilgrimage in many contexts, including an explicitly religious one: the heritage of the living community of Unitarian Universalism. We spoke in David's study.

Remapping Walden: "geography in your mind." When David made his first visit to Walden in 1981, he was familiar with the Concord Transcendentalists and had "resonated with Thoreau since high school." Reading had "established a kind of familiarity" with Thoreau as a writer who "doesn't beat around the bush." Intrigued by reading Thoreau's essay, "Civil Disobedience," he found "Life Without Principle" even more provocative. It made one "think more deeply about what you were living your life for." When in college David "felt it was time to steep [himself] more deeply" in

Thoreau, he turned to Walden. This text did more than provoke ideas, it suggested a landscape. “When you read Walden, [. . .] it conjures up a whole geography in your mind.” David’s first visits to Walden Pond were thus marked by a comparison of his mental map of place with the landscape he encountered in person.

That first visit was just a glimpse, a “quick side trip” to see Walden and Concord while David was in the area for another purpose. The Pond’s size and situation were among the first geographical impressions that stood in contrast with David’s expectations. “Like a lot of people, I thought [Walden Pond] was smaller than it is. That’s not a disappointment at all, it’s just that the actual geography is different from the imaginary geography.” Walden’s sociogeographical context was also more evident. As well as discovering that the Pond is “so close to Boston..that it’s a swimming hole for suburban” residents, Walden was also nearer to Concord than David had imagined. It is by coming to Walden that “you realize how close it is to the town.” These experiences shifted David’s sense of place from a disembodied location in an imaginative landscape to a grounded situation in a populated and accessible space. The ephemeral Walden of the imagination became grounded in the reality of the contemporary world. “[I]nstead of having this [. . .] Brigadoon-like experience, where something emerges from the mist [...Walden] actually has a situation.”

In spite of the contradictions between expectation and experience, there is still “an awful lot about [Walden] that does square with your mental image.” Its wooded landscape corresponded more closely with David’s expectations, seeming to be “properly forested.” David eventually learned that neither the present vegetation nor his imagined

woodland was particularly true to the historical record. As he “read more and more about Thoreau’s time there,” David learned that in the mid-19th century, this land was not as forested as it is now. In this case the experience affirms the imagination, although both are at odds with history. David suggests the irony “that only today does our image of Walden Pond kind of square with this imaginary landscape.”

The imaginary landscape holds more than the forest and Pond, encompassing Thoreau’s Walden house as well as David’s sense of Walden’s writer. “We all have an image of what [Thoreau] was like too, let alone what Walden was like.” A subsequent visit gave David time to ponder a replica of the house, and to walk around Walden Pond to the memorial at the original site of the house. At the House Site, “even though all you’re seeing is the outline of where that cabin stood,” the experience still “has something to do with your mental imagery.” This pilgrim wanted to know, “What kind of a house was this” and what does the house reveal to me about its builder? David had imagined the Walden cabin to be “a kind of cobbled together structure like a hobo camp.”

Although the granite pillars revealed little, seeing the House Replica filled in the outlines and challenged David’s ideas about Thoreau. “Somehow [the house] assumes a certain dignity [. . .] that was different from my mental image of it. You got the feeling that [Thoreau] was not only an intellect, but a craftsman, someone who tried to do things well, handy, good with tools.” Seeing the careful handiwork of the Replica, David “had to revise [his] mental image” of Thoreau’s time and purpose at Walden. “His experience there was a little more elevated” than that of a hobo living rough or a hippie “eking out a subsistence living.”

These first encounters provided an opportunity for the pilgrim to confirm or revise the sense of place and person gleaned from reading the texts. David's experiences with the natural and cultural landscape were incorporated into a new understanding of the world of Walden's author.

Revisiting Walden: "indelible" impressions and "different dimensions." David returned to Walden regularly after his first pilgrimage, gradually learning more of the history of the place and serving as a guide for others. But those first experiences made different and more memorable impressions than did subsequent visits. David's first "side trip" to Walden did not even allow time to "stop, get out and walk" around the Pond. In spite of, or maybe due to, the visit's brevity, he was left with an indelible impression of the physical environment. "For anyone who's drawn there, even as a side visit, your first view of the Pond is an indelible experience. The sun through the trees, the glimpses of the water, all of that leaves an impression." For David, there was something about that first experience that made it stand out from the memories of later visits.

On his next journey to Walden, David entered into this memorable vista, walking out alone to the House Site. Vision again dominated his memory of the experience, but this time the sights of Walden were interwoven with the imaginative activity of the pilgrim. "The first impression I had was seeing things through Thoreau's eyes...looking around as though I was looking at things through Thoreau's eyes. What did he see?" Through this almost ritual approach, the pilgrim sought to embody Thoreau, to connect with Thoreau's own experience. "You kind of put yourself in his place and imagine what

it must have been like to live there.” For David, visiting these “peaceful surroundings in a nice season of the year [. . .] conjures up a very bucolic image of things.”

In addition to the quality of the surroundings, David imagined the solitude of Thoreau’s time at Walden. Here, David’s own childhood experience in the outdoors contributed to his sense of connection. Because his family moved frequently, David didn’t have a large or continuous social circle while growing up. “I spent a lot of time on my own [. . .] taking long walks [. . .], so I could imagine myself out there at Walden Pond too. For anyone who values the place of solitude in their life,” the idea of living like Thoreau at Walden, “is a very appealing prospect.”

Imagination, solitude and the power of first impressions all contributed to making David’s first experience “kind of an idyllic one.” However, returning year after year changed the quality of the pilgrim experience. In subsequent visits, David attended meetings of the Thoreau Society, and learned more about the history and the natural history of Walden. As the pilgrim became “more steeped in the lore” of Walden, “the experience [took] on a different dimension.” His first orientation to the landscape gave Walden a spatial situation in the material world. Later, his increasing knowledge of the place’s history grounded Walden in time as well as space. “You begin to imagine what it did look like then [. . .], it becomes more concrete in a way.” Knowledge and experience add “a more historical dimension, a dimension [. . .] that didn’t exist initially.”

Walking with others: “in league with pilgrims everywhere:” Although solitude marked David’s first pilgrim experience of Walden, he made later trips in the company of others. These journeys included participation in communities that enabled the passing on

of Thoreau's legacy, revealed a sense of tradition in learning about Walden, and were an avenue for David's understanding of the Thoreau to develop. These journeys to Concord and Walden were one way for David to both learn and share knowledge about the place. And the walk to Walden also connected David with a broader international community of pilgrims.

David's subsequent visits were often made with others from the Thoreau Society. The organization's co-founder, Walter Harding, was a memorable companion. "Walter was so good at befriending newcomers to the organization, and just sort of walking with them." These shared journeys provided a context for learning about Walden's history. "I can remember walking with [Walter] out to Walden Pond and learning things about it." This mentor revealed aspects of the Thoreauvian landscape that were not located on trail maps or interpretive signs. "[H]e showed me where the trees were, the stumps of the trees that Thoreau had planted." Through walking to Walden with others, David is able to see more of Thoreau's legacy in the landscape.

But David was also planting seeds with a new generation to whom Thoreau had yet to be introduced. As a minister, David led an annual trip to New England with a group of young people. The purpose of this "heritage tour to Boston, Cambridge and Concord" was to visit "the roots" of the Unitarian Universalist tradition. The tour invariably included Walden. "For a lot of these youth [. . .] this is their first experience of Thoreau." Although David couldn't tell how much the visit, or the ritual of placing something on the cairn, meant to these young people, his eye was on the future. "I think we're planting seeds."

David has also walked to Walden in solidarity with pilgrims from abroad. He recalled one group of visitors who, “able to travel out of Russia” for the first time since the dissolution of the Soviet state, came to Concord. “They wanted to march from the site of the jail [. . .]where Thoreau spent the night to the cabin site” at Walden. These pilgrims “wanted to acknowledge Thoreau’s influence on their own thinking, and to celebrate the fact that they were free to do this.” This was a “very moving experience” for David, one that was also “indicative of Thoreau’s influence, and how widespread it is.” Like another visit, during which he had witnessed pieces of the Berlin wall that had been placed on Thoreau’s cairn, David’s walks to Walden were also a way that he connected with other pilgrims around the world.

As meaningful as are David’s solitary visits, the experience of being part of a group going to Walden was also significant in his journeys. Over the years, such rituals provided an opportunity for connection across both generations and continents with a broader community of Thoreauvians.

Something that’s missing: An emotional dimension. David’s successive visits to Concord, like widening circles, have encompassed a greater historical knowledge of place and an expanded sense of the Thoreauvian community. But later trips have also been marked by a sense that “something’s missing” from the Concord experience, as a result of the loss of one particular place. Perhaps “the most vivid memory” of David’s first pilgrimage stands out for him “because [the place] is no longer there.” On that first trip it was not the Pond, but the Thoreau Lyceum that “made the biggest impression” on

David. Of all the sites he visited, this place had a unique ambience, giving David the impression that the Lyceum was a sort of “shrine to Henry David Thoreau.”

David recalls how the Lyceum’s space, its contents, and its staff contributed to it special and memorable role in the visitor experience. Located in Concord, the Lyceum “was just a simple house.” Unlike many notable historic houses of Concord authors, the building had no direct connection to Thoreau’s dwellings. “It was a humble house, not a fancy fashionable house.” On entering, the pilgrim “came into a parlor. And it was a little dark, not light and airy. But it seemed to have a certain aura to it.” Within this space were certain objects of interest to the pilgrim. “They had a bust of Thoreau [and] a little display case with some memorabilia in it.” David’s “impression of the Thoreau Lyceum [. . .] was that this is a shrine to Henry David Thoreau, and these are his relics.”

The Lyceum presented opportunities to connect personally with Thoreau’s legacy. David remembers that a copy of Thoreau’s journal was out and “it was always turned to the day’s date. So you could look at that.” There was also “a book where you could sign in, and you saw these signatures from all over the world.” Here again, place provided a touchstone for imagination and experience. “You imagine that there are a lot of people who share your appreciation for Walden’s writer, but until you actually see something like this logbook, and see these names from all over the world, you don’t realize how much of an influence he’s had.” The sense of participation in a broader community fostered by David’s Lyceum experience goes beyond scholarly interest to one of personal encounter. David reflects that “[y]our first encounter with Thoreau and Walden [. . .] is a very personal one.” Seeing the names in the logbook affirms for him “that all of these

people signing in have had this same kind of personal encounter.” The Lyceum also affected the young people who came with David on heritage tours of Concord.

“Inevitably the part of the experience that meant the most to them [. . .] was their visit to the Thoreau Lyceum.” David suggests that this was in part due to “the scale, and the ambiance” of the place. The Lyceum “was a shrine that wasn’t a museum” with a ‘don’t sit on the furniture’ atmosphere, [. . . where the kids] kind of felt at home.”

A vital aspect of the character of the Lyceum was the knowledgeable local caretaker. “Ann McGrath [. . .] made a big impression on the kids. She was a kind of no-nonsense person, and when the kids were fidgeting, she’d tell them to sit still, sit up straight, so it wasn’t as though she was effusive and gushed over them.” “But they just loved hearing about Thoreau from her.” Rather than giving a rote presentation on Thoreau, “he was just such a part of her mental mindset that she could start anywhere.” Her knowledge and personal interest in Thoreau impressed these young visitors. “[S]he spoke with such affection for Thoreau that one student [. . .] said, ‘Is she Thoreau’s widow?’” The people who staffed the Lyceum contributed a lot to David’s sense of the place as a shrine. The interpreters were “people who lived locally and were just so thoroughly steeped in Thoreau [. . .] so deeply affiliated with him, that they brought not only a human dimension, but an emotional dimension to it.”

The Lyceum was closed in 1994, and the building was subsequently demolished. Although David continues to visit Walden, and to bring groups to Concord, he misses the fact that there isn’t a shrine to visit. Although museums offer interpretative programs and display artifacts, and have done “a fine job of preserving these things,” compared to

David's Lyceum experience visiting a museum is like "the difference between seeing animals in their habitat and animals in a zoo." Without the Lyceum, "there's something missing." He contrasts the response to Emerson and Thoreau: "You can admire Emerson, there's a lot to admire there. But Thoreau wrote so much about himself [. . .that] you felt you were actually in conversation with someone." David suggests that "more than Emerson, Thoreau needs a shrine," because "people have a more personal feeling about Thoreau."

Tom's story

Tom is an independent scholar and teacher who has researched and written about Concord authors and pilgrims. He has lived in the Concord area for much of his life, where he is noted for his seminars on Transcendentalism and for his involvement with local historical and conservation efforts. We spoke in the parlor of his central New England home.

To be part of these places: Not a pure experience. Tom's first Walden visit was both the culmination of years of anticipation, and the beginning of a lifelong involvement with the landscape of Transcendentalism. His interest in this place was sparked by reading Emerson and Thoreau. The opportunity to "see the places I [had] read about" was the impetus for pilgrimage. Tom's initial sojourn revealed a Walden which complemented Thoreau's writings. But in other ways the contemporary landscape contradicted the values that had attracted Tom to the Concord author.

Inspired and moved by religious and philosophical ideas, Tom began reading Emerson and Thoreau as a junior in high school. At first "it was Emerson that caught

me,” and Tom read “everything of Emerson’s that I could get my hands on.” Intrigued by Emerson’s “Eulogy” for Thoreau, Tom then read the whole of Walden. “Thoreau got right into the front seat [. . .] with Emerson at that point.” By Tom’s senior year in high school, he was “plugged into the Transcendentalist spiritual philosophy,” and “immersing” himself in the “fourteen volumes of Thoreau’s journal.”

Tom’s “big ambition was to travel to Concord to see [the] places” he had been reading about. He longed “to go immerse myself in the sites [. . .] to be part of these places.” His goal came to fruition a week before his high school graduation. Tom and a friend borrowed a car and made the fifty mile drive to Concord. Almost forty years later, Tom recalled “the excitement of approaching” Concord that first time. After a memorable visit to the Emerson House, the young men headed toward Walden.

The year was 1966, and New England was in the midst of a severe drought. The water level in Walden Pond was extremely low, exposing a broad swath of beach around the Pond’s circumference and a long sand bar across Thoreau’s Cove. The public beach was even closed to swimming. These unusual conditions fostered Tom’s ability to draw on particular recollections of Thoreau’s experience. As he walked the landscape, Tom was “always trying to relate the writing to place.” To Tom, the wide beach recalled Thoreau’s desire for “a broad margin to his life.” And although normally submerged, the pilgrims were able to walk “out on the sand bar right in the middle of Thoreau’s Cove” where Thoreau’s family had once picnicked.

Tom and his companion walked out to the House Site, placed a stone on the cairn, and then continued around the Pond. Accompanying this Walden ritual was Tom’s

recitation of Thoreau's text. He was "just so happy to be there," that he was "waxing verbose out there, talking about the margin of the sand [and . . .] those features of the Pond that [Thoreau] described." But Tom's enthusiasm at the correspondence of place and text was not shared by his friend. As they reached the far side of the Pond and looked back toward the beach area, his companion countered Tom's narration by pointing out, "the Henry David Thoreau Memorial Bath-house." Tom's friend saw another reality, one suggested by contemporary structures rather than literature and imagination; and his comment "let the air out of [Tom's] Transcendentalist balloon."

The sight of the bath-house reminded Tom that he was walking not only in Thoreau's footsteps, but also in "just another New England town, like my own." He remembered thinking that "as rich as this experience is, it's not a pure experience." Although he continued to love coming to Concord and seeking out places that connected him with Thoreau, Emerson and their ideals, Tom acknowledged that there was "always...a layer of 'bath-house' on the town." The tension of conformity and contradiction between Walden and Walden, between Transcendentalist ideals and contemporary land use, remained a significant aspect of Tom's ongoing experience of Concord. "There's still that dichotomy out there."

Feeling the way: Finding connection. Tom made many trips to Concord, taking a summer job there during college, and eventually making his home there. Two of Tom's early trips were "particularly connecting" and gave rise to "that special feeling" that "recapitulated those first feelings" of his initial pilgrimage. One of these experiences was a solitary ramble through a snow-covered Concord landscape; the other was a steep climb

up Fairhaven Cliff. These journeys suggested the roles of solitude, exploration and reflection in transforming an ordinary excursion into a memorable pilgrimage.

The winter following Tom's first visit, he had an opportunity to visit Concord on his own. He remembered this visit as "one of the most connected days" that he ever experienced in Concord. A blizzard had shut down schools and closed roads and blanketed the landscape with snow. Tom arrived from college by the first train after the storm. The roads had been plowed, and he spent the day walking around the whole town, from North Bridge to Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, and then out to Walden Pond. "In a sense it was my first pilgrimage of a more inner nature, because it was the first trip that I made myself." He was able to experience "Concord in solitude [. . .] because there weren't many people out at all after the storm." Tom also kept a kind of diary of the visit in the form of a letter to a friend. "Writing down my thoughts as I was walking around town" added to the memorable nature of this visit.

In addition to the solitary and reflective quality of the journey, a sense of exploring new terrain contributed to Tom's feeling of pilgrimage and his sense of connection. Although he had visited Concord before in the company of friends, "the layout of the town, how to get from one place to another, was still enough of an unknown" that this visit had "almost that numinous, mysterious quality" associated with wondering, "what's around the next corner?" Tom described it as a "a kind of pilgrimage in which I'm feeling my way."

Wayfinding also characterized a sojourn Tom made years later, when he sought out a local place he'd never been before. According to his Journals, Thoreau frequented

a local rise called Fairhaven Cliff, but in the 1960's "most Thoreauvians [. . .] didn't really know where it was." Working in Concord during the summer, Tom got to know "local people [who would] show me these places off the beaten path," places that "weren't on the tourist map." Locating the desired site on a survey map, Tom found his way across private property and through the woods, climbing up the Cliff "hand over hand." Although he later learned an easier route, that first time he did it "the hard way," an approach that seemed "good for a pilgrim."

The journey to Fairhaven Cliff provided a "recapitulation of those first feelings" that Tom had on making his initial Concord pilgrimage. "I remember getting that special feeling while I was there." Contributing to the experience was the "extra effort" Tom had made to get there, and the fact that he "had found it" himself. It provided a "sense [of] mission accomplished, [that] I had reached the goal." For Tom, "coming up onto that rocky area [was] like getting to the top of a mountain."

Distinguishing this pilgrim journey from other travels that bring a sense of accomplishment was the sense of connection with Thoreau that resulted from his effort. In Tom's understanding, Fairhaven Cliff was the place "that meant the most to [Thoreau]." The experience of being there "was particularly connecting" for him, because he was able to sit "on the very rock that Thoreau sat on." He remembered "feeling a great calmness in sitting where Thoreau had sat so often, reflecting for hours."

What distinguished these moving and memorable pilgrim experiences from the many visits Toms made to Concord places? Both journeys were made in solitude and included time for reflection – through letter writing in one case, through contemplating

the landscape in another. Both journeys were also marked by a sense of discovery fostered by a need to find one's own way; in one case through a landscape remade by deep snow, in the other through unmarked and unfamiliar woodland. In Tom's experience of Concord, a pattern of solitary exploration and meaningful connection gave these particular journeys a pilgrim quality.

Life pilgrim: A place of Transcendentalism. Over the years, Tom has added “a thousand pebbles to the cairn” at Thoreau's Walden memorial. It was in looking back over a lifetime of engagement with Concord authors and places that the meaning of place in Tom's pilgrim experience emerged more fully. Motivations and experiences which were “unconscious” at the time came to be understood “retrospectively” by attending to “the things that have stuck with me over the years.” For Tom, these journeys – and much of his life's work – constituted “a pilgrimage to symbols” in “a place of Transcendentalism.”

As a youth, Tom read Emerson and Thoreau in the context of other spiritual writings, including “the Romantic poets [. . .] Plato and the eastern scriptures.” And he saw his pilgrimage as part of a broader philosophical quest into “the nature of things.” To make meaning of his Concord pilgrimage required understanding its context in Transcendentalism and in ideas which the Concord authors shared with other perennial philosophers. Tom himself might be considered a living, believing Transcendentalist. “Everything I think and do is in that context, that Transcendentalist context.” Considered from this perspective, Tom's “pilgrimage to Concord has always been a Transcendental pilgrimage.”

For Tom, Concord was not just an historical landscape marked by the memorials and museums of dead writers. Concord's landscape continued to be alive with symbolic power: "a place that is still a place of Transcendentalism." Drawing on the Transcendental understanding of the hierarchical nature of reality, Tom understood Concord to have "multiple levels of reality," to be "an exceptional and, in a sense a blessed place." Using Thoreau's vocabulary, Tom explained the role of symbols in his own view of Concord. "For Thoreau, the 'real' is the spiritual underpinning, the 'actual' is the manifest." And symbols are "the meeting place between the real and the actual." In a Transcendental sense, "Concord is a place that symbolizes the integration of [all] levels of life."

Seen in this light, Concord places take on new power in Tom's personal pilgrimages. For this contemporary Transcendentalist, Walden pilgrimage "wasn't just a pleasant reminder of something I've read," but a way to make Thoreau's "inspiring work change my life." Visiting these places allowed "the material of [his] inner landscape [to] become manifest, actually tangibly concrete," so that the pilgrim himself could "enter into the nature of the symbol." Ideally, a new and life-changing element emerged from this convergence of inner and outer landscapes.

In Tom's experience, ideas already at work through his reading and thinking found resonance in place through the "contemplative experience of the landscape." Pilgrimage allowed the symbolic meaning of the Concord places to be brought more into his conscious life, to be "constellated with his own ideals and values." Tom experienced "contentment in the placement of [himself] in the context and proximity of the symbol,"

because he felt “an affinity and connectedness with it, a oneness with it.” For a Transcendental pilgrim, “that’s finally what you’re seeking [. . .], that sense of oneness with everything.”

Tom’s Concord pilgrimage extended beyond a search for personal transformation to a quest for social transformation through the restoration of Concord’s symbolic landscape. Seeking to connect the inner and outer landscapes of Concord, his work encompassed teaching about the Concord authors as well as advocacy for the preservation of Concord places. In this task, the Transcendental notion of hierarchy guided his vision. “My work has been to make the real and the actual a kind of continuum [. . .] to see where they inter-related and, where things are out of whack, to see what can be done to improve it.” Almost forty years after his first visit to Walden, Tom was “still very deeply connected” to Concord. “My life identity has entered into these symbols.”

Donald’s story

Don teaches writing and environmental literature in an alternative college in southern California. Although he went to high school in New England, he didn’t read Walden as part of his formal education. Donald’s first visit came as a side trip on a visit East with two of his teenage children. His unexpected emotional response to Walden was rooted in the physical setting that he encountered, and the connection he recognized between Thoreau, Walden and his own environmental values. We spoke at my home in central Massachusetts, while Don was on another trip to New England.

Reading *Walden*: “The coincidence of place and value.” When Donald first read Walden, he was living at home in southern California. An 18-year old recently returned from school, he was engaging with environmental problems for the first time. “When I came home from New England in 1970 to live in Los Angeles again, I was living two miles down the road from a huge landfill [. . .]. I started thinking about what happens with everybody’s newspaper every day [. . .], and that’s where I started to get hooked up with environmental issues.” It was then that he sought a copy of Thoreau’s work.

Walden was not an easy read. Donald remembered “having to fight [his] way through page after page.” What stood out amidst the oblique references and “Victorian style” of the text was a sense of place that brought together Thoreau’s landscape and ideas. “[W]hat was left for me always were these descriptions of place [. . .] that coincided with the values that were being expressed.” Although the southern California landscape differed markedly from southern New England’s, the values Donald found in Walden “coincided with what [he] was thinking about, what was going on at home.”

Although *Walden* was “a place [Donald] wanted to visit,” a trip back East wasn’t “in the cards” for him. “I was in California raising a family, so that whole idea of ever going to *Walden* was sort of deferred.” But Donald’s family responsibilities ultimately provided the pretext for his visit to *Walden*. He “always had that place on [his] mind.” And when one of Donald’s children headed East for a college recruitment event, he planned a family side trip to *Walden*. “That was really the first opportunity [to go to *Walden*]. And I just jumped on it.”

Wordless experience: Looking at “a place out of a picture.” Donald made his side trip to Walden in the company of a small group of family members on a gray, wet summer’s day. He felt “let down” when he saw the “typical state park parking lot,” supposing that Walden would be “another one of those trampled public wilderness spaces.” But that feeling “didn’t last very long.” As he stood on the beach and looked out over the lake, Donald was “just totally moved. I was very choked up. I had to [. . .] separate myself from the rest of the group [b]ecause [. . .] they weren’t connecting to it in the same way that I was.” This encounter with Walden was marked by intense visual engagement. “I just stared for, I couldn’t even tell you how much time it was. I just looked out and tried to trace the outline of the Pond with my eyes, just looking all the way around.”

This visual exploration was accompanied by “a real sense of connection” that left Donald speechless, and made it hard for him to describe what he felt. “[I]t was really kind of a wordless experience? I wasn’t having a great flood of thoughts. It was more just a great flood of feelings.” Even in retrospect, Donald comments “I don’t know that I can completely explain it [. . .] as I’m talking to you about it now, it’s still hard to get a grip on.” Donald doesn’t think of himself as “somebody who’s given to that kind of experience” of going “to a particular place and find myself completely wowed.” Though familiar with place of Western grandeur like Yosemite, his encounter with Walden stood out for him. “I can be very taken by the beauty of something, but not like that.”

Donald attempted to compare his experience at Walden with “other places in the world where I’ve had my breath taken away.” His description of one such place suggests

how the physical setting that Donald encountered at Walden may have contributed to what is, for him, a rare experience. “Mammoth Mountain in the eastern Sierra” allows a “360 degree view from the top” that conceals the nearby ski area, inn and parking lots. A recent visit had given Donald a “sense of being in a completely unbuilt world, [one] not human made.” As Donald stood on the beach at Walden, the parking lot, road and buildings were all behind him. The “beautiful sort of gray misty day” on which he came enclosed the visitors and kept summer crowds away. From this orientation Walden may well have looked untouched, “like a place out of picture, absolutely..perfect.” Donald was able to take away the impression that “this is what Walden is always like.”

“What moved me: Where environmentalism starts.” An unexpected sense of connection also marked Donald’s experience at Walden. What was it about Walden that moved him? In some sense, Donald felt a renewed connection to a region that he had known as a youth. “I always knew that I had a really strong connection to New England, and there was something about that moment of being at Walden Pond that kind of crystallized it for me.” Even deeper than a sense of physical return to a familiar landscape was Donald’s sense of connection with Thoreau’s environmental values. “[M]y experience in environmental activism [. . .] is probably the key to what moved me when I was there.”

Until his pilgrimage, Walden had remained an image representing a particular set of values. “The more involved [Donald] got in environmental causes, the more that [Walden] meant something to [him], but only from a distance and in completely abstract terms.” Walden’s significance was derivative, meaning “something to [Donald] because

it meant something to Thoreau.” When Donald visited Walden, he sensed that he was “going to a place that inspired somebody else,” and then was surprised to feel “that same sense of inspiration.”

Walden held a central place in the landscape of environmental history from Donald’s perspective. He saw Thoreau as among the first to “articulate loud and clear the problems of development and industrialization,” environmental issues that Donald had struggled with in his home landscape. For him, Walden pilgrimage meant “going to the place where environmentalism starts. I don’t think there’s any other place in the United States that represents that any more than Walden does.” Donald felt “a connection through ideals and values,” because “what Thoreau [was] starting to talk about back then are things that are very much at the core of my own set of values.” “At the heart of what moved me” was a “moral connection.”

DJ’s story

DJ is a retired anthropologist living in the Pacific Northwest, with a number of published works on Eskimo art and culture to her credit. At the age of eighty-three, she was both the oldest pilgrim who participated in this study and the one whose pilgrimage took place longest ago. We spoke in the sitting room of her island home in Washington state, where she shared with me the photographs and diary accounts kept by her companion on the trip to Concord.

Thoreau as symbol: “Simplifying your life.” DJ’s Concord visit was part of a bicycle tour during which the Iowa college student and a friend traveled 850 miles around New England. Like many of her fellow students, she had dreamed of a visit to Europe –

a desire made impractical by the political situation abroad. For most of her friends, even a trip to New England remained out of reach, “just a dream,” because of financial considerations. The year was 1940, and “it was still the Depression.” Yet the era provided unique opportunities for the young people to travel simply, staying in hostels and living “on a dollar a day.” However, the rural lifestyle of the mid-West also provided a critical context for considering Thoreau’s exhortation to simplify. Even as her journey to Walden enacted a kind of Thoreauvian simplicity, observations at home raised practical questions about these ideals.

The idea and practice of simplicity permeated DJ’s recollections of Thoreau, and her pilgrimage to Walden. As an English major, DJ was familiar with Thoreau’s writing from the perspective of American literature. “Thoreau was our hero, you might say.” But she also studied biology and earth science, taking “one of the first courses in the United States on conservation,” a perspective that “worked very well into Thoreau’s idea of simplifying your life.” “[T]hose two things,” DJ’s interest in Emerson and Thoreau, and the post-Dust Bowl consciousness of conservation, accompanied her journey to New England, and inspired her visit to Walden.

The journey began in Iowa, where the two young women boarded a bus to Connecticut. Their few belongings fit into bicycle panniers. “We just lived with very little.” Forgoing restaurants, they bought and prepared their own food along the way. “We’d buy something every day [such as] a nickel’s worth of potatoes, [. . .or] we’d stop along the way and get a drink of water, and someone would give us a head of lettuce or something nice like that.” Particularly memorable was the “time we got free cookies, big

cookies, because mice had nibbled on one end.” The young women stayed at hostels, paying “sometimes 25 to 35 cents a night. We had a sheet sleeping bag and we’d crawl into that at night, and sometimes it was in a barn, or renovated chicken coop, or a nice bedroom.” Expenses “never came to over a dollar [. . .] but we had a wonderful, wonderful time.”

Their economy and simplicity of travel seemed to accord well with Thoreauvian ideals, as did their adventurous spirit. In those days “you couldn’t stay at a hostel unless you’d gone on your own power. When people found out, along the road or somewhere, that we were hostellers, that put us a peg above other people. They thought that was adventuresome.” The trip was also a literary treasure hunt for DJ. In re-reading her companion’s journal of that long-ago trip, she found that in every town “I’d been going either to an antiques shop or a used bookstore.” Among the riches she sent home were “[the] complete volumes of Emerson I bought for four dollars and a half, [and . . .] a ten volume set of Thoreau.”

DJ’s familiarity with rural life in the mid-West provided another landscape for considering Thoreau’s example. For many of DJ’s college friends, “life was simplified” because their families “were living in what we would consider poverty now.” Farms “still had their outhouses [and . . .] some of them didn’t have electricity.” DJ’s recognition that, it “was very difficult living that way” lent a practical perspective to youthful ideals. The “idea of simplifying your life [. . .] was a dream too!” These young students “felt that [Thoreau] was very much alive to us, and that his living [at Walden]

alone [. . .] was something that maybe we should strive for.” But at the same time they realized that perhaps Thoreau “was just a symbol of what we wanted.”

A personal encounter: Meeting a hero The travelers spent several days at a hostel in Concord, and Walden was one of many places they visited. DJ’s motivation for seeing “all the other houses” of famous authors was more of “an unformed idea” than an intentional pilgrimage. She compared her motives for visiting Walden with those of her companion. Lucille “Wanted to see all the spots that were mentioned” in the guidebooks “as a tourist.” In contrast, DJ went there “prepared, having read so much” of Thoreau’s work. DJ wanted to visit Walden “because I had read about it.”

The cairn at Thoreau’s Walden House Site was one goal of DJ’s visit. Finding a rock to add to the cairn was an “obligatory” ritual. Arriving at the site, DJ “looked and looked and looked for a good rock,” but previous visitors had scoured the landscape with a similar purpose. “Everything was cleared clean right around there.” The cairn connected DJ with a procession of pilgrims. And she remembered being “very happy to see all those rocks” on the cairn, because it meant that “many people had preceded me” to Thoreau’s Walden.

DJ turned next to a replica of Thoreau’s cabin, which she remembered as “a skinny house, kind of dark” inside, where there was a shelf holding Thoreau’s flute. Since DJ was herself a flute player, the instrument suggested another connection between the pilgrim and the author. Through persistent and persuasive conversation with the guide at the replica, DJ first gained an opportunity to hold the flute, and then, to play it. “Here I was, this skinny kid, all dusty [. . .]. To think that I got to hold his flute, and to

touch the mouth piece where Thoreau's mouth had been!" Although that summer was full of memorable adventures, the "high point [. . .] was holding [Thoreau's] flute, because that was such a personal thing." DJ recalled her Walden experience as "the meeting of a hero."

Recollections of Walden: "Just another thing." Although DJ's bicycle trip was a "most enlightening and wonderful experience," it was also something that she "hadn't thought about in years and years." The passage of time, the preservation of mementoes, and the overall richness of her life experience have influenced the pattern of her remembered journey. In telling her pilgrimage story, DJ was negotiating the landscape of memory with a fragmentary map of the past. Some of her memories were associated with mementoes of the trip. DJ had the diary and photo album kept by Lucille. Along with DJ's own souvenirs of the trip, mostly books, they served as visual and concrete markers. Photos of Walden Pond, a tourist pamphlet about Concord, and Lucille's diary notation that DJ "played Thoreau's flute – I wish I could have heard her," substantiate moments of the trip, as do the volumes of Thoreau's works on DJ's bookshelves. Unusual happenings also stood out against the background of remembered experience: the hostel where they stayed in a "real bedroom;" a day on a lobster boat; a solo swim across the Connecticut River. The landscape of memory contains some clear markers, but the space in between can no longer be explored. Recollection "brings it all back, I can see everything, but it doesn't get any clearer about certain things."

The richness of DJ's life also influenced her recollection and understanding of the Walden trip. Although for Lucille, the New England bicycle tour was "the trip of a

lifetime,” for DJ it wasn’t all that out of the ordinary. At the time, she “didn’t think we were doing anything unusual.” DJ had already been a frequent traveler around the United States, making family trips to “the Ozarks, and New York [. . .] the Badlands and the Great Lakes” as well as traveling to musical competitions. After graduating from college, her career included gold mining in Alaska, living rough in the Brooks Range, and research with native artisans. A long and active life, rich in memories, provided a dense tapestry against which to recollect a youthful trip to Walden. What seemed to others an adventure, or a pilgrimage, was to DJ “just having fun.” “It was just another thing. I look back at it, and that’s what it was. I didn’t even feel tired when I got home!”

Linda’s story

Linda went to Walden “out of need” and “without high expectations.” Although she had lived near Walden for most of her life, she had “never thought of a pond as anything that would interest her.” But, debilitated by cancer treatments, she was unable to pursue up her two most significant ‘necessity’ activities – drawing, and swimming at the ocean. So she went to Walden “as a second choice,” taking along a camera with which she “hadn’t really ever done anything.” Ten years later, she is a Walden “regular,” a cancer survivor, a grandmother of two – and she has taken over 30,000 photographs at Walden. Linda’s Walden pilgrimage involves a regular ritual of walking in solitude, connecting with the place through the camera, and swimming along its margins. She comes early in the morning, eager and anxious to see what each new day brings. Walden has become a place where she can be herself – inwardly and outwardly – a place where she feels profoundly at home. For Linda, pilgrimage to Walden is a way of putting

meaning into the world; and her photographs are a legacy through which she hopes to share that meaning with others.

Walking and Looking. Movement and vision are clearly linked in Linda's experience of life, and of Walden. As a portrait artist and a counseling psychologist, Linda "had walked through life [. . .] deliberately noticing faces." Although "nature was not part of [her] growing up," she responded to the environment at Walden. Although she "felt a peacefulness" on arriving at Walden, "it was when [she] started to [. . .] walk around that [she] began to just notice everything." "All of a sudden the details around me were speaking to me [. . .] the way faces always had."

Linda loves to get to Walden "first thing in the morning [. . .] when there is as little sign of humanity as possible." The first thing she does is "walk around with [her] camera." For Linda, "a very short walk would be an hour. Typical would be 2 to 3, and some days" the walk is even longer. She no longer thinks of the camera as present, it has become an extension of herself, and a way of connecting with the details she seeks out. Attuned to both sights and sounds, Linda finds that her "inner focus and outer focus are conjoined" through this Walden ritual. "If anything, I would have trouble not focusing at Walden."

Walden is not just Linda's "territory," it's also her "routine." Path finding is intimately connected with her sense of place. Linda's walk is motivated and directed by a desire to see everything; but her sense of what is available to be seen is rich and dense. Dropping her things at the beach, she will walk out along the main path, sometimes exploring side trails, squeezing through the fence, or lunging into wetlands in pursuit of a

promising mushroom or the sight of an unknown bird. She prefers taking the counter-clockwise direction in the morning “because it’s like following the light.” When she has “encountered, connected [with] and recorded whatever” she needs to – “or run out of film, whichever comes first” – she’ll head back along the same trail, still open to new experiences. “I know I see differently [. . .], lights, shadows, reflections, everything differently, than if I’m coming the other direction.”

In addition to looking forward and backward along the path, Linda also searches above her. “I love the way things look when you’re looking up.” From the flowers and “pine cones that grow on higher parts of trees,” to a nesting pair of cormorants, to the way that branches meet to form an arbor over the path, Linda testifies that “there’s so much you don’t see if you don’t look up.” Even when she returns to the beach and enters the water for a swim, Linda moves parallel to the shore, always looking at the sky and at the woods. Her careful movement around the Pond, in the water and out, is an almost insatiable quest to take all that she can of this world around her. She seeks “all the time to see in the water, see in the trees, see in the sky [. . .], see everything.” “It feels as though I will never see it all. And even if I see it all, that was yesterday and today it’s different.”

Linda’s time at Walden has provided a space for learning through experience. Although a capable and interested academic scholar, she has “loved the experience of learning about nature through just being in it.” She can tell you where there’s trillium and when it blooms, “what kind of weather brings out certain butterflies,” the way that

dead leaves look when there are mushrooms trying to push their way up, and the difference between the rustle of a chipmunk and that of a snake.

Linda has also found her own way with photography, just as she finds her own way around the landscape. As a child, she didn't want to take art lessons "because I thought if someone showed me how they drew, I would lose what was mine." She finds the process of photography more exciting because she's "not doing fifteen technical things" with the light. Linda compares her photography, and her nature education, to way finding. "I love to find my own private trails through everything. Literally and figuratively."

Linda's Walden pilgrimage is also very personal. Although "everybody seems to connect to Thoreau's Walden," Linda has "almost purposely not read all the books [she's] bought about Walden, including Thoreau's." Linda does not see herself as following in Thoreau's footsteps, or as part of a community of Thoreauvians. "It's almost as though I'm not following a journey someone else took. I'm creating my own journey."

A World That's Infinite. What keeps Linda coming back day after day, for ten years, still photographing and exploring? What does she bring to Walden and what does she find there? For Linda, Walden is always new, a place of vitality that responds to a sense of wonder and the sacred. "There's..forever a world there that's infinite." Linda first came to Walden at a time when she was very aware of her own mortality. Having exhausted treatment options, her "outlook at that time was maybe two years." She brought to Walden a new perceptiveness. "Everything in and around me had a

sacredness somehow,” something she had never experienced before. She came to Walden with “almost a childlike sense of wonder,” and a “very universal sense of acceptance” that led her to “want to capture everything.” Even death was acceptable at Walden, and Linda’s photographs capture that too. “There is something so sacred about the life and death of everything,” that Linda even takes “pictures of dead birds and animals,” finding that they still hold a kind of “presence” for her.

The quality of infinitude that Linda experiences at Walden is manifested in the potential for discovery. For Linda, Walden holds something new every day, its ability to surprise her is never exhausted. “Every day I see something new. I can go on the same trail even, and it doesn’t matter [. . .], ten different times in the same day, or a hundred or a thousand.” Each time will be a new experience because “each time the light will be different, the sound will be different, what’s moving or not moving is different.” Walden is always fresh, always new for Linda. “It feels as though I will never see it all. And even if I see it all, that was yesterday and today’s it’s different.”

Although Linda has come at different times of the day, and can still be delighted by the differences she finds, she prefers to come in the morning. Coming to Walden in the morning contributes to that sense of Walden as a place that is ever new. “There’s a newness and a freshness to the day as it’s starting, things look as though everything has just awakened.” The relative quietness and stillness of the early hours foster an “untouched sense” of place that Linda values even more than the variation in light provided by the lengthening day.

Even in the face of death, or perhaps because she has faced death, Walden is a place of unending wonder, universal acceptance, and inexhaustible renewal for Linda. She compares the depth of her experience of Walden, and her desire for it, with others who love the place. “I’ve just had a sense that [Walden] has vitality and I have a need for it that goes way beyond just going there for peace, comfort and serenity.”

A place where I belong: A fullness that’s circular. The sense of acceptance that Linda holds for Walden is a reciprocal experience. She also feels at home at Walden in a way unlike any other place she has ever experienced. For her “entire life,” Linda has “always had a sense of wanting to feel right in a place,” never finding that feeling in either “an inward place or an outward place.” Contributing to this sense of belonging at Walden are Linda’s experiences of connection through photography, her feeling of personal integration when there, and a lack of fearlessness and loneliness while there. At Walden, Linda feels more at home than she does in her own house, and can imagine Walden as her final resting place. “It just feels as though I’ve found a place I was always looking for.”

For Linda, walking and photographing at Walden is not an act of distanced observation but a ritual of connection. “My camera is the tool through which I connect with everything I’m seeing there, so there’s no longer a sense of separation between me and it.” One thing that surprised her at Walden was how close she can get to wildlife. Often passers-by who see her at work comment that “look! Such and such is posing for you.” Linda finds that “when I see anything alive, any wildlife [. . .], I’ve been able to approach things very closely.” This connection with the life of Walden is marked by a

sense of “communication,” even of “communion.” So at the heart of her relationship with Walden are these quiet moments of connectedness. “Everything seems to come back to that sense of connection. And the euphoria I feel on the days when I have found some [. . .] being that I can connect with is just indescribable. I lose all sense of everything else.”

This forgetting of self and everything else contributes to the sense of personal integration that Linda experiences at Walden. Coming to Walden Linda is able to leave behind or let go of other roles and relationships in the other world and reach forward to embrace the world that awaits her here. She tells a story about plunging into Wyman’s Meadow at a time when it was waist high in water, having caught a glimpse of a “blue-green bird” that was new to her. “Without even thinking [. . .] I just went running through all that muck” in order to get “close enough to take pictures.” A certain “lack of consciousness seems to engulf” Linda when she sees something at Walden.

Linda’s sense of unity at Walden extends both outward and inward. Walden is a place where she connects with herself. Throughout her life she had felt herself to be a distanced observer, “telling the story of what I was experiencing while I was experiencing it.” The immediacy and lack of self-consciousness with which she engages with Walden is a unifying experience. At Walden “it’s as though I can shed the part of me that has to be part of the rest of the world all the time.” “Other things can really evaporate” over the time I spend there.” This integration comes in part from the solitude that Linda seeks and finds at Walden, but not only from that state she can be alone in other places. At Walden, she doesn’t have to “make things ok” for others. “Walden is the

only place that I have felt that it is part of me inside, and I am part of it, and a sense of unity” that is like meeting the rest of yourself. “When I’m there I don’t feel this separation between how I am in the world, and who I am inside.” At Walden her “inner focus and outward focus are so wonderfully conjoined.”

There is a reciprocity to this experience for her. “At Walden I can just be. It’s a kind of fullness that’s sort of circular.” It’s not that she’s simply taking something away for herself. “I’m giving, it’s coming, it’s going back [. . .].” Linda credits part of her “survival long past what it was supposed to be” to “having found a place where I feel I belong.” This sense of belonging runs so deep with Linda, that at Walden she feels more than at home. She is “absolutely fearless there.” Although she demands solitude for her long walks and swims, she doesn’t “ever feel lonely there.” Rather, she finds an intimacy with the place that she describes as “the most fulfilling alone-ness, a connected solitude.” Walden is also the “only really safe place” Linda has ever found, “the only place where I’ve no fear of any forces of nature or man.” Some of her fearlessness is a consequence of the wonder that overtakes her in the urgency to connect with and photograph wildlife. She has spent a morning sitting next to a large snapping turtle, realizing only later that it was busy with egg-laying. She has the same sense of safety in the water at Walden [as she does] in the woods. And an attitude that, “if anything adverse happened, at least I’m home.”

Alex’s story

A naturalist and environmentalist, Alex has been a life-long visitor to Walden. From day trips to the beach as a four-year old, to summer visits with friends during

college breaks, he has been coming to Walden for over 20 years. Walden was one place that fostered Alex's sense of place in nature while growing up. When he learned about Thoreau in high school, it was the solitary dweller at Walden who most appealed to him. For this city kid, the trip to Walden was a journey to the wilderness; and its woods became a place to test and to taste the freedom of the wild. After high school, Alex headed West to backpack in "real wilderness" and to make his home on the west coast. Although travel has broadened Alex's idea of the wild, Walden remains at the core of his New England sense of place.

Thoreau in theory: A powerful image of what could be. Alex was drawn to wildlife, from an early age, "something always drove [him] to the wilderness." His interest in nature, and his sense of himself as a naturalist provided an avenue of connection with Thoreau. How does a kid growing up in the city become a naturalist? Alex's pathways included bird-watching, nature camps, and exploring Walden. His interest in birds began at the zoo, where he the sight of a Golden Eagle triggered a fascination with birds of prey, which later spread to an interest in birds of all kinds. A local amateur mentored the boy in the basics of bird-watching, and by the 5th grade Alex was out in the field with his binoculars before school. "In spring, when the migration was really heavy with warblers and song birds, I'd get up [at] 6:00, I'd go to the cemetery, bird-watch for about an hour and a half, two hours. And I swung the median age probably by about 60 years, because it was really an old ladies' sport."

Alex's preference for exploring outdoors was also evident in his camp experiences. He rebelled against the scripted and social activities of the typical summer

camp. He didn't want to play dodge ball, make macramé jewelry, or get thrown in the pool with a lot of splashing kids. Instead, he ended up at the Habitat camp in Belmont. "It was a nature camp. We had a special night walk, we'd go look at the fireflies. We'd hatch butterflies, we'd go to the Pond." Instead of people bossing you around, the campers got to "sit in the woods and listen for sounds, and that sort of thing." Throughout childhood, Alex visited Walden Pond, outfitted to explore nature on his own. "I'd always have a fanny pack or some little back-pack, and binoculars and a bird book, and an animal tracks guide [. . .]. I loved the tools of the trade, I always loved that whole concept of the naturalist." Eventually Alex was spending time at Massachusetts Audubon's Drumlin Farm, a local wildlife rehabilitation center and working farm. "I actually ended up volunteering there when I was in junior high, because I loved wildlife, and birds in particular."

There was little to resonate with that passion in high school. High school biology classes served only to convince him that a career with birds was out of the picture. And though he was reading Edward Abbey and Tom Brown on the train to school each day, assigned academic reading seemed irrelevant to his interests. Walden provided a welcome opportunity to think and talk about solitude in nature. Although Alex found Thoreau "heavy and too long-winded" for easy reading, still "what [he] knew of Thoreau, [he] liked." It was Thoreau's actions, more than his words, which spoke to the naturalist in Alex. "I liked Thoreau in theory, because I consider myself an environmentalist and naturalist."

Although Alex's knowledge of Thoreau was limited, it was nevertheless influential. "I was aware that he had spent this time here" at Walden, which "to him was sort of a wilderness [. . .], though in retrospect he was a short walk from the house of his friends and warm meals." It was the image of Thoreau's life in the woods that stayed with Alex long after his high school unit on the Concord authors. "The idea of spending a year in nature always appealed to me. Having that [idea] in the back of my head was a powerful image of what could be."

Approaching Walden: A glimpse of the wilds. From childhood, Alex loved the trip west from Cambridge to Walden. On family trips, the drive along Route 2 took them up a long hill from which they could look back on the city. Next would come the farm stands, with "Walden as our final spot," a destination that "always felt like the wilderness" to Alex. Years later, as a day student in Concord, Alex would take the train "out from Porter Square every day," past Walden Pond. At the time, the train trip represented the transition from the city to the wilderness. He recalls the route: "You leave from this sunken station" right in the city, "then you [. . .] crawl your way out through Waverly and Belmont" stations. "As you move west, there are more and more trees, then Waltham. And then right after you pass under Rt. 95" and Brandeis, "it just becomes woods." Before reaching Concord station, the train would "come right along Walden," allowing a nice glimpse of the Pond and of Heywood's Meadow. "Back then, it felt like the wilds."

It was during high school that Alex started going to Walden "more independently." Summer trips with friends were typically for swimming and relaxing.

But during the school year, Alex and his high school comrade would “always walk the railroad tracks between Concord and Lincoln.” They chose the tracks not only because “it was the most direct route” to their destination, but because the railroad “gave us a feeling of expansiveness.” For these two young men, “there was something about the train tracks that also gave us [. . .] the idea that if you kept walking on them you’d be out of Massachusetts and eventually [. . .] to the Rockies.”

The walk to Walden fostered ideas about life after high school, and dreams of a longer journey. While they walked, they talked about hiking the Appalachian Trail, “another release” from the constraints of high school. “We’d go out and talk about what back packs we were going to buy, and what kind of food we’d have, and planned this whole thing.” Of all Alex’s experiences with Walden, those of walking the tracks from Concord were among “the most lasting as to shaping who I am.”

A taste of wilderness: Going off into the woods. It was not only the journey from the city to the woods that marked Walden as wilderness, but also the experiences of freedom and independence that Alex enjoyed there. Here he could wander alone, come and go as he pleased, and sleep out under the stars. Even as a young child coming to the beach with his mother, it was the woods that attracted him. “I started coming here when I was... about 4 or 5, [and] I really was in it for the woods, more than for the water.” Once Alex was eight or nine, “[my mother] started letting me wander [. . .]. She was always very trusting with that, which is a gift she gave me [. . .], she would let me wander off.”

Going off into the woods gave Alex an opportunity to develop confidence in his own abilities. Alex remembers, the “paths being less established” at that time than they

are now. “They weren’t fenced in...and it felt less like a ringed walkway around the Pond.” The paths were loosely marked, forking and coming back together again, a pattern that encouraged exploration. “And I remember liking that. I remember feeling like I was learning how to learn direction in the woods.” Although the shoreline of the Pond curves and narrows, concealing parts of the Pond and shoreline, certain landmarks remain. Alex learned that even when he’s not quite sure where he is, “I know if I walk long enough I’ll find either the railroad tracks or the boat house.”

The relative lack of other people helped to qualify Walden as a wilderness, as well as the openness and freedom of movement that the landscape fostered. “Living in a relatively urban area [. . .] narrowed [. . .] what a wilderness consisted of” for Alex. But “even though [Walden] had a railroad track on one side and [. . .] cars on the other, the fact that there weren’t people within a stone’s throw qualified it as a wilderness to me.” At Walden, Alex was far from other people, but he was also outside the realm of supervision. “It felt like you could go here and that people wouldn’t necessarily know you [. . .] or know what you were doing [. . .], you didn’t have to sign in.” The landscape provided alternatives to the paid public entrance to the park, especially to someone who was – by high school - becoming familiar with Lincoln’s network of hiking and biking trails. “There were multiple ways of coming and going from [Walden].” Depending on whether you come on the road, on foot, or along the train tracks, “there’s different places you can pop down” to the Pond, and it was easy to “come and go as you please.”

Alex’s experience of Walden supported the sense of solitude and independence that he associated with Thoreau and with Walden. “I liked the idea of being self-

sufficient, and doing something for myself [. . .], being on my own time, being in my own world of nobody knowing where I was at that moment.” Another way that Alex exercised his desire for self-sufficiency was by sleeping out at Walden. Although his parents had taken him on day hikes, “neither of my parents are campers” and sleeping out was “not something that we ever did.” So on several occasions during high school, Alex took his sleeping bag out to Walden and, having told his parents that he was staying with friends, spent the night in the woods. These escapades were generally in the early fall “so the air was just cooling down,” the season itself contributing Alex’s sense of the wild. “Those cool nights [were] like a taste of the wilderness, pouring into the city with clean, cold air.”

Going West: A conscious act. Alex acted on his plans to hike the Appalachian Trail, and on his vision of taking the railroad track West to the Rockies and beyond. In very real ways, his boyhood journeys to Walden were a preparation and a prelude to these farther explorations. And as his “vision of wilderness has expanded,” so has his sense of Walden been tempered by experience. But the landscape of New England is deeply ingrained in Alex’s sense of wilderness, and in spite of the beauty and wildness of the west, this place has brought Alex home again.

After his final year of high school, Alex and his Walden comrade spent two months on the Appalachian Trail, an experience that took them well beyond Concord and “acclimated Alex to living in the woods.” Ready for more adventure, Alex then spent two years alternately working and traveling, “a conscious act” that had its seeds in Alex’s walks along the railroad tracks to Walden. “I took my backpack and I took the train out,

and I was going west.” Alex “went all up and down the west coast, and explored everything” from Baja, Mexico to northern Canada. After coming back east for college, Alex headed west again to continue his education, working and living on a little island off the coast of Washington for three years. His choice of island solitude was “another conscious act,” one that involved “giving up a lot of urban niceties” in exchange for “eagles out my door, deer in my yard, salmon and orcas and the whole nine [. . .].”

But in spite of the wildness of his new environment, “something about it still didn’t feel like home,” and Alex has returned to Cambridge. “I became very conscious of the fact that the New England landscape is deeply embedded in me [. . .]. I never became attuned to that landscape, like I am out here. I am so much more comfortable under white pines, and oaks [. . .], I like the feel of the air, and the smells.” Although he’s traveled to beautiful places and gone backpacking in “real wilderness [. . .] three days from anybody [. . .], it still never felt quite right.” Back at Walden, Alex acknowledges that “it’s this landscape right here; that’s what my image of wilderness is.”

Reflection

The difficulty of reading so many stories one after another is that the wealth of information overwhelms our ability to make sense of it all. On the first reading, we quickly lose our grasp of these pilgrims as distinct individuals in the chorus of voices. As the researcher, I had the advantage of meeting each pilgrim in person and hearing their stories one by one, over the course of a whole year. I listened to the tapes of our conversations over and over, read and re-read the transcripts, and worked for weeks on writing each summary. For me, the stories are the outlines of a more fully rendered

understanding of each person; as well as a method for moving forward from an even greater complexity of information about pilgrim experience.

The themes of pilgrimage that emerged from the individual experiences suggested several paths for exploring commonalities, in particular the embodied experience of place and pilgrim experience of bringing person, place and text together. We will make reference to the stories and actions of these pilgrims again in the chapters to come, as a way of illustrating these broader themes of pilgrimage. Before we turn to exploring the commonalities of pilgrim experience, it makes sense to reflect back on the variety and individuality of these participants and raise the question of pilgrim community.

DJ, now 85, is not only the oldest participant, but also the one whose pilgrimage took place the longest ago (1940); and therefore one for whom there was the greatest distance for memory to span in telling her story. Her experience of Walden, set within a bicycle and hostelling trip around New England, suggests the compatibility of pilgrimage and tourism.

In contrast, Alex was both the youngest pilgrim and the one for whom Walden was almost in the backyard. His ideas of Thoreau and Walden did not have the economic context of the Depression, as did DJ's; and his formative years did not fall in the counter-cultural decades of the 1960s and 1970s, as did so many of the older pilgrims. As a "local" pilgrim who visited frequently, Alex's story reveals a different side of pilgrimage in which journey and strangeness are less bound up with distance from home.

Like Alex, Don spent his high school years near Concord, and read Thoreau before he was 20. But Walden was never a part of his adolescent landscape. For him,

Thoreau and Walden became connected with ideals developed in later in life and in another setting, his Western home. Environmentalism is at the heart of Don's understanding of Thoreau, one among several threads by which Thoreau appeals to pilgrims.

Another of those threads is Thoreau's natural history exploration and nature writing. Fred might be recognized as a literary pilgrim, coming to Walden in the tradition of other writers and readers who aspire to visit the inspirational ground on which their favorite authors walked, perhaps to be inspired themselves.

Thoreau's spiritual and philosophical nature was deeply attractive to two pilgrims. David brought with him an appreciation for Thoreau's historical connection with contemporary Unitarian Universalism; while Tom included Thoreau within the sphere of his devoted interest in Transcendentalism as a perennial philosophy. Religious pilgrimage at Walden might be encompassed within the bounds of these two perspectives of religious tradition and living philosophy.

Brian is perhaps the quintessential seeker, the model of a pilgrim whose own life questions literally move him to seek answers through a journey to a source of wisdom. Thoreau's writing about independence, integrity, and simplicity, embodied in his life at Walden, seemed to provide an exemplar of the best wisdom of Brian's generation.

The counter-cultural ethos that influenced Brian's reading of Thoreau, also affected Thoreau's reception by Brad and Laura as high school aged readers. Both Brad's and Laura's pilgrimages might be read as journeys motivated solely by academic interest

- the devoted historian or scholar explores his field beyond the library - except for the dynamics between their youthful individuality and their first reading of Thoreau.

Linda is another local pilgrim, but one whose interest in Walden stems from the qualities of the place rather than its association with a notable person. The passion of such “regulars” at Walden suggests that, whether or not we think of them as pilgrims, their sense of strong and even possessive attachment to Walden is a phenomenon worthy of consideration. When a place becomes so intimately bound up with one’s life journey, pilgrimage is clearly a matter of both the inner and outer landscape.

Reading these stories emphasizes the particularity of each person’s experience and highlights the individual nature of Walden pilgrimage. Although a few of these people have met one another, and the experiences of some overlap, the stories do not readily present the kinds of common motivations, movements and meanings that characterize traditional pilgrim communities. To refer to them as a community would seem to place the primary burden on their connection, over a span of more than 60 years, to the same location. The commonalities of their experiences will be drawn out and articulated more fully in succeeding chapters. In this chapter on narrative, our concern lies more with the seeming absence of a pilgrim community at Walden, and with raising the question of how a tradition of pilgrim story-telling can be developed and maintained apart from such a community.

Telling pilgrim stories is more than an individual affair. Story-telling has a traditional and communal relationship with pilgrimage, as well as a personal and private role. In their study of Pilgrim Voices, Coleman and Elsner note the range of historical

pilgrim narratives from personal oral accounts, diaries, and journals to published essays.⁹⁸ However solitary their journeys, pilgrims seldom write about their experiences in isolation. The pilgrim is a member of a community of people who share in a tradition. Narrative is not just an outcome of pilgrimage, but may also supply its motivation and outline its form. Stories that pilgrims hear shape their expectations, and influence the form of subsequent tales. Narrative shapes pilgrim places as well, by identifying sites as the focus of a journey or prescribing a particular path or goal.

For Walden pilgrims, Thoreau's writing often serves as a pilgrim's first or only guide. Like Thoreau's sojourn there, Walden pilgrimage is often a solitary affair marked by appreciation of solitude or the seeking of undisturbed places. The lone pilgrim who arrives without a guide may be surprised to encounter signs of a pilgrimage tradition, such as the cairn at the House Site with its origin story on a nearby plaque. The ethos of independence and solitude, combined with diversity in the origin and intent of Walden pilgrims, makes problematic the establishment or recognition of a story-telling community. But pilgrims do find ways to hear and share Walden stories. The narrative relationship may be one to one, or conducted through published accounts – verbal and visual – or accomplished through loose networks of Thoreauvians or regular Walden visitors.

Pilgrim stories include not only the narratives of personal experience of place, but also include the authoritative accounts – oral and written – of those more familiar with tradition or well-versed in Scripture; in the case of Walden, published accounts of Walden pilgrims or Thoreau's own writing. Pilgrims may seek a guide, sometimes on the

first trip, sometimes on subsequent ventures as interest and opportunity allow.

Guidebooks in the form of tourist publications have a long tenure in the Concord area, and details about Walden Pond and its traditions are frequently included. But personal mentors provide a more substantial link in the pilgrim's search for Thoreau, leading the way to places not marked on any map and passing along traditional lore. For more than one Walden pilgrim, the Thoreau Society's founder Walter Harding served this role for newcomers to the annual meeting in Concord, walking with them to the Pond and pointing out the significance of various features in the forest. Pilgrims also take on the role of guides to other visitors, sometimes sharing what they know of Thoreau with their unschooled companions, or, having made their own discoveries, going on to lead others in Thoreau's paths.

At one time, the Thoreau Lyceum in Concord provided a touchstone for Thoreauvian pilgrims. A small house that had been converted to a reception area and used bookshop, the Lyceum served as a sort of shrine. On crossing the threshold, visitors found a copy of Thoreau's journals opened to the date, a visitor log, and a room full of Thoreau memorabilia. The interpreter was a local person with more devotion than professionalism, who spoke from the heart about Thoreau's life and work. As someone who met many Walden pilgrims, Ann McGrath served as a kind of keeper of the lore. Her role, and the role of the Lyceum as a place dedicated solely to Thoreau, was lost when changes in administration and financing at the Thoreau Society led to the Lyceum's closure and eventual demolition.

The Thoreau Society Annual Gathering not only provides a meeting ground between newcomers and keepers of the lore, but serves in part as a community for some Walden pilgrims. A number of the study's participants became involved in the Thoreau Society after their pilgrimages, or came to Walden for the first time as part of their entrée into the Society. Since Walter Harding's death, the meeting program has included a ritual circumambulation of Walden Pond in his honor. And alongside the academic agenda of the formal presentations, Thoreauvians connect for walking and talking.

But for the most part, Walden pilgrims are unaffiliated with any formal community. Their voices and experiences may occasionally find an audience through a published essay, a webpage, or an exhibit in the onsite art gallery. An appreciation of the depth and extent of Walden as a place of pilgrimage requires a more open and public forum for the sharing of pilgrim stories. Toward that end, this chapter has been dedicated to providing a small space for stories.

But the challenge to Walden's pilgrim community is more than a matter of making opportunity for the sharing of stories and traditions. The place itself can challenge the whole notion of Walden as a pilgrim destination. At the very threshold, pilgrims are often faced with a reality that differs markedly from their expectations. Pilgrim visitors are a small minority amidst the hundreds of thousands of recreational visitors and tourists who come each year; a fact that will be particularly evident on fine summer days when the parking lot is full and the beach is crowded. Fred, Brad and Laura were all disturbed by the presence of so many "non-pilgrims," and had to overcome their dismay in order to move forward. Even aside from the presence of

people, changes in land use at and around the Pond over the century have resulted in a landscape that diverged more or less from the pilgrim imagination. The simple sight of an imposing bath-house can seem to shift the ground beneath the pilgrim's feet, calling into question the legitimacy of the whole enterprise.

We've listened to the pilgrim stories; but we haven't yet heard the story of Walden itself. Before we move on with the pilgrim experience, further exploring the themes of Walden pilgrimage, we'll take a critical look at Walden's landscape and history. Pilgrim expectations and actions are only half the story. The place itself also has a story to tell about sacred space.

CHAPTER 4

MAKING SPACE: RITUAL, INTERPRETATION, AND NEGOTIATION

Prelude

There are more visitors here than I had expected to find on a weekday morning. Young moms tote toddlers in backpacks and strollers, a woman in a skirt and sneakers partners a man in a suit bearing take-out coffee. College students carrying coolers rumble past in time to their own music, leaving behind the lingering scent of sunscreen. Amidst the bustle of arrivals and activity, I realize I had anticipated a holy hush or at least an off-season solitude. I feel out of step and over-dressed in my jeans and anorak, with camera, journal and a well-thumbed copy of Walden in my canvas bag. Although it is unusually warm for the first of May, I'm surprised that everyone else thinks it's a beach day. Whatever happened to my mother's taboo against swimming before Memorial Day? I wonder if I have mistaken the timing of my journey or the purpose of the place.

Walking away from the House Replica, I look for another sign to guide my pilgrim steps. Two sturdy notice boards with narrow shingled roofs stand squarely in the space between the House Replica and the path to Walden Pond. A boy and his dad stand together before the larger of two signboards, reading about the life of Thoreau and the history of Walden Pond. The posters and pictures seem to support the idea that Thoreau is somehow essential to this place, an assertion reinforced by the mute testimony of the House Replica located close by. Not wanting to intrude on the father-son duo, I wander

toward the smaller board, only to discover elements of different story about the meaning of this place.

Tacked behind the glass of the signboard are a job posting for State Beach lifeguards and an announcement for a Hunter Education course, as well as a list of Park Rules and Regulations: No Dogs, No Fires, No Camping. I also read a notice of elevated mercury levels in fish in several water bodies in Concord, including Walden Pond. And there is a list of disbursements made from the Conservation Trust Fund: \$1346.00 for Junior Ranger T-shirts, \$200.00 for a bank restoration slide show, and \$148.38 for Thank You plaques. No record here of the legacy of nature mysticism. These pronouncements speak the bureaucratic language of pragmatic conservationism, an ideal of Walden accented by the presence of uniformed rangers complete with walkie-talkies.

Turning back to the first signboard, I find a brief history of Walden. The brochure informs me that recreational use of the Pond is no recent development. I am surprised by a century-old photograph of “Lake Walden” and mention of tens of thousands of Sunday visitors in Depression Era summers. How to find the pilgrim path in a landscape where everyone else is headed to the beach? Fortunately, the signboard posts a map showing the trail to the Thoreau House Site.

I decide that my improvised pilgrimage should continue down to the water and aim for the House Site. Making a mental map of the route I need to take, I cross the road and begin to make my way at last toward Walden Pond. The paved walkway I follow makes a sharp diagonal across the slope toward the beach. A high fence borders the path, screening my view through the trees to the Pond. The tight wire mesh seems out of synch

with the rustic wood décor typical of state parks, and I am puzzled by its impenetrability. I suspect that the barrier is meant to keep kids from taking a shortcut to the water. Steep slopes on sandy soil are prone to erosion.

When I reach the shoreline, I find a low granite signpost pointing the way to the Thoreau House Site, another arrow on the pilgrim path. This trail is not just marked, it is mandated. Enclosed upslope and down by taut wire fencing, the path confines foot travel to a narrow, armored route. The fences, about four feet high on either side of me, are firmly anchored with tightly spaced metal posts. A plywood plaque holds a sign explaining that a landscape restoration project is underway. “The years have taken their toll” on the landscape, and drastic measures are required to undo the erosion from a century of patronage.⁹⁹

The sun is warm, the path stretches out before me, and I resign myself to the narrow way. As I stand aside to let yet another jogger pass, I wonder for whom this place was designed. Will I find at the House Site any echo of the Thoreau’s ethos and purpose, or has his influence eroded from the landscape along with the native soil? As I walk, I reflect on my route. The mental map that guided my initial vision of Walden was purer than this confusion of purposes, more open to wandering, more unified in its suggestion of ritual.

I realize now that I had expected to have a quiet moment by the Pond, collecting my thoughts and savoring the time, considering the proper gestures of approach before reaching the shrine. So I slow my steps, adopting the pace of pilgrimage, purposefully

enacting a role that contrasts with the aerobic intent of my fellow travelers. Perhaps the act of pilgrimage will be enough to make this path a sacred way.

Overview

Signs are an indicator of special places, characteristic of boundaries and thresholds. “Enter.” “No hunting.” “You are leaving historic Concord.” The messages invite, prohibit, and inform. Unlike graffiti, signs are officially sanctioned. Their subtext may be read as a claim to ownership, an assertion of power over access, or an exercise of the right to interpret the meaning of place. One signature of official presence at Walden Pond Reservation is the display of solid wooden structures painted ‘park service brown.’ With their thickly routed white lettering, the gates, outbuildings, and notice boards invite a sense of rugged outdoorsmanship even as they provide cues for behavior in these special places. Like many public spaces, the landscape of Walden is punctuated with signs that supply rules, directions, and information.

The two large message boards near the House Replica are part of the landscape of the park. They provide an overview of the history and function of this place, and also suggest a range of visitor interests from jogger to junior ranger, from tourist to pilgrim. Standing as they do at right angles to one another, these two signboards might be read as divergent discourses on the meaning of the place. My initial impressions of the park as a site of cross-purposes, beachgoers heading in one direction, pilgrims in another, are affirmed by their incongruous messages. Is Walden Pond sacred ground or playground, the haunt of Thoreau’s spirit and central to his legacy, or just a good place to catch some rays? What makes Walden a sacred space?

From one perspective, based on the work of Mircea Eliade, sacred space includes three primary features: center, threshold, and axis.¹⁰⁰ The sacred center founds a world in the midst of undifferentiated space and reorients activity towards itself. The threshold sets the sacred space apart from the profane realm of ordinary activity. The *axis mundi*, a pole or passage, provides a vertical thread connecting this world with the underworld and the heavens. My initial experience at Walden was suggestive of this Eliadean map of sacred space. The House Replica that drew my attention served a focal point of both vision and intention. Like a sacred center, the presence of the house provided an anchor for my wandering, and gave shape and meaning to the surroundings. The boundary of the space around the little dwelling, tangibly marked by the paling of pine trees and ritually inscribed by human response – a turning aside from the well-trod path to the beach – suggested a delineation of sacred from profane space. The *axis mundi*, a point of connection between Thoreau's world and mine, was discovered through my childhood reverie.

My experience at the House Replica conformed to one way of reading sacred geography at Walden. But that approach is no longer sufficient for the questions that emerge from a broader exploration of the landscape. The journey to Walden may have brought me to one location, but I arrived at the threshold of more than one place. The pilgrimage place overlaps the tourist attraction, and tourist and pilgrim both seem at cross-purposes with joggers and beach-goers. The questions, like the landscape, now seem more complex. Who makes space for Thoreau at Walden, and how? And what do

the repeated revisions of this landscape, from recreational resort to bioengineered nature, reveal to the critical reader?

Eliade's model of sacred space has been turned upside down by David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, who propose a cultural model of sacred space.¹⁰¹ Where Eliade suggests that the sacred center is set apart from ordinary space, these contemporary scholars of religion and culture observe that sacred space is "inevitably entangled" with profane space.¹⁰² Whereas the earlier model offers the idea of a center that connects different levels of reality, the natural and the supernatural, the cultural model claims that sacred space is the site of another kind of hierarchy, one of human power relations involving "domination and subordination, inclusion and exclusion, appropriation and dispossession."¹⁰³ And in contrast to Eliade's sense that the creation of sacred space is a response to theophany, a manifestation of some extra-human reality, Chidester and Linenthal remind us of the human effort involved in "setting aside, [. . .] protecting, [. . .] and redefining sacred places."¹⁰⁴ In the latter model, sacred space is produced and reproduced by cultural labor.

So there is human power at play in sacred space: the power to shape what is seen and accessed; to direct activities and attention in certain directions: and to uphold or subvert messages about meaning. Reading the landscape from this perspective, I no longer see the House Replica's proximity to the parking lot merely as a sop to accessibility. Staked in the midst of the usual park entrance signs, the unusual building can be read as a claim for Thoreau's centrality to the meaning of this place. The presence of the House Replica here, in just this space, contests the cues that would lead us to

believe Walden Pond is just one more multiple use facility in the recreational landscape of eastern Massachusetts.

In this chapter, Chidester and Linenthal's cultural model provides a framework for reading the sacred geography of Walden. The text is Walden's landscape and the method involves a re-examination of Walden's history with a "hermeneutic of suspicion," an inquiry into the interests served by the particular designs and stories of place. According to the cultural model, sacred space has three defining features: sacred space is ritual space; significant space; and contested space.¹⁰⁵ The inquiry will follow the questions suggested by these defining features: In what ways is Walden a ritual space, "a location for formalized, repeatable symbolic performances?" How is Walden a significant space, a site "subject to interpretation because it focuses crucial questions about what it means to be a human being in a meaningful world?" And where is the evidence for Walden as a contested space, "a site of negotiated contests over the legitimate ownership of sacred symbols?"¹⁰⁶

Ritual Space: A Place for Thoreau

The path to the House Site hugs the wooded hillside and doesn't wander far from the shoreline of the Pond. After about ten minutes' walk, the path diverges, makes a sharp bend, and opens out onto a shallow cove. The trail slips between Walden Pond and a shallow marsh before heading back into the trees. When I see a small wooden sign with an arrow and the words "House Site," I turn away from the Pond and head uphill. The path isn't nearly as well marked here, and for a minute or so I am lost and wondering which way to go next. I choose the broad path to my right and find that it leads to a dead

end back at the highway right across from the landfill. After retracing my steps to the point of confusion, I make a start in another direction. As the land flattens out at the top of a rise above the cove, I see evidence of my goal.

Standing ahead of me is a set of granite pillars linked with a heavy black chain forming a structure that resembles the enclosure of a family cemetery plot: the site of Thoreau's Walden house. A low pile of stones is situated to one side looking like nothing more than the remains of a cellar excavation, or a rockpile cleared from a long-ago field. As I move forward to explore the House Site, wondering what response is appropriate for a pilgrim, I encounter an interpretive sign that leads to a change in my focus. The stone pile is a memorial cairn, comprised of offerings brought here by other pilgrims.

The brief history provided by the sign outlines the visit of another curious soul who came here with Concordian Bronson Alcott a decade after Thoreau's death. Thoreau's Walden house was already long gone, having been removed only months after his decampment, and those first stones were meant to mark the memory of its location for pilgrim Mary Adams and those who followed. The story brings home to me that I am not the first or only pilgrim to Walden or to this shrine at the House Site. The low mound must hold thousands of stones, together alluding to the breadth and activity of the pilgrim community. Had I only known, I would have brought a stone of my own to offer. Instead, I scour the landscape, obviously picked over by others in similar circumstances, and eventually find a pebble to place on the cairn.

If ritual consecrates space, then ritual activity is one way in which sacred space is produced and reproduced at Walden. In the place where Thoreau once built for himself a small dwelling, pilgrims now make space for Thoreau through their ritual visitation. This ritualization, or ritual production, of space includes not only the performance of the pilgrim but the demarcation of space for such rituals. Ritual is not just the ephemeral activity of a “formalized, repeatable symbolic performance.”¹⁰⁷ Through human actions like pilgrimage, meditation, and ceremony, ritual sites are distinguished and set off from their ordinary surroundings.¹⁰⁸ There is a kind of dynamic mutuality between the action of the pilgrim and the site of devotion. The ritual activity contributes to the consecration of the site, even as the selection and demarcation of the site contribute to the symbolic power of the ritual acts.

The landscape of the House Site attests to this dynamic production of space. By marking Thoreau’s House Site with stones, Alcott, Mary Adams, and their Unitarian companions initiated a ritual, and demarcated this site at Walden as sacred space.¹⁰⁹ The performance of ritual includes the journey to this site and the laying of a stone on the cairn. And perhaps, like me, other pilgrims take time to measure in their minds the magnitude of the cairn, to examine other stones for unique markings, and to meditate on the meaning of their gesture. In addition to initiating a ritual, the establishment of the cairn also set aside that space from the “ordinary” uses at Walden Pond. The demarcation of this site as “the” place where Thoreau built his Walden house empowers the act of homage. The creation of the cairn generated a subtle demarcation of sacred space, that halo of holy ground around the cairn cleared of stones by generations of devoted visitors.

Ritual consecrates space, but what can be consecrated can also become desecrated.¹¹⁰ People engaged in ritual “act out the way things ought to be, in conscious tension with the ways things are ordinarily perceived to be in the world.”¹¹¹ One consequence of this tension is desecration, another marker of the sacralization of space. Because ritual may assert meanings or values that run counter to prevailing attitudes or surrounding activities, ritual space is always in danger of being obscured or impinged upon by actors not in accord with the pilgrims’ views. The House Site was marked in 1872, but since that time Walden has also been over-run with pleasure seekers, the cairn mined for souvenirs by tourists, and a later granite marker knocked over by a fisherman backing up to the shore.¹¹² Through ignorance or intentional incursion, sacred space has been violated. After the land around the House Site changed hands, coming into public ownership in 1922, a large bronze plaque was added to the cairn, making a more official statement about the nature of this heap of stones.¹¹³

The cairn is not the only marker of sacred space on this plot of ground. The granite-framed monument outlines the boundary of Thoreau’s cabin, the upright posts emphasizing the absence of the house itself. I walk over to stand between the stones that mark the doorway. Like the House Replica, an opening in the perimeter invites entry. Opposite the space for the door there is a cement pad level with the ground marking the location of Thoreau’s chimney foundation, inscribed with the words “Go thou my incense upward from this hearth.” Compared with the cairn, this structure is more formal and more official. The establishment of this memorial was not the afterthought of sauntering pilgrims, but the result of concerted action – planning, design, and construction.

Standing distinctly apart from the cairn, the House memorial raises questions about people and place. Who put the memorial here? And which monument, rough stones or carved pillars, truly marks Thoreau's place?

Here again the interpretive sign provides a little enlightenment. An amateur archaeologist named Roland Wells Robbins excavated the foundations of Thoreau's house in 1945, and the present memorial was subsequently placed on the very spot. As our exploration of the ritual production of space at Walden continues, we will focus on the House Site and its memorial, and draw on Robbins' history with this site through a reading of his journals. This historical review will be conducted in conjunction with a reading of the ritualization of this place that asks: What signs and suggestions of ritual performance, demarcation, and desecration are evident in relation to the excavation of the House Site, and in the construction and reception of the memorial?

Ritual and Demarcation

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life. And see if I could not learn what it had to teach and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

Thoreau (on sign at House Site)

One might say that Thoreau consecrated Walden Pond generally, and a site on its northwestern shore specifically, by his own ritual performance: moving apart; building a cabin; and dwelling there for solitude and reflection. The pattern of the holy man's hut has its lineage in many of world's religions, a tradition that continues in American environmentalism.¹¹⁴ To be a critical yet effective mirror of society, the prophet must locate himself out of "the world," but not so far out that his symbolic performance is lost

on the intended audience. It was Thoreau's choice that marked this space as a place apart, and it was his construction of the original dwelling that made this site a reference point for later ritual and demarcation.

The house itself has been absent from the Walden shoreline since shortly after Thoreau's decampment. The house was first rented and removed to another part of Waldo Emerson's woodlot by Hugh Whelan, Emerson's gardener.¹¹⁵ Two years later, the abandoned house was moved to the Clark farm in Concord, where it stood in homage to Thoreau until it was converted for use as a storage shed.¹¹⁶ Here the little house attracted some attention after Thoreau's death, including a visit from his sister Sophia who came to have her supper under its roof, and a guest of Ellery Channing, who took away a shingle as a souvenir.¹¹⁷ In 1868, the house was dismantled by the farm's subsequent owner, and pieces of it used in the construction of a small barn.

The establishment of the cairn in 1872 marked both the place and the absence of the Walden house. If the cairn denoted the House Site as sacred space, that claim was not universally apparent. The boundaries of the space demarcated by the cairn became blurred by the incursions of other activities, and by changes in the cairn itself. Robbins recorded stories he was told about a local blacksmith who had removed the pile of stones for his own use.¹¹⁸ He also heard tell of park employees dumping stones on the cairn as they did work around the Pond.¹¹⁹

Further confusion about the true location of the House Site was created in the landscape when granite pillars marking the outline of the house were erected in 1931. Two scholars, apparently acting on their own, marked the area that they believed to be

the site of Thoreau's cabin, somewhat at a distance from – though still within sight of – the cairn.¹²⁰ The difference in the location of the two structures was a measure of the uncertainty that had arisen over the decades since Bronson Alcott's eyewitness testimony to Mary Adams. Nevertheless, on July 4, 1945, the cairn was the site of a centennial memorial of Thoreau's inhabitation of the Walden house. The gathering included both local residents, like Roland Robbins, a local handyman and amateur historian, as well as authors and academics with an interest in Thoreau, among them Society secretary Walter Harding.

The question of the "true" site of the house was taken under consideration in very different ways by these two men. Robbins undertook the quest to locate the foundations of Thoreau's house by probing the ground for evidence of the foundation, using ordinary tools, common sense, and keeping careful measurements and records. Harding questioned the efficacy of Robbins' methods, and a story he related about the use of triangulation to determine the site of another shrine suggested a scholarly skepticism about the value of Robbins' undertaking.¹²¹

Roland Wells Robbins was not a professional archaeologist or an educated literary scholar. Born in 1908, he left school after the eighth grade and spent the years of the Depression traveling around the country from job to job.¹²² By 1945 he was settled in Lincoln, with a local business as a window washer and handyman. But there was another side to this self-made man. He wrote poems about life in rural Vermont, and had researched and written a booklet on the history of Concord's statue of the Minute Man. His interest in Thoreau's House Site may have been borne of his own identification with

this local hero who had downplayed the value of status and possessions, or as much a matter of self-promotion as it was devotion to Thoreau.¹²³

In spite of Harding's doubts, and in the face of grudging cooperation from the Park Supervisor, Fred Hart, Robbins became a self-appointed archaeologist of the project. His notes include careful documentation of his exploratory transects, maps and sketches of his excavation, and notes on the weight and number of the artifacts that turned up, mostly nails, and bits of brick, plaster, and broken glass. On November 11, 1945, Roland Robbins discovered the remains of the chimney foundation of Thoreau's House.¹²⁴ He went on to write a book about his Discovery at Walden, to advocate for a memorial at the site, and eventually to become a president of the Thoreau Society.

The rituals of archaeology that Robbins enacted at this place - the daily log of activities, the cataloging of finds, the methodical excavation documented with sketches and photographs - are perhaps another aspect of the ritualization that contributed to making the House Site sacred space. Although a visitor's only evidence of Robbins' archaeological activity is a photograph of the excavation on the interpretive sign at the House Site, this hole in the ground became the basis for establishing a new memorial to Thoreau. The cairn was pushed aside in order to reveal the true place of Thoreau's Walden house.

The chimney foundation that Robbins had uncovered remained buried under an engraved marker. The outline of the house itself was marked out by granite posts linked by heavy chain roping, with an opening on the side where the doorway to the hut had been. These features demarcated the size as well as the position of the house as

accurately as possible without disturbing its original corner posts, still buried. The hearth stone was engraved with the statement “Under these Stones lies the Chimney Foundation of Thoreau’s Cabin 1845-1847” and the quotation “Go thou my incense upward from this hearth.”

This bounded but open structure suggests other rituals in addition to those associated with the cairn. The pilgrim can stand where Henry once stood, in the “doorway” looking out at the Pond, or enter the “house” to pause before the hearth. As sacred space, the House boundaries are more firmly staked, and more historically substantiated, than the subtle clearing of stones around the cairn. The shrine at the House Site did not replace the cairn, but it did displace it. If Bronson Alcott had intended to put those early markers at Thoreau’s doorstep, and if the original stones were still in the position he had placed them, the cairn was an accurate marker after all. But the rough heap of offerings impinged on the space required by the amateur archaeologist, and he had to remove stones from the cairn in order to complete the House Site excavation to the desired width and breadth.¹²⁵

Although the House Shrine more clearly and concretely demarcates and delimits a space for Thoreau than does the cairn, there seems to be less scope here for pilgrim participation. The House memorial outlines a negative space, highlighting the absence of the house and of Thoreau. The granite posts are less responsive to the pilgrim, providing little opportunity to make a mark, less incentive to leave a memento. In contrast, the cairn occupies positive space that not only marks Thoreau’s place here, but bears witness to the steady stream of pilgrims that have followed him.

Demarcation and Desecration

In the case of the cairn, we saw that the ritual act of consecration also raised the specter of desecration. Making a claim to the importance of the cairn through the establishment of a bronze plaque may have made clear to some pilgrims the significance of that shrine, but its subsequent defacement revealed that not every visitor to Walden respected that ground as holy. Vandalism of the House Site was of great concern to Robbins during his excavation of the area and he took pains to try to reduce the visibility and publicity of his work during its initial execution. In one sense, the memorial at the House Site can be seen as a ritual reburial of the valued hearth foundation, and a way to protect its purity from theft, graffiti and other kinds of danger and defacement.

But no sooner had the House Site been demarcated, and set aside from the surroundings, than the various markers came under attack. Robbins' journal entries for 1948 and 1949 read like a litany of desecration. Wooden signs to the cabin site, and even the granite marker for the House Site, went missing. One visitor backed into a granite marker and broke it off. The entry for July 22, 1948, notes that he even found "defecation" on the marker for the hearth stone, right above the word 'incense.' To his own efforts to repair and reconsecrate the site, Robbins added calls for more protection from town police and park staff. His journal entries suggest that he remained a sort of guardian and steward of the site, at least in spirit.¹²⁶

Robbins archaeological exploration focused attention on, and formalized demarcation of, the Thoreau House Site, contributing to its consecration as sacred space and inviting desecration. But archaeology itself raises particular questions about

appropriate behavior with respect to sacred space. Just as the rituals of archaeological excavation draw attention to the meaning and power of a site, so can the unearthing and removal of artifacts or relics disturb the sacred ground. The foundation stones of Thoreau's fireplace may remain safely buried, though out of sight, beneath the memorial. But a dozen or so stones that Robbins removed from the cairn during his work, sincere offerings of earlier pilgrims, remain out of place to this day.¹²⁷

Sacred space is ritual space, set aside through, and for, acts of ritualization. The cairn and the House Site indicate both ritual and demarcation as historical and ongoing activities through which this place is sacralized. The consecration of sacred space reveals the values of those whose cultural labors contribute to its production. It also invites desecrating activity as an expression of those whose ideas or interests run counter to the beliefs of those who maintain the sacred space, or who wish to contest the shrine keepers' power. We have given some consideration to the way that ritual has contributed to the sacralization of space at Walden. In the next section, we'll focus on the ways that Walden is culturally significant space, and therefore subject to interpretation and reinterpretation.

Significant Space: Reading the Landscape

One pilgrim to Walden remembers visiting Yosemite as a child, when the spectacle of that waterfall was highlighted by nightly "firefalls" in the spring.¹²⁸ In seasons when the river was flowing, a bonfire of logs would be floated downstream and over the rim of the falls, creating a shower of sparks and flame to amaze the visitor. These were the days when an open dump on the valley floor attracted foraging bears, a

practice encouraged in order to improve wildlife viewing for the tourists. Today these activities would be considered signs of human manipulation and even acts of environmental pollution, intrusions on an underlying landscape that is more “natural” without overt signs of human management. Cultural attitudes toward nature, including ideas about its aesthetic value, are a shifty thing. In addition to the perception of our senses, what we see in the landscape, and what we make of what we see, gets filtered through our sense of what is good and beautiful.

Our experience of Walden is likewise colored by beliefs about the meaning of Thoreau’s life and work, and influenced by ideas of nature that have emerged in the American mind in the century and a half since his residence there. Thoreau’s Walden was not the pristine wilderness that 20th century visitors have come to associate with solitude in nature. Concord was no backwater, but held its own in the commercial and cultural life of the region. And Walden, little more than a mile from the town center, was a patchwork affair of cut-over woodlots vegetated with scrubby oaks, pitch pine, sumac, and blackberry vines.¹²⁹ The woods around Walden, as with much of New England’s forestlands, are more mature now than at any time since 1845. Yet in the experience of some pilgrims, today’s setting seems consistent with their image of how Thoreau’s wilderness should have looked. What appear to park visitors as natural landscapes, both at Yosemite and Walden, are places where changing ideals have directed and influenced management approaches, manipulating the appearance of these parks. These interpretive efforts have included substantial alterations in the landscape, or shifts in management decisions that affect the landscape, from building visitor accommodations to deporting

historic residents, from fire suppression to the re-introduction of wild species. To read these landscapes as the product of human desire and design is to read a story of a culture's changing ideas about nature.

Sacred space is not only ritual space, but it is also significant space, “a site [. . .] subject to interpretation because it focuses crucial questions about what it means to be human in a meaningful world.”¹³⁰ To explore Walden as sacred space also requires attention to the ways in which ideas about nature have shaped, and been reflected in, its landscape. By focusing his “crucial questions” in Walden around a particular place, Thoreau made Walden significant in a way that distinguished it from other kettle ponds in the area. Thoreau used Walden/Walden to explore what it meant to him to be human in a meaningful, natural world as well as in relation to the world of industry, economics, war and taxes. If Walden is sacred space, then it is also significant space; a site subject to interpretation and reinterpretation. Through Walden's natural and cultural features we may read historical and ongoing interpretations of “what it means to be human,” particularly in relation to nature.

In this section of our focus on the production of sacred space at Walden, we'll inquire how the landscape of Walden over the last century and a half reveals changing, overlapping and competing ideas about nature. This consideration of Walden's environmental history will take a somewhat chronological approach in addressing several key themes. In the century after Thoreau's death, land use at Walden suggests ideals of the human relation with nature as various as a place of industry, a place of recreation, and a place of inspiration. Over the last four or five decades, management activities

involving removal, restoration, and reinterpretation reveal Walden's significance in focusing broad social questions about human impacts, environmental protection, and ecological restoration.

Inspiration, Industry, and Recreation

Thoreau's ideal of Walden, its purity and changelessness, contrasted with his contemporaries' exploitation of the Pond and woods as natural resources. In his day, this area of Concord was no remote wilderness "untrammeled by man."¹³¹ The sandy sloping land had been protected from development prior to 1845, the year Henry built his house, more by its unsuitability to farming and propensity to wildfire than by any public sense of special or sacred value.¹³² The railroad track past the Pond had been completed just a year earlier, and was in daily use while Thoreau resided at Walden. And during one winter of his sojourn there, a team of ice-cutters harvested the solid surface of the Pond and warehoused the goods on the shoreline.¹³³ Less than ideal for farming, not much good for fishing, the Pond and its environs nevertheless held a few commodities worth the taking. Yet Thoreau's own final vision for the place included its preservation from any kind of material harvest, and he implored that Walden remain a "primitive forest."¹³⁴

Outside Walden, and making inroads even there, the Industrial Revolution was underway, as was another movement, more aesthetic and less material. The painters of the Hudson Valley School, and writers and poets influenced by Romantic ideas of nature, presented an alternative view of nature's values. As the American landscape was transformed through ever greater material exploitation, visions of its spiritual and symbolic value were articulated through painting and poetry. The image of Walden in

1845, with the author's cabin on the quiet lakeshore standing in contrast to the noisy passage of the railroad train, is iconographic of the themes of some of these American artists.¹³⁵ The contradistinction of Nature as Raw Material and Nature as Sacred Inspiration, contested meanings at a societal scale, were evident even in the Walden of Thoreau's era.

Romantic notions and railroads moved more people than poets and painters to seek out American's natural wonders. Accompanying the poetic turn to nature in the 19th century was the advent of nature tourism, and the development of parks and scenic areas as tourist destinations. Until the early 19th century, American nature had been "consumed" through the agency of human and mechanical labor, as resources like timber and water power were extracted and exploited. As that century came to a close, and into the early 20th century, nature became more available for consumption through human leisure activities such as tourism and recreation.¹³⁶ The establishment of parks and the impulse to nature tourism were both supported and advanced by the railroad industry. Landscape artists were even hired by railroad companies to create stirring images of the scenery accessible by rail. From the poetic elevation of the Transcendent in nature emerged a carefully packaged and marketed product.

Although Walden was no Yosemite, the end of the 19th century also saw the advent of a kind of local railroad tourism that served an urban population with new ideas about time and leisure. While the railroads were transporting thousands of well-off easterners to the scenic vistas of the Northeast and West, the Boston-Fitchburg Railroad was bringing hundreds of thousands of city dwellers to Walden for amusement,

recreation, and relief from the urban environment. Within a decade of Thoreau's death, the shores of Walden Pond sported a bathhouse and a ballfield, dance halls, boating facilities, and benches all around the clear-cut shoreline.¹³⁷ An excursion park served by the railway had been developed on the western shore. At the turn of that century, Walden's landscape reflected the shift from a site of spiritual inspiration to one of recreational consumption. The Pond continued to be a popular destination for recreation into the 20th century, even after the railroad park's demise. Automobiles and new patterns of middle-class activity brought thousands to the teeming shores of the 60-acre lake. The popular perception of the place as a recreational resource, contested the ideals of solitude and sanctuary associated with the idea of nature as inspiration.

Yet throughout the 20th century, Walden was the site of repeated assertions on behalf of its Thoreauvian meanings. One such claim was marked by a transfer of property: the 1922 grant of 80 acres of land from the private holdings of four local families to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.¹³⁸ Along with stipulations for continued bathing, boating, fishing and picnicking, the donors required that the land be managed to "preserve the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau." Whether the transfer of property provided more protection of the place than private ownership, it seems to have done little to alleviate its popularity. The summer of 1935 saw as many as 25,000 people visiting Walden Pond in one day.¹³⁹ Was this the Walden of Thoreau? The stipulations of the deed mandated a compatibility between recreation and inspiration, between development and preservation, that managers of the subsequently formed park were left to reconcile. The tension between nature for recreation and nature for inspiration that is

so blithely ignored, or challenged, in the deed's stipulation, continues to play out at Walden throughout the 20th century and to the present day.

Removal, Restoration and Reinterpretation

When reading the sacred landscape, we do well to pay attention to the “interpretive labors” that have contributed to making that space significant.¹⁴⁰ In Walden's case, the cultural labor of interpreting the significance of place was accomplished in part through the application of rather heavy-handed physical labor. Since 1922, interpretive labors at Walden have included minor and major modifications of the landscape, many of which have been undone by succeeding interpretive regimes. Trees were cut to expand the beach area, then seedlings were planted by volunteers to restore the woods. A number of bath-houses were constructed to serve the beachgoers, then all but one taken down. A concrete apron and immense diving pier were once substantial features of the eastern shoreline, although few traces of them remain today.

Through the latter half of the 20th century, Walden's significance as a public recreational facility competed with its status as a national shrine to Thoreauvian values, a contest that was worked out in the landscape with bulldozers and chainsaws, construction and vandalism. From the 1950s to the early 1970s, intervention in the landscape was part of an ethos of progress which spelled success in terms of maximizing visitorship to the park through control and manipulation of the natural features of the site. But during this period, growing environmental consciousness in the United States began to be felt in the local, state and national interest in Walden's potential as a symbol of all that we as a nation stood to lose.

The balance of recreation versus inspiration was weighted heavily on the side of recreation throughout most of the era when the Middlesex County Commissioners held sway (1922 - 1975). Removal of impediments to recreation was complemented by installation of facilities consistent with the development of Walden as an outdoor swimming pool. The removal of water, of trees, and even of fish, exemplifies the ethos of control that was a hallmark of natural resource management of the time, a legacy of progressive conservationism that sought the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

Attempts to assert control over Walden Pond's water level exemplify this approach to resource management. Walden Pond has no inlet or outlet streams, and is fed solely by groundwater. The geology of its basin is such that the water level of the Pond fluctuates with the groundwater table, in a lagging response to the alternation of wet and dry cycles. Thoreau himself remarked on the mystery of these ups and downs, and on their tendency to keep Walden's shoreline clear of vegetation by periodic submersion.¹⁴¹ In the mid 1950s, the water levels rose high enough to cover the swimming beaches and to flood parts of the trail around the Pond. Park officials responded by removing water from the Pond, short-circuiting its natural groundwater outlet by means of pumps and pipes, and there was talk of constructing a permanent system for controlling the Pond level.¹⁴² The weather intervened, and the severe drought of the early 1960s brought the Pond level down again, so low that the swimming area had to be closed again.¹⁴³

Plans were also hatched to increase visitorship at the Pond through other kinds of transformations. The steep wooded slopes around the Pond were a problem, preventing road access to the shoreline and limiting the beach area to the narrow strip between the water level and the trees, a strip which might readily be reclaimed by the Pond in times of high water. In 1957, crews went to work with chainsaws and bulldozers, removing more than a hundred trees and leveling the ground on the northeastern shore of the Pond.¹⁴⁴ Once again, the natural environment was considered an impediment to progress, in need of reshaping to conform to desirable dimensions. The Pond's piscene population also fell short of providing maximum utility for recreational anglers because it was dominated by "trash fish," species less desirable for sport. The management solution again required removal. Following standard practice, the water was poisoned to purge it of all fish life, then restocked with desirable species.¹⁴⁵

But there was a current of change in the air, if not in the intentions of the park overseers, a shifting social sensibility toward the environment. A decade after the publication of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring, growing concerns about overpopulation, pollution, and wilderness protection contributed to an emerging environmental consciousness that reshaped the context for interpreting Walden Pond. In 1972, a reform slate was elected to the Middlesex County Commission, a group of people who had campaigned on the pledge to "Save Walden Pond." The new Commission appointed a Citizen Advisory Council, and announced plans to rescue Walden before the nation's 1976 bicentennial celebration.¹⁴⁶ At the behest of the new committee, a bill was passed that removed Walden Pond from the authority of the County Commissioners and put it

into the care of the Commonwealth's Department of Natural Resources (now the Department of Conservation and Recreation).

Even more significant to Walden's future than the shift in management from the local to the state level was a new vision for the landscape of Walden Pond State Reservation. The advisory board solicited proposals for the future development of Walden Pond. What would "saving Walden" entail? It might mean saving it from its popularity as a swimming hole, and attempting to redress the "balance" of people and nature. The proposal set forth a range of scenarios, from an increase in the size of the swimming facilities to the restriction of visitors to a level low enough to allow restoration of the natural shoreline.¹⁴⁷ Ultimately it was decided to adopt a fairly restrictive scenario, limiting parking facilities to 300 cars and reducing the visitor load to no more than one thousand people at a given time.

At first, the restoration of Walden's Thoreauvian ethos and ecological landscape required further removals. Although the bathhouse remained, the shabby concrete restrooms on the shoreline and the large concrete swimming pier were demolished. Large parking lots above the beaches were replaced by a smaller lot across the street, one partly concealed by the wooded surroundings. Perhaps the new management went a bit too far in their removal of manmade features. In 1975, the cairn at the House Site was also taken away in the back of a truck, considered by the current park commissioner to be a messy eyesore. After complaints, the stones were unceremoniously returned in 1978.¹⁴⁸

The landscape around Walden was also subject to various removals. In 1976, the adjoining privately owned Walden Breezes trailer park reverted to state ownership, with

plans to phase out the residences as tenants moved on. The Concord town landfill, adjacent to the trailer park, was also slated for removal. The “dump” was targeted by a succession of local activists and organizations, both for its potential impact on the water quality of the Pond and for the intrusion of its barren and littered surface on the Walden landscape. After capping and conversion to a recycling and transfer station, the land now serves as Concord’s composting facility.

Renewing Walden required restoration of what was deemed missing, as well as removal of what was deemed incompatible with Walden’s new significance. Perhaps the most extensive and expensive reshaping at Walden was a multi-phase bioengineering project that aimed to reclaim the eroded shoreline of the Pond by redrawing the path around its circumference and reestablishing vegetation on the slopes. From the early part of the century, visitors to Walden had so trampled the sandy sloping shore that deep gullies eroded the bare soil. Former managers had made numerous attempts to control the problem. Standard practice was to build large “cribs” made of railroad ties, fill them with gravel, then top them off with soil and grass seed. By today’s standards, these bulky structures were unsightly and an obvious reminder of human manipulation of the landscape.

The new approach to addressing Walden’s erosion problems used a “bio-engineering” method that draws on organic materials, including live plants, to secure and stabilize steep slopes. Once new vegetation has grown over the coir mats and rolls that are staked into the eroded ground, the resulting effect is naturalistic. Yet the implementation of this strategy requires a major overhaul of the landscape. The

restoration project took place in three stages, during which large portions of the Pond path were closed off while excavation, filling, planting, reinforcing and fencing took place. To prevent damage to the landscape, the new path was enclosed with fencing and marked with signs educating the visitor about the fragile ecology and warning people to keep on the trail.

While structures were being removed from Walden, and the landscape was being reshaped, other features were added in order to strengthen Walden's interpretation as a Thoreauvian place. In 1985, a replica of Thoreau's Walden house was designed by Roland Robbins and placed at the park entrance. Later, a bronze statue of Thoreau was donated and placed in front of the replica. Park brochures began to outline the history of Walden, including Thoreau's life and relevance to the place. Interpreting these features in the context of the landscape was the job of Denise Morissey, Walden's first educational director, who was hired in 1992. And, in a unique partnership, the Thoreau Society took up residence on the property, placing their book and souvenir shop in the park headquarters.

By the close of the millennium, the removal of commercial and some recreational facilities from Walden and its environs, the regrowth and active restoration of the ecological landscape, and new ways of representing Thoreau's association with the place, contributed to a reinterpretation of space that stood in sharp contrast with the Lake Walden of a century earlier. The revised landscape was more consistent with a 20th century American ideal of nature as sacred space, a place apart from human habitation and interference. Walden's reinterpretation affirms broader cultural ideas that nature is

more natural in the absence or limitation of human presence, and supports the idea that humanity's role in relation to nature is that of rescuer. If we have saved Walden both from ourselves and for ourselves, perhaps we can "Save the Planet."

From one perspective, the restored Walden is a significant site because it affirms an optimistic view of the status of humanity and nature. But from another point of view, Walden's significance may have been obscured by the interpretive efforts of the last few decades. If sacred sites are significant sites, then Walden's significance may be more powerful in a degraded or threatened state. This is the view of local scholar, Tom Blanding. To this activist, Walden has tremendous symbolic potential to speak to the relationship of nature and culture in America. Blanding's concern with the current "restoration" at Walden is that, by presenting a pleasing mien to the public, Walden will conspire to fool us that we are good stewards of the environment after all, and be less active in its protection elsewhere. A degraded Walden pronounces judgment, and might inspire radical grass-roots, large scale societal transformation. A Walden "saved" and "restored" by the interest and actions of a few may be a testament to its significance, but provides false comfort if a wounded relationship continues to fester beneath the band-aid.

Contested space: the politics of place

Leaving the House Site, I continue on the path around Walden Pond. Beyond Thoreau's cove are other embayments in the shoreline. The path branches into trails that lead closer to or farther from the water, and even across the railroad tracks into the adjoining conservation lands. The western cove of the Pond was the site of the former amusement park, but there seem to be no traces of the dance hall, boathouse, track or ball

fields of this once busy shore. A single family is encamped on the small beach, the young children playing in the shallows with their dog.

The path angles up from the cove and then diverges. Here I can cross out of the park on trails through the adjoining woods or continue along the shoreline of the Pond. A sign on a nearby tree catches my attention, a wooden park sign placed so as to greet a visitor arriving from outside the reservation: “No Pets Allowed.” The sign seems to signify a sort of back entrance, and also reinforces the park boundary by reiterating the rules of entry. As I get closer, I see that someone has carved another letter into the sign, a small “o” that translates the message into one more troubling for the Thoreauvian pilgrim: “No *Poets* Allowed.”

This unofficial commentary on boundary setting at Walden suggests another feature of sacred space: its boundaries and meanings do not go uncontested. The production of sacred space is also an exercise of power, by which one group asserts its own interest over the interests of others. The desecration of Thoreauvian markers is only one manifestation of contested space at Walden. Walden’s changing landscape can also be read as a shift in the cultural significance of nature, the victory of one interpretive regime over another.

To read sacred space with a hermeneutic of suspicion, we work with the presumption that “sacred space is not merely discovered, or founded or constructed; it is claimed, owned and operated by people advancing specific interests.”¹⁴⁹ This view of sacred space requires that we ask whose interests are served by various claims on a place, and whose interests are marginalized or excluded. Conflict and controversy are not

exceptions at sacred places, but are integral features of the cultural work that produces sacred space. Indeed, sacred space “is inevitably contested space, a site of negotiated contests over the legitimate ownership of sacred symbols.”¹⁵⁰

A primary way in which Walden can be read as contested space is through the consideration of conflicts over land use in and around Walden. Over the years various individuals and organizations have been active in speaking out against the use of Walden primarily for recreation, or against the desecrating effects of the careless treatment of numerous visitors unacquainted with – or unconcerned by – Walden’s status as sacred ground. In the early 1900s, photographer Herbert Wendell Gleason recorded all the places Thoreau visited, and at the same time documented the impacts of visitors on Walden’s shores.¹⁵¹ In 1939, another famous visitor, essayist E.B. White, wrote a public “letter to Thoreau” that deplored the litter in the shabby glade around the House Site.¹⁵² And twenty years later, preservationist Mary Sherwood moved to Concord aiming to keep “Walden Forever Wild.”¹⁵³ Each of these visitors noted the tension between Walden as playground and Walden as sacred ground.

Our exploration of the politics of place at Walden continues through a consideration of sacred place as contested space. Chidester and Linenthal discerned four themes in the politics of place in the foundational work of another scholar, Gerardus van der Leeuw’s early exploration of the phenomenology of religion.¹⁵⁴ Evidence of these themes, including a politics of property, of position, of exclusion and of exile, will guide our discernment of the role of human power and control in the sacralization of space at Walden.¹⁵⁵ First, we will focus on the politics of property at Walden through a

consideration of ownership. Next, we will explore the politics of position by examining the movement and placement of sacred space. Then, we will consider the politics of exclusion in relation to the sanctity of space at Walden. In closing the chapter, we will turn to the theme of exile.

The politics of property

Property, or the availability of space or objects for ownership, is an aspect of the sacred that is subject to human action and negotiation. The fabled sword in the stone claimed by young Arthur comes to mind as a (hi)story in which the appropriation of the sacred object reveals and affirms the birthright of the holder. Claims on property are not only a matter of title and deed, but may be effected by planting flags, redrawing maps, changing place names, and controlling use and access.

The possession of symbolic objects is another way that claims to sacred space can be asserted and contested: “religious symbols, myths, or rituals can be shown to operate in economic contexts and to serve specific social or political interests.”¹⁵⁶ The (mis)use of Native American myth or ritual by an environmental group, for example, might be read as a bid for legitimacy, an attempt to transfer an ethos of ecological nobility on the particular organization, venture, or discourse of those appropriating the tradition. With respect to Walden, we will wonder not only who claims the land, but how the symbolic property has been appropriated and disseminated.

We’ll begin by reconsidering the House Site. A place is made sacred not only by its history, but through the work of appropriation, possession, and ownership.¹⁵⁷ When Robbins began his excavation, the House Site was located on property owned by the

Commonwealth of Massachusetts and managed by the Middlesex County Commission as a public recreation area. In reading Robbins' journals, I was struck by his presumptive possession of the site. He was generous in giving away Thoreau's bricks to his supporters, while shielding his work from those he mistrusted. Robbins' activity on this public land staked a claim for Thoreau and his pilgrims. But Robbins was also staking his own claim to the discovery and the contents of the excavation, efforts which supported his claim to a place among the scholars of Concord and the academics of the Thoreau Society.

As Robbins began, literally, to poke around the House Site, and then to excavate trenches in search of the foundation, he began to recover material artifacts relevant to the find. In his daily journals he recorded unearthing nails and plaster, bricks and mortar. Most of these materials were boxed, labeled and stored after removal. But Robbins also rewarded some of his companions at the dig site. His daily log, compiled later into a list, showed what artifacts ended up where. Robbins disseminated bricks from Thoreau's stockpile at the House Site to various people during the period of excavation. And when he became president of the Thoreau Society some years later, those subscribing to lifetime memberships received a small plaque to which were affixed small bits of brick and mortar from his collection.¹⁵⁸

But Robbins was also careful to guard his work, and concerned to prevent vandalism and looting of the site. After his first discovery of the chimney foundation stones, he carefully reburied the evidence and attempted to disguise where he had been working. A few local friends were invited to witness his work, and to document through

photographs Robbins' methods and the evidence that he was uncovering. Robbins' caution extended beyond casual passers-by, and when the secretary of the Thoreau Society, Walter Harding, visited Walden to see the work in progress, Robbins denied him access.¹⁵⁹ Yet when a young stranger appeared at the site claiming to be Henry Thoreau, he was not only show the excavation, but given a token brick to take away.¹⁶⁰

The memorial at the House Site not only bears testimony to the true location of the Walden house, but also to Robbins' status as discoverer of the site. Robbins had no academic credentials as an historian and no experience in archaeology. Building from his limited education and working class background, and energized by his curiosity and zeal for accomplishment, he sought to establish himself in a new career. He went on from Walden to excavate other historical sites in New England. Robbins' rise and reputation in the field of historical archaeology are chronicled in a recent biography.¹⁶¹

Sacred sites are places of power. From a traditional view, the sacred site has been considered a place of divine power and mystical connection. But from a cultural perspective, the sacred center is a place through which human power relations are asserted, negotiated, and contested. The excavation of the House Site, and the sacred property associated with it, empowered Robbins in his rise from amateur historian to historical archaeologist, and from an outsider to the president of the Thoreau Society. The rocks now buried for safekeeping below the memorial stone are not only the foundation of Thoreau's chimney, but of Robbins' subsequent career.

Possession of sacred property can empower the owner. But the value or sacrality of place can be asserted and maintained through claims and counter-claims on its

ownership.¹⁶² Roland Robbins may once have asserted a personal claim on the House Site, but no, at the park gates, there's little question about who owns Walden. The state flag flies, DEM logos are everywhere, even the ubiquitous brown paint all announce the Commonwealth's claim on this space. The transition to public ownership has been a gradual affair. When Thoreau was resident here, he was merely a squatter on land owned by the Concord philosopher, Ralph Walden Emerson, who had given his young friend both permission and encouragement to try this experiment in living. In 1922, four families owning land around Walden Pond deeded it to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.¹⁶³ Walden was designated as a national historic landmark in 1965, and by 1975 the control of the property was transferred from the County Commission to the State Department of Natural Resources.¹⁶⁴ These changes in interest and ownership mark a succession in the hierarchy of power and interest in Walden from the individual citizen to the Commonwealth. A reading of the politics of property at Walden suggests that the place has become too meaningful, or too powerful, for private ownership or local management.

The politics of position

Ownership is not the only way that sacred space is produced and contested. Another way the sacred is subject to human control is through movement and placement. In contrast to natural features like Walden Pond that are fixed in place, many sacred objects are movable. What established Santiago Compostela in northwestern Spain as a Christian shrine to an apostle beheaded in Jerusalem? It was the myth-shrouded movement of his beheaded body, miraculously carried in a stone boat with no oars and no

sails to Finisterre, the “ends of the earth.”¹⁶⁵ The positioning of such a powerful object into territory contested by Muslims and Christians in ninth century Spain had political significance. A saint never known to wield a sword was transformed into Santiago Matamoros – Saint James, Moorslayer – and began to appear in the triumphalist visions of military leaders even as he stands today “captured in stone, his sword raised” atop the municipal offices opposite the cathedral.¹⁶⁶

A sacred object need not be portable for position to be at issue, for shrines can also be created in place. Prior to the manufacture of Mt. Rushmore’s sculpted face, several other attempts were made to position sacred sites in the Black Hills.¹⁶⁷ In the eyes of Mt. Rushmore’s chief promoter, Doane A. Robinson, the positioning of the current memorial was integral to its meaning as “a monument to the American myth of frontier and conquest.”¹⁶⁸ The interests of regional business owners were also served by positioning a tourist attraction in their locale.¹⁶⁹ It is no accident that this shrine of nationalism is positioned in a place long home to the sacralizing work of a people native to the area long before the inauguration of the United States.¹⁷⁰

Although Walden Pond has not itself been moved, actions on the surrounding landscape have nevertheless served to reposition it. In Thoreau’s day, the Pond lay in the margins of Concord. Even to someone on foot, the cabin was not remote. Still, it was distinctly off-center, well-positioned for a critical stance toward the dominant discourse of the day. Although the Pond retained its marginal position with respect to the town, any reading of the margin as a place of purity in terms of sacred nature was challenged by

later developments. Throughout the 20th century, those profane icons of society's fringe, the town dump and the trailer park, were positioned on the Pond's eastern shore.¹⁷¹

In the course of the century after Thoreau's farewell, the Pond was also re-centered at another scale and with another meaning by means of changing transportation modes and routes. The rail line from Boston to Fitchburg was built up against the southwestern cove of the Pond in Thoreau's time, essentially repositioning Walden within easy reach of urban pleasure-seekers in the early days of leisure excursions and recreational enterprise. In the 20th century the development of Route 2, a major thoroughfare connecting western suburbs to the metropolitan area, delivered Walden's amenities to the doorsteps of anyone with a car in a 50-mile radius. This busy four-lane highway also effectively cut off the park from continuity with the local town center. From its integral though peripheral place in the wild fringe of historic Concord, Walden Pond has been repositioned as a regional recreational resource.

Walden Pond was also repositioned through social conflict. The growth of Walden's popularity for swimming led to a legal show-down in 1957. Two weeks before the annual meeting of the Thoreau Society, the County Commissioners gave the go-ahead for an attack on the northeastern shoreline of Walden Pond with chainsaws and bulldozers. Their goal was to create a larger beach area, including an access road for ambulances, more parking, and the installation of structures for Red Cross swimming lessons. The "Battle of Red Cross beach" pitted a hastily formed "Save Walden Committee" against the commissioners that led to a court injunction, temporarily halting work on the new beach facilities. Bitter debate in the press and at hearings, in which

beach proponents construed the contest over Walden Pond as one of elitism over egalitarianism, and trees over children.¹⁷²

This polarizing public contest positioned the Pond itself as somehow central to Walden's sacred space. But another Concord activist, seeking ways to preserve the local heritage, adopted another strategy than head-on conflict. Combining his own historical research on Thoreau's ramblings and writings with a scientific assessment of the landscape by an ecologist, Tom Blanding articulated new boundaries that asserted the historical, literary, and ecological significance of Walden Woods. By promoting Walden Woods rather than Walden Pond as the true legacy of Thoreau, Blanding enlarged the landscape of the sacred and broadened the base of support for its protection. And by diverting attention away from the bitter and divisive controversy over the Pond, Blanding was able to direct concern toward new threats to Walden's sanctity – the encroachment of commercial development within those woods.

Between 1922, when private land around Walden Pond was first deeded to the Commonwealth, and the present day, the State Reservation had increased in size as the Commonwealth sought control over more of the surrounding property. The reservation now includes over 400 acres.¹⁷³ But Blanding's proposed Walden Woods, as mapped in 1988 by his Thoreau Country Conservation Alliance, incorporated even broader boundaries and included well over two thousand acres.¹⁷⁴ This repositioning of Walden drew on the writings of Thoreau and Emerson, as well as the accounts of pilgrim visits, and even marshaled evidence to enlarge and unify this vision of Walden. The new map incorporated land from Brister's Hill northeast across Route 2 from Walden Pond

and, to the west, all the way to the Concord River and Fairhaven Bay in the town of Lincoln. The mapping of Walden Woods not only repositioned the place of Walden in the landscape, but moved the matter of preservation away from the swimming issues at Walden Pond.

The mapping of Walden Woods was clearly intended by its advocates to reposition the place in the emotional landscape of the community. Blanding himself asserted that the work was intended “to restore to Concord’s consciousness” this broader sense of Walden’s extent, as well as its value as a “unique ecological and cultural resource” worthy of protection.¹⁷⁵ By this time, Walden was facing threats other than hordes of temporary visitors. Both an office park and a condominium complex were planned near the Pond, impacts to the landscape that would “change the character of Walden Woods for all time.”¹⁷⁶ These new threats, publicized by the Alliance in relation to the repositioning of Walden, began to attract more than local concern.

In 1990, attention to the development threats facing Walden Pond began to reach a national audience. Moved to help, the well-known and well-heeled rock musician Don Henley got involved in the efforts, and initiated further organization and fund-raising. A new association, the Walden Woods Project (WWP), was begun in 1990. Taking a different political strategy, and professionalizing the fund-raising activities in aid of Walden, the WWP took over the mission of the local conservation organization. One of its early fundraising efforts was a book called Heaven is Under our Feet that included essays from a broad spectrum of well-known people from Jimmy Buffet to Jimmy Carter, and Whoopi Goldberg to Jack Nicholson.¹⁷⁷ Under the Thoreau Country Conservation

Alliance, Walden Woods had been repositioned in the American consciousness. Under the Walden Woods Project, the task of saving Walden was repositioned from a grassroots effort to a celebrity cause.

The politics of exclusion

Exclusion is another way that power is exercised in relation to sacred space. Exclusion works to maintain the “sanctity of the inside [. . .] by maintaining and reinforcing boundaries that [keep] certain persons outside the sacred place.”¹⁷⁸ For example, the sanctity of home is available to family members because its doors and walls act to keep out most other people, most of the time. Likewise, a romantic sense of the sanctity of nature in this country’s national parks was historically defended by excluding people from living therein, even to the point of displacing the land’s longtime residents.

The sanctity of Walden in some form has been protected by restricting access to the Walden Reservation to numbers much lower than those Depression-era Sundays that brought tens of thousands of visitors in a day. As a result of the restoration plan, the role of the gatekeeper is to limit the park population to no more than a thousand at a given time, a “people capacity” designed to ensure a positive visitor experience and to maintain the integrity of the resource.”¹⁷⁹ Bold “NO PARKING” signs on the entrance gates are meant to turn away would-be visitors once capacity is reached and those gates are closed. Even so, summer visitors seldom experience anything like the solitude that Thoreau enjoyed, a solitude that pilgrims long to emulate during their own sojourns here.

The park faces a dilemma that many sacred sites experience. Its very popularity brings problems, and the very qualities that contribute to its attraction are compromised

by the impact of the visitors it draws. The activities of the faithful, the curious, the fun-loving, often through the influence of sheer numbers, produce a more material form of desecration from which the place must be protected.¹⁸⁰ To understand the biophysical impacts of intensive and long-standing use at Walden requires knowing something of its peculiar geology.

A kettle pond, Walden is a deep divot in a thick blanket of sand and gravel formed at the end of the last glaciation. The continual outwash of meltwater from retreating ice spread layers of sediment seaward from the glacial edge, burying the former landscape in sand and gravel and insulating the occasional land-locked iceberg. As these isolated blocks of ice slowly melted away, the sandy surface above them sagged into somewhat circular depressions, the deeper of the holes filling with groundwater to form the natural ponds and lakes common to southeastern Massachusetts. Walden Pond is the water filling the bottom of one of these sandy bowls.

Half a million visitors a year took their toll on the place, defiling the green shores and slopes of Walden Pond through the erosive effect of their activity. It's a familiar story in this kind of terrain. Disturbed by the impact of continual foot traffic, easily erodable soil washed away. Shrubs and trees were undermined by erosion and died, then failed to regenerate in the droughty soil. The loss of their subterranean root systems led to further instability on the steep slopes. And the absence of the annual leaf fall – organic matter that helps hold moisture – impoverished what soil was left. As one path became unusable through erosion, alternate paths into undisturbed areas were made, and the deterioration of the shoreline advanced to a broader and broader swath.

The Pond, as well as the land around it, was affected by these impacts. Sediment washed into the water, decreasing depth and clarity. The near-shore habitat lost the vegetation that provides shade, cover, and nutrients. The integrity of the Pond's natural environment was gradually worn away under the eager feet of its admirers to a gullied, barren halo of human impact.

Thoreau described a pattern of rocks ringing the Pond in his day, most likely lag deposits caused by wave action on the boulder-pocked glacial outwash of the shoreline.¹⁸¹ The resulting "walled-in" effect could, in his fancy, have given the Pond its name while mysteriously marking it off like private property. But now the Pond is walled-in by other means, the extensive armoring of bioengineering materials and the fences that protect their work and defy access to the shoreline. Approach to the Pond is possible, but carefully controlled and circumscribed by these guardrails of fence and stone.

Another type of exclusion is occurring behind the wire fences. It is not just human trespass onto these sites of active restoration that is controlled. The vegetation is also under orders. The informational signs about the bioengineering project are careful to note that "native" plants are being grown in this effort. When the project is finished, "the shoreline will be restored to its native condition, not seen in 75 years."¹⁸² The process of exclusion at Walden Pond includes a purifying activity that reveals another facet of our contemporary ideal of nature, for the restoration of what is native implies the exclusion of what is not native. Restoration of the shoreline is not only about ecological integrity, but the establishment of an idealized organic community. What is more sacred in nature is

what was there “before.” The politics of nature, reinforced and enacted through those with the power to make or influence the politics of place, determine what is allowed and what is excluded at Walden, what is welcomed and what is viewed as a threat.

The politics of exile

Moving on from the “No Poets” sign, I continue my way around the Pond. Eventually I come across an unoccupied fisherman’s landing, and descend the stone steps to the water’s edge. A flat rock, winged with densely branched and freshly budded blueberry bushes, forms a private niche for my meditation. Sounds drift down from the path behind me: the regular slap-slap of a jogger’s sneaker soles, the rhythmic crunch of gravel, the sturdy stride of a determined walker. Loose threads of dialogue from unseen partners float by like dust motes in sunshine: “You have to find other people who want to do it [. . .]. That’s the problem with society [. . .] you can’t just drop your job, drop your kids, drop your [. . .].”

The passing voices come into range and retreat again like the hum of the commuter train across the Pond, a series of excuses dropped like wishes into the still water. Though coated with reason, the words reveal a longing to be like the imagined Thoreau – solitary, unencumbered, dwelling in nature’s midst. This nostalgia for paradise reveals something of the modern conviction under which we live, believing ourselves cast out from nature and forever unable to return. The best we can do is to speak lovingly and longingly of the imagined homeland, and make periodic pilgrimage to its holy places. The “problem with society” is that we imagine ourselves a diaspora – a

community that lives in exile from the nature it still thinks of as somewhere else, somewhere in the past, or somewhere far from home.

Walden, as a sign of our exile from nature, complements what historian of religion Gerardus van der Leeuw considers to be a modern alienation from the sacred as well.¹⁸³ Although we may still hold the home as an ideal of sacred space, in contemporary American society the actual experience of sanctuary is generally missing. The functions of home are displaced or replaced, the boundaries weakened and dissolved by the sporadic presence of the household members or the intrusion of the outside world through electronic media. What does exile mean for our sense of the sacred in nature? Only that “the most sacred places [are] remote, and the most authentic religious experience in relation to sacred space [is] homesickness.”¹⁸⁴ The aptness of exile as a description of the modern condition affirms our movement away from the sacred landscape, even if only through nature’s erasure or desecration.

In the historical study of traditional religions, when people migrate or are driven out of the homelands where religious place and practice are intimately intertwined, fundamental changes in theological concepts result.¹⁸⁵ One way in which some diasporic communities differ from their rooted counterparts is in the gradual severing of ties between land and religion, a growing emphasis on freedom from place, and the development of a utopian cosmology. Place allegiance shifts from “here” to an “ideal” place. Continued connection to a homeland might be fostered through practices such as pilgrimage. But these journeys can be as much a visit to a symbol as to an actual place. Jerusalem or Walden: either might stand for the future expectation of the exiled, or the

longed-for idyllic past recounted in song and story in the diaspora, but neither is promoted as a present day possibility for a place to live. After all, “you can’t just leave your job [. . .].”

As sacred space, Walden Pond affirms our sense of exile from nature. The place works to remind us that the sacred is out of reach, yet still desirable; sought, but never realized; valued and visited, but never lived in. From the perspective of a politics of exile, the power of nature is both affirmed and subordinated at Walden. Nature’s value is affirmed by the act of preservation; Nature’s subordination assured by its restriction to a reservation. As I think back on the House Site and my experience with the House Replica, the power of Thoreau emerges for me in a new way. He is the incarnation of modern man dwelling with nature – neither fleeing away, nor fencing it out. This nineteenth century Green Man holds out the prophetic possibility of restoration with nature, and in doing so reinforces our own sense of exile from it.

Reflection

What does a reading of Walden from the perspective of sacred space tell us about the power of place, and the role of the pilgrim? From this critical perspective, the sacred is not an essential aspect of place but one constructed and maintained by human effort, through the rites we enact, the stories we tell, the rules we follow. Sacred places are not revealed, made holy by an indwelling power; rather, certain spaces are sacralized by the “cultural labor of ritual,” interpretation, and negotiation.¹⁸⁶ Intentional human effort, rather than divine agency, produces and reproduces sacred space through the “hard work of attention, memory, design, construction, and control of place.”¹⁸⁷ In this view the

value of the House Site as sacred space lies not in the fullness of its own power to evoke meaning, but in its very openness to interpretation. In the cultural model's interpretation of sacred place, the power of a shrine "derives [. . .] from its character almost as a religious void," its ability to function as "a vessel into which pilgrims devoutly pour their hopes [. . .] and aspirations."¹⁸⁸

Such a critical, cultural view of sacred space casts not only place but pilgrims, and pilgrimage, in a different light. From this perspective, pilgrims are never only humble seekers after enlightenment or healing, but potentially powerful players in a political field. My claims about the meaning of Walden, my story of sacred experience in the House Replica, run counter to other assertions about the meaning and the appropriate use of the space. My presence here as a pilgrim, bearing my copy of Walden rather than my beach towel, walking rather than jogging, seeking in a public park the accoutrements of privacy - solitude and silence - are actions which constitute a claim on this place. Whether or not we intend it, pilgrimage is a political act.

CHAPTER 5

MAKING PILGRIMAGE: JOURNEY, RITUAL AND STILLNESS

Prelude

A stone stairway from the path to the shore has led me down to a quiet perch by the water. The swimming beach near the park entrance is now a muffled hubbub. The light plash of a lure hitting water signals the nearby presence of an angler. From the next landing along the shoreline, obscured from sight by the curve of the shore and the curtain of shrubs, comes the rise and fall of voices in earnest conversation, now and then a single word penetrating the porous boundary of audibility.

Behind and above me, slow footfalls sound on the path, accenting the progress of another pair of visitors. I hear one side of a dialog: “That’s nice honey . . . Walk a little faster, ok? . . . No, I don’t have a bucket . . . Maybe you could use one of those plastic bottles?” I imagine a 3 year old anchor trailing behind a young mother, eager hands reaching to sift the sand and sample the stones on the trailside. For the child there is no clock and no path, only the continual repetition of “here” and “now.” Taking my cue from the invisible child, I stop wondering what’s ahead. Shedding my shoes, I roll up my jeans, dangle my feet in the water and sift sparkling sand between my toes.

Here at the water’s edge, light is in motion. Flecks of mica wink from the sandy bottom of the Pond. Sun shining through rippling water makes a rick-rack pattern that trembles around my submerged feet like a golden net. The fringing shrubs that surround

this small embayment enclose me, as it were, in a solitary niche, an architecture that invites contemplation on the broad vista of the Pond which lies open before me.

An image comes to mind of Thoreau rising early to bathe in Walden Pond “as a religious exercise,”¹⁸⁹ a figure solitary as Adam wading into the still water of a quiet morning, rejoicing in the “alabaster whiteness” of his own skin.¹⁹⁰ The vision fleshes out my sense of water’s rich symbolism of transformation and purity, in baptism standing for the power of death and the promise of new life. Walden is no thin stream of water poured from a silver shell to dampen the forehead, but a font of cosmic proportions. Will my reception of this place be as generous, as embracing, as Thoreau’s?

The Pond clasps my calves, fluid leaning into flesh with a continuous persistence that contrasts with the flutter of warm air on my face. The interpenetration of my body and this water body is outlined by the peninsular topography of toes, and marked by the fine fuzz of bubbles limning each hair on my legs, holding an incrementally warmer layer of water next to my flesh. Any slight movement and I feel the displacement of liquid substance as coolness sliding over skin, a phenomenon that makes me sensible of my own embodiment, a feeling long forgotten in my passage through our subaerial world.

The sun, too hot for early spring, presses like a weight on the top of my head. My bare arms radiate back the excess heat. For this moment I am part of the shoreline, the boundary of sky and Pond, the meeting ground of simmering air and cool water. Warmth penetrates my body as my limbs penetrate the water, but to greater effect. Pushed by the sun, pulled by the water, intrigued by the possibilities of immersion, I yield to the lure of

the Pond. Shedding my clothes, I step into the water, reach with both hands, and plunge away from the shore.

The water is cold. Not the paralyzing jolt of a meltwater pond, but the penetrating chill of spring water. Such a bracing environment encourages action, not philosophical floating. In my imagination I might have plumbed the depths of the Pond, or swum its circumference. But here, in my body, I am shocked by the audacity that impelled me this far. Through pilgrimage, desire and deed have come together to reveal another way of knowing place, another way of knowing self.

A breath of air, another dive, a turning toward shore, and I emerge from the Pond dripping, amused, and strangely satisfied, to dry off in the now welcome sun. This unplanned gesture of embrace feels good, a small pillar of testimony to the ability to pay attention to what moves me. To ignore the heat of the sun, the lure of the water, the vision of Thoreau – my own desire – would be like refusing a hand, spurning love, turning a deaf ear to the whisper of God.

Overview

The language of action and response, offer and acceptance, seems to me most fitting of my dip in the Pond. The spontaneity of that immersion revealed a creative and collaborative aspect to the “making” of pilgrimage. My experience of place was interactive, more like a dance or a dialog than the enactment of a role on an inert stage. But words that evoke activity on the part of place run counter to some notions of sacred space that see place as the powerless receptacle of divine action, or as a mere backdrop to assertions of human politics. In such views of sacred space, place itself is disempowered.

Yet my experience challenges the notion that place is passive. Entered bodily, the Pond feels neither like an empty space available for meeting a transcendent Other, or a blank slate awaiting the meanings that I would read and write thereon. The place itself played with my expectations, inviting in its openness, resistant in its coolness, capturing my thoughts and evoking certain images for me. Understanding my own embodied experience of pilgrimage requires a conception of sacred space that is open to the power of place itself.

A phenomenological approach to place offers promise here. Grounded in an assumption that “person and world are intimately part and parcel,” phenomenology challenges our separation of the world of experience into agent and environment, actor and background.¹⁹¹ Person and world are recognized as whole and indivisible, rather than dichotomized as subject over object. This way of exploring sacred space invites consideration about the ways that place and pilgrim interact in the making of pilgrimage. In the words of the philosopher, Edward Casey, “just as there are no places without the bodies that sustain and vivify them, so there are no lived bodies without the places they inhabit and traverse... Bodies and places are connatural terms.”¹⁹² Pilgrim bodies and pilgrim places are vital to one another.

In Casey’s analysis, the role of the lived body reveals two essential traits of place: the power to elicit movement, or the “emotive power” of place; and the power to hold meanings as well as things, the “gathering power” of place.¹⁹³ Although Casey sees places as actively constituted by lived bodies, and dependent on them, places are not passive in this exchange. Places themselves “actively solicit bodily motions,” having an

“e-motive thrust,” the power to move us both physically and emotionally.¹⁹⁴ To say that I was moved by the Pond is more than a turn of speech, it is an affirmation of the power of place to elicit response. My journey to Walden and my subsequent rituals, crossing thresholds, following signs, immersing myself in the water, might all be seen as responses to the emotive power of this place.

A second essential trait that speaks to the power of place has to do with its ability to hold together the past and the present, emotion and perception, symbol and story. Places “gather” both animate and inanimate presences, as well as a thousand intangible inhabitants, overcoming the limits of time and having the power to order even distinct and dissimilar things into a unified array of experience: Thoreau’s body bathed in the same light and water as my own, the summer camp fragrance of Pond water pervading the cadenced liturgy of baptism, the possibility of drowning or discovery salting my impromptu immersion with the tang of risk. Memories, events and ideas, past and present and timeless, are gathered in place. Walden Pond holds them out, hides them, but embraces all of them and more, always more than what I or anyone can bring to it. As Casey notes, and my experience affirms, this gathering power is something other than my own projection onto an empty space, or reproduction of meanings ascribed to pond-like places. The power belongs to place, and “consists in gathering these lives and things, each with its own space and time, into one arena of common engagement.”¹⁹⁵

In this chapter, we’ll draw on the resources of phenomenology to take a poetic rather than a political approach to reading the sacred geography of Walden. Having explored and acknowledged the role of human power in the production of sacred space,

we'll move beyond deconstruction to recover a sense of the power of place as it is encountered by the pilgrim. Personal narratives of the pilgrim experience of place will provide the text for a hermeneutics of recollection, in which we seek to discern the power of place to move us.¹⁹⁶ We'll consider how pilgrim experiences of Walden reveal the emotive power of this place; and what they tell us about the gathering power of Walden.

Casey emphasizes the importance of bodily movement as a way of understanding the phenomenology of place. He identifies three primary ways that we move in relation to place, and I suggest that each has a counterpart in pilgrimage.¹⁹⁷ One kind of motion entails *moving into place* from the outside; and corresponds with the pilgrim's journey to the shrine. Another type of motion includes all the ways we *move about within a place*, including for the pilgrim the formal ceremonial actions that may be prescribed by tradition or improvised in place. A third way of moving our bodies in place is *stillness*, the pause in our movement that may deepen our sense of what is moving around us as well as within us. For the pilgrim, the body's role in meditation or contemplation may include postures of prayer or prostration that demand a relative lack of movement.

Three themes emerged from the pilgrim narratives of Walden that echo Casey's three types of embodied experience of place: the themes of journey; ritual; and stillness. These themes will guide our consideration of the power of place. Drawing on the pilgrim stories, we'll explore the role of the journey in the pilgrim experience of Walden and what draws the pilgrim to place. Next, we'll consider where pilgrims go and what they do once they arrive, and how their movements reflect a responsiveness to place. Pilgrims also halt their movement in certain places – occasionally in surprise or dismay, but

sometimes to encourage or enjoy an experience of wonder or connection. The power of place is also evident in this cessation of movement, and so we will take note of what stops the pilgrim in place. Exploring these themes of pilgrimage may lead to an understanding of the emotive power and the gathering power of Walden, as well deepen or expand our sense of the phenomenon of pilgrimage.

Pilgrim Journeys

A pilgrim is a person who travels. Our word comes from the Latin, *peregrinus*, to travel or to visit.¹⁹⁸ In considering pilgrim movement, we'll look first at the role of the journey in the pilgrimage as a whole, and at the place of the pilgrimage in the life journey of these pilgrims. But the primary focus of our reflection is the relationship of place and pilgrim movement, so we'll ask what draws pilgrims to Walden - what motivates their journeys?

Travel: the role of the journey

The journey, as an aspect of pilgrimage, assumed a more serious mien in times and places of primitive travel where strangers were unwelcome or the natives hostile. And in some religious traditions, pilgrimage mandated the intentional adoption of hardships enroute to the shrine, adding further privation to the difficulty of travel. The assumption of voluntary suffering was part of a spiritual accounting that might offset sins or accrue merit for the pilgrim. But many contemporary pilgrims are less focused on suffering and endurance than their historical counterparts. Changing technology and infrastructure have relieved the pilgrim of much of the discomfort of travel, just as changing notions spiritual efficacy have reduced personal willingness to adopt

asceticism. Yet the means of travel to Walden was carefully considered by some pilgrims, for whom the journey was as integral to the pilgrimage as was the destination.

Intentional simplicity, motivated by stringent budgets as much as by Thoreau's model, characterized the journeys of two Walden pilgrims. DJ's bicycle trip around New England in 1940 emphasized simplicity in style and economy in accomplishment. Bicycle transport limited luggage to a bare minimum, and a dollar-a-day budget spurred creativity in finding meals. The new availability of hostels provided affordable accommodations that were compatible with their goals, budget and means of transportation. A certain admiration accrued to them as a result of being "hostelers," their privations adding a stamp of authenticity to their journey.

Brian's journey to Walden was also intentionally patterned after Thoreau in its simplicity and economy. Brian drove an economical VW bug and stayed with relatives along the way. Like Thoreau, Brian kept a journal of his trip in which he noted every item he packed for the trip, and kept a detailed log of his expenses. "I spent \$15.35 on fuel, \$1.80 on tolls, \$1.50 on the sights, and arrived home with thirty-five cents in my pocket, none the worse for the wear."¹⁹⁹

These examples of Walden pilgrim journeys raise a question of emphasis: What is the role of the journey in pilgrimage compared to the role of the destination? Pilgrimage traditions vary in the importance associated with the journey and the destination within the general circular structure of leaving home and returning again, and Walden pilgrims exemplified more than one type of traditional pattern. In some traditions the importance of the journey seems to predominate over the value of place. Pilgrimage is about getting

there, and being on the road is the hallmark of the pilgrim. In the newly popular pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain, for example, the foot journey along the medieval routes is the essence of the experience.²⁰⁰ As with Brian and DJ, simplicity of travel and humble accommodations contribute to the sense of authenticity.

In others traditions, travel is almost immaterial in relation to the importance of the pilgrimage center. Pilgrimage is more about being there than getting there, and the ritual emphasis is focused around the shrine. Pilgrims today travel to Fatima or Jerusalem in air-conditioned busses or trans-continental jets, perhaps as part of a tour group.²⁰¹ It isn't how they get there, but what they do when they arrive at the shrine that gives their visit the stamp of pilgrimage. Walden pilgrims David and Don both made it to Walden in the course of side trips, adjuncts to business or family travel. But the mode of getting there didn't seem to detract from the value of their Walden experience.

Some pilgrimages emphasize the place, and some the journey. But pilgrimage can also combine the two through a sort of circumnavigation that includes several shrines rather than a single goal. The emphasis on journey is woven together with the sacred sites that link the pilgrimage route into a whole, just as eighty-eight shrines make up the never ending circle of the Shikoku pilgrimage.²⁰² For Tom, Walden was merely one stop in the landscape of Concord pilgrimage. Specific sites such as Emerson's study were more special than others, and the landscape itself was holy ground. To Brad, Walden was only one place in a more extensive Thoreauvian landscape. For this tracker of Thoreau, the more obscure and forgotten the site, the more it was sought after. Like beads on a

rosary, these storied spaces form the stopping places that give sense to the journey and provide the substance that gives weight to the thematic thread that ties them all together.

Pilgrimage may also function as a symbolic journey for the pilgrim. Just as the practice of the labyrinth allows those who cannot travel afar to enact the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, so the pilgrim journey may substitute for a journey that is as yet only imagined. Alex's trips to Walden are precursors of his subsequent journey West, repeated movements from home to the wild that were acted upon in a larger landscape once he left school. Walking to Walden along the railroad tracks from school allowed him to imagine another journey, and when he headed West to backpack in real wilderness areas, he went by train.

Pilgrim travel runs the gamut from exemplary journeys in the spirit of Thoreau, to spur routes taken from business or family trips. For some pilgrims, getting to Walden was simply a matter of time and transportation. But for a few, the journey itself was an important aspect of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is not only about travel – movement through a changing outer landscape, but can also involve significant inward and social transition. Moving on from the role of the journey in the pilgrimage, we'll consider the role of the pilgrimage in the life journey of the pilgrim. Having decided to go to Walden, why do pilgrims go when they do?

Liminality: the place of the journey

Time is experienced in more than one way. My daily planner helps me keep track of *chronos* - secular time, clock time, linear and compartmentalized. But the conception of time includes another notion to which the pilgrim spirit is sensitive. *Kairos* is sacred

time, the awakening to awareness that the time is right, the spontaneous reception of the moment. The “place” of pilgrimage can refer not just to the pilgrim’s goal, but also to the role that pilgrimage plays in the life of the pilgrim. In considering what moves pilgrims to come to Walden, we might ask what moves them to come *when* they do.

The word “journey” is related to “sojourn” with its connotations of a temporary stay, the brief rest of the person who is not – or not yet – at home. As a sojourn, pilgrimage is a departure from the ordinary roles and responsibilities of daily life. It requires a break in routine and offers the opportunity to be a stranger among strangers, to explore other possibilities for living. A pilgrim who is moved by place may return home, or move on, a changed person, the rite of pilgrimage having sparked or accompanied a rite of passage.

Pilgrimage has been interpreted as a rite of passage by anthropologist Victor Turner.²⁰³ Drawing on the work of Arnold van Gennep, Turner found that rites relating to social transition include three stages. The “liminal” stage is a time of marginal status for the initiate, in between separation from a previous role and return to society with a new status.²⁰⁴ Turner compared pilgrimage to this liminal phase, a time/space in which the pilgrim experiences a loosening of social ties and familial expectations.²⁰⁵ As such, pilgrimage frees the pilgrim to explore the inner landscape of self even as she makes her way through the outer landscape of the pilgrimage journey.

For many Walden pilgrims, the journey coincided with a life passage or a change in societal status, suggesting the complementarity of the pilgrimage to the life journey. Tom, DJ and Alex made meaningful visits to Walden at a liminal time in their lives.

Nearing the end of high school or college, their futures were largely open, and they had a new freedom to travel independently. Coming to Walden was a way to affirm their emerging identities by positioning themselves in a place that represented the ideals, values and beliefs that had drawn their interest and admiration.

Older pilgrims came to Walden at turning points in their careers. Laura and Brad were both non-traditional students who came to Walden when they were finishing graduate work. The presentation of their work to the members of the Thoreau Society was a key point in their emergence as Thoreau scholars. Each went on to become an active member of the Thoreau Society, and a noted contributor to the scholarship on Thoreau.

Don and Fred were also at turning points in their respective careers at the time of their Walden visits. Already at mid-life, each man was making a transition from a previous career to one oriented specifically toward writing and environmental concern. For both pilgrims, Walden promised inspiration for a new course in life.

Brian and Linda stand out as pilgrims whose Walden journeys were integral with a primary crossroads in life. It was at the brief hiatus between leaving school and entering military service that Brian went to Walden.²⁰⁶ The pilgrimage was an outward enactment of his ability to discern and direct his path in life, and reflected his inner commitment to act on his own beliefs.

When Linda first came to Walden, she was not expecting to live more than two years. In the face of death and loss, Linda was moved to try a new place and new ways

of making sense of the world. Her pilgrimage to Walden opened a new door to her in the form of photography, and led to a deep experience of connection with the natural world.

The life transitions that are coincident with so many pilgrim journeys suggest the freedom that characterizes these crossroads. When one is leaving one's niche in life, there is a sense of emancipation from prior patterns and commitments. Pilgrims have the freedom to travel, but also the doubts and questions that accompany the threshold of change. This combination of movement and searching distinguishes the meaningful journey of pilgrimage from the simple escape of recreational travel. But even knowing that it's time to move, what is it that moved these pilgrims toward Walden?

Motivation: the drawing power of Walden

Pilgrimage begins with an idea, a place pictured in the mind's eye or known through an evocative description. At Walden, place and imagination are linked for many pilgrims by Thoreau's stories of that place. Walden grounds Thoreau's ethos in place, even for pilgrims who were first attracted to Thoreau by works other than Walden. The motivations for these pilgrims' journeys are bound up with Thoreau's words and works, and with the ways they understand his legacy. The desire that motivates them may be as simple as the wish to see the places Thoreau wrote about, as intangible as the hope of encountering something of his spirit, or as explicit as the need to stand where he stood and walk where he walked.

Walden offered a kind of validation for some pilgrims. Through writing about pilgrimage to Walden, Fred could affiliate himself with Thoreau and with Thoreau's legacy in the environmental and literary communities. To Laura, "It didn't seem right" to

be writing a dissertation on Thoreau without having “a sense of the New England landscape.”²⁰⁷ Perhaps Walden pilgrimage serves as a legitimating activity for those who want to identify themselves or their work with Thoreau.

DJ considered her visit to the Concord sites “more of an unformed idea than an intentional pilgrimage,”²⁰⁸ but she nevertheless distinguished her trip to Thoreau’s House Site from that of her companion, Lucille. DJ identified Lucille as a tourist because the latter wanted to see the places that were mentioned in a guidebook. In contrast with Lucille, DJ came to Walden prepared: Thoreau was a hero and she had read his work. In DJ’s taxonomy of tourist and pilgrim, the pilgrim motive is important. Motivation comes from within rather than from without, and is accompanied by knowledge of and esteem for the object of one’s journey.

Even so, pilgrims differ in the emphasis they give to the man and the place. Brad downplayed the importance of Walden, noting that the place was important to him only “by virtue of Thoreau’s relation with the landscape.”²⁰⁹ At first, the same was true for Don. Walden had value only “because it meant something to Thoreau.”

But for some pilgrims, Thoreau is more deeply entwined with place, and Walden sustains the motivation for pilgrimage. Although Fred wanted to pay homage to Thoreau, he was also seeking what he imagined Thoreau had found at Walden, inspiration for his own commitment and vision as an environmental writer. Tom’s engagement with the Transcendentalists of Concord led to another way of valuing the landscape. He longed to go to Concord and “immerse” himself in these sites, and “be part of these places.”²¹⁰

Tom's sense that a pilgrim can indwell a place suggests that making the journey has rewards that cannot otherwise be achieved.

To Brian, Walden offered a testing ground, a way for a young man who identified with Thoreau's ideas to "substantiate" Thoreau's ideas. He wanted to "vicariously experience" Thoreau's Walden in order to incorporate the substance of Thoreau's message into his own life experience.²¹¹ Walden, as a place where Thoreau had lived, and which was central to the philosophies expressed in Walden, offered unique opportunities to validate Thoreau's message.

Most of these Walden pilgrims were Thoreauvian pilgrims, drawn to pay homage to the man or in search of connection with Thoreau. They sought inspiration or validation for their work, they came to align themselves with the values that the landscape symbolized, and they came to test the value and veracity of Thoreau's principles. But not all the people I interviewed were readers of Thoreau, or motivated solely by Thoreau's association with Walden. Whereas pilgrims who come from a distance are led by imagination informed by texts, local visitors who find Walden meaningful may be drawn in as much by the present substance than the past history of the place. For these pilgrims, the emotive power of place is linked to the landscape rather than the literature.

For Linda, the draw to Walden was rooted in its physical characteristics and recreational resources. She needed a place to swim and to be alone by the water, and she came to Walden "without high expectations."²¹² There she found pathways in the landscape that invited exploration, and a capacity for discovery sustained by the

ecological richness of the place. It was the experience of new pathways opening up for her, a collaboration of both place and pilgrim that drew Linda back to Walden again and again.

For Alex, as for Linda, the question of motivation was more about what drew him back. As a teenager in Concord, it was the railroad tracks that drew him to Walden. This back door presented an element of freedom and anonymity that nurtured his desire for wildness and solitude, aspects of Walden that are not as evident at the gated and patrolled main entrance. In the network of trails through adjoining conservation lands, Alex found multiple ways of journeying to Walden. Here he could come and go as he pleased, without having to sign in.

What do we learn about the power that place has to motivate or draw the pilgrim? Two things contribute to the power of Walden to draw pilgrims: imagination and experience. The power of place can stem from story, provoking us to enter into some aspect of the tale and what it means for us. Or the power can arise out of our own movement into and response to the place. For some Walden pilgrims, the texts and the legacy of Thoreau establish a sense of place that coincides with the values that he expressed. But literature and legacy are not the whole story. The draw of a place has a material aspect as well. The way the outer landscape complements the inner journey, and what a place affords the visitor, can also compel the pilgrim. The draw of a place may be as simple and as material as a secret door, a beckoning path, or a bench by the water.

Pilgrim Rituals

If I had walked all the way to Walden, I might have found a positive side to the exposure I sought to avoid. In my concern to bypass unsolicited queries and stares, and my unwillingness to suffer blisters and burdens, I also lost the opportunity to meet unforeseen helpers and companions. Although pilgrims walking the long road to Santiago de Compostela may make the journey as individuals, they are seldom alone. This ancient route through northwestern Spain brings them in contact with both hospitable villagers and hiking companions, people who form a community that can pass on to the pilgrim the traditions of the way. Such a community, one that extends through space and time along the pilgrim road is possible when the pilgrim's journey takes a recognized and traditional route. Markers, maps and stories are time-honored ways to communicate the pattern of a ritual, providing liturgical stage directions to the players that move from place to place. But Walden's pilgrims have many starting places, and most have little notion of the pilgrim traditions that surround Walden.

Like many of these Walden pilgrims, I came to the place without knowing what I would find, or what my pilgrim rituals might be. Although I experimented with the House Replica's potential as a shrine, it was only at the House Site that Walden revealed itself as a place of pilgrimage for others. It was at the cairn that I found suggestions of tradition and ritual, and it was at this shrine that I first saw myself as part of a larger community of pilgrims. Active participation with community guides most pilgrims to and through the places they visit. Communities foster the sharing of stories, they model and elaborate ritual, and direct the evolution and dissemination of pilgrim lore.

Pilgrimage traditions at Walden are not widely known, nor actively policed, in part because pilgrims arise as a result of independent readings and individual responses to Thoreau. Not only does Walden attract many more recreational visitors than pilgrims, but many pilgrims who come are, like Thoreau, attentive to the beat of a different drum. They place greater value on independence and individuality, and may desire to experience Walden in relative solitude.

How do pilgrims know what to do when they arrive at Walden? A few Walden pilgrims had contact with a community or the company of a guide. Other pilgrims used Thoreau's text or example as their pattern for pilgrimage. But most often pilgrims found themselves alone in a place at odds with their expectations, or came to Walden with less familiarity of Thoreau's life and writing. In these circumstances, place itself became the guide and these pilgrims looked to the landscape for their cues. Even those pilgrims whose movements were shaped by the texts, or directed by participation with a community of pilgrims, revealed the influence of place itself in the shape of their pilgrimage.

Emerging from the pilgrim stories, we can discern three ways of moving through Walden, patterns of engagement with place that we'll refer to as pilgrim rituals. Pilgrims often aimed for the House Site, where they intended or improvised an offering at the cairn. Pilgrims frequently walked around the Pond in a way that is reminiscent of ritual circumambulation. And some pilgrims wandered the broader landscape of Walden with or without a particular goal, content in the act of sauntering or exploring. We'll begin with a look at the pilgrim response to the House Site, including cairn rituals, then

consider circumambulation and “ritual sauntering” in terms of the experience of Walden pilgrims. Finally, we’ll review the category of ritual and its relevance to describing the balance of intention and innovation in pilgrim ways of moving within Walden.

Cairn Rituals

A cairn is a pile or pyramid of stones constructed as a memorial or landmark. A cairn may cover the buried body of a great person, mark a trail or boundary, or protect a cache of goods.²¹³ The cairn at Walden was begun as both a marker of Thoreau’s house, and as a memorial that would mark his fame in terms of the offerings of pilgrims. When DJ came to Walden in 1940, the cairn was there to mark the hallowed spot even though it would be more than five years until Roland Robbins uncovered the chimney foundation. A visible marker of pilgrimage in the Walden landscape, the cairn is a focus of what may be the most tangible and enduring ritual at Walden.

Since the first stones were brought to the site of Thoreau’s house in 1872, both groups and individuals have come to the cairn to place stones in homage to the man. Some pilgrims mark their offerings with their names, the date, or other messages. The origin of the stones that pilgrims bring to the cairn is sometimes of significance. David recounted the story of pieces of the Berlin Wall which were placed on the cairn at a time when the dismantling of that long-standing divide symbolized a new freedom from government tyranny.²¹⁴ One pilgrim brought stones from a Civil War battlefield to place on the cairn, one blue stone and one gray, in memory of Thoreau’s ardent stance against slavery.²¹⁵

For some pilgrims, the cairn was a focus of repeated and meaningful engagement, while others, like Brian, recalled nothing about the cairn. DJ's "obligatory rock" seemed like a perfunctory action, and was much less memorable to her than was the opportunity to hold Thoreau's flute.²¹⁶ David has returned to the cairn time and again with the groups of young, sharing stories about the cairn as they added their own offerings to the heap. The cairn was an object of Tom's first pilgrimage to Walden, and remained the most fitting memorial to Thoreau. He has placed "a thousand stones" on the cairn over the years.²¹⁷

Like me, Laura was surprised by the cairn and intrigued by its suggestion of pilgrim ritual, yet disappointed that she had come unprepared for the opportunity. Yet she resolved to make some gesture in accord with tradition, located a small pebble to lay on the cairn, and vowed to "do this better" at some future point.²¹⁸ Some years later Laura brought a beach-worn rock from her own beloved place on the Pacific coast to place at Thoreau's memorial. This time she confronted another dilemma – whether to write a personal message on the stone as some pilgrims do. But for her, the offering was a private act, not a public one, and she decided that a written message was unnecessary. The stone laid on the cairn would connect her home with Henry's home, and was sufficient in its natural state. After making this gesture, Laura felt she had completed the ritual begun on her first visit.

The first time a pilgrim comes to a shrine, he may do so with both intention and ignorance. Expectations about what to do are in tension with the unexplored possibilities and features of the site. At Walden, pilgrims often seek cues in the landscape, guides for

their behavior that range from signs and pathways to the actions of other visitors. Pilgrims who anticipate solitude and silence as backdrops to their rituals may need to adapt their intentions when they find themselves in a public and very popular place. Rather than performing their expressions of interest or devotion in private or in the company of like-minded visitors, pilgrims may need to assert their intentions in spite of the flow of secular activity at Walden.

Like Fred and Brad, pilgrims may redirect their goals after being disappointed by some aspect of the place. Or, like Laura, they may improvise in order to meet the ritual obligations suggested by the place. It is up to the pilgrim to wrestle with the purpose and significance of their ritual, changing direction, adapting to circumstance, and determining the meaning of their own actions. Pilgrim rituals at the cairn suggest a balance of intention and improvisation, of tradition and innovation, as ideas emerge or are adapted in response to place.

Circumambulation

About a dozen of us quietly gather at the House Replica early on a summer morning. Crossing the road, we pick up the Esker Trail along the south side of Walden Pond. Walking in silence and in single file, keeping the Pond to our right, we process slowly along the path. The Pond is shrouded in mist, the silence broken only by the rhythmic splashing of people swimming laps and the flustering noise of the ducks they disturb. A little more than half-way around the Pond, we pause at the House Site in quiet homage, then continue on back to the starting point. This circumambulation is made

every year at the Thoreau Society Annual Gathering in memory of society co-founder Walter Harding.

To circumambulate means simply “to walk around.” Ritual circumambulation is a devotional practice common to many religious traditions.²¹⁹ In such religious rituals, the center of devotion is the pivot around which the pilgrim moves. One interpretation of the ritual suggests that it contrasts the circling of the pilgrim and the changeability of the physical realm with the stability and immutability of the “House of God.”²²⁰ The direction of pilgrim movement may also hold significance, and the symbolism of a clockwise or “sunwise” direction is sometimes preferred.

Why do Walden pilgrims circle the Pond? As a focus of circumambulation, Walden Pond may simply provide a reference point, an immovable locus for the pilgrim who might be concerned about getting lost in the woods. As long as they wander within reach of the water, visitors have the reassurance of returning eventually to their starting point. Walden Pond is also a touch point with Thoreau, a physical presence in the landscape that connects the pilgrim with the centerpiece of so many of Thoreau’s Walden stories. The availability of trails that circumscribe the Pond both creates and suggests the possibility of circumambulation. Pilgrims often end up walking around the Pond, even when their initial intention was to walk out to the House Site and back.

Brian and Tom each began his circumambulation at the House Site, and used the walk as a time to seek connections between past and present while looking at and across the Pond. Brian’s walk around the Pond was marked by reminiscence and reverie, as the different sights he encountered recollections of Thoreau’s experience. When Tom first

came to Walden, prolonged drought had exposed the entire shoreline of the Pond. The broad swath of bare sand around the water brought to mind Thoreau's saying that he "liked a broad margin to his life."²²¹ For both Brian and Tom, the ritual of circumambulation provided a way to gain multiple perspectives of the landscape, allowing the place to suggest connections between their own experience of place and Thoreau's.

Most first time visitors take a counter-clockwise approach to their circuit of the Pond, making their way from the parking area to the House Site and then deciding to continue around the Pond. Like Tom and Brian, Laura circled the Pond in this way on her first visit. But after Laura had the opportunity to spend several months in residence near Walden, she preferred "going clockwise around the Pond."²²² The far side of the Pond was more isolated and "lonelier," offering more choice for the pilgrim who wants to "spend some time wandering" before coming back to the main path to the House Site. The path around the Pond may be circular, but it is not uniform.

Linda also followed the Pond path in her daily walks, but her circuit varied from the pattern in another way. Rather than making a circle around the Pond, she walked out and back along the same path. Linda preferred to begin on the beach side of the Pond, in the sun, and she followed the light around the Pond as the day progressed. Linda felt that this approach gave her more opportunity for connection, because it allowed her to see the same places from different directions as well as in a different light.

Besides intention, what distinguishes the pilgrim ritual from an ordinary walk around the Pond? Two characteristics of pilgrim circumambulations seem to distinguish

their movements from those of other visitors: pace and posture. The pilgrim pace is often slower than the pace of other visitors. They're not trying to get anywhere, they already are where they're going. If Linda is ever in a hurry at Walden, it's to get there before anyone else so that she can see Walden again "in its untouched state, before it's changed by people being there." In contrast with runners who pound along the trails, Linda's "very short walk would be an hour, typical would be two to three."²²³ The path of the jogger and the pilgrim may be the same, but the pace is different.

Pilgrim posture complements pace. Pilgrim posture is open and expectant, waiting and looking, even reverential. Fred identified other visitors to the House Site as tourists because "there wasn't a kind of reverential tone about" their behavior.²²⁴ Linda's posture at Walden involved craning her neck to "see everything," and being "attuned to the sounds of the place."²²⁵ Walden also provoked an intensely visual posture from Don who "just stared" at the Pond.²²⁶ So pilgrims move with a pace and posture that distinguishes their rituals of circumambulation from the walks of other visitors.

Pilgrims to Walden circle the Pond in different ways, finding significance in the direction of the walk, and opportunity for connection in the multiplicity of viewpoints. Rather than adhering to a static tradition that mandates certain prayers or the contemplation of given events at particular sites along the way, Walden pilgrims discovered and created their ritual ways of moving in place. Although the path is inscribed in the landscape, the ritual is not prescribed. Circumambulation provides a sense of wholeness to the pilgrim, allowing them to encompass the place physically and visually. Yet that wholeness is punctuated by occasions of meditation or revelation, as

the pilgrim stops to reflect or remember, or is startled into awareness of a new discovery or revelation.

Circumambulation is a traditional pilgrim ritual suggested by the Pond and the paths, and is one way that pilgrims move around Walden. The slow walk around the Pond permits a gradual introduction to, and illumination of, the larger landscape around the House Site for the visitor who begins at the cairn. A counter-clockwise circuit can provide a time of preparation and solitude in the woods prior to a visit to the House Site. The movement of the pilgrim around the Pond fosters an array of perspectives, an inversion of the act of turning a gem over and over in one's hands in order to see all its sides.

The desires and expectations of pilgrims shape their rituals. But the place also plays a role. The topography of Walden invites circumambulation of the Pond. Nestled among low hills and surrounded by a horizon of trees, the Pond lies at the center of a shallow bowl, a world apart. The steep slope of the land draws the feet of the pilgrim downward toward the water, even as the prospect of its broad, clear expanse draws the pilgrim's eye around the Pond. No streams flow in or out of Walden to interrupt the circle of the shoreline. The fact that Walden's entire outline is never visible from one vantage point is a phenomenon that engenders a sense of mystery. Like the path that parallels it, the curving shoreline beckons the pilgrim on.

Ritual Sauntering

In his essay, "Walking," Thoreau speaks a word for the practice of sauntering in nature, drawing on a derivation of "saunter" that relates the term's origin to Holy Land

pilgrimage (à la sainte terre).²²⁷ Thoreau is a model for a kind of roaming in nature, and other scholars have recognized the role of wandering in the tradition of Walden pilgrimage.²²⁸ Wandering, wayfinding, and exploration emerged in many of the pilgrim stories as essential themes in their experience. In contrast with circumambulation with its adherence to the circumscribed trail around the Pond, Walden pilgrims got off the beaten path, away from the crowded places and traditional shrines, and into the broader landscape. Even pilgrims who did not come in search of Thoreau found that Walden's landscape beckoned them to explore.

Sauntering is characterized by both open-endedness and the prospect of discovery. Unlike circumambulation, no two pilgrim paths are alike. Although sauntering or exploring was thematic for several pilgrims, the intention of the pilgrim and the significance of the ritual differed substantially from person to person, as did the role of place. We'll reflect on the experience of several pilgrims, seeking commonality and difference, before turning to the question of place and its role in shaping this pilgrim ritual.

Exploring new ground was a key aspect of Fred's experience, and his wandering gained him a sense of congruence with Thoreau as an explorer of uncharted territory. Exploratory wandering was also a key part of Alex's experience of place. Sauntering around Walden allowed him to develop confidence to navigate the natural world on his own, and embodied his longing for independence.

Exploration and discovery were essential to Linda's practice and experience of pilgrimage. She delighted in the multiplicity of trails and was just as likely to slip across

fences in search of a desired encounter as Alex was to slip into Walden the “back way.” Linda noted that her Walden wayfaring was not about “following a journey someone else took,” but creating her own journey.²²⁹ For Thoreau, a “circle of ten miles radius,” was sufficient for a life-time of sauntering.²³⁰ For Linda, Walden seemed to be enough. No matter how many times she walked a path in her ten years of almost daily visits, Walden was always new, “forever a world that’s infinite.”²³¹

Brad’s pilgrimage was also marked by continual exploration and discovery, but he preferred to continually move on to new territory. His pilgrimage developed into a ritual of exploration whose aim was the rediscovery of all-but-forgotten places. But once a site had been “recovered from the past,” Brad felt his work was done and he moved on to the “next unknown site of pilgrimage.”²³²

Pilgrim practices of sauntering had in common a spirit of independent action in the face of the unknown, and some pilgrims revealed strong parallels between inward and outward movement. The ritual of sauntering had distinct meanings for different pilgrims, including the recovery of the past, a way of enacting the life journey, or a process of illuminating the ordinary mysteries of the natural world through human attention and response. Pilgrim intentions influenced their sauntering, but their experiences also revealed that place has a role in moving the pilgrim.

Brad’s pilgrim way of moving was more goal-oriented than most pilgrim sauntering, and covered a wider and more diverse territory. His exploration aimed to find sites that accorded with Thoreau’s recorded life experience. For Brad, the power of place resided in both its spatial characteristics – the coordinates that coincided with Thoreau’s

survey maps, for example – as well as its ability to offer traces of Thoreau. That land can retain the impressions of a long-ago road, allowing the pilgrim to walk Thoreau's route to Walden, is one way that place guided this pilgrim's sauntering. The fact that a Thoreauvian place has been touched primarily by the changes of abandonment and succession, rather than more wholesale anthropogenic disturbances, offered the hope that traces of Thoreau would be only thinly veiled by the passage of time.

For Fred and Alex, Walden's setting in the midst of woods that are criss-crossed with a network of trails influenced the shape of their pilgrimages. This setting provided the physical latitude for their sauntering, as well as landmarks that provided both orientation and meaning. For example, both men found the railroad tracks a significant marker. To Fred, the railroad tracks afforded a permeable boundary that demarcated the populous places near the Pond from the wild places beyond. For Alex, the tracks provided an alternate pathway to Walden, offering an unsupervised way into the park as well as an important landmark. As a young child, Alex had learned that, if lost, he would eventually find "either the railroad tracks or the bath house."²³³ The physical and cultural attributes of Walden made it a safe place to saunter, and a good place to learn one's way in the woods.

Walden's landscape fostered Linda's sauntering by its provision of multiple trails. She loved to "find her own private trails through everything."²³⁴ Both place and perception contributed to Linda's sense of the richness and infinitude of Walden. Just as she was open to discovery, Walden was rich in material to meet her desire. A biodiversity more than adequate to her burgeoning knowledge of the natural world was

amplified by New England's seasonal changes, as well as by the diurnal changes of land and sky.

For Fred, Alex and Linda, the power of place to move the pilgrim was evident in the importance of sauntering in their experience of pilgrimage. The wooded and expansive quality of the landscape provided enough territory to explore in solitude. Well-worn yet unmarked trails, with frequent turnings and crossing, allowed pilgrims to move forward readily yet still depend on and develop their sense of wayfinding. Key features, such as the Pond itself and the railroad tracks, provided anchors to help pilgrims stay oriented, or become reoriented when they wandered beyond familiar territory.

Reflections on Ritual

In this discussion of pilgrim movement within Walden, we've touched on three ways that place elicits a pilgrim response. The cairn, the Pond, and the woods each host a particular kind of pilgrim ritual. The cairn at the House Site is a locus of intention and improvisation, where Thoreauvian pilgrims might pay homage through the addition of a stone to his memorial, and discover they are part of a broader community and tradition. The Pond offers the possibility of circumambulation, contributing to pilgrim's sense of having come full circle. And the extensive landscape surrounding Walden Pond, with its woods and trails, provides ample opportunity for the pilgrim to enact a kind of Thoreauvian sauntering.

However, to describe these patterns of movement as ritual may be premature or inaccurate. The term "ritual" is associated with both formal ceremony and the development of routine. This word can be defined in two ways: as symbolic action

within an interpretive community; or as the habitual motion of someone repeating familiar tasks.²³⁵ The solitary and exploratory nature of many Walden pilgrimages suggests that pilgrim actions may lie outside this dual understanding of ritual. Pilgrim movement at Walden may *become* ritual in the traditional sense when pilgrims come with groups or guides who model Walden traditions, such as placing a stone on the cairn or walking clockwise around the Pond, or when returning pilgrims develop habitual patterns of movement. Pilgrim stories reveal a tentative and emergent quality to their actions that differs markedly from the sure and sometimes unreflective steps of ritual.

There are deeper concerns with the use of the term “ritual” as a way to describe and understand Walden pilgrimage. Catherine Bell reminds us, in her critical analysis of ritual theory, that ritual has been traditionally understood by anthropologists as a symbolic act that encodes some prior meaning.²³⁶ The *activity* of ritual is thereby considered to be secondary to the *meanings* that it supposedly encodes. To consider a pilgrim’s behavior at a shrine as ritual might therefore suggest that the understanding of the pilgrim precedes and directs the movement of the pilgrim. From this perspective, the meaning that the pilgrim makes of Walden is prior to and determines the pilgrim’s actions. In this kind of analysis, place is left as the receptacle of the action and the meaning that the pilgrim brings to it.

But in my own experience as a Walden pilgrim, and in the stories of other pilgrims’ experience of this place, it was more often our spontaneous activity in response to place that led to a contemplation of the meaning of our movements. It was only through reflection on our actions in the Walden landscape that we realized their

significance and came to understand their meaning. If ritual is a kind of performance, one that enacts the meaning of a script, then pilgrim movements through Walden may be better described as improvisation. Place is a partner in the performance, eliciting pilgrim response, so that even the solitary sojourner is a participant with something beyond herself. At Walden, pilgrim ritual is not primarily the performance of prescribed actions, but personal, improvisational activity through which the power of place, and perhaps the hidden questions and desires of our pilgrim souls, are revealed.

We set out at the beginning of this chapter to explore the phenomenology of Walden pilgrimage through a consideration of three ways that people move with respect to place, three ways that pilgrims move in relation to Walden. In addition to the pilgrim journey – movement toward place; and pilgrim improvisation of ritual – movement within place; we have to attend to pilgrim stopping places.

Stillness

At the heart of pilgrimage may come a moment when movement ceases, or time stands still. After journeying to the place of pilgrimage and circling the shrine, the pilgrim kneels in homage or sits in contemplation. Or perhaps the moment occurs not as part of a ritual, but in an unplanned turning aside from the tour or the ceremony. In the face of a local child, the sight of a sunrise over the temple, or in the synesthesia of sounds, smells and textures, a pilgrim makes a connection with history, sees the embodiment of an ideal, or encounters the Divine. This moment may stand in the pilgrim's memory long after the details of the place or journey have faded.

For Don, the moment came as he stood on the beach and gazed out across the Pond. For DJ, it was the touching of her lips to Thoreau's flute. For Tom, it was sitting atop Fairhaven Cliff, one of Thoreau's favorite haunts.²³⁷ For Brian, it was the sense of seeing Walden through Thoreau's eyes. Linda found moments of connection when she looked through the lens of her camera; Brad, when he worked with Thoreau's manuscripts.

If the place of pilgrimage has the power to move us, then it also has the power to stop us in our tracks. Anne McAffrey suggests that pilgrimage includes intention, attention and connection.²³⁸ Stillness is that aspect of the pilgrim experience when connection is sought or found. For some pilgrims, the power of place to stop them in their tracks and to elicit that sense of connection remains at the heart of their experience of Walden. For others, the connections they sought were found less in the landscape than through Thoreau's material artifacts. What do the stopping places of pilgrims tell us about their experiences of Walden? And how is the power of place evident in these experiences of connection, disconnection and redirection?

Tom's ritual circumambulation of Walden was made at a time of low water. Drought had resulted in the closure of the swimming facilities, and the Pond was ringed by a broad sand beach. As he was walking and waxing lyrical about Thoreau and the place, his companion paused to point out a structure that he sarcastically called "the Henry David Thoreau Memorial Bath-house" which had come into sight on the far side of the Pond.²³⁹ The encounter with this large and incongruous structure brought Tom to a halt. Although he had been imagining himself walking in Thoreau's footsteps, he was

suddenly reminded that he was in just another New England town. This encounter stopped him in place through an experience of disconnection, one that “let the air out [his] Transcendentalist balloon.”²⁴⁰

Brian had a similar experience of disconnection, and for the same reason. While “being pulled into” a sense of reverie in which he felt himself both present at the Pond, and present with Thoreau, he too caught sight of the same bath-house. The intrusion of the contemporary structure “shocked” him out of his reverie, and it was only when he moved past the structure and was able to put it out of his mind, that he was able to resume his walking reverie. The connection with the past and with Thoreau’s text that these pilgrims were making was brought up short by the incongruity of an intrusive modern structure in what they had initially experienced as Thoreau’s landscape.

In some cases, the incongruity of present and past stops the pilgrim in place. But a contrast between expectation and reality can also deter or redirect the pilgrim. Fred’s and Brad’s respective disappointments at the House Site gave them pause, but also resulted in a redirection of their movements and intentions. Each eventually moved away from the House Site, just as Brian put the bath-house behind him and continued his journey.

Disappointments and incongruities at the place of pilgrimage can be experienced as obstacles to overcome, or as obstacles to pilgrimage. Sometimes the noise and crowds of the Pond can stop an intended pilgrimage before it even begins. Writer Ann Zwinger, at one time active in the leadership of the Thoreau Society, had her desire to walk out to

the House Site one July afternoon quenched by the noise and crowds on the beach. She turned back, and never attempted another visit.²⁴¹

Some pilgrims were slowed or stopped by a sense of dismay or disconnection, but the power of place to make the pilgrim pause can also be associated with a deep or memorable experience of connection. When Don went to Walden, the place took his breath away. Although he was outwardly still, inwardly Don was “totally moved,” finding himself breathless and speechless, yet flooded with feeling. “At the heart of what moved” Don was a “moral connection,” the connection between his reading of Walden, his ideas about Thoreau, and Don’s own involvement in environmental work.²⁴² Contributing to his experience of connection was the “gathering power” of Walden, its ability to bring together Don’s past and present involvement with the environment, and to conjoin the inspiration brought about through Thoreau’s work and through places of natural beauty.²⁴³

This gathering power of Walden was evident as well in Fred’s experience of stillness and connection. Having explored the woods across the railroad tracks after their disappointment at the House Site, Fred and his pilgrim companion came upon the Andromeda Ponds. It was in this “place of genuine engagement” that Fred found “a deep sense of connection to the wildness of that place” and where he felt “blessed with the presence of Thoreau.”²⁴⁴

To what do we ascribe the power of a place to engage the pilgrim, luring him off the path, moving him inwardly even as he pauses outwardly? Authenticity and surprise each played a role in Fred’s experience, as did an undefined “something beyond.” At the

Andromeda Ponds, authenticity was established by the historical fact of Thoreau's acquaintance with the site, and reinforced by the congruence of Thoreau's words with Fred's experience of "sunlight shining through the red leaves."²⁴⁵ Fred also acknowledged that his experience of connection at the Andromeda Ponds would not have been so powerful had he not first gone to House Site "with the intention of honoring Thoreau there." Fred reflected that he "needed to be surprised" by something he wasn't expecting "in order to move to that deeper place." Yet there was more to the power of the Andromeda Ponds in Fred's experience than either authenticity or surprise, something "apart from the place of Walden itself" that brought about his experience of connection.

What is it about this particular place that moved Fred to the place of genuine engagement? Both place and pilgrim seemed to play a role here. The pilgrim's posture at the place of connection is receptive and reflective. In his story of connection, Fred noted the stance of sitting there "in silence" and solitude, "apart from other people" that prefaced his experience of engagement. But the place itself had qualities that elicited, enforced and expanded on the pilgrim desire for a place apart. The topography was conducive to stopping, and the rich texture of the place was inviting. The Andromeda Ponds are shrub swamps in the shallow water at the bottom of two linear kettle ponds. The steep sides of these depressions form a kind of natural amphitheater, and lend a feeling of enclosure to the pilgrim who descends from the path to get a closer look. The rich mosaic of vegetation was highlighted by the sounds and colors of spring, in particular the chorusing tree frogs, or spring peepers, whose music "pulsed" in the pilgrim's ears. The pilgrim was physically embraced by the setting, and encircled by the

sights and sounds of nature. Perhaps what stops the pilgrim in his tracks also brings him to his senses.

To inquire further into the power of place to draw the pilgrim to a halt, and to foster stillness and connection, we may do well do consider Linda's experience. As a Walden regular, Linda is drawn to Walden by the contemporary rather than the historical characteristics of the place. She did not see herself as a follower in Thoreau's footsteps, and she had avoided reading about others' experiences of Walden in order to foster her own sense of place. What Linda sought at Walden was not colored by a reading of Walden or a desire for connection with Thoreau.

Like Fred, Linda's experiences of connection seemed to spring from both her own actions and expectations, and the surprises that arose in the course of her wandering. A key aspect of Linda's sense of participation at Walden was the practice of photography. She experienced the camera as an extension of herself that allowed her to capture and hold those moments of connection. For Linda, walking, looking and photographing were not acts of distanced observation, but rituals of encounter and connection. She described these encounters as euphoric experiences of communion during which she lost all sense of everything else.

Not only did Linda find communion at Walden, but it was here that she also came home to herself. The sense of connection included an integration of her inner and outer self that contrasted with a lifelong sense of disconnection, of being a distanced observer of life. At Walden, her inner focus and outward focus were conjoined. She experienced

an internal stillness in which the movement between “how she is in the world, and who she is inside” came to a halt.²⁴⁶

Linda brought to her encounters at Walden the expectation of discovery and the conviction that everything she encountered at Walden held beauty. But there was more to her experience of Walden than the openness to encounter she brought. There was also a rich sense of reciprocity woven through her experience of place. Walden and its inhabitants seemed to her, and sometimes to others observing her, to respond to her presence. Not only was she able to approach things very closely, but she spent little time setting up her photographs. The place and its inhabitants seem to be in perfect readiness for her. She experienced Walden as meeting her desire for it, being “just the way I want it, immediately.” Linda described this feeling of reciprocity as a “kind of fullness that’s circular,” a participation in an exchange of giving and receiving.²⁴⁷

Language for this pilgrim experience of stillness, and the power of place to elicit a sense of connection to something beyond – or within – ourselves, is suggested by another student of sacred space, Belden Lane. In Landscapes of the Sacred, Lane considers his own experience of place, developing four “axioms” for the study of sacred space. In this work sacred space is interpreted in broadly spiritual terms as place experiences which produce moments of clarity or insight. The outcome of Lane’s phenomenological approach to sacred space echoes and affirms the stories of some of these Walden pilgrims.

Lane’s first axiom states that “sacred place is not chosen, it chooses.”²⁴⁸ Through this axiom, Lane suggests that the place and moment of encounter cannot be planned or

predicted, even though the pilgrim is seeking and receptive to encounter. To say that the sacred place has choice, is another way to affirm what Fred described as being surprised by place, or what Linda experienced as unpredictable encounters. By affirming “the independence of the holy,” this axiom counters the presumption that sacred experience is a matter of human arrangement, where place is merely the passive recipient of our desires.²⁴⁹

Lane also proposes that “sacred place is ordinary place, ritually made extraordinary.”²⁵⁰ This axiom suggests that there is more than the power of place at work in the experience of sacred space. Place may have historical connections, hold out a rich invitation to our senses, or afford a desirable stopping place. But the pilgrim’s actions also matter. The ritual of waiting, and perhaps even more so, the ritual of response – a willingness to plunge in – were ritual acts elicited in place that contributed to my own sacred experience at the Pond. What makes sacred place extraordinary is not its spectacular setting nor its special designation, but the sanctification through ritual in a particular moment.

That “sacred place can be tread upon without being entered” is the third of Lane’s axioms.²⁵¹ Here he asserts that sacred space is “existentially, not ontologically discerned.”²⁵² In this way of defining sacred space, it is our experience of place that matters. The boundaries of sacred places, in time and space, are permeable and ephemeral. Others may come to sit by the Andromeda Ponds, or see a scarlet tanager against the wet, green pine boughs, without recognizing anything out of the ordinary. I may one day re-enter that special niche and find it no more than a bare rock to hold my

gear while I take a quick swim. This axiom offers the possibility of co-existence, rather than a contest of claims about meaning. The swimmer at the beach and the pilgrim on the shore may encounter different places in the very same space. This axiom suggests the resistance of sacred place to desecration, and evokes the possibility that all places are potentially sacred spaces.

Finally, Lane offers the notion that “the impulse of sacred place is both centripetal and centrifugal, local and universal.” Here, he affirms the emotive power of place, and reminds the pilgrim that ultimately movement, not stasis, characterizes the experience of sacred place. Place has the power to draw us in, as well as to send us forth. The pilgrim does not stay put, but returns to her home and to the larger community. Fred went on to write an essay about his Walden pilgrimage, and to teach nature writing. Linda exhibited her photographs of Walden, hoping to “help people go there with their eyes open.”

Pilgrim stories of stillness and connection suggest a responsiveness of place to pilgrim, and pilgrim to place. What the place presents to the pilgrim is not always what the pilgrim expects. Like other pilgrims, I had anticipated that the heart of my pilgrim experience would coincide with the House Site. Instead, by turning aside for a moment of reflection before reaching the site, and in responding to the call of the water, I came into the heart of my pilgrimage. One more aspect of the power of place is the possibility of finding holy ground even in ordinary spaces, the power to loosen the boundaries we set between the sacred and the profane. Place has the power to shift the inner as well as the outer geography in these moments of stillness. We connect not only with something beyond us – the patient labor of a snapping turtle, the presence of Thoreau, the cold

embrace of clear water - but through that embodied outward experience we make a kind of connection within. In these moments of stillness, when the chorus of other voices is silenced, when we are awakened to our senses, when we affirm the rightness of our desires, we come home to ourselves.

Reflection

The purpose of this chapter was to recollect the power of place through an exploration of the experience of sacred space. In the previous chapter, we revealed something of the cultural construction of sacred space at Walden through a consideration of ritual and interpretive activities, and struggle over the meaning and purpose of the place. By limiting our exploration to an approach that seeks to expose human agency as the power at the heart of Walden's sacred space, we risk losing a sense of the power of place itself. Although the cultural model provided helpful concepts through which to understand the power politics of place, it lacks a language that allows us to attend to the voice of place itself. By turning to a phenomenological approach, we are able to recollect a sense of the power of place by means of a focus on the lived experience of sacred space as it emerges through pilgrim's stories.

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that the power of place might be approached in a phenomenological sense through attention to Edward Casey's concepts of the emotive power of place and the gathering power of place. Our exploration of the theme of journey, ritual, and stillness revealed something of the power of place to move the pilgrim. We addressed three questions through the wealth and particularity of these

pilgrims' experiences of Walden: What draws the pilgrim to place? What moves the pilgrim in place? What stops the pilgrim in place?

The rich theme of journey, ritual and stillness that guided this exploration of the poetics of pilgrimage drew largely on the embodied experience of place. Pilgrim journeys revealed a variety of motivations for the journey, from desire for a closer connection with Thoreau, to testing the promise and possibility inherent in Thoreau's words and actions, to the desire for personal growth or physical healing through interaction with the place. Pilgrim stories also suggested the important place of pilgrimage in the life journey of the pilgrim. The imagination of the pilgrim, in relation to Thoreau's life and writing, played a key role in pilgrims' motivations. But qualities of place are also a factor, especially moving to some pilgrims for whom Walden promised water, wilderness, and a chance to be challenged or changed.

My own experiences and the experience of other Walden pilgrims highlighted the cairn, the Pond, and the paths at Walden as loci of pilgrim ways of moving within place. We discerned a creative and collaborative aspect to pilgrim actions, a blend of intention and innovation that points to the important role of place. In the absence of a received tradition or an active community of Walden pilgrimage, the place itself worked with – or against – pilgrim intentions to shape their movements at Walden.

The experience of connection also recurs in this theme of pilgrimage. Experiences of connection and disconnection were often marked or spoken about as a pause in the pilgrim's progress. The role of place was evident here as well. Moments of stillness were spurred by encounters with some feature of the place, like the color of the water or

the sight of the bath-house. Connection/disconnection was also provoked by the sensory texture of the place: the vibrant sound of spring peepers or the noise of a crowded beach.

Though less explicit in our inquiry into pilgrim ways of moving, we also learned something of the gathering power of Walden in relation to community and connection. Just as “ritual” may be an inappropriate term for the improvisational character of many pilgrims’ responses to Walden, so “community” seems too definite a word to describe Walden pilgrims as a collective. Individual expression and independent action are themes in Thoreau’s life and work that many pilgrims aspire to achieve or emulate. And pilgrims most often come singly, from all different directions, and at any season of the year. There is no one purpose, place of origin, mode of travel, or festive day that unites them. Walden is perhaps best represented here by the memorial cairn, a strong link between the lives and stories of these pilgrims. Enduring for a century and half, embodying the actions of its many pilgrims, and signifying – even for the lone visitor who comes when no one else is present – the long history of visitors to this place, the cairn is a gathering place for these traces of the pilgrim community.

The gathering power of place was also evident in some pilgrims’ experiences of connection. For me, the Pond evoked childhood memories through the sounds of swimmers and the odors of fresh water, resonated with the symbolism and practices of my religious tradition, and recalled Thoreau’s potent phrases about the significance of this deep well. For others, the place gathered Thoreau’s spirit, ethos and heritage with memories of reading his work, and commitments to work on behalf of the environment. Walden’s gathering power is also evident in the way that pilgrims discover the

coincidence of Thoreau and Walden in this place, a theme of pilgrimage that comprises the focus of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6

THE PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE:
PERSON, PLACE AND TEXTPrelude

The longer arc of the Pond is still before me as I continue around the Pond in a counter-clockwise course. Although this bearing does not follow the usual pilgrim tradition, I suspect it is more appropriate for someone following Thoreau. In Walden, he railed against the trains and factories whose urgent timetables raised the clock to prominence in households and town squares. His time in the woods ran counter to clockwise time, an intentional pause set against the unrelenting rhythm of the machine. Thoreau, I imagine, had no clock here at Walden.

I hear the hum of an approaching train, and then the silver cars with the purple logo of the commuter line stream past. The straight line of the gravel-embedded track stands in contrast to the meandering course I am on. Near this cove, the tracks run tangent to the broad oval of water, their level grade standing some twenty feet above the shore. The train's progress is measured in linear terms. But on the winding path it is difficult to measure distance, to know where I am in my journey, or to assess my position with respect to the whole.

Why finish the circle? An about face would bring me back to my starting point in less time, and over familiar ground. But walking around the Pond offers a sense of ritual closure, and the movement acknowledges the water's centrality in my experience of

Walden. The circuit allows me to embody a sense of the scale of the Pond, and to affirm the power of its presence. And perhaps it is my gift in response to this place. Earlier Christians “beat the bounds” of their parishes to demarcate their sacred space and seek a blessing on their fields.²⁵³ May my steps mark a circle of blessing here, containing this place within the embrace of my movement.

My path emerges from the woods onto a broad lawn bisected above the boat ramp. Across the busy street is a small parking area next to a modest house with gray clapboards, white trim, and two front doors. The door on the left leads to the Park Headquarters, the door on the right opens into the Thoreau Society’s bookstore. Inside the shop I find shelves of books and T-shirts, both chock full of Thoreau’s words and wisdom, enough pithy quotations to overflow onto bumper stickers, hats and mugs. Any shrine worth its salt sells mementos and souvenirs for the faithful to contribute to the upkeep of the enterprise, and to acquire tokens of their devotion for display. Here I can buy the insignia that might identify me as a Walden pilgrim. In the end I leave for home without anything money can buy, only the rude gleanings of my walk: a bottle filled from the Pond, a few pine needles caught in the pages of my journal, the sand between my toes, and one small stone.

Introduction

Like the house with two front doors, the aim of this chapter is to bring together two approaches to Walden under a common roof. So far in our study of this place of pilgrimage, we have taken each approach in turn, devoting one chapter to the politics of place and one to the poetics of pilgrimage. In the earlier chapter, our consideration of the

ways that sacred space has been produced and reproduced at Walden through ritual, interpretation and negotiation allowed us to step away from potentially naïve assumptions about Walden's status as sacred space. In its emphasis on the role of cultural labor, this deconstructive approach allowed us to see Walden as a place where the changing landscape reflects the intentional shaping of the site in accordance with social trends and political agendas. These insights relieved us of any latent misperception concerning the "naturalness" or continuity connecting Thoreau's Walden with the place as we see it today.

In the subsequent chapter, we adopted a second approach to understanding Walden's sacred geography, one that drew on the lived experience of the place as understood from the stories of Walden pilgrims. We sought to discover the sacred place as it was experienced by individuals, rather than as constructed by cultural labors. We learned that Walden has the power to move the pilgrim, both outwardly and inwardly. Pilgrim responses were shaped both by the place and by the intentions of each pilgrim. Personal and powerful experiences of surprise, discovery, and connection revealed that there is more to Walden than what pilgrims bring with them.

In addition to the primary goal of exploring the sacred geography of Walden through the perspective of pilgrimage, we began this journey with a methodological challenge: to bring both the politics and poetics of sacred space to bear on the endeavor. Until now, we have developed two rich but distinct readings of place through each approach. In this chapter we will experiment further with these contrasting approaches to understanding Walden's sacred geography by using a common theme to continue our

exploration. The theme of person, place, and text is amenable to reading both the poetics of pilgrimage and the politics of place. Emerging from the pilgrims' stories were thematic experiences that related to seeing or bringing together the person of Thoreau, the text of Walden, and the place of Walden. Their stories correspond with a school of scholarship on the politics of place that identified the triad of person, place, and text as a way to organize pilgrimage studies.²⁵⁴

This chapter brings into spatial proximity two distinct ventures, the poetics and politics of place, for which the primary common ground is Walden. The common theme of person, place and text will be addressed in relation to the poetics of place through the experience of pilgrims, and in relation to the politics of place through the role of the “gatekeepers,” those who interpret and manage the site. The process of exploring the poetics and politics of place conjointly will move us toward an understanding of the differences and inter-connections of these two approaches.

Person, Place and Text

The most consistent theme in the pilgrim stories was the connections of person, place and text. Running through the poetic experience of place were accounts of connections that pilgrims discovered, revealed or made between the person of Thoreau, the text of Walden, and the place of pilgrimage. For the pilgrim, the *text* includes Thoreau's own words, including but not limited to Walden. The *person* is a living Thoreau, the Thoreau who dwelt at Walden and whose spirit may yet reside there, and with whom the possibility of connection is open. The *place* includes not only the land

around Walden Pond, but is continuous with a sacred landscape that extends to other sacred or Thoreauvian places.

The idea of person, place and text as an approach to the study of pilgrimage places has also been suggested in the introduction by John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow to Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage.²⁵⁵ The pilgrimage studies that are drawn together this volume, as the title suggests, highlight the politics of place, emphasizing difference in the pilgrim experience and suggesting three types of pilgrimage places. Person-centered pilgrimage is focused on a holy person, living or dead. Place-centered pilgrimage is centered on the “locations which most strongly evoke” the spirit of the deceased saint.²⁵⁶ In textual pilgrimage, the goal of the pilgrim is less about connection to a particular place than the retelling or re-enactment of a special story. Although Eade and Sallnow recommended the “coordinates” of person, place and text for approaching the study of pilgrimage in scripturally based religious traditions, they are particularly appropriate for our study, given the integral role of Thoreau’s life and writing with Walden’s origin and history as a place of pilgrimage.

In relation to the gatekeepers, we’ll consider the *person* to be the historical Thoreau, one feature among several desirable/problematic resources that must be understood and interpreted in order to be efficiently managed. The place is the bounded property of the state reservation, in contrast with of the assertions of other interested parties concerning boundaries for ‘the place of Thoreau’ and ‘Walden.’ The *text* here is not Thoreau’s writing, but the work of cultural inscription, the text that is received and written in/on place through structures, signs, and interpretive programs.

In addition to the theme of person, place and text, Eade's and Sallnow's work guided other developments in my understanding of the themes in this chapter. John Eade's work on Lourdes, a traditional site of Christian Marian pilgrimage, drew my attention to the role and perspective of influential non-pilgrims on the pilgrim experience.²⁵⁷ His study highlights the difference between pilgrim expectations for use of the shrine, and the uses sanctioned by the institution. Eade's focus on lay helpers who mediate between disabled pilgrims and the "cult hierarchy" calls attention to role of those who organize and run the shrine in the interpretation of its meaning and its rituals.²⁵⁸ As a result, I began to look more carefully at the role of Walden's "gatekeepers," those who manage access to the site and guide the interpretive programs for visitors.

Two other studies in Contesting the Sacred suggested to me that the poetic experience of person, place and text might also be contextualized within, or overflow into, the politics of place. Glenn Bowman's study of Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem illustrates just how different pilgrim behavior can be, in spite of a common Biblical text.²⁵⁹ Bowman's examples show that pilgrim goals at this traditional place run the gamut from the poetics of personal spiritual renewal, to the social rite of passage, to action for political change evident in the Christian Zionist expression he studied.

Christopher McKevitt introduced to me a new conception of pilgrimage, one in which the pilgrim not only journeys to place, but takes up residence there. His work on the shrine of Padre Pio focuses on the divergent geographies of San Giovanni Rotondo as perceived by these immigrant pilgrims and the native residents.²⁶⁰ The roles of non-

pilgrim others in the use and interpretation of places of pilgrimage, the extensive variety and potentially political nature of some pilgrimages, and the tensions between pilgrim and local ideas of sacred geography are themes of religious pilgrimage that are also evident in my reading of *Walden*.

Person, Place, and Text in the Poetics of Pilgrimage

One cluster of themes that emerged in reading the pilgrim stories was the pilgrim's own role in discerning or developing connections between the place as they began to explore it, the text of *Walden* as they knew it, and the man as they understood him. Pilgrims brought text to place, reading or remembering passages from *Walden* at relevant sites. The place suggested the text and the man to the pilgrim, through sights suggestive of passages in the book, or through more general similarities with Thoreau's experience, such as walking in the wooded landscape. Some of the most disturbing moments for pilgrims occurred when their experience of the place stood in contradiction to the text, or to what a pilgrim had imagined based on reading the text.

In the first part of this chapter, we'll consider several pilgrim stories in greater detail in order to explore the poetics of pilgrimage through the theme of person, place, and text. The three examples that follow emphasize a variation in emphasis from a primary interest with the historical person of Thoreau, to a concern for the moral truth of Thoreau's message, to a transformative personal connection with the place itself. These differences will bring us to question the relative roles of the pilgrim and the place in shaping the experience of pilgrimage. A fourth example of the pilgrim experience of

person, place and text, one that suggests the symbolic power of place, will move us to revisit the boundary between the poetics of pilgrimage and the politics of place.

Seeking Thoreau: Recontextualization and Reconstruction

Brad's pilgrimage becomes a quest for connection with Thoreau as the focus of his interest shifts from "the valuing of Thoreau's work to a valuing of the man" himself.²⁶¹ Thoreau's manuscripts are central to Brad's interest in the landscape; through the written material he finds the sense of connection with Thoreau that he seeks. Place becomes important in relation to texts. Through acts of "recontextualization," Brad reunites places and texts to find greater satisfaction in his experience of Thoreauvian places. But it is through "reconstruction," the tracing of Thoreau's thinking and writing processes by a realignment of related texts, that he comes closest to feeling connected with Thoreau. Through both of these endeavors, recontextualization of places and reconstruction of the textual landscape, Brad puts himself in the place of Thoreau.

Brad's interest in place is oriented around bringing text together with place in order to establish and affirm the historical context of a site. Recontextualization involves finding mention of a place through manuscript research, then seeking that place in the landscape. The connection between place and text is made through a personal visit and perhaps re-enactment, such as walking where Thoreau walked or seeing plants that Thoreau had noted in his journal. For Brad, pilgrimage involves not just knowing where these sites are, but understanding what they were like in Thoreau's day. To this pilgrim, the experience of place is most powerful when the place is "freighted with lots of context," and supported by historical connections to Thoreau.

Connecting physical places and textual references is one aspect of Brad's pilgrimage. But at various scales, the physical landscape of both place and text is also subject to intense exploration. At Walden, Brad seeks impressions in the ground that provide clues to the location of a former pathway used by Thoreau. In a textual version of this detailed tracking, Brad takes note of minute physical details in Thoreau's manuscripts, such as pin perforations in the margins, as a way to reconstruct Thoreau's writing process. In his "manuscript work," Brad brings together multiple resources that allow him to track the source of Thoreau's journal entries or the development of his lectures. As with the recontextualization of sites, this textual aspect of the pilgrim process also includes a bringing together of what had been separated by time and space, and produces Brad's most intimate experiences of connection with Thoreau.

Brad exemplifies the bringing together of person, place and text by using text to illuminate the significance of place; and drawing on both place and text to create a detailed knowledge of Thoreau's work. The person of Thoreau takes precedence in this pilgrim's quest, as Brad seeks a sense of connection through familiarity with both the habits and habitats of the historical Thoreau. Although texts are a valued and critical tool in Brad's search for Thoreau, both place and text are subservient to the goal of connection with the man himself.

Seeking Truth: Reflection, Reminiscence and Reverie

Brian's quest centers on the moral ground that Thoreau outlined in his texts. It is motivated by a need to test the Thoreau's trustworthiness, in order to validate and substantiate his message. As Brian seeks to "stand where Thoreau stood" and "walk

where Thoreau walked,” Walden serves as both a guide and litmus test in the course of his pilgrimage.²⁶² Thoreau’s words are at the heart of the journey, but the actions of bringing place and text together define the core of the experience. Reflection is one way in which the pilgrim brings together place and text. Reflection is an intentional act of the pilgrim, and involves putting himself in place and then considering the author’s accounts of that place. For Brian, the House Site is a place of reflection, in which he actively recalls passages that pertain to Thoreau’s descriptions of gathering materials and building the cabin. In a landscape that no longer includes Thoreau’s house or his bean field, Brian attempts to orient himself with respect to both.

In addition to purposeful recall and reflection, Brian also experiences the pull of place in eliciting connections with Thoreau’s text. As he walks around the Pond, various sights and sounds bring to mind particular passages from *Walden*. Qualities of the landscape which are reminiscent of Thoreau’s own experience become more striking and memorable to the pilgrim. To “reminisce” is to allow the place to suggest connection with the text – rather than to choose the texts for reflection. At *Walden*, the passage of a train, the sight of a loon, and the blue-green color of the water are experiences of place that connect Brian with Thoreau through reminiscence.

Brian uses the word “reverie” to describe his sense of being in two worlds at once, physically present to the *Walden* of an October day in 1960s while imaginatively present to Thoreau’s *Walden* of the 1840s. In reverie, the two worlds are conjoined through the pilgrim, whose physical senses are tuned to place and whose sense of place is informed by the text. The experiences of reflection, reminiscence and reverie that describe the way

this pilgrim brought, or found, a connection between place and text also lead back to Thoreau. Finding links between his own experience of Walden and the testimony of Thoreau allow Brian to substantiate the integrity and honesty of the author.

Although specific sights, sounds and events that connect place and text are integral to Brian's affirmation of Thoreau, his interest in the text is more over-arching and less concerned with historical detail than Brad's. Brian is more concerned with Thoreau's ideals of self-reliance and living by one's own principles, and in testing out the fabric of Thoreau's integration of these values. To Brian, Walden is a landscape that has come to embody these ideals rather than an artifact that confirms a manuscript. Now when Brian returns to Concord, his swim in Walden Pond is a way of re-immersing himself in these values, reminding himself of what he already knows. And he also seeks and enjoys the company of fellow Thoreauvians, people who have "incorporated some of Henry into their lives."²⁶³ The connections he makes between person, place and text reflect concern with the broad truths of living, rather than the factual evidence of history.

Seeking Communion: Communication and Connection

Brad's story focuses on the centrality of the person of Thoreau in his pilgrimage, while revealing the important roles of place and text in his quest to know the man. To Brian, Thoreau's message and its implications for his own philosophy of life and moral decision-making are central. Through journeying to Walden and finding congruence between the place and the text, Brian is able to substantiate the validity of the message and the messenger. But Linda's experience has a significant difference from that of these

two pilgrims. Thoreau is not a motivation for her coming to Walden, nor is his writing directly significant to her experience there.

In Linda's experience, the place itself is central. At Walden, she finds a deeper acceptance of both life and death, the vitality of a world that always new, and a sense of communion and connection that goes beyond peace and serenity. Walden becomes for her a place of unending wonder, universal acceptance and inexhaustible renewal. Although Linda seeks connections with others through her encounters with the plant and animal inhabitants of Walden, and knows some of the other Walden "regulars," her primary connection with the place is intensely personal. It isn't Thoreau that she connects with at Walden, but herself.

Linda had felt like a distanced observer of her own life until Walden, where she is able to lay to rest the ubiquitous narrator and experience the conjoining of her inner and outer energies. At Walden, there is no separation between the person she is "in the world" and the person she is inside. There is no place where Linda feels more at home, a sense of intimacy with place that she describes as a "connected solitude."²⁶⁴

And Linda has less interest in Thoreau's stories about his Walden experience than she does in having and sharing her own. Although she has purchased books about Walden, including Thoreau's, she has "purposely not read them," desiring to create her own journey rather than follow in another's footsteps. Instead of connecting Thoreau's text with her experience of this place, she creates her own text. Through her photographs, which have been exhibited at Walden, she seeks to show the possibilities of this place to

others. For Linda, taking photographs is both a way of seeing that fosters her connection with place, and way to speak to others about her own love for Walden.

Less interested in Thoreau than other pilgrims, Linda is in many ways the most like Thoreau in her relationship to Walden. Like Thoreau, she finds Walden a complete cosmos, a world that in her experience is infinite. She delights in looking at the world around her from different perspectives, looking at the woods while she swims, walking out and back on the same path, and encouraging others to “look up” to see what is overhead. Although she had little familiarity with the natural world when she began coming to Walden, she “learned about nature through just being in it.” She can tell where and when the trillium blooms, and where mushrooms are pushing their way up through the leaves, the difference between the rustle of a chipmunk and that of a snake, and “what kind of weather brings out certain butterflies.”²⁶⁵ Thoreau-like, she is able to “approach things very closely” and seems to others to have a special ability to get close to Walden’s creatures. For Linda, as for Thoreau, going to Walden is a part of the rhythm of life, the center from which she sojourns.²⁶⁶

Through the stories of three pilgrims, Brad, Brian, and Linda, we read three different ways of bringing person, place and text together at Walden. Brad’s activity as a pilgrim centers on weaving Thoreau’s texts back into place as a way to read and restore its historical significance. Brian seeks connections between Thoreau’s text and his own experience of place in order to affirm the moral integrity of the text. And Linda moves beyond Thoreau and his text to discover herself and her own story in relation to this place.

The Place of Pilgrimage: The Pilgrim Experience

What can we learn about the place of pilgrimage from the experience of these three Walden pilgrims? Places of pilgrimage foster unique connections between the revered person, the holy text and the sacred site. Both place and pilgrim contribute to these connections. In the pilgrim experience, the coincidence of place, text, and person may affirm or revise the pilgrim's notion of all three. The primary emphasis on either person, place or text also varies, and seems to depend on the desire and intent of the pilgrim. The experiences of Walden pilgrims suggest that the place of pilgrimage may serve as an historical site, as a moral landscape, or as a locus of personal transformation.

As an historical site, the place of pilgrimage supports the authentication and re-enactment of former realities through correspondence with historical documents. Here, it is not only the primary pilgrimage text that is important, but other documents that allow for historical triangulation. In Brad's work of recovering and recontextualizing places in the Thoreauvian landscape, it is as often Thoreau's journals or surveys and even the letters of others that lead to new discoveries. The landscape supports the texts by retaining the physical and ecological features that are consistent with this documentation. In this more historical pilgrimage, details of time and place and position are valued. Through establishing or witnessing the material world of the revered person, the pilgrim gains a more intimate sense of connection with the person he reveres.

As a moral landscape, the place of pilgrimage recalls stories that are more than simple accounts of past events, but evoke a broader truth for living. Features in the landscape, such as Walden Pond or the railroad tracks, transcend their ordinary roles as

water bodies or transportation routes. They serve both to connect the text to this landscape, and to testify to the veracity of the stories. The blue-green color of the water is more than an accurate observation of a natural phenomenon that testifies to Thoreau's powers of observation, but a reminder of his insight and the pilgrim's belief about the interpenetration of the material and the spiritual worlds. In visiting the place of pilgrimage, these moral seekers aims less to verify or retrace the historical acts of the revered person than to identify themselves with the values imbued in place.

The place of pilgrimage can also be a place of transformation, a sacred space through which the pilgrim's view of herself and the world around her is radically altered. Places of pilgrimage are also places where the life circumstances of the pilgrim, and the associations of place, may induce an encounter with loss and death, and support the social and personal work of making meaning of life. For Linda, the acceptance of death and the entry into a new life are intimately connected with, and fostered by, the process and the place of pilgrimage.

The experiences of pilgrims show us that places of pilgrimage can hold the characteristics of historical sites, moral landscapes, or thresholds of transformation. But places of pilgrimage can also serve as symbolic landscapes, a pattern suggested by the metaphysical orientation with which another Walden pilgrim connected text and place. Tom was deeply invested in the Transcendentalists years before his first visit to Concord. For this pilgrim, the history of Concord and the lives and work of Concord authors represented a larger story of which Thoreau and Walden were only a part. Tom considered his pilgrimage to be part of a broader philosophical quest, a way to align

himself with symbols in a powerful place with multiple levels of reality. Eventually, Tom relocated to Concord in order to place himself in the “context and proximity” of the symbols, and to experience “an affinity and connectedness” and “oneness with everything.”²⁶⁷ He also became active in local preservation efforts.

For Tom, Concord pilgrimage did not consist of simply associating himself with the power of place, but of actively contributing to the power of place. His real pilgrimage was a life-long effort to make visible and viable the ideal landscape that he understood to be mystically connected to the physical place. Tom’s “work has been to make the real and the actual a kind of continuum,” to identify where the landscape fails to manifest the symbolic ideal and, “where things are out of whack, to see what can be done to improve it.”²⁶⁸

The place of pilgrimage as a symbolic landscape suggests its potential to become an inspirational rallying point for broad issues of national or cultural identity. The Concord landscape, including Walden and Lexington, resonates deeply with many Americans, in part because of its rich history with the nation’s independence and its role in the emergence of an American literary culture. Considered as a symbolic landscape, the ecological fragmentation and commercial degradation of Walden carries more than local significance, with the power to suggest that American values of self-determination or natural heritage were subject to erosion or under attack. Tom hoped that the consequences of such a revelation, mediated by the Thoreau Country Conservation Alliance, would effect changes in contemporary culture at a grass-roots level with respect to a host of core values, care of the environment only one among them.

When the place of pilgrimage serves as a symbolic landscape through the connection of person, place, and text, the boundary between the poetics of pilgrimage and the politics of place begins to dissolve. The pilgrim experience and vision of place become the foundation for active restoration, preservation, and interpretation. In one sense all pilgrims are activists, advocating their ideas and ideals about the place of pilgrimage through the paths they take, the shrines they visit and the stories they tell. But Tom's expression of pilgrimage included intentional participation in local decision-making as a citizen of Concord, and committed grass-roots organizing to raise awareness of the spatial extent and national symbolic value of Walden. Tom's experience suggests that pilgrimage places can serve as symbolic maps that inspire preservation and protection, not only of the places themselves, but of the values and identities that are symbolized by such places. The symbolic landscape can be read as more than the power of place to move the pilgrim, but as a sort of ideological map through which pilgrims seek to gain power for their particular view of reality. Here, the journey of the pilgrim and the agenda of the activist become one and the same.

In this first part of the chapter on person, place and text we've focused our attention of the pilgrim perspective. Our reflections have brought us to a blurry edge of the poetics of pilgrimage, where the politics of place seems to merge with – or emerge from - the pilgrim's passionate ideals. In the next part of the chapter, we'll continue the exploration of person, place, and text by turning to Walden gateways and gatekeepers for insight.

Managing Thoreau: Text, Person, and the Politics of Place

It is a grey summer morning at Walden. The sky is overcast, the air is still and damp, the flat surface of the Pond anticipates rain. A small group of people are gathered under a canopy on the lawn above the beach to sip coffee, sit in metal folding chairs, and listen as a long line of readers take a turn at the podium. I stand and do my part, having been assigned a couple of pages from Thoreau's chapter on "Economy:" "our inventions...are but an improved means to an unimproved end."²⁶⁹ Here at Walden, we are engaged in reading the text of Walden from cover to cover between dawn and dusk.

On July 8, 2004, Walden Pond State Reservation hosted this celebration of the 150th anniversary of the book's publication. Sponsored by the park, the Thoreau Society, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, and Friends of Walden Pond, the event included many who came to listen and well over a hundred invited readers. The list of readers was as broad as it was long, drawing on the willing participation of government officials and local high school students, Thoreau Society officers and Thoreau scholars, artists and film-makers, activists and naturalists, authors, lawyers, retirees and Thoreau enthusiasts. The inclusive event was one instance through which the person of Thoreau and the text of Walden were brought together in place through the intentional work and official action of the park's gatekeepers.

At the same time that Thoreau's work was being celebrated at the shore of the Pond, another effort was being made to bring Thoreau's work to Walden. Eric Eldred seems like a Johnny Appleseed of books. On the morning of July 8, 2004, he was in the Reservation parking lot with his Internet Bookmobile, a vehicle equipped to download,

print and bind books available free through online sources. Eldred thinks of himself as following up on Thoreau's principle of self-reliance, that "you don't need to be dependent on [. . .] a big publisher" to preserve our culture.²⁷⁰ In the spirit of Thoreau, Eldred wanted to participate in the celebration by distributing free copies of Walden to anyone who was interested.

Walden may be popular and copyright-free, but this particular way of bringing the text to place was not welcomed by gatekeepers at the park. Eldred was asked to leave the grounds. Although his vehicle is not much larger than that of the ice cream vendor who regularly sells refreshments in the parking lot, Eldred's undertaking was unwelcome. He did not have a permit, and his activity was considered to be in direct conflict with the official bookstore, a Thoreau Society concession, just yards away. For the gatekeepers at Walden, managing Thoreau involves not only reconnecting Thoreau and his text with the place, but setting limits on who can represent Thoreau, and how his message will be interpreted here.

In the following discussion we'll consider the role of the gatekeeper in bringing person, place, and text together - or in keeping them apart. We'll approach this aspect of the study by considering another key role that people play at the place of pilgrimage, that of the gatekeeper. The term "gatekeeper" is generally used in social science studies to describe the role of a person who aids the researcher in gaining access to a study site or who introduces the researcher to participants. In this study, gatekeepers are people who work at Walden, such as the park supervisor or the manager at the Thoreau Society's onsite bookshop. Although these people did share valuable information and insights with

me through interviews and informal conversations, their role as gatekeepers of a place of pilgrimage means that they have a thorough-going familiarity with the people who visit Walden. Consciously or not, they have become adept at reading the needs and interests of visitors, and have a good sense of who are Thoreauvian pilgrims and who are curious recreational visitors or tourists. Each also has an interpretive role with respect to Walden, and manages a significant set of resources germane to the relationship of person, place, and text.

For the gatekeeper, Thoreau is an historical figure, a potentially problematic resource to be managed in a way that is compatible with Walden's other uses. Although the current management regime has literally brought Thoreau's text to place by housing a bookstore, our focus on the geographics of Walden invites us to look to the ways that Thoreau and his ethos are interpreted in place. We'll consider how Thoreau has been "put in place" at Walden through structures and stories, including interpretive programs; and also note what has been left out or kept out. The aim is to understand Walden as a place of pilgrimage through consideration of the ways that person, place, and text are brought together through the agency of the gatekeepers.

Putting Thoreau in Place

Through the 1970s, the two-story frame house that stands across the street from Walden's beach was home to the park superintendent and his family. It looks like a typical suburban dwelling, with picture windows looking out across the Pond and a wide stairway, now supplemented by a ramp, leading to the entrance. The building still houses the park's gatekeepers, but they are a more diversified lot than the former staff of park

police, maintenance patrols, and summer lifeguards. Like the Thoreau House Replica only a dozen yards away, this structure is an indicator of changes in park management and interpretation over the last twenty-five years, particularly through the institutional collaboration that it represents. The building houses not only the park offices, but a bookshop and art gallery as well.

The bookstore places Thoreau at Walden with more textual substance and scholarly emphasis than the brief write-up available in the park brochure. The place serves as an outlet for Thoreau's own work, including various editions of Walden, the most recent editions of his journals, and other collections of his writing. The shelves also include books about Thoreau, from scholarly works of history and literary criticism to children's picture books. Blank journals are available for those who wish to emulate Thoreau. And the shop sells souvenirs like T-shirts, mugs and postcards; as well as bottled water (not from the Pond).

Although the bookstore is operated by The Thoreau Society, it also serves by default as a Visitor Center. For the Thoreau Society members who converge on Concord for the Annual Gathering every July, and the tourists who arrive by the busload every October, the bookstore at Walden is an obligatory stop. The bookstore's manager, a retired engineer with international sales experience, discerns the needs of the visitors and directs them accordingly. Curious tourists, looking at the large lake across the road, may wonder "where is Walden Pond?" Or they come in to the shop looking for a copy of "On Walden Pond," mistaking Henry Fonda for Henry Thoreau, and Walden for another pond.²⁷¹ This gatekeeper accommodates a range of visitors, from stranded travelers who

want only to phone a garage, to ordinary readers with a considerable interest in Thoreau, to scholars in the international community who are amassing libraries on Thoreau. The bookstore stocks Walden in Japanese, German, French and Spanish; it sends requested material to readers overseas. Some requests are more personal than professional. The manager has even received a rock mailed from Japan, with a plea to place it on Thoreau's cairn. The bookstore is a nexus of text and place, but also a site where Thoreau is interpreted for visitors, scholars, and pilgrims.

The bookstore looks out through one of the picture windows of the gray house, and a small gallery looks out through the other. The Tsongas Gallery is named in honor of Paul Tsongas, the senator whose bid for County Commissioner was energized by the mission to Save Walden Pond. The exhibits of painting, poetry, and photography that come and go in the gallery most often feature nature, either natural places in general, or Walden in particular. The pictures are often landscapes, or detailed compositions of standing trees, fallen leaves, or light on the water. If we think of these images as texts in place, or even texts about place, the Gallery becomes another way in which the park fosters and directs the way that person, place and text are brought together at Walden.

Although some exhibits of visual art tie text to image, associating quotations from Walden with the paintings or photographs, for the most part the images are meant to speak for themselves. Some images suggest Thoreau by their emphasis on visual engagement with the natural world, and by the careful way the artists encourage us to look at what is often overlooked. One feature shared by many of these works of art is the absence of human life or signs of human activity in their renderings of place. In summer

months, these peaceful pictures stand in stark contrast to the lines of impatient motorists queued up outside the locked gates to the parking area, and to the crowded, noisy beach across the street. By offering a vision of Walden and of nature that is less trampled and trammled than what the visitor may experience, these visual texts assert the values of preservation and solitude. Standing close by the park headquarters, perhaps these texts subtly reinforce the policy of visitor limitation.

In this section on person, place, and text in the politics of pilgrimage, we have so far considered the Thoreau Society bookstore as one way that the person and texts of Thoreau have been put in place at Walden, and we have reflected on the bookshop staff in their other role as pilgrim gatekeepers. In addition, we visited the small gallery on the other side of the little gray house, and pondered the role of these exhibits in interpreting Thoreau and his texts in place. There is one more space to visit in this small house.

Keeping Thoreau in Place

Sandwiched in between the bookshop and gallery, and extending onto the second floor, are the offices of the park staff. The configuration of state park employees is significantly different from that of Walden's 1950s heyday under county management, when dozens of seasonal lifeguards made up a good part of the staff.²⁷² In 1992, about the time the bookstore opened at Walden, the first Visitor Services position was filled. In addition to permitting and policing park visitors, the park staff now offers educational and interpretive programs, including a range of offerings that focus on Walden's association with Thoreau. Programs for school children may include visiting the House Replica, a walk to the House Site, and time to find a quiet place by Thoreau's Cove and

write in their own journals. On some occasions, visitors even find a Thoreau re-enactor at home in the Replica and ready to engage in conversation by the fireside.

Dressed in period costume and sitting by the woodstove in the House Replica, a man with long sideburns and a well-trimmed beard looks up from his journal. Richard Smith is an historian, actor, and interpreter whose work brings Thoreau to life for park visitors at least once a month. He reads passages from *Walden*, and answers questions about Thoreau's life and reasons for coming to live here. Person, place, and text come together in a quietly dramatic way when Richard inhabits the House Replica. This living history program focuses on bringing the historical person to the contemporary visitor, and Smith's participation is supported and welcomed by the park officials.

But not all kinds of Thoreau re-enactors are welcome. One dissenter has highlighted his own civil disobedience as well as his unsympathetic treatment at the hands of park police through an online essay.²⁷³ G. Tod Slone proclaims himself an enemy of The Thoreau Society, and suggests that Thoreau would be as well. This self-styled American dissident quotes Thoreau's texts to argue that *Walden's* connection with Thoreau would be strengthened by allowing more freedom of speech (specifically the publication of his own opinions), by allowing the landscape to erode "naturally" rather than painstakingly restored, and by removal of such un-Thoreauvian structures as the police "barracks," the statue of Thoreau, and the "Thoreau trinket boutique."²⁷⁴

The park has prohibited the posting of such opinions on its grounds, removed unauthorized flyers left in the House Replica, and even limited access to the place by means of a restraining order, excluding a person who sees his actions as a parallel to

Thoreau's own "coarse and eccentric" manner.²⁷⁵ Also denied are the less strident and perhaps more sincere requests of would-be Thoreaus who want to sleep overnight in the House Replica, go skinny-dipping in Walden Pond, or have a campfire on the beach. Not only does the park connect Thoreau with the place in positive ways, but its supervisors and interpreters continually edit the place, deciding where, when, and how the place will say "Thoreau."

At Walden, Park Supervisor Denise Morissey is well aware of the multiple interpretations available in relation to Thoreau and Walden. In one of our conversations, she reflected that managing "a place built around a person is always tricky. You often hear, 'What would Thoreau think?'"²⁷⁶ Interested parties can make broad generalizations based on a little information, and develop competing visions and agendas for Walden. Some visitors have an image of Thoreau as someone who wanted to break the rules all the time, and that they therefore should be able to do whatever they want. But the park managers do set limits and enforce rules. Those who work at Walden in an official capacity encourage visitors to think that Thoreau "would appreciate the fact that we're trying to protect the resource, not trying to limit your freedom."²⁷⁷

This peculiar connection of person, place, and text was one of Morissey's own insights on coming to work at Walden. She was the first person to take on the Visitor Services position when it was established in 1992. To fill this role, she had to do some homework and get to know the resource. One of her initial lessons was how to pronounce Thoreau (accent on the first syllable). She made connections with "the pillars of Concord, the keepers of Concord history and of Thoreau's legacy."²⁷⁸ Morissey's

own text – the stories she uses when interpreting the place to visitors – include the tales she learned from these elders. Through meeting other people who came to Walden to pay tribute to Thoreau, she came to understand that “it was not only the book and the person Thoreau” she had to grasp, but she needed to be aware that there “was some feeling about this place” as well.

The role of gatekeeper is often one of direction and limitation with respect to the interpretation of the story or person connected with a site. John Eade notes in his study of order and power at the popular Roman Catholic pilgrimage place of Lourdes that pilgrim intentions may run counter to the regulations and restrictions of the shrine. Whereas pilgrims anticipate miraculous cures through immersion, officials emphasize the water’s lack of therapeutic qualities and the importance of the springs as symbols of reconciliation and communion with God.²⁷⁹ Eade suggests that a ritual focus on the holy women historically associated with the place has been sidelined by an emphasis on the church’s ongoing sacrament of baptism, intimating that messages about the power of women as well as the power of place being reinterpreted by authorities. At places of pilgrimage, gatekeepers may play a significant role in the way that the text and person are connected with place; interpretations that often serve to align the power of the shrine with the institution in control of the site.

The job of managing this place of pilgrimage entails greater diplomacy than would be required in an ordinary park, because of the deep values that pilgrims hold for Thoreau and Walden. People come to Walden from all over the world and for all different reasons. Morissey has hosted a writer from China, a country where Thoreau’s

texts were banned; worked with a team of Japanese film-makers on a documentary about Walden; and patiently dealt with the complaints of many a Walden “regular” upset over some disruption to their special place or routine. She has learned first hand from these visitors about Walden’s symbolic significance for international pilgrims, as well as its role as a tonic of wildness for regular visitors who rely on Walden for their sanity.

A good part of Morissey’s role is to balance the legacy of Thoreau with the other demands on this place. The public puts pressure on the park to allow more access. And some Thoreauvians would like to see more limits - fewer people, no swimming, nothing but people coming to learn about Thoreau. To the park managers, Walden should be more than a museum or a memorial to Thoreau; they are required to honor the original bequest to provide a place for fishing, swimming and picnicking to local people.

Multiple organizations, from Friends of Walden Pond to The Thoreau Society and the Walden Woods Project, surround and support Walden. Although they each have a stake in this common ground, they also assert their own particular values and interests. Morissey sees her official role as protector and interpreter of the State Reservation as that of a “neutral party” who fosters collaboration and cooperation in the use of the place.²⁸⁰

Considered from the perspective of a politics of place, neutrality is a privilege that accords with the ownership of the property. That neutrality should be seen as relative to the power of persons and organizations who offer competing discourses about Thoreau’s legacy or the use of Walden. However outsiders interpret Thoreau and Walden, the politics of property yield the power to include, exclude, and integrate the values of other stake-holders. Yet that “neutrality” contrasts with trends at other places of pilgrimage to

restrict and limit the interpretation of place to a single, orthodox perspective. Walden is managed in such a way that it is open to a variety of uses and interpretations. “A whole spectrum of people who are trying to be true to Thoreau’s way,”²⁸¹ as well as many more people who care little about Thoreau but a lot about this particular place, find sacred space at Walden.

Reflection

We began this chapter with the goal of bringing two approaches to sacred space side by side. Accordingly, we considered the activity and experience of both pilgrims and gatekeepers in bringing person, place, and text together at Walden. At the close of this chapter, we review what we learned from each perspective and reflect on the insights of this exploration for the relationship of the poetics and politics of place.

Pilgrims come to the same place, in search of the same person, or guided by the same texts, but those common goals should not lead us to expect that they seek or find the same end. Walden pilgrimage, understood through the theme of person, place, and text, varies with each pilgrim. Common themes arise in their experience; on closer examination, these commonalities enfold substantial differences in the characterization and emphasis of person, place and text. What pilgrims bring to the place of pilgrimage, in terms of their own interests, aspirations, life histories and beliefs is as important to the shape of their pilgrimage as are the natural and cultural characteristics of the place. One measure of Walden’s richness as a place of pilgrimage may be its ability to meet the desires and move the lives of pilgrims with so many distinct approaches.

Gatekeepers, like pilgrims, recognize and reorder the connections of person and text at places of pilgrimage. The gatekeepers at Walden put Thoreau in this place through sales of books, reenactments of his life, and markers of the historic places associated with him. They also work to keep Thoreau “in his place,” managing the resource in a way that both exhibits and maintains the power relations among users, neighbors, and others who have an interest in Walden.

Whereas the pilgrim experience allows us to look with depth and particularity at the way Walden may be received and revered, the experience of gatekeepers expands the breadth of our understanding of Walden as a place of pilgrimage. Through the experience of gatekeepers, we learn that visitors come to Walden from all over the United States, as well as hundreds of foreign countries. Distance, language, and culture are not deterrents to the motivation and devotion of pilgrims. Through the stories of gatekeepers, we come to know the power of place through its ability to draw these visitors from so far away, as well as its capacity to inspire a variety of competing agendas.

Although there may be broader or more theoretical boundaries and bridges between the approaches of poetics and politics, the understanding of pilgrimage places as sites where person, place, and text come together allows us to consider both politics and poetics under “one roof.” Both pilgrims and gatekeepers receive and recognize connections among person, place and text at Walden. And both may actively work to establish or recover these connections. But the individual stories of pilgrims and gatekeepers also advance our question about the relationship of politics and poetics.

When considered through the frame of individual perception and action, the poetics and politics of place have overlapping boundaries.

Tom is an example of a pilgrim whose experience and work extends into the sphere of the political. A true believer in his commitment to a sense of Transcendentalism that affirms the symbolic power of place, his pilgrimage moves from poetic reception to political action. From his initial search to recognize signs of the text in place, this pilgrim took on the quest of inscribing the text in place. His way of connecting person, place, and text included mapping and naming Walden Woods, effectively reinterpreting the landscape to the public consciousness.

Denise, although a gatekeeper at Walden whose management concerns embrace all the responsibilities that adhere to the supervision of a large and popular public venue, also plays a key role in the pilgrim community. In the days of the Lyceum, Ann McGrath was keeper of the lore of Thoreau; and while he was alive, Walter Harding was a companion and guide to many Walden pilgrims. Denise has inherited some of their legacy. By seeking out the elders of Concord and learning about Thoreau from the people most committed to and concerned with his life in this place, Denise schooled herself by attending to people who cared for Walden. Through her role as gatekeeper, she is also privy to dozens of stories told by the myriad of pilgrim visitors each year. This gatekeeper is, in a very real sense, a keeper of stories for the pilgrim community and a primary way in which many visitors, both tourist and pilgrim, will come to understand Thoreau and Walden.

The boundaries between poetics and politics begin to blur at the personal scale. Tom, the true believer, is also an ardent activist. Denise, the official gatekeeper, is also the keeper of pilgrim lore. Our personal experience is never wholly divorced from our political life; and the integration of personal belief and effective action may be a significant way of understanding the relationship of power and place.

CHAPTER 7

RETURN

Prelude

The return journey shifts me from the reflective wandering of my pilgrimage to the high speed lane of the interstate. Leaving Walden, I enter the afternoon stream of commuter traffic, dial home on my cell phone, and let the kids know I'm on my way. My journal is tucked away in my bag, my reflections postponed until a more auspicious time. But the brief retreat has begun its work. Like soil after a soaking rain, there is a sense of replenishment, and I have faith that the effects of my day at Walden will emerge in due course.

Although I step back into the normal routines without a ripple, my life is now permeated by a quiet and quizzical delight in my pilgrimage. My mind turns again and again to that old and new image of myself in the doorway, sweeping the threshold. The childhood longing for a place to myself, a place for my self, is with me still. But the seeds of action have been sown, and a new confidence in my ability to recognize and respond to my own desires is beginning to grow.

Henry's house was little more than a roof over his writing, a space for solitude, limited hospitality and a night's rest; a threshold from which to launch himself each morning into the sparkling world, and a den from which to reflect on his experiences. The

thought of having such a simple spare space haunts me. The houses in my dreams are always cluttered and complicated, dim places through which I can't seem to find my way.

And the house I live in, though bigger than Thoreau's and brighter than my nightmares, seems to circumscribe my life in other ways. At home I feel defined by relationships and obligations, the rooms and furnishings delineating my outward roles in family and community. But there is more to my life than meets the eye, inner passions that are not so evident in the furniture of these domestic arrangements. The shelves of my closet are lined with books on theology and mysticism. My household altars are obscure, my daily rituals almost imperceptible: a candle and a few stones on a corner table; a litany of psalms learned by heart to repeat as I walk in the woods. Even my life as a student is tucked away, books stuffed into canvas bags in the margins of rooms, ready to go wherever I can find a quiet place.

Why do I hide what I love and need from view? Possibly to avoid justifying time spent on work that seems to serve only myself. Maybe to keep from public view these obvious signs of my difference, emotional residues of the child who preferred reading to play. Perhaps a desire to protect these cherished aspects of my self from criticism. But hiding what is sacred to me means that even those closest to me cannot acknowledge what I hold most dear. What I keep safe inside makes me a stranger to others.

But my pilgrimage has borne some fruit. These questions about my place, once nigh imponderable, are revealed in a new light. I recall how good it felt to voice my own desire, how narrow the threshold of risk I needed to cross in order to respond. As well as insights on action, I have also grasped anew the value of place. What I cherish can be

expressed and affirmed not only through the beliefs I hold and the words I say, but through the spaces I create. By making a place to exercise my calling, I can affirm its existence and value.

Another threshold crossed, I plant myself in the midst of the catch-all space in a corner of the house and begin shifting furniture. The place I create is centered around a pine table I use for a desk, and bounded by a low bookshelf and hanging plants. The consecration of this space involves repeated removals of laundry racks and music stands, as well as my own improvised rituals: a bit of incense to remind me to breathe, a stone from Walden to recall my pilgrimage, and a daily nod of thanks for the gift of this work.

Reflection

I resisted the inclusion of politics in this study of pilgrimage, wanting to focus solely on individual stories and the phenomenological experience of place, desiring the simplicity of a single focus. To the initiate, adopting a research stance can feel like trying on so many coats and looking for a good personal fit; appropriate to the climate of inquiry yet stylish enough to meet with the approval of one's peers. The challenges of articulating a clear question and developing a compatible method of inquiry are daunting enough without taking what seemed to be a two-fisted approach. At the outset, and throughout much of the project, I struggled with what felt like two separate projects with two very different methodologies.

But theory and practice provide substantially different perspectives on place and pilgrimage. The divide between politics and poetics that was so evident to the scholar in the academy was less obvious to the pilgrim on the ground. Through making my own

pilgrimage to Walden, though enlightened (or burdened) by theory, I found difficulty in separating the two perspectives. When I tried to focus solely on the poetic experience of Walden, I ran smack into signs of the politics of place. Just when the quest seemed most scripted and constrained by the social configurations of space, the next step or glance would move me into an unexpected encounter with the numinous.

Sharp theoretical divides may be possible on paper, but lived experience is more fluid. Our individual stories and imaginative geographies intersect everywhere with the social fabric of our lives and the landscape of our natural~cultural environs in a rich reciprocity of meaning and experience. The place that pilgrims seek is shaped by local political agendas as well as historic figures, national movements, and natural processes. And though they may seem relatively few in number, pilgrim actions, stories, and rituals are deeply interwoven with the sacralization of Walden.

As pilgrim-researcher, I wore a “reversible” methodological coat. It was not that I flip-flopped from one side to another; instead I was continually conscious of the fabric closest to my experience or mindful of the patterns of speech necessary to convey a part of the whole story. Whichever side was outermost, bits of the lining also showed; the two fabrics gave a weight and texture to this material that, in the end, proved more satisfactory than either alone. Both of these “basic postures of hermeneutics,” one associated with a critical suspicion that seeks to “unmask ideologies,” the other associated with a phenomenology that aims to “restore meaning,” are necessary steps toward a whole understanding of place and pilgrimage.²⁸²

My experience also bears witness to the reciprocity of place and pilgrim. I went to Walden because I believed in the power of place. Through the experience I discovered the power of pilgrimage. Places may fire our imaginations, and exert an emotive power that lures us to them. But it is up to pilgrims to cross the threshold between imagination and action. It was not Walden alone that yielded connection or enlightenment to the pilgrim, but the interaction or inter-animation of pilgrim and place that bore fruit. What the place *revealed* was triggered in part by the expectation and memory of the pilgrim. Yet what the pilgrim *discovered* was rooted – often as not – in the unexpected and surprising gifts of place.

Traditional pilgrimages rely heavily on scripted routes and ritual actions, and one could easily map an “orthodox” Walden pilgrimage: a stop at the House Replica; a walk through the woods; a stone placed on the cairn; a brief walk round the House Site to read the plaques, maybe a pause in the doorway to gaze toward the Pond; perhaps a passage or two read aloud or in silence. For some pilgrims, depending on the season, their own inclination, or their impression of the water quality, a purifying swim in the Pond would be included. The pilgrimage closes with a walk round the long way to the book shop for a souvenir, a new journal, or another book by or about Thoreau.

But experiences of connection, the enduring moments for Walden pilgrims, most often arise apart from the expected pattern. The pilgrim responsiveness to place, to what disappoints as well as what draws the pilgrim on, often leads to the heart of the Walden experience. The improvisational actions of the pilgrim - wandering in the woods or walking the opposite way - conspire with the unanticipated offerings of the place –

summer heat on a spring day, a shoreline exposed by drought – to nourish a unique and particular story of pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage that is responsive to place exemplifies a way of being in the world that encompasses both deeply held values and sincere engagement with the possibility of change. This balance of intention and response – pilgrim desires and their openness to place – speaks to the power of place as well as the power of pilgrimage. The beaten paths and established shrines of the constructed landscape may be the most tangible signs of Walden’s pilgrim heritage, but they don’t reveal a complete picture. Through the steps and stories of pilgrims, a more holistic map of Walden’s sacred geography becomes known. This map encompasses the ephemeral and emergent nature of sacred encounters, sites that are realized only through embodied presence and connected with the landscape through pilgrim stories such as those told here.

The reciprocity and complementarity of poetics and politics characterize this research, whichever side of the coat was facing outward in a given task or conversation. The diversity and individuality of the pilgrim stories are sufficient to counter any notion that only one pilgrim story is essential to Walden. Listening to the pilgrim voices wakes us up to the multiplicity of ways that people experience place. It is possible that poetics alone may have raised pressing political questions. But a critical reading of place laid important groundwork for understanding my own experience, as well as for my acceptance of these pilgrims’ stories. Phenomenological method requires that we first reflect on our own experiences and set them aside before inquiring into the experiences of others. For me, this process of “*epoche*” also involved critical reflection on the cultural

underpinnings of my experiences, on the language I used, and on the assumptions I made about the possible meanings of place. A critical examination of the politics of place at Walden provided a suitable quiver of “red flags” – historical events, organizational dynamics, personal relationships – that balanced the credulity with which I attended to pilgrim stories.

The framework of politics also shored up the significance of Walden, and the relevance of this research, in relation to the underlying concerns of the study, questions about the valuation of nature in our society. A purely phenomenological focus would have weighted the value of place primarily in terms of individual experience. As vital and valuable as is personal transformation in remapping the human~nature relationship, the consideration of cultural stories and their iconic power in social transformation brings these questions to another scale of importance.

The results of this study as well as my own experience of Walden as pilgrim and researcher suggest the reciprocity of hermeneutics and phenomenology, as well as that of pilgrim and place, and politics and poetics. Two basic postures of hermeneutics each support and enrich the other. To examine the power of place in terms of human politics moves us beyond a naïveté in which mystical experience inhibits critical reflection. A hermeneutics of suspicion *keeps us honest* about our participation in the structures of power that may oppress and exclude others. To attend to the power of place through the poetics of lived experience moves us beyond a denial of materialism, a nihilism in which the world is empty of any meaning beyond human inscription. A hermeneutics of recollection *keeps us whole*, recalling us to participation in a world full of surprises.

In concluding this chapter, we'll briefly review what we learned about Walden by exploring it as a place of pilgrimage, and what we learned about pilgrimage from the experience of Walden pilgrims. To close, we'll reconsider the value and necessity of bringing both poetics and politics to bear in the study of sacred space.

Walden as a Place of Pilgrimage

When we consider this place, Walden, as a place of pilgrimage we understand its value, meaning and geography with greater depth and insight. Reading Walden's environmental history from the perspective of a politics of sacred space reveals how ritualization, interpretation, and negotiation have shaped Walden's landscape in the past, resulting in the sacred geography that contemporary visitors experience. This perspective leads us to recognize that the Thoreauvian meanings of Walden are not merely given or received, but have been inscribed through human intention and action. The construction of Walden's sacred landscape includes the establishment and maintenance of the cairn and memorial at the House Site; alteration of the landscape through restoration and restriction, as well as vegetative succession, to embody a native New England woodland; the limitation of visitorship; and the modification of recreational facilities to complement Thoreau's emergent status as an icon of environmentalism. At Walden, the reconstruction of the landscape is bound up with the construction of its meaning and significance.

Walden's sacred space is not merely an historical artifact, and our critical interpretive task also allows us to focus on Walden as a place of pilgrimage today. Using the triad of person, place and text, we discern how cultural labor continues to effect connection

between Walden, the “holy person” of Thoreau, and the “sacred text” of Walden.

Through park literature and signs, visitor attention is called to the place of Thoreau in the park’s history. Structures such as a House Replica and a statue of Thoreau recall the person; a bookstore operated by the Thoreau Society makes Thoreau’s ideas available through a variety of texts. Through collaboration with interested organizations and local scholars, and by means of interpretive program designed and conducted by park staff, Walden and Thoreau are presented and represented at Walden.

The gatekeepers at this place of pilgrimage foster a variety of readings of nature, civil action and person independence called forth by Thoreau and Walden, including aesthetic expressions. But gatekeepers also edit the presentation and interpretation of Thoreau and Walden through limitation of activities and enforcement of regulations; and seek to uphold an official view of Thoreau that is consistent with the park’s current uses and policies.

Treating Walden as a place of pilgrimage is a way to make sense of its history and the contemporary politics of place. By incorporating the sacred in our interpretation of Walden, we emphasize the significance of claims that might otherwise be dismissed as inconsequential or unfounded. And we clarify the deeper motivations underlying attitudes and actions that might otherwise be regarded as idealistic or incomprehensible. To conceive of Walden as a place of pilgrimage is to anticipate the cultural dynamics that generally accompany such sacred places. Chronic tension between local residents and interested outsiders; dissonance among tourist, pilgrim and mundane uses; friction between pilgrims and gatekeepers over access and appropriate and allowable ritual uses;

a halo of repercussions, perhaps extending to the international scale, in response to changes in policy and place; and competing agendas regarding the interpretation and meaning of the place make Walden a more complex place to manage than an ordinary recreational park.

Most importantly, in relation to the foundational concerns of this study, the perspective of sacred space allows us to speak of Walden as more than a protected ecosystem that allows for the advancement and protection of biodiversity; more than a set of goods and services that provides “user satisfaction” for so many days of fishing, swimming, boating and jogging. Sacred geography allows us to acknowledge that Walden’s value extends beyond its contribution to the local historical landscape (“Thoreau slept here”), and draws attention to the symbolic power of the place, as well as to the power at stake in relation to its ownership and interpretation.

The Experience of Walden Pilgrims

How does the experience of these Walden pilgrims inform our understanding of place and pilgrimage? Their stories reveal the diversity and value of pilgrimage and remind us of the depth and possibility of personal engagement with place. These pilgrim experiences also help us to recover another sense of the power of place. The politics of pilgrimage emphasize the openness, even emptiness, of place in terms of its availability for the inscription of human meanings. In contrast, the poetics of pilgrimage enables us to see Walden’s fullness, a capacity for revelation that moves beyond what we bring to place, challenging pilgrim ideas and superceding pilgrim expectations.

This reciprocity of place and pilgrim is evident in pilgrims ways of moving. Place has the power to move the pilgrim by motivating their journeys, shaping their ritual responses, and fostering experiences of connection/disconnection that become turning points for these individuals. In pilgrim responses to place, and in their experiences of surprise and discovery, the power of place to move our bodies, as well as our hearts and minds, is evident. Pilgrims ways of moving toward and within Walden are only partly driven by pilgrims' own expectations and intentions; their movements are also significantly influenced by the place itself. Patterns of pilgrimage at Walden reflect participatory engagement with place, in which innovation and adaptation are as important as intention and expectation. The pilgrim posture of openness and attentiveness complements the "surprises" or unanticipated encounters afforded by the place of pilgrimage, affirming the sensory richness of place and the intersubjective nature of pilgrimage.

Pilgrim stories affirm the gathering power of place as well as the drawing power of place, through pilgrim experiences of finding and making connections among person, place and text at Walden; especially, but not exclusively the person of Thoreau and the Walden text. This gathering power is evident in the diverse ways that pilgrims seek and find Walden. Pilgrims may experience Walden as part of a historical landscape, a moral landscape, a symbolic landscape, or a place of personal transformation. What they find depends in part on what they seek: *ground truth* for historical documentation in the search for a personal connection with Thoreau; *substantiation* of Thoreau's moral authority through congruence of place experience and text in the formation of a personal

philosophy; *manifestation* of spiritual principles through the correspondence of landscape and ideology; or physical refreshment and *spiritual solace* in the face of death.

Pilgrims embrace a variety of purposes and pathways. Although Walden pilgrims exemplify greater diversity in their origin, intention and action than pilgrims who participate in communally enacted and traditionally bound pilgrimages, their stories affirm other research that emphasizes distinction rather than unification in pilgrim experiences of the same place.²⁸³ Although some of this diversity arises from ideals and intentions that pilgrims bring with them to Walden, the difference also results from making pilgrimage, what the pilgrim “makes up” or improvises through impromptu and imaginative adaptations to place. The richness of Walden’s landscape, the fluidity and subtlety of its pilgrim traditions, foster the diversity of pilgrim patterns that arise through the reciprocity of place and pilgrim. Efforts to foster a sense of pilgrim community, to make more visible the pilgrim tradition at Walden, or to design programs or facilities for the reception of pilgrims, will want to be sensitive to the diversity and individuality of expression, rather than expect or encode uniformity.

The pilgrim experience also highlights the personal value with which Walden has been and continues to be held by many individuals over the decades and through all its changes, a valuation that may be created or sustained through pilgrimage. Just as the politics of place reveal Walden as a place in which cultural values are deeply etched and passionately argued; so it is a place where individual lives are shaped and transformed. We might suspect John Muir of relying on religious rhetoric in his attempt to save the

Hetch-Hetchy valley, except that the stories of these Walden pilgrims reveal anew how deeply special places can be a source of light and life, of inspiration and of renewal.

The power of place and pilgrimage is also bound up with revelatory experience. In place, and through action and subsequent reflection, pilgrims come to understand themselves and the world around them in ways not previously considered or experienced. In contrast to abstract thought or patent instruction, pilgrimage is a way to knowing that relies on embodied movement and therefore, on the places we “inhabit and traverse.”²⁸⁴ Pilgrimage is also a form of ritual empowerment. Through acting on desire and by moving into the unknown, the pilgrims practice self-reliance and embrace openness to mystery, gifts that aid them on their larger journey of life.

The pilgrim experience bears witness to another aspect of the power of place, beyond the human power that is bound up with the cultural construction of sacred space. The pilgrim experience of the richness and fullness of place, its presentation of that which pilgrims do not bring with them or expect to find at Walden, contrasts with a political reading of sacred space as “almost a religious void” within which any set of ideas may be read or described.²⁸⁵ The experience of connection reveals the potential of place to offer and receive a coincidence of meanings, enabling past and present, image and ideal, inward and outward journeys, to come together and inform one another. Rather than a void of meaning, pilgrims remind us that sacred places have a peculiar fullness of possibility.

This rich geography of place informs Walden’s neighbors, conservators and gatekeepers, those who make the policy and those who police the territory. To

understand Walden as a place of pilgrimage is to grasp the breadth of its international reach and the depth of its cultural significance. To consider Walden as sacred space casts in a very different light the willingness of people to work for it, fight for it, and pay for it, and prepares us to expect that consensus and constancy in regard to its interpretation will always be relative. Insight that comes from seeing Walden as sacred space also helps those who are most active in and most affected by its use and management to focus on the underlying questions and issues of meaning and interpretation, rather than treating conflict and negotiation merely as a matter of personalities.

The Poetics and Politics of Walden

What do we make of the divide between the poetics and politics of place as approaches to the study of sacred space, now that we have brought both to bear on our study of Walden? As the literature suggests, these approaches stem from divergent ideas regarding the ontology of the sacred: as an experienced reality or as a cultural construction. In considering Walden as a place of pilgrimage, it was evident that cultural labors have contributed to shaping sacred space at Walden. Yet the impetus or fulcrum for institutional and political action often emerged through the passion and persuasion of an interested individual. Roland Robbins' identification of Thoreau as a self-made man, Mary Sherwood's desire to act on behalf of Thoreau in the protection of Walden, Tom Blanding's lifelong Concord pilgrimage, and Don Henley's response to the Thoreau's Walden, reveal that those who are moved by a place are sometimes motivated to take action on its behalf. A pilgrim's commitment to place is one of the energizing forces within the cultural realm that contributes to the construction of sacred space.

Pilgrims who come to Walden, however independent their intentions, however pure their imaginations, still have to make sense of a place that is subject to the labors and values of the changing cultural milieu. Although pilgrims may not be consciously aware of the human power at play in the place of pilgrimage, the field of their experience is not immune from its influence. The House Replica, the cairn, the memorial at the House Site, Walden Woods and the protected land that surround the reservation, even the trees that shield the Pond from traffic on Route 2 – all features that may engage and move the pilgrim - are the intentional result of an interpretive agenda. The pilgrims in this study visited Walden over a period of time spanning more than sixty years, years of significant change in Walden's landscape and in cultural attitudes toward the environment. Politics produced some changes that became integral to the experiences of Walden pilgrims, features such as reforestation, adjoining conservation land, and the House Replica. Pilgrims also sought and found sacred ground prior to these changes, or failed to find satisfactory correspondence between their own ideals and the thoroughness of recent revisions. The politics of place influences the pilgrim experience, but is not the primary determinant of their reception and response to the place of pilgrimage.

Politics and poetics may be distinct approaches to the study of the world we make and live in; but ultimately they are both focused on the same world. By drawing on both perspectives, we achieved – perhaps not theoretical convergence – but a multidimensional understanding of one sacred place. The process was not bilateral but another kind of hermeneutic spiral, moving from the lived experience of pilgrimage to a critical reading of power and back to the sacred experience of place. By drawing on both

politics and poetics, we can approach a “second naivete,” and perhaps begin to reverse the process of “demystification” and accomplish that restoration of wonder proposed by Ricouer.²⁸⁶

To distance ourselves personally from the prereflective responses of sacred experience permits a clarity about other kinds of power at work, powers that influence our lives and our landscapes. By understanding where and how these forces shape the places in which we dwell, taking note of the resulting relations of empowerment and disempowerment, we free ourselves from naïve participation in ritual and stories that may be oppressive or incongruous with the heart of our own beliefs. To deny that there is more to the world than what we put in place is to remain ignorant – or unresponsive – to so much that can move us, both from within and from without. The power to act, on our own behalf as well as in the larger arenas of society and culture, emerges from the place and process of pilgrimage itself.

Postlude

To return is to turn again, back home, back to the starting place, back to the questions at the heart of pilgrimage. Pilgrims know that, when they reach their goal, they are still far from their journey’s end. So it is with the work in hand. The inarticulate confusion that confounded my attempts to write a conclusion to this research is akin to the malaise and silence which can attend the pilgrim’s return. My reflections here are not conclusions as much as rough insights that I struggle to put in order, while feeling only mid-way through the process. The return marked by reaching this goal is merely the beginning of another spiral of reflection. With time, I will come to see what is behind me

more as a whole than as a succession of hurdles. New companions and new conversations will mark the journey. The pieces will come together, or stand out, in fresh ways. I'll make or find new linkages and comparisons with the larger body of knowledge and with the broader community of pilgrims and scholars. In time, if there is something of value here, this pilgrim story will become part of a shared tradition.

I began the pilgrimage of this research because I believed in the power of place. As I turn the corner, I find myself with even deeper convictions about the power of pilgrimage. Pilgrims contribute to the making and power of place; but the response to and participation with place can transform and empower the pilgrim. The power of place to shape our lives also comes through our willingness to risk the journey, to move outside our accustomed roles and rounds, to enter a world that may not meet our expectations or mirror our ideals. To be a pilgrim is to be open to challenge and change, to acknowledge the limitations and possibilities of place, to locate ourselves and our knowledge in our bodies as well as our minds.

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NOTES

¹ Henry David Thoreau, Walden, ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer, annotated ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 274.

² Thoreau, Walden 274.

³ Alan Morinis, ed., Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992) 2. Here I draw on Morinis' use of the term 'sacred,' by which he refers to "the valued ideals that are the image of perfection that a human being sets out to encounter or become on a pilgrimage."

⁴ J. P. Bartkowski and W. S. Swearingen, "God Meets Gaia in Austin, Texas: A Case Study of Environmentalism as Implicit Religion," Review of Religious Research 38 (1997). Lawrence Buell, The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁵ The work of sacred geography is also a mapping project, one in which we attend to our experience of the world so as to include "the places most important to us [and]...rely on our own sense of direction" rather than a "societal map" based on abstractions. Neil Evernden, The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 33.

⁶ Tim Cresswell, Place: A Short Introduction (Malden: Blackwell, 2004) 7.

⁷ Philip Sheldrake, Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001) 1.

⁸ This definition and admission are drawn from Relph's consideration of the components of place identified by Lukermann. Edward Relph, Place and Placelessness, Research in Planning and Design, ed. Allen J. Scott (London: Pion Limited, 1976) 3-4. F. Lukermann, "Geography as a Formal Intellectual Discipline and the Way in Which It Contributes to Human Knowledge," Canadian Geographer 8.4 (1964).

⁹ Sheldrake, Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity 7.

¹⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977) 6.

¹¹ Terence Young, "Place Matters," Annals of the Association of American Geographers 91.4 (2001).

¹² Sheldrake, Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity 8.

¹³The particular contributions of the following scholars to this work will be further explored in the next chapter. Yi-Fu Tuan, Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values, Morningside ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). Relph, Place and Placelessness. David Seamon, A Geography of the Lifeworld (New York: St. Martin's, 1979). Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). Clare Cooper Marcus, House as a Mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home (Berkeley: Conari Press, 1995). Marie Louise Million, "It Was Home: A Phenomenology of Place and Involuntary Displacement as Illustrated by the Forced Dislocation of Five Southern Alberta Families in the Oldman River Dam Flood Area," Doctoral dissertation, Saybrook Institute Graduate School and Research Center, 1992.

¹⁴ The work of two cultural geographers who also focus on sense of place were influential in leading me to a more critical consideration of place and culture. And the work of a number of scholars on sacred space and pilgrimage, collected in the following anthologies, gave substance to the outlines of the notion of contested space. David Lowenthal, The Past Is a Foreign Country (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Robert Muggerauer, Interpreting Environments: Tradition, Deconstruction, Hermeneutics (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995). David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Attention to narrative embraces the literature that relates story and place, but also the role of narrative in methodological approaches to the study of place. More discussion of both topics will follow. Here let me suggest the value of three studies that emphasize the role of narrative in understanding place. Belden C. Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality, expanded ed. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002). Keith H. Basso, Wisdom Sits in Places (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996). Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds., Senses of Place (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996).

¹⁶ Lane places the dilemma before us by noting that "the language of objective analysis is too abstract...[but] the language of engaged participation may be too impenetrable" for the description and study of spiritual experience. The solution, as Lane sees it, is "the poetic language of metaphor and suggestion." Through example and advice, Lane commends a narrative approach to communicating the sacred experience of place, an art that he terms 'lyric geography.' Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, Expanded Edition 11.

¹⁷ Morinis, ed., Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage 16.

¹⁸ Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, "Narratives of Transformation: Pilgrimage Patterns and Authorial Self-Presentation in Three Pilgrimage Texts," Pilgrim Voices: Narrative and Authorship in Christian Pilgrimage, eds. Simon Coleman and John Elsner (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003) 85.

¹⁹ Clifford Geertz, afterword, Senses of Place, edited by Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1996) 259-62.

²⁰ "Walden Pond State Reservation," brochure, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, 18 May 2005
<<http://www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/northeast/wldn.htm>>.

²¹ Exceptions noted by Kong are the study of Medjugorje, by Jurkovich and Gesler, in which the authors emphasize the immanence of the poetics of place for the individual adherent even in the midst of church and social conflict; as well as Kong's own work on the religious landscape of Singapore in which she considers how the politics of place influence the conception of sacred place. J.M. Jurkovich and W.M. Gesler, "Medjugorje: Finding Peace at the Heart of Conflict," The Geographical Review 87 (1997), Lily Kong, "Negotiating Conceptions of Sacred Space: A Case Study of Religious Buildings in Singapore," Transactions, Institute of British Geographers 18 (1993b).

²² Lily Kong, "Mapping 'New' Geographies of Religion: Politics and Poetics in Modernity," Progress in Human Geography 25.2 (2001): 225.

²³ John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage (London: Routledge, 1991).

²⁴ Simon Coleman and John Elsner, eds., Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

²⁵ Eade and Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage 1-29.

²⁶ Adrian J. Ivakhiv, Claiming Sacred Ground: Pilgrims and Politics at Glastonbury and Sedona (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001).

²⁷ Jill Dubisch, In a Different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine, Princeton Modern Greek Studies (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

²⁸ Bhardway recommends freeing pilgrimage studies "from the confines of formal religions" as well as considering the role of environment in pilgrimage, while Kong encourages us to extend "the site of analysis beyond the 'officially sacred,'" and highlights the need to explore the "dialectics [. . . of] politics and poetics." Surinder M.

Bhardwaj, "Geography and Pilgrimage: A Review," Sacred Places, Sacred Spaces: The Geography of Pilgrimages, eds. Robert H. Stoddard and Alan Morinis, vol. 34, Geoscience and Man (Baton Rouge, LA: Geoscience Publications, Department of Geography and Anthropology, Louisiana State University, 1997) 19. Kong, "Mapping 'New' Geographies of Religion: Politics and Poetics in Modernity," 226-27.

²⁹ Ivakhiv, Claiming Sacred Ground: Pilgrims and Politics at Glastonbury and Sedona 5.

³⁰ Trevor Barnes, "Hermeneutics," The Dictionary of Human Geography, eds. R.J. Johnston, Derek Gregory, Geraldine Pratt and Michael Watts (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

³¹ Louise Chawla, "Spots of Time: Manifold Ways of Being in Nature in Childhood," Children and Nature: Psychological, Sociocultural, and Evolutionary Investigations, eds. Jr. Peter H. Kahn and Stephen R. Kellert (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002) 204.

³² Chawla, "Spots of Time: Manifold Ways of Being in Nature in Childhood," 204.

³³ Paul Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970) 32.

³⁴ Helmut R. Wagner, ed., Alfred Schutz: On Phenomenology and Social Relations (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Max van Manen, Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy (Ontario: State University of New York Press, 1990).

³⁵ van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 27.

³⁶ These varied ways of seeing the aim of hermeneutic interpretation are associated with the phenomenological tradition, and van Manen summarizes the contributions of Dilthey, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Ricoeur to his own approach. van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 35-41.

³⁷ van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 181.

³⁸ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 17.

³⁹ Denise Morrissey, personal interview, 20 April 2004.

⁴⁰ van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 9.

⁴¹ van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 13.

⁴² van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 6.

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- ⁴³ van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 10.
- ⁴⁴ van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 111.
- ⁴⁵ van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 112-14.
- ⁴⁶ Robert S. Weiss, Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies (New York: The Free Press, 1994) 148.
- ⁴⁷ van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 10.
- ⁴⁸ Richard H. Hycner, "Some Guidelines for the Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Data," Human Studies 8 (1985): 296.
- ⁴⁹ Hycner, "Some Guidelines for the Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Data," 296.
- ⁵⁰ Hycner, "Some Guidelines for the Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Data," 296.
- ⁵¹ van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 65.
- ⁵² van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 10.
- ⁵³ These three approaches are described in van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 92-94.
- ⁵⁴ NVivo qualitative data analysis program; Melbourne, Australia, QSR International, Pty Ltd., version 2.0, 2002.
- ⁵⁵ van Manen, Researching Lived Experience 88, 90.
- ⁵⁶ "David," personal interview, 17 Nov. 2003.
- ⁵⁷ Special Collections, Concord Free Public Library, 6 July 2005, <<http://www.concordnet.org/library/scollect/scoll.html>>.
- ⁵⁸ W. Barksdale Maynard, Walden Pond: A History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- ⁵⁹ Roland Wells Robbins, Discovery at Walden, reprint ed. (Lincoln, MA: The Thoreau Society, 1999).

⁶⁰ Donald W. Linebaugh, The Man Who Found Thoreau: Roland W. Robbins and the Rise of Historical Archaeology in America (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005).

⁶¹ Eade and Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage 10.

⁶² These categories of a politics of the sacred were discerned in the work of Gerardus van der Leeuw, by Chidester and Linenthal. See their introduction to Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 7-9. Gerardus van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation, trans. J.E. Turner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁶³ The word "sign" carries broader meanings which encompass many of the verbal, behavioral, and material aspects of place and pilgrimage considered here. My use of the term refers primarily to the ordinary kinds of public notices made of wood and words.

⁶⁴ Thoreau, Walden 39, 43, 100.

⁶⁵ Thoreau, Walden 47.

⁶⁶ Mircea Eliade, Sacred and Profane, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1961) 42.

⁶⁷ Thoreau, Walden 124.

⁶⁸ Thoreau, Walden 124.

⁶⁹ Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan, Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

⁷⁰ Ian Reader and Tony Walter, eds., Pilgrimage in Popular Culture (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1993).

⁷¹ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).

⁷² This was not a question that I explored in detail, but the following studies are examples of this conversation. N.H.H. Graburn, "Tourism: The Sacred Journey," Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism, ed. V. Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978). Erik Cohen, "Pilgrimage Centers: Concentric and Excentric," Annals of Tourism Research 19 (1992). Gisbert Rinschede, "Forms of Religious Tourism," Annals of Tourism Research

19 (1992). N. Collins-Kreiner and N. Kliot, "Pilgrimage Tourism in the Holy Land: The Behavioural Characteristics of Christian Pilgrims," Geojournal 50.1 (2000).

⁷³ Coleman and Elsner, eds., Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions 6.

⁷⁴ Nancy Frey, Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 27.

⁷⁵ Morinis, ed., Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage 4.

⁷⁶ Simon Coleman and John Elsner, eds., Pilgrim Voices: Narrative and Authorship in Christian Pilgrimage (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002).

⁷⁷ Frey, Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago 186-88.

⁷⁸ Dubisch, In a Different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine 18.

⁷⁹ Dubisch, In a Different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine 3-19.

⁸⁰ Basso, Wisdom Sits in Places.

⁸¹ The essays to which I primarily refer are set between the chapters of this text, and inspired the use of 'prelude' essays in the dissertation format. Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, Expanded Edition.

⁸² Belden C. Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) 33.

⁸³ Sheldrake, Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity. With reference to place and narrative, Sheldrake refers particularly to: Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁸⁴ Sheldrake, Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity 19.

⁸⁵ Morinis, ed., Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage 4.

⁸⁶ Visitors from India, including dignitaries who have attended Thoreau Society gatherings, note Thoreau's influence on Ghandi. Maynard, Walden Pond: A History. Reflections on Walden were written by numerous celebrities for the following collection of essays, including writers Wallace Stegner and Bill McKibben, actors Whoopi

Goldberg and James Earl Jones, and performers Janet Jackson and Sting. The project was mobilized by the involvement of musician Don Henley. Don Henley and Dave Marsh, eds., Heaven Is under Our Feet (Stamford, CT: Longmeadow Press, 1991).

⁸⁷ Buell, The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture 325-27.

⁸⁸ A former membership director for the Thoreau Society told me of one society member who lived close enough to Walden to visit, yet preferred to keep her distance lest a visit dispel her treasured notions of the place. Tamara Beams, telephone interview, 30 Mar. 2002.

⁸⁹ Frey, Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago 55-6.

⁹⁰ Simon Coleman and John Elsner discuss traditions and types of pilgrim narratives, drawing on the essays in Pilgrim Voices as well as Frey's work on Santiago pilgrimage. Coleman and Elsner, eds., Pilgrim Voices: Narrative and Authorship in Christian Pilgrimage 5-8.

⁹¹ Frey tells of travelers who began the route for athletic recreation, but later came to understand and refer to their journey as pilgrimage. Frey, Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago 55-56.

⁹² Frey writes of her initial reluctance to wear a scallop shell, the traditional identifying mark of a Santiago pilgrim. Frey, Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago 56.

⁹³ Frey, Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago 186.

⁹⁴ Catherine Kohler Riessman, Narrative Analysis (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993) 2.

⁹⁵ Frey, Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago 186.

⁹⁶ Coleman and Elsner, eds., Pilgrim Voices: Narrative and Authorship in Christian Pilgrimage 5.

⁹⁷ Coleman and Elsner, eds., Pilgrim Voices: Narrative and Authorship in Christian Pilgrimage 8.

⁹⁸ Coleman and Elsner, eds., Pilgrim Voices: Narrative and Authorship in Christian Pilgrimage 4.

⁹⁹ Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (DEM), "Restoring the Shore at Walden Pond State Reservation," park brochure, undated.

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter 1. “Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred” in Eliade, Sacred and Profane 20-65.

¹⁰¹ Lane states that recent scholarship on place relates to three different “philosophical and methodological starting points” that he calls the ontological, cultural and phenomenological approaches. As an example of the cultural approach, Lane offers the work of Chidester and Linenthal. Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, Expanded Edition 42-43. Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space.

¹⁰² Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 17.

¹⁰³ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 17.

¹⁰⁴ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 17.

¹⁰⁵ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 9 and ff.

¹⁰⁶ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 15.

¹⁰⁷ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 9.

¹⁰⁸ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 9-10.

¹⁰⁹ Roland Robbins copied into his own notes Bronson Alcott’s June 12-13, 1872 journal account of the founding of the cairn. See Roland Wells Robbins, “Thoreau House Notes,” the Roland Wells Robbins Collection, the Thoreau Society, Lincoln, Mass. Robbins cites Odell Shepard, ed., The Journals of Bronson Alcott (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1938) 425.

¹¹⁰ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 10.

¹¹¹ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 9.

¹¹² Robbins, “Thoreau House Notes.”

¹¹³ The boulder and marker were installed by the park’s caretaker Fred Hart in 1928. Linebaugh, The Man Who Found Thoreau 39.

¹¹⁴ See Buell on Thoreau as a “memorable American example of a civilized person’s withdrawal to a simpler state of spiritual refreshment.” The archaic religious roots of this ritual are not traced here. Buell, The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture 327.

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- ¹¹⁵ Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 92.
- ¹¹⁶ Roland W. Robbins, “#3 Thoreau Hut Notes,” the Roland Wells Robbins Collection, the Thoreau Society, Lincoln, Mass., 8 Feb. 1947.
- ¹¹⁷ Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 156-57.
- ¹¹⁸ Roland W. Robbins, “#2 Thoreau Hut Notes,” the Roland Wells Robbins Collection, the Thoreau Society, Lincoln, Mass., 30 March 1946.
- ¹¹⁹ Robbins, “#2 Thoreau Hut Notes,” 30 March 1946.
- ¹²⁰ Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 240.
- ¹²¹ Harding related that the site of Jesus’ nativity was determined by triangulating between three sites in contention for the honor in a letter to Wallace Conant, which Conant later gave to Robbins. Walter Harding, letter to Wallace Conant, 3 August 1945, the Roland Wells Robbins Collection, the Thoreau Society, Lincoln, Mass.
- ¹²² Linebaugh, The Man Who Found Thoreau 29.
- ¹²³ Robbins’ biographer noted the former’s “decisive self-promotion,” which is no doubt evident to anyone who has read Robbins’ own book, Discovery at Walden. Linebaugh, The Man Who Found Thoreau 58.
- ¹²⁴ Robbins, Discovery at Walden 29.
- ¹²⁵ Robbins, Discovery at Walden 46.
- ¹²⁶ See, for example, 17 June 1950, Robbins, “Thoreau House Notes.”
- ¹²⁷ Robbins, Discovery at Walden 48-49, 57. Apparently the “Banner of Light” stones were moved again, as a number of them are now located at the Thoreau Institute.
- ¹²⁸ Don, personal interview, 4 March, 2004.
- ¹²⁹ For a description of Concord’s natural and cultural landscape in Thoreau’s day, see David R. Foster, Thoreau’s Country: Journey through a Transformed Landscape (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 8-14.
- ¹³⁰ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 12.

¹³¹ The partial definition of “wilderness” as given in The Wilderness Act, Public Law 88-577 (16 U.S.C. 1131-1136), 88th Congress, second session, 3 Sept. 1964.

¹³² In an introduction to *Walden Woods* in Henley’s book, Edmund Schofield summarizes the “pitch pine plain” ecology of the area, noting that Thoreau himself started an accidental fire at Walden in 1844. Henley and Marsh, eds., Heaven Is under Our Feet 23.

¹³³ Thoreau, Walden 284-88.

¹³⁴ “Each town should have a park, or rather a primitive forest, of five hundred or a thousand acres, where a stick should never be cut for fuel, a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation.” Henry David Thoreau, Journal 15 October 1859, “Henry D. Thoreau Quotations Pages,” 5 August 2005
< <http://www.walden.org/Institute/thoreau/writings/Quotations/Quotations.htm>.

¹³⁵ See Chapter VIII “Man’s Traces: Axe, Train, Figure,” in Barbara Novak, Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875, revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 157-200.

¹³⁶ For a cogent analysis of landscapes of consumption and production in this era, see Michael Heiman, “Production Confronts Consumption: Landscape Perception and Social Conflict in the Hudson Valley,” Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 7 (1989).

¹³⁷ Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 162.

¹³⁸ Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 229.

¹³⁹ Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (DEM), “Walden Pond State Reservation,” park brochure, (Boston: DEM Office of Public Information, 2001).

¹⁴⁰ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 12.

¹⁴¹ Thoreau, Walden 176.

¹⁴² Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 255.

¹⁴³ Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 275.

¹⁴⁴ Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 257.

¹⁴⁵ For an account of fish removal, see Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 275.

¹⁴⁶ Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 280.

¹⁴⁷ The report, by Richard A. Gardiner and Associates, based the land-use scenarios on parking lot size, aiming to limit visitor usage by expanding or limiting the number of cars that could park at Walden from 1000 on the upward side and 150 on the lower end. A 300-car lot was ultimately recommended. Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 282-83.

¹⁴⁸ For an account of a busload of Japanese visitors arriving shortly after the cairns removal, “each person clutching a stone to leave as tribute,” see Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 284-85.

¹⁴⁹ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 15.

¹⁵⁰ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 15.

¹⁵¹ To learn more about Gleason and his work photographic work, see Concord Free Public Library Special Collections staff, Yours for the Conservation of Natural Beauty: The Landscape Photography of Herbert Wendell Gleason, an on-line display adapted from an exhibition in the Concord Free Public Library Art Gallery October 4- December 31, 2002, 8 August 2005
<<http://www.concordnet.org/library/scollect/Gleason/Gleason.html>>.

¹⁵² E.B. White, “Walden,” *One Man’s Meat*, Tilbury House ed. (1942; Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House Publishers, 1997. 65-70.

¹⁵³ Mary Sherwood organized the Walden Pond Society in 1978, which was later renamed. Maynard, Walden Pond: A History 289..

¹⁵⁴ van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation.

¹⁵⁵ Chidester and Linenthal draw on the above-cited work of Gerardus van der Leeuw to discern four aspects of the politics of sacred space: a politics of position, a politics of property, a politics of exclusion and a politics of exile. I draw on those themes in this study of the Walden’s sacred space as a contested space. Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 7-9.

¹⁵⁶ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 8.

¹⁵⁷ Chidester and Linenthal on van der Leeuw’s recognition of a politics of property: “A sacred place was not merely a meaningful place; it was a powerful place because it was appropriated, possessed, and owned.” Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 8.

¹⁵⁸ Jeffrey Cramer, lifetime member of Thoreau Society, personal communication with the author, March 2003.

¹⁵⁹ Robbins notes that he sent Walter Harding away from the site, preferring “not to have him see my work” at this time. Robbins, “#1 Thoreau Hut Notes,” 14 Nov 1945.

¹⁶⁰ Robbins, Discovery at Walden 26.

¹⁶¹ Linebaugh, The Man Who Found Thoreau.

¹⁶² Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 8.

¹⁶³ Jeanne M. Zimmer, "A History of Thoreau's Hut and Hut Site," Concord Saunterer, Supplement No. 3 (1973).

¹⁶⁴ Subsequently the Department of Environmental Management, and presently the Department of Conservation and Recreation. These changes reflect changes in the names and structure of the state agency in charge, rather than changes in the supervisory authority for Walden Pond State Reservation.

¹⁶⁵ Frey recounts one version of this legend “according to later texts [than the writing of the Gospels] and eighth and ninth century documents, Jesus sent James to proselytize in the west, to the end of the earth – Finisterre.” Frey, Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago 8-9.

¹⁶⁶ Frey, Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago 155.

¹⁶⁷ Matthew Glass, "'Alexanders All': Symbols of Conquest and Resistance at Mount Rushmore," American Sacred Space, eds. David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995) 154-55.

¹⁶⁸ Glass, "'Alexanders All': Symbols of Conquest and Resistance at Mount Rushmore," 157.

¹⁶⁹ Glass discusses the commercial lure of the monument, noting that “[o]ver the years promoters and supporters have struggled continually with the tension between the commercial and inspirational appeal of Mount Rushmore, present from the very beginning.” Glass, "'Alexanders All': Symbols of Conquest and Resistance at Mount Rushmore," 156-58.

¹⁷⁰ Part III of Glass’s essay concerns American Indian Movement (AIM) activities at Mount Rushmore, or Paha Sapa, and the site’s use as a locus of protest regarding

injustice to Native Americans. At issue in the contested nature of sacred space is not just the question of secular/sacred; but sacred to whom? A measure of the possible differences in the meaning of Mount Rushmore can be summed up by the term “the faces of killers” which Glass uses to sum up its symbolic power for several Lakota people he interviewed. Glass, ““Alexanders All”: Symbols of Conquest and Resistance at Mount Rushmore,” 185, note 66.

¹⁷¹ Edmund Schofield notes the movement and enlargement of the town dump to its position across Rt.126 from the pond between his first visit in 1955 or 1956, and his return 25 years later. Henley and Marsh, eds., Heaven Is under Our Feet 33. The landfill has been closed and capped, and was being used as a transfer station when I made this pilgrimage to Walden in May, 2001. At that time, the trailer park had been ‘grandfathered’ by the town and only a few residences remained.

¹⁷² Cite Maynard on the Red Cross Beach battle

¹⁷³ Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, “Walden Pond State Reservation,” 8 August 2005, < <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/northeast/wldn.htm>>.

¹⁷⁴ In a letter in the Special Walden Issue of the Concord Saunterer, Thomas Blanding introduces the scope and the reasons for this remapping. Concord Saunterer 20 (Dec. 1988) 1.

¹⁷⁵ Thomas Blanding, letter, Concord Saunterer 20 (Dec. 1988) 1.

¹⁷⁶ Thomas Blanding, letter, Concord Saunterer 20 (Dec. 1988) 1.

¹⁷⁷ Henley and Marsh, eds., Heaven Is under Our Feet.

¹⁷⁸ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 8.

¹⁷⁹ Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (DEM), “Restoring the Shore at Walden Pond State Reservation, park brochure, undated.

¹⁸⁰ In describing a general lack of publicity for certain pilgrimage occasions and sites, Nolan and Nolan cite the difficulties encountered by communities when faced with the demands of unusual numbers of tourists. Nolan and Nolan, Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe 52-53. .

¹⁸¹ Thoreau, Walden 176-77.

¹⁸² Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (DEM), “Restoring the shore at Walden Pond State Reservation, park brochure, undated.

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- ¹⁸³ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 8.
- ¹⁸⁴ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 9.
- ¹⁸⁵ In his preface, J. Z. Smith outlines the way in which he has brought a “hermeneutics of suspicion” to the theoretical description of sacred space advanced by his own teacher, Mircea Eliade; and introduces the models of “locative” and “counter-locative” traditions developed in consideration of the religions of Late Antiquity. Jonathan Z. Smith, Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978) xiii-xiii.
- ¹⁸⁶ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 6.
- ¹⁸⁷ Chidester and Linenthal, eds., American Sacred Space 6.
- ¹⁸⁸ Eade and Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage 15.
- ¹⁸⁹ Thoreau, Walden 86.
- ¹⁹⁰ Thoreau, Walden 172.
- ¹⁹¹ David Seamon, "A Way of Seeing People and Place: Phenomenology in Environment-Behavior Research," Theoretical Perspectives in Environment-Behavior Research, ed. Seymour Wapner (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000) 160.
- ¹⁹² Edward S. Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time," Sense of Place, eds. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1996) 24.
- ¹⁹³ Casey, "From Space to Place," 23-24.
- ¹⁹⁴ Casey, "From Space to Place," 24.
- ¹⁹⁵ Casey, "From Space to Place," 26.
- ¹⁹⁶ Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation.
- ¹⁹⁷ Casey, "Space to Place," 23.
- ¹⁹⁸ Frey, Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago 257, n1.

¹⁹⁹ This quotation is from an essay Brian wrote in 1972, based on his journal entries from the trip; and which he gave a copy of to me at the time of our interview.

²⁰⁰ The pilgrims themselves distinguish between tourists and pilgrims based on mode of travel. Those who walk or cycle “understand what it means to be on the road.” Frey, Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago, 18.

²⁰¹ Collins-Kreiner and Kliot, "Pilgrimage Tourism in the Holy Land: The Behavioural Characteristics of Christian Pilgrims."

²⁰² This traditional pilgrimage on the smallest of Japan's islands is explored by Ian Reader, "Dead to the World: Pilgrims in Shokoku," Pilgrimage in Popular Culture, eds. Ian Reader and Tony Walter (London: Macmillan, 1993).

²⁰³ Turner and Turner, Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. In the first part of this book, Turner compares pilgrimage with Arnold van Gennep's concept of rites of passage. Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

²⁰⁴ The word liminal is based on the Latin word for threshold, limin. Turner and Turner, Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture, 249.

²⁰⁵ See Chapter One, “Pilgrimage as a Liminoid Phenomenon” in Turner and Turner, Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture, 1-39.

²⁰⁶ From further conversation after the completion of the audiotaped interview, I learned more about the details of this trip; and of the history of Brian's familial relationships. The story of his trip to Concord revealed even more about the role of the pilgrim journey in his life transition. As Brian recalled staying first with one set of relatives and then another on his road to Concord, he also told stories of his childhood relationships with these family members. It became clear that his journey marked more than a change in social status from student to soldier, but also embodied his transition to adult status within his extended family.

²⁰⁷ Laura, personal interview, 14 Oct. 2003.

²⁰⁸ DJ, personal interview, 30 Mar. 2004.

²⁰⁹ Brad, personal interview, 29 July 2003.

²¹⁰ Tom, personal interview, 16 Dec. 2003.

²¹¹ Brian, personal interview, 12 July 2003.

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- ²¹² Linda, personal interview, 24 May 2004.
- ²¹³ "Cairn." Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th ed., 2001-2005, Columbia University Press, Great Book On-line. 11 Sept 2005 <<http://www.bartleby.com/65/ca/cairn.html>>.
- ²¹⁴ "David," personal interview, 17 Nov. 2003.
- ²¹⁵ Denise Morrissey, personal interview, 20 April 2004.
- ²¹⁶ DJ, personal interview, 30 March 2004.
- ²¹⁷ Tom, personal interview, 16 Dec 2003.
- ²¹⁸ Laura, personal interview, 14 Oct 2003.
- ²¹⁹ Paul B. Fenton, "The Symbolism of Ritual Circumambulation in Judaism and Islam: A Comparative Study," The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy 6 (1997): 345.
- ²²⁰ Fenton, "Ritual Circumambulation," 346.
- ²²¹ Tom, personal interview, 16 Dec 2003. See Thoreau, Walden 108.
- ²²² Laura, personal interview, 14 Oct. 2003.
- ²²³ Linda, personal interview, 24 May 2004.
- ²²⁴ Fred, personal interview, 13 June 2003.
- ²²⁵ Linda, personal interview, 24 May 2004.
- ²²⁶ Don, personal interview, 4 March, 2004.
- ²²⁷ Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," The Essays of Henry D. Thoreau, ed. Lewis Hyde (New York: North Point Press, 2002) 147.
- ²²⁸ Lawrence Buell described the rituals of Walden pilgrimage in The Environmental Imagination, 324-35.
- ²²⁹ Linda, personal interview, 24 May 2004.
- ²³⁰ Thoreau, "Walking," 153.

²³¹ Linda, personal interview, 24 May 2004.

²³² Brad, personal interview, 29 July 2003.

²³³ Alex, personal interview, 8 June 2004.

²³⁴ Linda, personal interview, 24 May 2004.

²³⁵ "Ritual," The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged Edition, 2nd ed. 1993.

²³⁶ Catherine Bell, Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²³⁷ It must be noted that on Tom's first visit to Concord, it was Emerson's study that made time stand still. Tom sees himself as a 'Concord' pilgrim rather than a Thoreauvian or Walden pilgrim. Tom, personal interview, 16 Dec. 2003.

²³⁸ Anne Clarke Brown, "A Pilgrim's Progress," Episcopal Life January 2005.

²³⁹ Tom, personal interview, 16 Dec. 2003.

²⁴⁰ Tom, personal interview, 16 Dec. 2003.

²⁴¹ Ann Zwinger, personal interview, 03 Nov 2003.

²⁴² Don, personal interview, 4 Mar. 2004.

²⁴³ Casey, "From Space to Place," 24-26.

²⁴⁴ Fred, personal interview, 13 June 2003.

²⁴⁵ Fred, personal interview, 13 June 2003.

²⁴⁶ Linda, personal interview, 24 May 2004.

²⁴⁷ Linda, personal interview, 24 May 2004.

²⁴⁸ Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, 19.

²⁴⁹ Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, 19.

²⁵⁰ Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, 19.

²⁵¹ Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, 19.

²⁵² Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, 19.

²⁵³ John Kimbrough, "The Rogation Days," University of Chicago Intersity Christian Fellowship Calendar, <<http://intersity1.uchicago.edu/kal/rogation.html> >.

²⁵⁴ Eade and Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage 6-9.

²⁵⁵ Eade and Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage.

²⁵⁶ Eade and Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage 8.

²⁵⁷ Eade and Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage.

²⁵⁸ Eade and Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage 51.

²⁵⁹ Glenn Bowman, "Christian Ideology and the Image of a Holy Land: The Place of Jerusalem Pilgrimage in the Various Christianities," Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage, eds. John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

²⁶⁰ Christopher McKeivitt, "San Giovanni Rotondo and the Shrine of Padre Pio," Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage, eds. John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2000).

²⁶¹ Brad, personal interview, 29 July 2003.

²⁶² Brian, personal interview, 12 July 2003.

²⁶³ Brian, personal interview, 12 July 2003.

²⁶⁴ Linda, personal interview, 24 May 2004.

²⁶⁵ Linda, personal interview, 24 May 2004.

²⁶⁶ Thoreau describes the conclusion of his time at Walden as a return to his sojourn “in civilized life.” Thoreau, Walden, 1.

²⁶⁷ Tom, personal interview, 16 Dec 2003.

²⁶⁸ Tom, personal interview, 16 Dec 2003.

²⁶⁹ Thoreau, Walden 50.

²⁷⁰ “Chronicle: “Something About Henry,” ed. Ellen Boyce, dir. Gregg Kind, prod. Lisa Pierpont, WCVB-TV, 24 Sept 2004.

²⁷¹ More than one story about visitors mistaking Walden Pond for the site in the movie “On Golden Pond” has reached my ears.

²⁷² Maynard, Walden Pond, 255.

²⁷³ G. Tod Slone, “Battle at Walden Pond: Essay Accounts,” The American Dissident, 12 Sept 2005 <<http://www.theamericandissident.org/>>.

²⁷⁴ G. Tod Slone, The American Dissident, 12 April 2005 <<http://www.theamericandissident.org/>>.

²⁷⁵ G. Tod Slone, The American Dissident, 12 April 2005 <<http://www.theamericandissident.org/>>.

²⁷⁶ Denise Morrissey, personal interview, 20 April 2004.

²⁷⁷ Denise Morrissey, personal interview, 20 April 2004.

²⁷⁸ Denise Morrissey, personal interview, 20 April 2004.

²⁷⁹ Eade and Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage.

²⁸⁰ Gregg Kind, “Something About Henry,” Chronicle (USA: WCVB-TV, 2004), ed. Lisa Pierpont, WCVB-TV, 24 Sept 2004.

²⁸¹ Gregg Kind, “Something About Henry,” Chronicle (USA: WCVB-TV, 2004), ed. Lisa Pierpont, WCVB-TV, 24 Sept 2004.

²⁸² Tyrus Miller, “From City-Dreams to the Dreaming Collective: Walter Benjamin's Political Dream Interpretation,” Philosophy and Social Criticism 22.6 (1996): 91.

²⁸³ Bowman, "Christian Ideology and the Image of a Holy Land: The Place of Jerusalem Pilgrimage in the Various Christianities."

²⁸⁴ Casey, "From Space to Place," 24.

²⁸⁵ Eade and Sallnow, eds., Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage 15.

²⁸⁶ Lane quoting Eliade, "What are the possibilities of a 'demystification in reverse' – an effort to recapture the mystery of divine presence today, though without returning to a pre-critical naivete with its 'enchanted enclosure of consciousness'?" Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, Expanded Edition 19. Mircea Eliade, The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) 126. Sheldrake refers to "Paul Ricoeur's conception of the hermeneutical circle by which one moves from an original naivete, with its easy immediacy of belief, through a necessary process of criticism and demythologization to a 'second naivete' by which wonder is restored, chastened of its earlier confusion and credulity." Sheldrake, Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity 20.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Summary for Prospective Participants

Walden: A Sacred Geography

A pilgrimage can be thought of as a journey made in search of a place, a person, or a state of being that embodies an ideal valued by the pilgrim. Walden is a place of pilgrimage for some people. As part of dissertation research for the Ph.D. in environmental studies, I am conducting a study on the topic, “What is the pilgrim experience of Walden?” I chose this topic because my own values and beliefs have been influenced by experience with special places. As part of the study, I will also complete a literature review to learn more about previous work on the experience of pilgrimage and the meaning of special places. Since I am particularly interested in descriptions and meanings connected with your experience of Walden, I will use qualitative research methods to focus on the essence of that experience. I plan to interview about twelve participants, and to adhere to ethical principles of human science research. The descriptions and stories that I will be seeking will be used to develop themes that contribute to a synthesis of the pilgrimage experience of Walden as a whole.

Please contact me if you have an interest in the study.

Joy Ackerman
Antioch New England Graduate School
40 Avon St.
Keene, NH 03431

I can be reached at (603) 357-3122 x367 or
jackerman@antiochne.edu

Appendix B: Letter to Participants

Date _____
Dear _____,

Thanks for your interest in my dissertation research on the ‘pilgrim’ experience of Walden. I value the unique contribution that you can make to this study, and I am excited about the possibility of your participation in it. The purpose of this letter is to go over some of the things we have already discussed, and to get your signature on the participation-release form that is attached to this letter.

The research model uses a qualitative approach, through which I want to get comprehensive descriptions of your experience. In this way I hope to shed light on my question: “What is the pilgrim experience of Walden?”

Through your participation in this study, I hope to understand something of the power of this place as it reveals itself in your own experience. You will be asked to recall specific places, impressions and actions that contributed to your experience of Walden. I am looking for comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like for you; what Walden means to you and how your experience helped to shape that meaning.

I value your participation and thank you for the commitment of time, energy, and effort. If you have any questions before signing the release form, or if there is a problem with the date and time of our meeting, I can be reached at () xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,

Appendix C: Participant Release Agreement

I agree to participate in a research study of “What is the pilgrim experience of Walden?”

I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily. I grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing a Ph.D. degree, including a dissertation and any other future publication. I understand that a brief synopsis of each participant, including myself, will be used and will include the following information: first name (or pseudonym, if preferred), gender, age now and age at the time of my visit(s) to Walden, the general geographic region I call home or from which I traveled to Walden, my general field of employment, and any other pertinent information that will help the reader come to know and recall each participant. I grant permission for the above personal information to be used. I agree to meet at the following location _____ on the following date _____ at _____ for an initial interview of 1 to 2 hours. If necessary, I will be available at a mutually agreed upon time and place for an additional 1 to 1 1/2 hour interview. I also grant permission to audiotape the interview(s).

Research Participant/Date

Primary Researcher/Date

If you have questions or concerns at any time during the course of the study, please contact me.

Joy Ackerman

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Appendix D: Interview Guide

Opening Statement: The participant is asked to ‘go back to a memorable time at Walden’ and walk me through a significant visit to Walden, describing their experience.

The questions and topics below are aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the meaning of the pilgrim experience of Walden. Additional questions aimed at clarification and expansion on descriptions or replies may be offered in the course of the interview. The emphasis in the interview is to encourage the participant to describe their own experience, rather than to complete a set of questions. These questions may be used in full, in part, or not at all, during the course of an interview, as aids to obtaining sufficient depth and meaning in the description of the participant’s experience.

Description: Describe your (first, most significant, etc) visit to Walden.

What places or events stand out for you?

How are they meaningful for you?

Motivation: What motivated you to visit Walden?

What were your expectations of Walden before you came?

How did your visit meet or differ from those expectations?

What had you read of, or known about, Thoreau?

Reflection: Looking back on your experience, what thoughts and feelings stand out for you?

Invitation for further exploration:

Is there anything else that you want to share about your experience of Walden that you feel is significant for understanding what it was like, and what it means in your life?

Thank You Letter to Participants

Date _____
Dear _____,

Thank you for meeting with me in an extended interview and sharing your experience of Walden. I appreciate your willingness to share your unique and personal thoughts, feelings, and situations.

I have enclosed a transcript of your interview. Would you please review the entire document? Ask yourself if this interview has fully captured the essence of your experience of Walden. After reviewing the transcript of the interview, you may realized that an important experience(s) was neglected. Please feel free to add comments that would further elaborate your experience(s), or if you prefer we can arrange to meet again and tape record your additions or corrections. Don't be concerned about making grammatical corrections. The way you told your story is critical.

When you have reviewed the verbatim transcript and have had an opportunity to make changes and additions, please return the transcript in the stamped, addressed envelope.

I have greatly valued your participation in this research study and your willingness to share your experience. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,