RONALD EARL CLAPPER

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WALDEN: A GENETIC TEXT

The familiar image of Henry Thoreau (1817-1862) has been that of an eccentric lover of woodchucks and skunk-cabbage who, in bragging his way through WALDEN, was relatively unaware of the more tragic aspects of human experience that wrinkled the brows of Hawthorne and Melville. But behind the mask of the self-reliant narrator of WALDEN breathed a man of flesh and blood who was deeply involved in the doubts and tensions of his age. In choosing “to brag as lustily as chanticleer” rather than “to write an ode to dejection,” Thoreau was putting the best face on the matter, as he admitted in a passage canceled from the WALDEN manuscript just before publication:1

Thoreau made no secret, however, that he was taking some liberties with his account, such as combining two years into one “for convenience,” but it was not until the publication of THE JOURNALS in 1906 that it became evident that a considerable portion of WALDEN was based upon experiences Thoreau had after he left the pond. Some years ago J. Lyndon Shanley was able to distinguish seven distinct stages in the development of the WALDEN manuscript2 by grouping the leaves on the basis of similarities in the color and size of the paper, the shade of the ink, and the thickness of the penstroke.3 Because of Thoreau’s habit of retaining canceled leaves that were no longer a part of his working manuscript, we are able to observe the stage by stage development of WALDEN from the time Thoreau left the pond in 1847 until just before he prepared the copy for the printer in 1854.

Although Shanley did publish the first version of WALDEN in the Appendix to his study of the manuscript,4 no attempt was made to provide a complete transcript of the additions, cancellations, and revisions Thoreau made during the course of his work. The very nature of the manuscript itself creates certain problems. A literal transcript of any of the versions after the first would not prove satisfactory since none of the subsequent versions forms a complete piece in itself but consists of revisions of and additions to earlier versions. A better way of arranging the text might be to print the various versions in parallel columns if it were not for the great length of the manuscript. Still, however, because of the shifting of material within the various versions, a parallel text would not enable the reader to follow the order of the material in any one version. The method I have finally chosen is to present a Genetic Text in the form of a standard printed version of WALDEN5 as the running text and to indicate in footnotes all substantive variants and shifts in the order of material as they

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1. JOURNAL, III, 216.
2. JOURNAL, III, 215-16.
3. JOURNAL, II, 101. Thoreau was experiencing what Brewster Ghiselin describes as typical of the initial stages in the creative process: “it is only as the work is done that the meaning of the creative effort can appear and that the development of the artists brought about by it is attained. This is why the creative urge may be at first so extremely vague as hardly to identify itself.... Creation begins typically with a vague, even a confused excitement, some sort of yearning, hunch, or other pre-verbal intimation of approaching or potential resolution.” See THE CREATIVE PROCESS (Berkeley, 1952), pp.13-14.
4. JOURNAL, III, 217.
5. JOURNAL, III, 51-52.
appear in the manuscript versions. This method actually provides the reader with a framework he would not have if he went directly to the manuscript, for even with all the versions spread out before him, he would have a difficult time distinguishing between passages that do not occur in the manuscript and those that merely were placed in a different order. In the Genetic Text, however, the reader can turn to any passage in the book and find out when it was first added to the manuscript, in what order it appeared, in what versions it was recopied, and the extent of its revision. The reader can compare the differences not only between one version and another but also between the original copying and the subsequent interlinings within the same version. For anyone with the desire and fortitude, the Genetic Text will enable him to reconstruct the complete text of the manuscript at any one of its seven stages (except where leaves are missing from the manuscript) by referring to the footnotes in connection with the running text.

One of the insights to be gained from a study of the Genetic Text is that many of the book’s inconsistencies can be traced to a difference in their period of composition. The desire, for example, to make his life one of innocence and simplicity, in tune with Nature herself, which the author expresses in much of “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For” was carried over from the original version, where the bulk of the “Higher Laws” chapter, which expresses the contrasting desire to “overcome” Nature, was not written until the fifth version. Similarly, the attitude that “there can be no very black melancholy” in Nature expressed in the fourth paragraph of “Solitude” was contained in the original version, while the contrasting attitude in the twentieth paragraph of “Sounds,” which characterizes the twilight sounds of the owls as “suggesting a vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognized,” and as representing “the stark twilight and unsatisfied thought which all have,” was added in the fourth version at a time when Thoreau was becoming aware of the deeper realms of Nature and the human minds.

If nothing else, the Genetic Text at least provides evidence of an important change in the author’s thinking during the composition of his masterpiece and raises serious doubts as to the validity of Shanley’s major conclusion in THE MAKING OF WALDEN: “The essential nature of WALDEN did not change from first to last. Much material was added over the years, but it did not introduce a new element and create a new strain; it was absorbed by and used according to the nature of the original piece.” The “nature of the original piece” did change, and what follows is an attempt to trace, in brief, the nature and extent of that change – for during the seven years that elapsed between the time he left the pond and the year his book was published, Thoreau matured far beyond the confines of Emerson’s Transcendental optimism and achieved a rich intellectual and poetic subtlety and complexity not far from that of Hawthorne and Melville; what had begun as a fairly straightforward account of his life in the woods from July 4, 1845, to September 6, 1847, became by the time of its publication a remarkably suggestive book that reflected the intellectual problems of its age.

Even during the years when Emerson had his greatest influence over Thoreau, the younger man possessed a hard-headedness that separated him from the Transcendentalists. To the chagrin of his close friend and first biographer, Ellery Channing, “Speculations on the special faculties of the mind, or whether the Not Me comes out of the ‘I’, or the All out of the infinite Nothing, he could not entertain.” As Leon Howard has pointed out, Thoreau “believed that the mass of men could escape the quiet desperation of their lives more readily by the light of common understanding than by that of Transcendental reason.” In spite of the self-confident narrator of WALDEN, one is aware of a somewhat more skeptical figure lurking through the pages – measuring the depth of the pond to prove that it really is not bottomless or driving life into a corner to prove that most of its so-called essentials are mere superfluities. With typical Yankee stubbornness, Thoreau demanded what Nathaniel Hawthorne referred to as “wisdom that had been tested by the tenor of a life.” It is this insistence that things make sense in terms of his own experience that led Thoreau to take on the mid-century doubts that troubled Hawthorne and Melville rather than to seek comfort in some transcendent realm where all contradictions would resolve themselves. Written in an age that was caught between two worlds – a dying Romanticism and a Naturalism waiting to be fathered by Darwin and Spencer — WALDEN bears the scars of its author’s attempt to reconcile his genuine love of Nature with his growing awareness of her indifference to man. But it also bears
the fruits of its author’s own intellectual and poetic maturity and his deepening sense of what it means to be involved in mankind.

As long as he did not stray too far from the woods of Concord, there are little to make Thoreau seriously question Nature’s benevolence. A truer test was his venture into the wilds of Maine. When the opportunity came in the late summer of 1846 to visit his cousin in Bangor, Thoreau made the trip by insisting upon climbing Mt. Katahdin (Ktaadn), Maine’s highest peak. While his companions prepared to turn back, Thoreau pushed on alone toward the summit where he discovered a kind of Nature different from anything he had experienced before.10

It was vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits. Some part of the beholder, even some vital part, seems to escape through the loose grating of his ribs as he ascends. He is more lone that you can imagine.... Vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature has got him at disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty. She does not smile on him as in the plains.

And yet we have not seen pure Nature, unless we have seen her thus vast and drear and inhuman, though in the midst of cities. Nature was here something savage and awful, though beautiful. I looked with awe at the ground I trod on, to see what the Powers had made there, the form and fashion and material of their work. This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night.... Man was not to be associated with it. It was Matter, vast, terrific, — not his Mother Earth that we have heard of, not for him to tread on, or be buried in, — no, it were being too familiar even to let his bones lie there, — the home, this of Necessity and Fate. There was clearly felt the presence of a force not bound to be kind to man.

The most immediate effect of this experience on the WALDEN manuscript was the passage Thoreau added at the very end of Version A, probably just before he left the pond.11

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10. JOURNAL, III, 236, 378.
11. JOURNAL, V, 135. Compare JOURNAL, IV, 410: “My thought is a part of the meaning of the world, and hence I use a part of the world as a symbol to express my thought.”
Thoreau’s first trip to Cape Cod apparently made as deep an impression upon him as did his trip to the Maine woods, for both places became favorite haunts. When he and Ellery Channing stopped off at Cohasset to survey the wreckage of a shipload of Irish immigrants, Thoreau soon lost his initial sympathy for the human remnants strewn along the beach in his fascination for a force that could toss and mangle human beings with such indifference—a fascination that led him back alone in June 1850, where with wary eyes he once again looked out over the vast ocean, now calm, that lay before him.12

Yet, this same placid Ocean, as civil now as a city’s harbor, a place for ships and commerce, will ere long be lashed into sudden fury, and all its caves and cliffs will resound with tumult. It will ruthlessly heave these vessels to and fro, break them into pieces in its sandy or stony jaws, and deliver their crews to sea monsters. It will play with them like seaweed, distend them like dead frogs, and carry them about, now high, now low, to show to the fishes, giving them a nibble. This gentle Ocean will toss and tear the rag of a man’s body like the father of mad bulls, and his relatives may be seen seeking the remnants for weeks along the strand.

By the time he had made his third excursion in July 1855, he had come to regard the beach as “a vast morgue, where famished dogs may range in packs, and crows come daily to glean the pittance which the tide leaves them. The carcasses of men and beasts together lie stately up upon its shelf, rotting and bleaching in the sun and waves, and each tide turns them in their beds, and tucks fresh sand under them. There is naked Nature,—inhumanly sincere, wasting no thought on man, nibbling at the cliffy shore where gulls wheel amid the spray.”13

Not even the plains of Concord could look the same after such experiences. Behind Nature’s smile something mischievous was going on, even in such a civilized place as Heywood’s meadow. Here, after observing a mud turtle with “a large pout just dead and partly devoured, which he held in his jaws,” Thoreau recreated in his imagination the events that led up to the struggle for life and death—the turtle, “buried in the mud at the bottom up to his eyes,” waiting, and the pout, unsuspecting, sailing over. “Suddenly a mud volcano swallowed him up, seized his midriff; he fell into those relentless jaws from which there is no escape, which relax not their hold even in death. There the pout might calculate on remaining until nine days after his head was cut off.”14

When Thoreau began to make extensive additions to the WALDEN manuscript in version D, sometime in January 1852, one of the first things he incorporated into the manuscript was the account of the ant battle in “Brute Neighbors.” After first describing the battle in mock-heroic terms from afar, he focused in upon the battle, describing it in terms of its actual ferocity and carnage.15

Holding a microscope to the first-mentioned red ant, I saw that, though he was assiduously gnawing at the near fore-leg of his enemy, having severed his remaining feeler, his own breast was all torn away, exposing what vitals he had there to the jaws of the black warrior, whose breast-plate was apparently too thick for him to piece; and the dark carbuncles of the sufferer’s eyes shone with ferocity such as war only could excite. They struggled half an hour longer under the tumbler, and when I looked again the black soldier had severed the heads of his foes from their bodies, and the still living heads were handing on either side of him like ghastly trophies at his saddle-bow, still apparently as firmly fastened as ever, and he was endeavoring with feeble struggles, being with feelers and with only the remnant of a leg, and I know not how many other wounds, to divest himself of them.

12. JOURNAL, III, 438.
13. JOURNAL, IV, 335.
14. JOURNAL, III, 201.
15. Spring 14 and 2b in the Genetic Text.
As was always the case, and as the third and fourth chapters of Walden particularly attest, Thoreau tempered his observations with his reading. In 1849 he had been granted special permission to check books out of the Harvard College Library, and he received similar privileges from the Boston Society of Nature History in December 1850. In May 1851 he was engrossed in Jacob Bigelow’s American Medical Botany, with its account of natural poisons in plants, and Asa Gray’s Manual of Botany of the Northern United States, with its account of the effects of darkness on plants and the importance of deep roots to perennials. In June 1851 Thoreau took extensive notes in his journal on Darwin’s Naturalist’s Voyage Around the World, and when Darwin’s Origin of the Species was published eight years later Thoreau took notes on it too and said he was very much impressed by it. In August 1851, Thoreau made a trip to Boston to check out two books from the library of the Society of Natural History. The first was Georges Cuvier’s Animal Kingdom, which implied that life had developed into high forms through successive creations. The second book was Agassiz and Gould’s Principles of Zoology, which contained a discussion of metamorphoses, or the changes which the body of an animal undergoes after birth—a concept that would interest Thoreau again late in 1852 when he was reading Kirby and Spence’s Introduction to Entomology and writing material for “Higher Laws.”

On that same trip Thoreau stopped off at the Harvard College Library for the Travels in North America of Per Kalm, an enthusiast of Linnaeus, who evidently inspired Thoreau to check out Dietrich Stover’s Life of Sir Charles Linnaeus and Richard Pulteney’s General View of the Writings of Linnaeus that November and Linnaeus’s Philosophia Botanica the following February.

From his reading of Asa Gray’s Manual of Botany in May 1851, Thoreau noted how annuals perish root and all the first season whereas biennials have extended roots that store up food for their second or flowering season. By analogy Thoreau suggested that the maturing of the human mind involves penetrating “into the womb of things,” that thought must be “wombed and rooted in darkness, a most and fertile darkness,—its roots in Hades like the tree of life.”

His observations during a moonlight walk to Fair Haven by way of the railroad tracks on June 11 tended to confirm his reading. In the daylight the sandbank of the new Deep Cut has appeared almost flat, but now in the moonlight its surface was casting dark shadows, leading Thoreau to conclude that “it was necessary to see objects by moonlight as well as sunlight, to get a complete notion of them.” Then upon entering a damp field he was impressed by a strange sense of creativity and fertility and felt “nearer to the origin of things.” Eventually this “moist and fertile darkness” would be incorporated into “Spring” in Walden, with its account of the thawing of the sandbank as it oozed down the sides of the Deep Cut, beside which its author felt “nearer to the vitals of the globe” because it reminded him of “excrements of all kind” and suggested that “Nature has some bowels.”

But in the meanwhile as Thoreau was walking with Channing on the night of July 11, 1851, he apparently found his friend incapable of understanding the darker side of Nature, for the next night Thoreau was out walking alone and bidding “farewell to those who will talk of nature unnaturally.” A similar feeling may have led Thoreau to confess in October 1851 that he and Emerson did not believe in the same God. By January 1852, his break with Emerson was complete: “I never realized so distinctly as this moment that I am peacefully parting company with the best friend I ever had, by each pursuing his proper path. I perceive that it is possible that we may have a better understanding now than when we were more at one. Not expecting such essential agreement as before. Simply our paths diverge.”

As Thoreau had admitted after his excursion into the vast, undeveloped regions of Maine, “man could no longer accuse institutions and society, but must front the true source of evil.” The true source of evil, Thoreau had come to recognize, was inherent in man’s animal nature: “Life is a warfare, a struggle, and the diseases of the body answer to the troubles and defeats of the spirit. Man begins by quarrelling with the animal in him, and the result is immediate disease.” Recalling Hawthorne’s tale “Egotism, or the Bosom Serpent,” Thoreau...

17. Journal, VI, 89.
18. Journal, VI, 190-91.
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asked himself in August 1851:

How many ova have I swallowed? Who knows what will be hatched within me? There were some seeds of thought, methinks, floating in that water, which are expanding in me. The man must not drink of the running streams, the living waters, who is not prepared to have all nature reborn in him, — to suckle monsters. The snake in my stomach lifts his head to my mouth at the sound of running water. When was it that I swallowed a snake? I have got rid of the snake in my stomach. I drank of stagnant waters once. That accounts for it. I caught him by the throat and drew him out, and had a well day after all. Is there not such a thing as getting rid of the snake which you have swallowed when young, when thoughtless you stooped and drank at stagnant waters, which has worried you in your waking hours and in your sleep ever since, and appropriated the life that was yours? Will he not ascend into your mouth at the sound of running water? Then catch him boldly by the head and draw him out, though you may think his tail be curled about your vitals.

It was this animal in man that Thoreau tried to come to terms with while writing the bulk of “Higher Laws” in version E: “We are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers. It is reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled; like the worms which, even in life and health, occupy our bodies. Possibly we may withdraw from it, but never change its nature.” Hawthorne, who was to return to Concord in the spring of 1852, would take a similar position in The Marble Faun (1860) in his speculation “that the Faun might be educated through the medium of his emotions, so that the coarser animal portion of his nature might eventually be thrown into the background, though never utterly expelled.” By confronting the true source of evil as something inherent in man’s animal nature, Thoreau found himself at odds with an earlier notion, which he shared with Emerson and had already expressed in a considerable portion of the WALDEN manuscript, that natural law and moral law were one and the ideal man was one who lived close to Nature. Such a man was Alex Therien, the principal subject of “Visitors,” whom Thoreau described in completely sympathetic terms in version A. But now that Thoreau had begun to perceive the irresolvable tension between man’s natural and moral instincts, the idea man was one who redeemed the animal in himself by developing his poetic imagination: “Nature is hard to overcome, but she must be overcome.” In version E, Thoreau revised his view of Therien. He complained that he could never get Therien to take a spiritual view of life: “The highest that he appeared to conceive of was a simple expediency, such as you might expect an animal to appreciate.” His thinking was still “primitive and immersed in his animal life.” Yet even though Thoreau himself had developed his imagination, he admitted that the animal in man is so strong that if he were to live in the wilderness at Walden Pond again he would “be tempted to become a fisher and hunter in earnest.”

Although maturity brought with it for Thoreau as for Wordsworth the sense of a loss of celestial light and glory from meadow, grove, and stream, there was an abundant recompense in the more sober joy that remained. “Why should pensiveness be akin to sadness? There is a certain fertile sadness which I would not avoid, but rather earnestly seek. It is positively joyful to me. It saves my life from being trivial. My life flows with a deeper current, no longer as a shallow and brawling stream.” A far richer life than that of natural innocence, which he sought in going to the pond, could be attained by the development of man’s moral nature through the education of his emotions. “What is Nature without this lofty tumbling?” Apparently Emerson could not understand this element in Thoreau any more than he could in Hawthorne, for in January 1852 Thoreau complains: “My friend invites me to read my papers to him. Gladly would I read if he would hear. He must not hear coarsely, but finely, suffering not the least to pass through the sieve of hearing. To associate with one for years with joy who never met you thought with thought! An overflowing sympathy while yet there is no intellectual communion.... It is dull work reading to one who does not apprehend you.” When WALDEN was finally published, it was received with more enthusiasm by Hawthorne than by Emerson. It was not until the beginning of 1852, however, that Thoreau began to see a relationship between his WALDEN
manuscript and the material he was writing in his JOURNAL. He had written version B and C by 1849, but they were little more than a polishing and recopying of version A. By November 1850, the creative process that would eventually reshape WALDEN was beginning to be felt in the form of a vague yearning toward some potential resolution:

I feel ripe for something, yet do nothing, can’t discover what that thing is. I feel fertile merely. It is seedtime with me. I have lain fallow long enough.

Notwithstanding a sense of unworthiness which possesses me, not without reason, notwithstanding that I regard myself as a good deal of a scamp, yet for the most part the spirit of the universe is unaccountably kind to me, and I enjoy perhaps an unusual share of happiness. Yet I question if there is not some settlement to come.

It was not until January 22, 1852, that the hitherto disconnected thoughts of this sort in his Journal had begun to shape themselves into a larger whole. “Thoughts accidentally thrown together become a frame in which more may be developed and exhibited.... Having by chance recorded a few disconnected thoughts and then brought them into juxtaposition, they suggest a whole new field in which it was possible to labor and to think.” Thoreau was discovering that through the coloring of the imagination Nature could take on a suggestiveness that would convey his most subtle feelings. The reflection of objects in water created “a dualism which nature loves. What you commonly see is but half. Where the shore is very low the actual and reflected trees appear to stand foot to foot, and it is but a line that separates them, and the water and the sky almost flow into one another.” Creating the kind of “neutral territory” Hawthorne described in “The Custom-House,” “Where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other.” In the material Thoreau wrote in versions D, E, and F, the pond itself became more and more the center of focus — a neutral territory, “blue at one time and green at another, even from the same point of view. Lying between the earth and the heavens, it partakes of the color of both.” It was what Nature suggested and was the symbol of that Thoreau cared for. “I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol.”

Quite in contrast to the writer in the earlier versions (A through C) who talked so much about himself, the conscious artist in the later versions (D through G) tended to lose himself in his material and allow his descriptions, especially those of the pond, to take on a suggestiveness that was lacking in much of the earlier material. Thoreau perceived this change as he was beginning version D in January 1852:

Nature never indulges in exclamations, never says Ah! Or Alas! She is not of French descent. She is a plain writer, uses few gestures, does not add to her verbs, uses few adverbs, uses no expletives. I find that I use many words for the sake of emphasis which really add nothing to the force of my sentences, and they look relieved the moment I have cancelled these. Words by which I express my mood, my conviction, rather than the simple truth.

His writing now involved a different kind of imaginative activity. Instead of absorbing material into himself and giving it the color of his own personality — the kind of imagination James Russell Lowell attributed to him and referred to as “receptive” — Thoreau was absorbing himself in the particulars of his material and thus freeing from his material the presence of the conscious artist — the kind of “active” imagination Lowell found so limited in Thoreau. This latter form of imaginative activity was similar to what Coleridge had called the “primary imagination” and was best exemplified for Thoreau as well as for Lowell and Coleridge in the works of Shakespeare:

The peculiarity of a work of genius is the absence of the speaker from his speech. He is but the medium. You behold a perfect work, but you do not behold the worker. I read its page, but it is free form any man that can be remembered as an impassable desert.

I think that the one word which will explain the Shakespeare miracle is “unconsciousness.”
Once Thoreau discovered that he could detach himself from his material by becoming “observant” of nature rather than being “part and parcel,” the creative impulse that had been stirring within him for so many months at last received direction. The poet had all of nature for “raw material of tropes and symbols with which to describe his life.... If I am overflowing with life, am rich in experience for which I lack expression, then nature will be my language full of poetry, — all nature will fable, and every natural phenomenon be a myth.”

It was in the spring of 1852 that Thoreau said he first perceived that the year is a circle. Apparently like Donatello, he had “travelled in a circle,” returning, in the words of Miriam, “with an inestimable treasure of improvement won from an experience of pain.” For Thoreau had learned, in his own words, that there must be “some tragedy, at least some dwelling on, or even exaggeration of, the tragic side of life.... The whole of life is seen by some through this darker medium,—partakes of the tragic,—and its bright and splendid lights become thus lurid.” Like the rainbow, which Thoreau said was “the symbol of the triumph which succeeds to a grief that has tried us to advantage, so that at last we can smile through our tears,” the optimism of WALDEN was to be a defiant optimism, the reassurance of a man who had weathered the storm.

Throughout versions E, F, and G, while the manuscript was being set off into chapters and the fall and winter were being developed to complete the circle of the year, Thoreau was working in that neutral territory between the actual and the imaginary, giving the pond human qualities (e.g., “Walden was dead and is alive again;” “it stretched itself and yawned like a waking man”). In describing the particulars of Nature, its hardening and thawing, Thoreau was finally able to give form to that expanding creative force that characterized his own inner life.

It took the cold and bleakness of November to ripen the walnut, but the human brain is the kernel which the winter itself matures.... It is for man the seasons and all their fruits exist. The winter was made to concentrate and harden and mature the kernel of his brain, to give tone and firmness and consistency to his thought. We too have our thaws. They come to our January moods, when our ice cracks, and our sluices break loose. Thought that was frozen up under stern experience gushes forth in feeling and expression.

In April 1854, just four months before WALDEN was published and on the very spring day that Walden Pond had opened completely, Thoreau created a metaphor applicable to the book he had just finished:

Some poets mature early and die young. Their fruits have a delicious flavor like strawberries, but do not keep till fall or winter. Others are slower in coming to their growth. Their fruits may be less delicious, but are a more lasting food and are so hardened by the sun of summer and the coolness of autumn that they keep sound over winter. The first are June-eatings, early but soon withering; the last are russets, which last till June again.

WALDEN, nine long years in coming into maturity, was a product of that second spring — not a June-eating, early but soon withering, but a russet, which lasts till June again — for it had been hardened by the sun of the author’s own poetic maturity and by the coolness of his own deepening awareness of what it means to be involved in mankind. As a result of that poetic maturity, WALDEN has kept sound over many a winter.
The author argues that the attribution of their findings to inherited genetic effects was without basis because McGue et al. never...Â

This article takes issue with the behavior-genetic analysis of parenting style presented by M. McGue, I. Elkins, B. Walden, and W. G. Iacono. The author argues that the attribution of their findings to inherited genetic effects was without basis because McGue et al. never indicated how those genetic effects manifested themselves. Instead, McGue et al. neglected important, and inevitable, developmental effects that most developmental psychologists understand to influence parent and adolescent behavior. The best study guide to Walden on the planet, from the creators of SparkNotes. Get the summaries, analysis, and quotes you need.Â Welcome to the LitCharts study guide on Henry David Thoreau's Walden. Created by the original team behind SparkNotes, LitCharts are the world's best literature guides. Walden: Introduction. A concise biography of Henry David Thoreau plus historical and literary context for Walden. Walden: Plot Summary. A quick-reference summary: Walden on a single page. Walden: Detailed Summary & Analysis. In-depth summary and analysis of every chapter of Walden. Visual theme-tracking, too. Walden: Themes. Walden serves as a written account of the two years Henry David Thoreau lived alone in a cabin in Concord, Massachusetts. He built this cabin, grew vegetables, and had transcendental experiences. He uses these to examine the fundamental elements of identity.Â Walden is an account of the two years during which Henry David Thoreau built his own cabin, raised his own food, and lived a life of simplicity in the woods near Concord, Massachusetts. Thoreauâ€™s idea was that oneâ€™s true self could be lost amid the distractions of ordinary life. His experiment consisted of stripping away those distractions, living deliberately instead of automatically, and following the inclinations that arose within him in the solitude, silence, and leisure of his simplified life.