



Performing Loss, Elegy, and Transcendental Friendship

WILLIAM ROSSI

—FOR JOEL

“Friendship, like the immortality of the soul, is too good to be believed.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Friendship,” 1841

THE broad outlines of Henry Thoreau’s complicated relationship with Ralph Waldo Emerson are well known. Embraced as a protégé following his graduation from Harvard College in 1837 and admitted to the circle of radical thinkers and young seekers who had gathered around Emerson, Thoreau benefited enormously, throughout the first decade of their friendship, from the older man’s encouragement, material assistance, professional advice, and rising stature as a writer and philosopher. In the seven-year period between April 1841, when he first moved into the Emerson house, and July 1848, when Emerson returned from an eight-month lecture tour in Britain, Thoreau passed more time with Emerson—under his roof or under his sponsorship—than with his own family. “For the simple reason that Emerson was the inspiration of his early years,” Thoreau was more invested in the friendship.¹

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of John Lysaker, whose initiative provided a first occasion for these thoughts, as well as the vital encouragement and valuable criticism he received from Karen Ford, Jim Crosswhite, and Lynne Rossi.

¹Robert Sattelmeyer, “Emerson and Thoreau,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Joel Myerson (New York: Cambridge University Press, *The New England Quarterly*, vol. LXXXI, no. 2 (June 2008). © 2008 by The New England Quarterly. All rights reserved.

But after a serious falling out in autumn 1848, apparently exacerbated by Emerson's belated criticism of Thoreau's first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), the relationship never regained its former intimacy.² Wounded and proud, his literary career on indefinite hold after the commercial failure of *A Week*, Thoreau seemed to Emerson to be wasting his time on nature studies, wandering the fields and forests like some deluded wood god.³ For his part, Thoreau began to feel that "Emerson is too grand for me[.] He belongs to the nobility & wears their cloak & manners—is attracted to Plato not to Socrates."⁴ Although they remained on good terms as neighbors and as allies in local and national causes, principally abolition, Thoreau captured both the present and the future of their friendship when he reflected in January 1852, "Simply our paths diverge."⁵ In the end, having been Thoreau's neighbor, mentor, friend, and belated critic, Emerson became his most prominent, most influential eulogist. In "Thoreau," published in the *Atlantic Monthly* soon after his friend's death in 1862 and reprinted over and over again in subsequent decades, Emerson saluted Thoreau as an "iconoclast in literature" while also fixing, for generations down to the

1995), p. 26. The two most extensive treatments of the writers' relationship are Joel Porte, *Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), and Harmon Smith, *My Friend, My Friend: The Story of Thoreau's Relationship with Emerson* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

²Sattelmeyer argues persuasively that the break probably also involved Thoreau's idealized feelings for Emerson's second wife, Lydia Jackson Emerson (whom her husband called "Lidian"). See "When He Became My Enemy: Emerson and Thoreau, 1848–49," *New England Quarterly* 62 (1989): 187–204.

³As Emerson characterized his friend in summer 1848: "Henry Thoreau is like the woodgod who solicits the wandering poet & draws him into antres vast & deserts idle, & bereaves him of his memory, & leaves him naked, plaiting vines & with twigs in his hand. Very seductive are the first steps from the town to the woods, but the End is want & madness" (*The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson [JMN]*, ed. William H. Gilman et al., 16 vols. [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960–82], 10:344).

⁴Henry D. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. 4: 1851–1852, ed. Leonard N. Neufeldt and Nancy Craig Simmons (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 309.

⁵Thoreau, *Journal*, 4:274.

present day, the image of that life as one of “renunciation and withdrawal.”⁶

Like children of an acrimonious divorce, modern critics have tended to take sides, more recently Thoreau’s, “stress[ing] the disciple’s independence at the master’s expense” and “tell[ing] the Emerson to Thoreau story as a tale of insurgence rather than of continuity.”⁷ But even for partisans, it has not been easy. In attempting to parse the complicated dynamic between the two authors, commentators have been compelled not only to sort out various tensions in the relationship—tensions arising from the men’s fourteen-year age difference, considerable personality quirks, philosophical divergences, and from Thoreau’s ambiguous role in the Emerson household—but also to reckon with the ideology of friendship they shared. Bronson Alcott captured the significance that transcendentalists attached to friendship when he described it as “the only religion possible to moderns” in an increasingly secular age.⁸ Conceived as a speechless bond between “higher” selves, with each person lovingly committed to cultivating the best in the other, transcendental friendship may strike us now as blithely naive and impossibly ideal, “a relationship of mutual recognition so perfect that it could never be fully realized on earth.”⁹ Yet, however otherworldly and interpersonally peculiar, his friendship with Emerson clearly proved invaluable for Thoreau, fostering his successful apprenticeship and, during the Walden Pond years, his emergence as a writer of extraordinary vision and talent.

At the heart of the friends’ dynamic was Emerson’s self-invention as a radically unconventional authority figure, one

⁶Emerson, “Thoreau,” in Henry D. Thoreau, “Walden,” “Civil Disobedience,” and *Other Writings*, ed. William Rossi, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), p. 394. Sattelmeyer, “Emerson and Thoreau,” p. 37.

⁷Lawrence Buell, *Emerson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 299, 300.

⁸A. Bronson Alcott, *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*, ed. Odell Shepard (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1938), p. 199.

⁹Jeffrey Steele, “Transcendental Friendship: Emerson, Fuller, and Thoreau,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 136.

who, as Lawrence Buell puts it, “invites you to kill him off if you don’t find him useful.” In practice, the “double message” conveyed to disciples, “‘I say unto you, be self-reliant,’” made Emerson less a mentor than an “anti-mentor.”¹⁰ This double-bind is nicely illustrated by a well-intentioned, if sharp, piece of advice Emerson reports having given his twenty-four-year-old live-in protégé in September 1841.

I told H. T. that his freedom is in the form, but he does not disclose new matter. I am very familiar with all his thoughts—they are my own quite originally drest. But if the question be, what new ideas has he thrown into circulation, he has not yet told what that is which he was created to say.¹¹

Even as he invites Thoreau to express freely that “which he was created to say,” Emerson seems at the same time patronizing, proprietary, and hard to please. Plugged in as he was to the oracle of what were then called the “New Views,” Thoreau could hardly help uttering thoughts “familiar” to his mentor. Indeed, given the gratitude Thoreau routinely expresses in his journal of the time, Emerson’s impression of having originated Thoreau’s ideas may well reflect the younger writer’s homage. Yet, Emerson’s barely concealed, self-congratulatory pleasure at seeing “my own [thoughts] quite originally drest” hints not only at the disciple’s difficulty in achieving originality but also at the means by which he might attain a measure of it. If Thoreau were to “disclose [his own] new matter” by extending the master’s ideas in a new “form,” he might simultaneously pay tribute to them and redouble their “circulation.” Thus, although bound by the terms of transcendental friendship to complement Emerson’s thought in learning to say “what he was created to say,” Thoreau was equally bound by Emersonian self-reliance to diverge from his mentor.

The inspiration Thoreau derived from this complex relationship, the love and gratitude he felt, and the literary heights to which it carried him are palpably present in the long discourse on friendship in *A Week*’s “Wednesday” chapter. Yet if, as I will

¹⁰Buell, *Emerson*, pp. 292, 308.

¹¹Emerson, *JMN*, 8:96.

argue, Thoreau's discourse not only represents his complementary engagement with Emersonian thought and writing on the subject of transcendental friendship but is itself a performance of that friendship, we should not wonder that he felt deeply betrayed by Emerson's criticism, whether its tone or substance. "I had a friend, I wrote a book, I asked my friend's criticism, I never got but praise for what was good in it," Thoreau wrote in his journal in early autumn 1849. But "my friend became estranged from me and then I got blame for all that was bad,—& so I got at last the criticism which I wanted."¹²

But to better understand Thoreau's stake in the relationship, to see how it shaped his literary emergence and his own conception of friendship in *A Week*, we must also consider how that relation was complicated by loss and grief—not only his own but his friend's. As Jeffrey Steele has shown, the transcendentalists' theories of friendship were typically formulated "in response to moments of crisis," including "separation or personal misunderstanding," unrequited feelings, and death. Under the best of circumstances a fragile state, friendship's bliss of mutuality may ultimately and inevitably be destined for dissolution. From this fundamental instability arises "one of the paradoxes of Transcendentalist literary expression: its central subject matter—profound moments of imaginative and spiritual intensity—could only be described in retrospect, from the vantage point of someone who had passed through and remembered the experience."¹³ Similarly, in moments of intense grief, when the distance between a remembered relation and its present absence seems so final, questions of intimacy and mutuality may become most urgent. Facing the deaths of those we love most, the existential question of how to maintain faith in our closest friendships puts into question the form of one's own survival, with or without the friend, including what Emerson called "the progress of the soul."

¹²Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. 3: 1848–1851, ed. Robert Sattelmeyer, Mark R. Patterson, and William Rossi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 26. Thoreau continues, "There is as much hatred as love in the world. Hate is a good critic." The editors place this undated entry between 11 September and 15 October 1849.

¹³Steele, "Transcendental Friendship," p. 121.

The complex layering of grief inherent in transcendental friendship helps account for Thoreau's distinctively elegaic presentation of friendship in "Wednesday," where elegy may be defined as a means of containing or living with as well as of expressing loss.¹⁴ This is not surprising in a book dedicated to memorializing Henry's brother John and the two-week-long boating expedition they had taken in 1839, three years before John's death. But John is not the only materially absent or vaporously present referent of "the Friend." When read as a complementary response both to Emerson's writing and to Emerson's friendship, Thoreau's distinctively elegaic mode of performing transcendental friendship in *A Week* can be seen to represent his furthest divergence from his mentor during the period in which they thought themselves close.¹⁵ Put simply for now, while both men represent friendship as a relation that can never be sustained, Thoreau insists that neither can it be permanently lost.

Grief, Transcendentalism, and Double Consciousness

I will consider three moments that relate to Thoreau's literary emergence and his presentation of transcendental friendship in

¹⁴The model I employ in this essay differs from the so-called normative and melancholic models of mourning that until recently have exclusively informed interpretations of elegy, most notably Peter M. Sacks's *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), and Jahan Ramazani's *The Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Whereas these works derive from a Freudian model that privileges decathexis, my reading follows the recent work of Robert Neimeyer, Thomas Attig, and others (see note 45 below) who have reexamined mourners' efforts to maintain the memory of the dead within a post-traumatic reconstruction of meaning. Although such efforts are commonly enough recognized as valuable in non-Western cultures, more often than not they have been pathologized as prolonged or "unresolved" grieving in the traditional psychoanalytic model.

¹⁵As I hope will become apparent, the performative dimensions of Thoreau's discourse on friendship in *A Week* encompass three different connotations of the term as used in performance theories: the display of a skill, here the art of literary nonfiction; a self-conscious awareness, implying distance between statement and performing self; and the performance's implicit reference to a tacitly received standard or set of conventions, in this case the ideology of transcendental friendship. See Marvin Carlson, "What Is Performance?" in *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader*, ed. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 146–53; and Angela Esterhammer, *The Romantic Performative: Language and Action in British and German Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

A Week. The first centers on a consolatory letter he wrote to Emerson on 11 March 1842, two months after John Thoreau's death from tetanus and six weeks after Waldo Emerson's from scarlatina. Since the previous April, Thoreau had been living upstairs in the Emersons' house, an arrangement originally planned to last twelve months.¹⁶ On a typical day, he tended the garden and did chores in the morning, leaving him ample time to read, write, and converse, or not, with various visionaries and radicals who visited the Emersons' home. As Ellen Emerson was only two years old when he moved in (Edith was born in November), Thoreau became particularly close to five-year-old Waldo, sharing his father's delight in the boy's precocious questions and innocent witticisms, repairing his toys, making whistles and miniature boats for him, and perhaps taking him out in his boat, then moored on the river just across the village, which he and John had built two years earlier for their excursion up the Concord and Merrimack Rivers.

After a few weeks' absence with his family following John's death on 11 January 1842, when he suffered a severe case of sympathetic lockjaw that replicated all the physical symptoms of John's final agony, Thoreau returned to keep Lidian company while Emerson fulfilled lecture engagements in New York.¹⁷ On 11 March, the two-month anniversary of John's death, Thoreau also resumed regular journal keeping, having recorded only spotty and fragmentary entries in late February and early March. And by late spring, with Emerson's encouragement, he was working on "Natural History of Massachusetts," subsequently published in *The Dial*, which Emerson was now editing.¹⁸

Yet, even though he seemed outwardly to be recovering, Thoreau's fragmentary journal for late February and March

¹⁶Robert D. Richardson Jr., *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 113.

¹⁷Smith, *My Friend, My Friend*, p. 62.

¹⁸As Emerson reported to Margaret Fuller, the magazine's former editor, Thoreau was serving as "private secretary to the President of the Dial." See *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Ralph L. Rusk and Eleanor M. Tilton, 10 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939, 1990-95), 3:47.

reveals how deeply he remained grief-stricken, vacillating between extremes of reassurance and despair, passive resignation and anxiety about his own “lingering.” On one hand, he was buoyed by the thought that what is truly “good” or “worthy” in our friends can never “depart” (“It does not go and come but we”) and that death is only “a transient phenomenon.” For if “to live is a condition of continuance and does not mean to be born merely,” then “[t]here is no continuance of death.” At such times, he felt content to “receive my life as passively as the willow leaf that flutters over the brook, . . . resting quietly in God’s palm.” On the other hand, sometimes within the same entry, he confessed fearing his own death or reflected poignantly that “when sorrow comes how easy it is to remember pleasure.” Over and over again, he impatiently judged his creative paralysis as a “low and grovelling” state, implicitly comparing himself at one point to the hens he tended (“[t]hese long march days setting on and on in the crevice of a hayloft with no active employment”) or imploring, more directly, “My life my life—why will ye linger? . . . How often has long delay quenched my aspirations—.”¹⁹

If we hear in these passages the wish “to put an end to one’s own meaningless existence,” as Richard Lebeaux has observed, it is also possible to detect, as Henry Seidel Canby remarked, the desire “to be put to work from the lips of a man convalescing from a great grief.”²⁰ In this sense, Thoreau did indeed begin to work through his loss toward a new sense of vocation. As Steven Fink has argued, after years of “grappling in the pages of his journal with the difficulties of remaining aloof, untainted, and unrelated to the world and the public,” Thoreau “emerge[d] from this period of grief and isolation with a significantly different attitude toward the world.”²¹

¹⁹Henry D. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. 1: 1837–1844, ed. Elizabeth Witherell, William L. Howarth, Robert Sattelmeyer, and Thomas Blanding (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 369, 372, 371, 400, 382, 392, 371.

²⁰Richard Lebeaux, *Young Man Thoreau* (New York: Harper, 1978), p. 173; Henry Seidel Canby, *Thoreau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), pp. 178–79.

²¹Steven Fink, *Prophet in the Marketplace: Thoreau’s Development as a Professional Writer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 40, 41.

These journal entries also reveal Thoreau's deep reliance on Emersonian thought, especially in the way the diarist navigates his sorrow in relation to psychic landmarks recently laid out by his mentor. In elaborating on the vision of death as "a transient phenomenon," for example, Thoreau reflects,

There seem to be two sides to this world presented to us at different times—as we see things in growth or dissolution—in life or death—For seen with the eye of a poet—as God sees them, all are alive and beautiful, but seen with the historical eye, or the eye of the memory, they are dead and offensive. If we see nature as pausing[.] immediately all mortifies and decays—but seen as progressing she is beautiful.²²

If the God-like vision Thoreau attributes to the poet resembles similar claims Emerson had begun to make in December in his Boston lecture series on "The Times," the double vision Thoreau describes here equally recalls Emerson's formulation of "double consciousness" in "The Transcendentalist," another lecture in the series, delivered at the Masonic Temple shortly before Christmas.²³ There, for the first time, Emerson acknowledged the nagging skepticism that he would explore more fully in "Experience," a self-divided condition between two states of consciousness, "the understanding" and "the soul." These two states, he confessed, "really show very little relation to each other, never meet and measure each other: one prevails now, all buzz and din; and the other prevails then, all infinitude and paradise." Thoreau's mournful determination to summon with "the eye of a poet" a vision of nature as "beautiful" when "seen as progressing" follows a similar transcendentalist logic as Emerson's desire to preserve the predominance of "the soul."

²²Thoreau, *Journal*, 1:372–73.

²³*The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Alfred R. Ferguson, Joseph Slater, and Douglas Emory Wilson, 7 vols. to date (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971–), 1:43. Besides reading "The Poet" in the series delivered in Boston (2 December 1841–20 January 1842), Providence (10–17 February), and New York (3–14 March), Emerson read an early version of this lecture, then titled "Nature and Powers of the Poet," at the Concord Lyceum on 3 November 1841. See *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Robert E. Spiller, Stephen E. Whicher, and Wallace E. Williams, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960–82), 3:341–42, 347.

In view of the fact that, “with the progress of life, these two lives [of the understanding and the soul] discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves,” Emerson counsels “Patience, and still patience.” Eventually “this petty web we weave will at last be overshot and reticulated with veins of the blue,” he declares, and “the moments [of vision and meaning] will characterize the days.”²⁴ Thoreau’s corresponding desire to occlude the “eye of the memory,” the “historical eye,” is especially pressing in his present condition, because the life of the soul, virtually identical with the life of “nature,” is the only guarantor that John’s life may persist beyond death.

Anyone struggling to make sense of not one but two sudden deaths might well be expected to hold tight to his idealism. Thoreau held on tightly enough to give his recent biographers the impression that he wished to deny death altogether.²⁵ Yet his remarkable letter of condolence to Emerson suggests that, in the midst of his own episodic and wildly vacillating recovery, Thoreau was also struggling to rework the binary logic of “double consciousness” in such a way as to acknowledge his actual grief without relinquishing the ideal, in Emersonian terms, the life of the soul. Since its first publication by Franklin Sanborn in 1895, Thoreau’s letter to Emerson has often been noted for the cool, elevated consolation it appears to offer. “If we did not know from other information the tragic circumstance occasioning the letter,” Sanborn opined, “this epistle would scarcely disclose it.”²⁶ Indeed, addressed to a man temporarily separated from his family and still overwhelmed by the loss of his son six weeks before, Thoreau’s apparently casual observation that death is not only “as common as life” but “beautiful when seen to be a law, and not an accident,” seems at best callously abstract. At worst, it suggests that Waldo’s death was “beautiful”

²⁴Emerson, *Collected Works*, 1:213–14; David M. Robinson, *Emerson and the Conduct of Life: Pragmatism and Ethical Purpose in the Later Work* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 54.

²⁵Lebeaux, *Young Man Thoreau*, p. 181; Richardson, *Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*, pp. 114, 115.

²⁶F. B. Sanborn, “Thoreau’s Poems of Nature,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, March 1895, p. 352.

because somehow fated. “How plain that death is only the phenomenon of the individual or class,” Thoreau writes, presumably explicating the beautiful “law.” “Nature does not recognize it, she finds her own again under new forms without loss. . . . When we look over the fields we are not saddened because the particular flowers or grasses will wither—for the law of their death is the law of new life.”²⁷ Sanborn believed this letter might have been one source of the stoicism Emerson attributed to Thoreau in his eulogy, a trait Richardson also associates with it.²⁸ To be sure, the letter is a stiff performance, its personal message of consolation overburdened by literary quotations and half buried in allusions. A closer reading, however, discloses not only a more nuanced and sympathetic relation to Emerson’s grief than has previously been noticed but also a multilayered representation of Thoreau’s own sorrow, apprehended through a kind of double consciousness.

First, as Emerson might have recognized, Thoreau dated his letter on the two-month anniversary of John’s death. Stoic acceptance or not, characteristic transcendentalist dismissal of calendar time notwithstanding, such anniversaries invariably yield their raw moments of death relived, an experience especially to be expected in a case as traumatically witnessed as John’s death was. Speaking directly out of a distinctive temporality of grief yet addressing their common bereavement, Thoreau almost certainly writes to console himself as much as to comfort his friend.

Second, situated as a resident in the Emerson household, Thoreau identifies with his friend’s grief in another way. His seemingly callous pronouncement that death is part of a lawful natural process, rather than being offered as an abstract truth, arises from a present-tense observation as he looks out on the landscape familiar to both men. “The sun has just burst through the fog, and I hear blue-birds, song-sparrows, larks,

²⁷*The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Walter Harding and Carl Bode (New York: New York University Press, 1958), p. 64. Further quotations will be from this edition and will be cited in the text.

²⁸Richardson, *Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*, p. 115.

and robins down in the meadow.” Neither innocent nor simply affirmative, moreover, this observation is shadowed by the memory of a walk the “other day . . . in the woods,” when “[I] found myself rather denaturalized by late habits” (p. 64). The tentative, perhaps even desperate, character of Thoreau’s imaginative effort to maintain the ideal is underlined again at the end of the letter in what can only be called, following Canby, a prayer. “After I have imagined thus much[,] will not the Gods feel under obligation to make me realize something as good?” (p. 65). As Fink notes, this intimation of “a covenant” suggests the intense sense of mission Thoreau associated with prophetic transcendental authorship.²⁹ Yet the prayer is uttered in a state of uncertainty and desire that is more than merely vocational. The “something” Thoreau hopes “the Gods” will help him “realize” is presumably an elegiac piece of some sort, perhaps a poem or a book. But as his self-conscious acknowledgment of having “imagined thus much” suggests, the letter is itself such a piece. Although only half realized, it offers a localized pastoral elegy in narrative form, concretely situated in the place of mourning and registering both the instability of an ideal, consoling vision and the hope that it will not soon melt back into a fog of despair.

Finally, although the concept of natural law Thoreau invokes through images of seasonal change may seem conventional enough, this too represents an attempt to update and personalize, not simply to reproduce, elegiac conventions. Good classicist and junior pastoralist though Thoreau was, rather than harking back to an ancient Stoic cosmos ruled by fate or the generalized Nature of pastoral tradition, his references to death as a cyclical metamorphic process and a phenomenon of the individual or species call to mind more contemporary analogues. Like Emerson, Thoreau assumed that natural law and “moral” law were metaphorically equivalent; and, like Emerson, he looked to contemporary science for relevant models.³⁰ The

²⁹Fink, *Prophet in the Marketplace*, p. 39.

³⁰Laura Dassow Walls, *Emerson’s Life in Science: The Culture of Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 42–55, 221–26.

uniformitarian form of natural law presented here was probably inspired by Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, which Thoreau had begun reading eighteen months earlier and would exploit heavily in *A Week*.³¹ Lyell's theory of incessant, gradual, but nondirectional change, conceived on a Newtonian model of "antagonist forces," contradicted the biological progressionism favored by most of his scientific peers, a theory whose teleology, culminating as it did in the production of humankind, struck Lyell as incipiently and dangerously Lamarckian. In elaborating his counter-theory of cyclical, steady-state change, Lyell went so far as to suggest that, given favorable climatic conditions, extinct genera might reemerge, albeit in new specific forms.³²

For all its sublime evocations of deep time, though, Lyell's uniformitarian vision is curiously ahistorical. In a move that Stephen Jay Gould characterized as "the neatest trick of rhetoric . . . in the entire history of science," Lyell conflated his uniformitarian theory with a methodological program that privileged the present as *the* scientific prospect from which to view the past.³³ Reading *Principles* by the light of Emerson's *Essays*, Thoreau therefore encountered an empirically rich, authoritative uniformitarianism that did for natural history and geological time what Emerson's essay "History" does for the alterity, the "preposterous There and Then," of human history, dissolving it into moments of timeless present vision.³⁴ If Emerson repeated to Thoreau the dismissal of Lyell's book he expressed to Margaret Fuller—that "it was only a catalogue of facts"—so much the better for a mentee whose self-realization

³¹Robert Sattelmeyer, *Thoreau's Reading: A Study in Intellectual History with Bibliographical Catalogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 227; Laura Dassow Walls, *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), pp. 42–44.

³²Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 123.

³³Gould, *Time's Arrow*, p. 120. See also my "Poetry and Progress: Thoreau, Lyell, and the Geological Principles of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*," *American Literature* 66 (1994): 278–84.

³⁴Emerson, *Collected Works*, 2:7.

depended upon complementing while diverging from his mentor.³⁵

In his consolatory letter to Emerson, then, Thoreau presents this uniformitarian stability and longevity of nature as tranquilly encompassing transient human life.

Nature is not ruffled by the rudest blast—The hurricane only snaps a few twigs in some nook of the forest. The snow attains its average depth each winter, and the chic-adee lisps the same notes. The old laws prevail in spite of pestilence and famine. No genius or virtue so rare & revolutionary appears in town or village, that the pine ceases to exude resin in the wood, or beast or bird lays aside its habits. [P. 64]

Like beasts and birds, young men and little boys do lay aside their lives, of course. But in a steady-state uniformitarian system, “death is only the phenomenon of the individual or class,” “the law of their death is the law of new life,” and Nature “finds her own again under new forms without loss” (p. 64).

At the same time, in the letter’s embedded narrative, this elevated vision of death as “beautiful when seen to be a law” is repeatedly undercut by reminders of the difficulty of sustaining that vision, especially by sharp memories of the beloved dead not yet passed into “new forms without loss.” Thus, when recalling his walk “the other day” and reminding his lately “denaturalized” self, and thereby his friend, that the Concord meadow landscape—the landscape embedded with memories of Waldo and John—presents “the same nature that Burns and Wordsworth loved[,] the same life that Shakspeare and Milton lived” (p. 64), he conveys a two-sided reality. The trans-historical, trans-spatial, uniformitarian nature is the same nature that has always carried human sorrow, carried it through the mutability sonnets, through the elegies of dead and living British poets. Yet if sudden natural events, “the rudest blast, the hurricane,” are contained within a uniform, lawful system, with death “as common as life” and winter (in a bitter pun) “the pastime of a full quarter of the year,” Thoreau’s catalogue of naturalized autumnal images of death—“the fallow

³⁵Emerson, *Letters*, 2:41.

and cadaverous countenance of vegetation, its painted throes” (p. 64)—likewise carries the vivid, abiding memory of John’s fast-becoming corpse and the trauma of witnessing his final agony exactly two months ago. Whether intentionally or not, the attempt to sustain a vision above loss, to maintain what Thoreau had called “the eye of the poet” as the eye of God, is here irremediably in tension with, and ever disrupted by, “the historical eye, or the eye of the memory.” Situated in a state of double-consciousness peculiar to grief, the mourner thus strives to imagine nature as the ideal whole he can recall partaking in yet can no longer confidently expect ever to realize again, even as he must hope to, and even as he offers that hope to his friend.

Incorporating Grief at Walden

It was two and a half years before Thoreau could begin fully to act on the prayer voiced at the end of his consolatory letter to Emerson. In the interim he had modest, if unpaid, success with contributions to *The Dial*, under Emerson’s editorship, including poetry, translations, a review essay, and the literary excursion “A Winter Walk.” He published another excursion (“A Walk to Wachusett”) and a few pieces in wider venues, but his attempt to crack the New York literary market while living on Staten Island for six months in the home of Emerson’s brother, William, came to little, leaving him dispirited and in debt. Little wonder that although his recovery from John’s death “was real, if gradual” during this period, it was also “punctuated by periods of lingering depression and self-accusation.”³⁶ Nonetheless, Emerson continued to help create the conditions for Thoreau to say “what he was created to say.” This time he did so inadvertently by purchasing fourteen acres of Walden Pond shoreline in September 1844.³⁷

³⁶David M. Robinson, *A Natural Life: Thoreau’s Worldly Transcendentalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 49.

³⁷W. Barksdale Maynard, *Walden Pond: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 60–61.

Soon thereafter, having arranged to squat on Emerson's land and in preparation for drafting *A Week*, Thoreau began transcribing journal passages related to the brothers' excursion into his "Long Book," a notebook he would take to the pond along with two new journal volumes.³⁸ His determination to make his first book an elegy is clear from an inscription (eventually the book's first epigraph) he had written onto the notebook's front endpaper:

Where'er thou sail'st who sailed with me,
Though now thou climbest loftier mounts
And fairer rivers dost ascend
Be thou my muse, my Brother³⁹

In appealing to his brother as muse, Thoreau was now associating inspiration with transcendental friendship rather than, as before, with "the Gods." As he adapted a passage originally written six weeks after John's death, "The death of friends will inspire us as much as their lives. If they are great and rich enough they will leave consolation to the mourners as well as money to defray the expenses of their funerals."⁴⁰

A similar but more complex gesture marks another inaugural moment the following summer at Walden as Thoreau again invoked the transcendental friend as muse when he opened a new journal volume. Dated 5 July 1845, the day after he moved to the pond, the entry begins, famously, "Yesterday I came here to live."⁴¹ As Sattelmeyer observes, this act clearly

³⁸Robert Sattelmeyer, "Historical Introduction" to Henry D. Thoreau, *Journal*, vol. 2: 1842–1848, ed. Sattelmeyer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 449–50. For the dating of Thoreau's transcriptions in the Long Book, I follow Linck C. Johnson, *Thoreau's Complex Weave: The Writing of "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," with the Text of the First Draft* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986), pp. 267–69.

³⁹Thoreau, *Journal*, 2:2–3; *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, ed. Carl F. Hovde, William L. Howarth, and Elizabeth Hall Witherell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 1. Further citations to this edition of *A Week* will appear in the text.

⁴⁰Thoreau, *Journal*, 2:38. As originally written and dated 20 February 1842, the first sentence read: "The death of friends should inspire us as much as their lives" (*Journal*, 1:369).

⁴¹Thoreau, *Journal*, 2:155.

resonates with Thoreau's "heightened sense of the significance of his experiment."⁴² But that elevated awareness involves more than his newfound freedom or an incipient sense of the literary potential of his project. Considering that John Thoreau would have been thirty years old on 5 July, as Henry (whose own birthday was seven days later) would not have failed to recall, this famous entry also resonates through the grief it contains.⁴³ Like the inscription at the head of the Long Book, this gesture strives to incorporate John's life as inspiration: the life he would have had and perhaps has still. But whereas the epigraph locates the brother in a spiritual landscape of "loftier mounts" and "fairer rivers," the inscription on the shore of Walden Pond draws John into "here," the present time and place, an act all the more intimate for being performed so privately. By displacing the announcement of his own independence day into an acknowledgment of John's life and loss, Thoreau thus writes the loss and the life into his experiment and into his own continuing life at the pond.

The quiet intimacy of this gesture remarkably anticipates Thoreau's unusual narrative technique in *A Week*: using the first-person plural pronoun to describe the week-long excursion as a joint experience, though John is never named. Although the book has often been read as the author's means of distancing himself from or displacing his grief, as David Robinson shrewdly observes, the narrator "not only remembers his brother but remembers for his brother, assuming a voice . . . that seems to speak for them both." That voice constitutes a "remarkably unified 'we,' essentially absorbing John's vision into himself, or, in another sense, giving John new life through his own eyes."⁴⁴ Rather than taking the form of a psychic disinvestment in the lost object (in the Freudian model of mourning), that is, Thoreau's elegy reconstructs the siblings'

⁴²Sattlemeyer, "Historical Introduction" to Thoreau, *Journal*, 2:454.

⁴³In *Thoreau's Seasons* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), Richard Lebeaux observes that Thoreau made this first entry "on the anniversary of his brother's birth" (p. 5). As far as I know, Lebeaux is the only other commentator to remark on this dating.

⁴⁴Robinson, *A Natural Life*, p. 60.

past trip as a present narrative act with the deceased brother as a symbolic participant in the survivor's ongoing existence.⁴⁵ As an unnamed but active presence in *A Week*, as here on the eve of the book's first drafting, John is neither displaced nor embalmed but rather enlivened through narrative memory, the friend and brother incorporated into our experience of reading the text as into its making.

Performing Transcendental Friendship in "A Week"

Thoreau completed the second draft of *A Week* in the spring of 1847, before he left Walden.⁴⁶ By this point, as Robinson notes, "Emerson had replaced John at the center of Thoreau's emotional life."⁴⁷ Yet the long discourse on friendship in "Wednesday" also indicates how he carried forward the relationship established with John into his conception of transcendental friendship, especially his relationship with Emerson. As Thoreau wistfully reflected in his journal not long after the break with his former mentor, "I was never so near my friend when he was bodily present as when he was absent."⁴⁸ Framing his loss in such a way, it should be noted, served Thoreau's transcendentalist literary purposes as much as it did his emotional needs. For in developing his discourse on friendship within the uniformitarian elegaic mode of his memorial narrative, Thoreau could place the problematic transience or instability of close relationships in a new light, drawing a new circle, as it were, around the phenomenon Emerson had described memorably in his essay "Friendship."

No less than Thoreau's, Emerson's figuring of the dissolution of relationships was shaped by his own mourning, his own

⁴⁵See Tony Walter, "A New Model of Grief: Bereavement and Biography," *Mortality* 1 (1996): 7–25; Thomas Attig, *How We Grieve: Relearning the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and the collection of essays edited by Robert A. Neimeyer, *Meaning Reconstruction & the Experience of Loss* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2001). For a traditional Freudian reading, based on the work of Erich Lindeman, see Lebeaux, *Young Man Thoreau*, pp. 172–204.

⁴⁶Johnson, *Thoreau's Complex Weave*, p. 265.

⁴⁷Robinson, *A Natural Life*, p. 64.

⁴⁸Thoreau, *Journal*, 3:19. The editors place this undated entry between 26 May and 11 September 1849.

several losses. During those times, Emerson's hard-won conviction that the deepest energies of the self-reliant soul participate in a progressive, ultimately benevolent cosmic order, or "law," no doubt provided him a measure of solace. If a friend is left behind or a close relationship abruptly terminated, the sufferer must somehow be enriched, Emerson argued, and his greater being thereby expanded. Looking back on his losses in "Compensation," the speaker views them as part of a "natural history of calamity" that discloses "advertisements of a nature whose law is growth,"⁴⁹ for the compensatory, progressive law through which we gain friends must also be at work in removing them from our presence. As this phenomenon is imaged in "Friendship," "the soul puts forth friends as the tree puts forth leaves, and presently by the germination of new buds, extrudes the old leaf."⁵⁰ Critical opinion remains divided as to how effectively this vision served Emerson as he mourned the devastating loss of his son.⁵¹ But if the melancholy speaker of "Experience" can fathom no compensation, or none yet, his brutally honest, bewildered description of losing Waldo figures a deciduous process that is eerily reminiscent of the extrusion of friends in "Friendship." "This calamity," he writes, "does not touch me: something which I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me, nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me, and leaves no scar. It was caducous."⁵²

To plumb the extent to which *A Week* engages the issues raised by "Experience," as "Ktaadn" has been shown to do, is beyond the scope of this essay.⁵³ For my purposes here, it is

⁴⁹Emerson, *Collected Works*, 2:72.

⁵⁰Emerson, *Collected Works*, 2:116.

⁵¹See Barbara Packer, *Emerson's Fall: A New Interpretation of the Major Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1982), pp. 162–79; Sharon Cameron, "Representing Grief: Emerson's 'Experience,'" *Representations* 15 (Summer 1986): 15–41; Stanley Cavell, "Finding as Founding: Taking Steps in Emerson's 'Experience,'" in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, ed. David Justin Hodge (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 110–40; and Walls, *Emerson's Life in Science*, pp. 148–53.

⁵²Emerson, *Collected Works*, 3:29.

⁵³See David M. Robinson, "Thoreau's 'Ktaadn' and the Quest for Experience," in *Emersonian Circles*, ed. Wesley T. Mott and Robert Burkholder (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 1997), pp. 207–23.

enough to note how much Thoreau's own experience as Emersonian mentee was foremost in his mind as he expanded his discourse on friendship in "Wednesday." As in March 1842 when he composed his letter of consolation to Emerson, Thoreau was again living in his sponsor's home, having been recalled from Walden Pond in September 1847 to stay with the family while Emerson lectured in Britain. Writing to him in February 1848, mentioning that "Lectures begin to multiply on my desk," including "one on Friendship which is new,"⁵⁴ Thoreau addresses his mentor familiarly for the first (and last) time as "Dear Waldo, For I think I have heard that that is your name."

I believe I never thanked you for your lectures—one and all—which I heard formerly read here in Concord— I *know* I never have— There was some excellent reason each time why I did not—but it will never be too late. I have had that advantage at least, over you in my education.⁵⁵

Given his attitude of indebtedness, combined with a sense of having finally made good on his Emersonian "education,"⁵⁶ it is not surprising that, in the phrasings and figures of his digression in "Wednesday," Thoreau prominently displays his debt to Emersonian ideas of friendship. Among the most important is that friendship is a natural phenomenon, one whose evanescence and recurrence is analogized to various forms of polarity, including gravitation, chemical and electrical attraction/repulsion, tidal ebb and flow, systolic and diastolic circulatory pulsing, all analogues abundantly evident during the river journey.⁵⁷ Like Emerson, Thoreau characterizes the friend as

⁵⁴Johnson describes Emerson's never-delivered lecture as an "expanded version of part of the first draft" of the section on friendship, which more than tripled its length from the first manuscript version completed in 1845 (*Thoreau's Complex Weave*, pp. 359–69).

⁵⁵Thoreau, *Correspondence*, pp. 208, 207.

⁵⁶Thoreau returned from Walden Pond with not one but two book manuscripts as well as with the essays "Thomas Carlyle and His Works" and "Resistance to Civil Government" and the travel narrative "Ktaadn, and the Maine Woods"—all in print or production.

⁵⁷For Emerson's use of polarity as "a model of universal order" and Thoreau's polar figurations of friendship, see Lawrence Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism: Style*

a collaborator in one's self-culture; and he notes the beneficent effect of anticipating new friendship, as illustrated by Emerson's anecdote of the "commended stranger."⁵⁸ Like Emerson, he has difficulty imagining that the "society" of friends can admit more than two or three; yet, with his mentor, he extols the utopian vision opened up by true friendship, claiming that "all the abuses which are the object of reform . . . are unconsciously amended in the intercourse of Friends" (p. 267).

As Robinson argues, such distinct echoes point to a complex intertextual and interpersonal engagement. "It is inconceivable that Thoreau would not have read 'Friendship,' in particular, without a sense of the dynamics of his own relationship with Emerson. . . . [R]eading these commentaries on friendship by two friends side by side reminds us how intertwined such texts were in the actual relationships that Emerson, Thoreau, and their circle of friends were attempting to practice. These essays contain quite specific interpersonal signals, translating the daily experience of their own interactions into broader theoretical axioms."⁵⁹ Indeed, Thoreau's excursive meditation in "Wednesday" bears reading as just such an "interpersonal signal," an exploratory performance of what in his essay Emerson had termed the "evanescent intercourse" of friendship.⁶⁰ As the literary embodiment of ideal relations (further stimulated perhaps by his friend's bodily absence), Thoreau's performance strives to imagine the transient, intersubjective relation of transcendental friendship and, in the process, subtly engages Emerson through *his* "Friendship."

Thus, taking up Emerson's statement that "Friends, such as we desire, are dreams and fables,"⁶¹ Thoreau figures friendship as a dreamlike condition, a state of being that is recurrently formed and dissolved by the powerful undercurrent of human

and Vision in the American Renaissance (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 159–65 and 225–30.

⁵⁸Emerson, *Collected Works*, 2:113–14.

⁵⁹Robinson, *A Natural Life*, pp. 64, 70.

⁶⁰Emerson, *Collected Works*, 2:126.

⁶¹Emerson, *Collected Works*, 2:125.

desire, a circumstance that parallels the “shifting islands” he mentions earlier in the chapter as holding such an “undefined and mysterious charm” for him. This charm, however, resides not only in the islands’ autonomy or insularity as images of the solitary self, as some have argued,⁶² but also and primarily in their “shifting.” They fascinate, that is, because of the way in which sedimentary islands are eroded by the same currents that have previously formed them.⁶³ The omnipresent yet unstable uniformity exhibited in islands, continents, and dreams is likewise exhibited in the phenomenon of friendship. It “takes place . . . because there is such a law, but always without permanent form, though ancient and familiar as the sun and moon, and as sure to come again” (pp. 261–62). On one hand, “All men are dreaming of it,” “dreaming that our Friends are our *Friends*, and that we are our Friends’ *Friends*” (pp. 264, 265). On the other, friendship is a daily “drama, which is always a tragedy” (p. 264). This inherent instability serves notice that the narrator’s excursive meditation, like the ideal friendship he strains to imagine, will dissolve as well, only to be “remembered [later] like heat lightning in past summers” (p. 261).

But long before it dissolves, the narrator’s dream of friendship noticeably intensifies, immediately following an interpolated missive from a “true and not despairing Friend” to his Friend. The pivotal placement of this frankly confessional address is all the more striking because it precisely duplicates Emerson’s strategy in “Friendship,” which features a remarkably tormented letter such as “every man,” were he to “record his true sentiment, . . . might write . . . to each new candidate for his love.”⁶⁴ The rhetorical dynamics of this letter epitomize

⁶²For a recent example, see Milette Shamir, *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 219.

⁶³“The shifting islands! who would not be willing that his house should be undermined by such a foe! The inhabitant of an island can tell what currents formed the land which he cultivates; and his earth is still being created or destroyed. There before his door, perchance, still empties the stream which brought down the material of his farm ages before, and is still bringing it down or washing it away,—the graceful, gentle, robber!” (p. 244).

⁶⁴Emerson, *Collected Works*, 2:117.

what Caleb Crain has termed the “hierotomy” of Emerson’s style, the effect of a compositional method that simultaneously deepens both the abstract and the personal dimensions of his prose. The effort to discern abstract meaning through an intensely personal register, and vice versa, “may even give the reader the feeling of being in a personal relationship with Emerson.” Because, “[r]epeatedly, the reader must extend sympathy into the prose to make sense of it,” the “character of the friend is the easiest character for the reader to play.”⁶⁵

If any sensitive reader may be induced to play this role, to experience such high-minded and supercharged intimacy, we can be sure that Thoreau did. Consequently, it is difficult not to read his less formal version as both literary homage and personal response, picking up on one of those “quite specific interpersonal signals” detected by Robinson, especially when we recall the kind of reciprocal intimacy Thoreau longed for. Frankly adopting the voice of a “true” and “not despairing” friend, Thoreau’s speaker would appear to be directly engaging precisely such a *despairing* friend as Emerson portrays in “Friendship” when he writes

Dear Friend: —

If I was sure of thee, sure of thy capacity, sure to match my mood with thine, I should never think again of trifles, in relation to thy comings and goings. I am not very wise: my moods are quite attainable: and I respect thy genius: it is to me as yet unfathomed; yet dare I not presume in thee a perfect intelligence of me, and so thou art to me a delicious torment.

[signed] Thine ever, or never.⁶⁶

Thoreau’s corresponding imagined epistle reads, in part:

“I never asked thy leave to let me love thee,—I have a right. I love thee not as something private and personal, which is *your own*, but

⁶⁵Caleb Crain, *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 227. As Crain demonstrates, Emerson most likely wrote this letter, drafted in his journal on 3 February 1840, while thinking of Samuel Gray Ward, to whom he frequently wrote in “a tone of affectionate longing” during this period (pp. 215–16).

⁶⁶Emerson, *Collected Works*, 2:117.

as something universal and worthy of love, *which I have found*. O how I think of you! You are purely good,—you are infinitely good. I can trust you forever. . . .”

“This is what I would like,—to be as intimate with you as our spirits are intimate,—respecting you as I respect my ideal. Never to profane one another by word or action, even by a thought. Between us, if necessary, let there be no acquaintance.”

“I have discovered you; how can you be concealed from me?”
[Pp. 269–70]

In the three sections that follow this counter-message of friendship, “Wednesday” shifts into a mode of intersubjective relation that diverges from, while still engaging, the more solitary Emersonian mode. In this portion of Thoreau’s text, transcendental friendship is most palpably performed as a relationship imagined not from the point of view of the solitary soul or lover but interdependently in concert with the loved other. “The Friend asks no return but that his Friend will religiously accept and wear and not disgrace his apotheosis of him. They cherish each other’s hopes. They are kind to each other’s dreams” (p. 270). Even the enmity that attends the dissolution of friendship is rendered relationally: “Let the Friend know that those faults which he observes in his Friend his own faults attract. There is no rule more invariable than that we are paid for our suspicions by finding what we suspected” (p. 277).

As if to demonstrate that the act of sustaining such complementarity requires “an exercise of the purest imagination and the rarest faith” (p. 272), the narrator shifts, in the space of a few sentences, from abstract third-person narration into an intimate free direct discourse.

He never asks for a sign of love, but can distinguish it by the features which it naturally wears. We never need to stand upon ceremony with him with regard to his visits. Wait not till I invite thee, but observe that I am glad to see thee when thou comest. It would be paying too dear for thy visit to ask for it. . . . Let our intercourse be wholly above ourselves, and draw us up to it. [Pp. 272–73]

To say, at this level, that “The language of Friendship is not words but meanings” is to seek its recognition in the reader for and with whom these “meanings” are performed in “an intelligence above language” (p. 273). Moments like this, written of course to be read in silence but that also silently voice an intersubjective intimacy, represent the high points of Thoreau’s excursive meditation.

Yet even the high points are never without tension, never envisioned as the completion of desire, “all infinitude and paradise,” to recall Emerson’s depiction of transcendentalist sensibility quoted earlier. Thus, if true friendship is “never established as an understood relation” and if in its ideal form that relation is above speech, this absence—of understanding, of speech—also provides the condition for its collapse, as the Merrimack River currents undermine the shifting islands they have formed. As the narrator notes later in the essay, “in human intercourse the tragedy begins, not when there is misunderstanding about words, but when silence is not understood.” For “then there can never be an explanation” (p. 278). Nowhere is this inherent instability or double-sidedness more succinctly expressed than in the observation that friendship “is a miracle which requires constant proofs. It is an exercise of the purest imagination and the rarest faith” (p. 272). The same exercise of imagination and faith required to live the miracle of transcendental friendship, that is, coexists with a skepticism that equally requires not only proof but “constant proofs.” Consequently, in characterizing friendship as “a drama which is always a tragedy,” Thoreau not only prefigures the eventual falling off or descending curve of his essay’s meditative trajectory; he also intimates that the “end” of friendship, the crisis, has in fact always been present as an undercurrent or double consciousness, even in the dream of intersubjective attainment.

Whether this prophetic performance of divergence from his mentor and friend also consoled Thoreau in the aftermath of their separation is hard to say. Certainly the vivid intimacy he imagined helps account for the severity of the pain Thoreau experienced from Emerson’s criticism. For in presenting friendship as a shifting relational phenomenon within a steady-state

physical and metaphysical system, he had placed a higher faith in relations than in the onward march of an essentially solitary self. Yet that performance may also account for the peculiarly stoic resignation he tried to maintain. For if, through *A Week's* reinvention of pastoral elegy, the natural evanescence and dissolution of friendship is acknowledged, its essential continuity and persistence is likewise recognized: as a relation neither possible to sustain nor wholly to lose, "always without permanent form, though ancient and familiar as the sun and moon, and as sure to come again" (p. 262).

William Rossi, *Associate Professor of English at the University of Oregon and an editor of the JOURNAL in the Princeton University Press edition of Thoreau's writings, is the author of essays on Thoreau, Emerson, and nineteenth-century natural science. He is editor most recently of the Norton Critical Edition of "WALDEN," "CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE," AND OTHER WRITINGS (2008).*