

Walking into the Forest, Rereading Thoreau's Walden

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Abstract: Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was an excellent natural philosopher in America. Walden is one of his most famous works. It recorded his thought about nature living in Walden for 2 years. This paper attempts to discover the specific thought of nature in Thoreau's works, and appeal for attention of modern people to ecological nature. It inspired people the idea of harmony between humanity and nature. This paper is divided into 3 parts. The first part will introduce Thoreau himself and his work Walden. The second part will analyze spiritual contributions of Thoreau and his influence to the generation, pointing out that ecological value and practical guiding significance of Thoreau's nature thought. The last part will express what I have learned in the book. According to Thoreau, he reminds human that they must attach importance to the harmony between themselves and nature as well as stimulate people's thought to protect nature.

Keywords: Thoreau; Walden; Feeling; Harmony with nature

1. Introduction

Walden is a lake located near Concord, Massachusetts, USA. With Thoreau's cabin and his words, it has become a holy land of literature and a spiritual home. Walden is a famous collection of essays written by Henry David Thoreau, which was first published in 1854. It is a record of the author living alone by Walden Lake, describing what he experienced for more than two years. This collection of essays advocates his simple life and the natural scenery. It has rich content, vivid language and far-reaching significance.

Henry David Thoreau was an American transcendentalist writer and philosopher in the 19th century. He graduated from Harvard University in 1837 and returned to his hometown to teach. After 1841, he turned to writing^[1]. He assisted Emerson in editing and commenting on the quarterly *Sundial* and supported the abolitionist movement all his life. He chose the freedom and leisure of the mind, emphasized close to nature, pursued a simple life of "simpler, simpler", and advocated that the short life should be perfect due to the abundance of ideas. His works include *Walden*, *Non violent Resistance*, *A Week on the River*, etc^[2].

A book may be silent, but a person's mind will shine forever. *Walden*, a book published as early as 1854, was ignored and ridiculed at that time. Even today, it is still lonely after it becomes a world masterpiece, but no one or any obstacle can block the bright light of thought. What is *Walden*? It is just a daily account of life. But Thoreau's journal is like a poem. This poem depicts a picturesque paradise for us. The most touching thing in the picture is not the limpid *Walden*, but the simplest and most "luxurious" life.

2. The Taste of Rereading Walden

2.1 Walking into the forest to find human and nature

Thoreau wrote *Walden* at a time when the American economy and territory began to expand rapidly in the 19th century. This huge expansion changed people's attitude toward benefits. At that time, people were so focused on material and money that they ignored the beauty of nature. It was in this gloomy environment that Thoreau felt lost. Fortunately, Thoreau was influenced by the American native culture, which was decoupling from the traditional British culture. Guided by Emerson, Thoreau was in search of transcendentalism, which broke away from the majority of people and walked out of the confusion. As one of the representative figures of American transcendentalism, Thoreau always has a heart of gratitude and cherish for nature.^[3] In his mind, the spiritual satisfaction brought by the inimical purity of nature can ease the tight frown and make the life healthier. Following the laws of nature, human beings can

achieve a balance between their material needs and inner world.

Thoreau's feelings for the universe in nature are complex, changeable and pure. This deep and unique understanding makes Thoreau inadvertently complete the role exchange with nature. For him, nature is not merely a physical world, but a closely related living community. "Am I not myself a part of the earth of leaves and greens?" Thoreau lived with nature all his life, emphasizing that man and nature are interlinked. Especially on the spiritual level, nature not only shows us vitality, but also edifies people's minds.

Thoreau's reverence for the beauty of nature determined him to interpret human and nature from a holistic view of life.^[4] "Enjoy the earth," he warned. "Don't try to own it." In today's severe ecological crisis, it's a trend to analyze Thoreau's self-contained thoughts on the basis of his poetic language. He derives infinite pleasure from being close to nature, so he is opposed to waste limited resources recklessly to feed people's insatiable needs. The pursuit of material desire makes people lose their original direction, and such kind of life can't be called "real life" in Thoreau's eyes. In Walden, we can see that what he proposed to the world is not a practical road which can be directly practiced, but a green life anthem which needs more people to echo. This not only provides us with the opportunity to solve the ecological crisis and rebuild the harmonious relationship between human and nature, but also improve the consciousness of environmental conservation and moral concepts for reference before making a choice between industrial civilization and ecological civilization.

2.2 Walk into the forest to find an artistic life

Thoreau was full of ideals and passions, and his words conveyed the belief that people can return to nature and reach the perfect state, and that only by joining nature can they find themselves. To pursue the inner peace and abundance, Thoreau's original life in Walden followed the principles of simplified lifestyle that he advocated. Escaping from the bustling city, he has learned to stop in time and to be fascinated by nature. "The scenery of Walden Lake is humble. Although it is beautiful, it's not magnificent. People who do not often go to visit or people who do not live on its shore may not be attracted by it; however, such a lake is famous for its depth and clarity, which deserves a prominent description." Thoreau's words reveal clearness and lightness, which is full of wisdom. The wise man smiled in silence and concentrated on his heart: "I don't sing like a songbird. I just smile quietly and laugh at my happiness."

In fact, Thoreau is committed to turning every moment of daily life into an artistic life full of aesthetic experience. He integrates himself with nature, cultivates and reaps by himself, and slowly feels the changes of the seasons. He really experienced his life and put aesthetics into his life. He said: "A moment of good experience is worth remembering more than a monument as high as the moon." By reading Thoreau's words, people released themselves from reading and began to think deeply, which is rare for a busy office worker in the daily life. "People often remind me to use their wonderful theories and all kinds of rhetoric to solve the problems of the universe, but it doesn't help me. I'd better go back to the boundless sea, which has no islands or islands, and keep exploring, looking for a bottom that can be anchored and firmly grasped." A simple and clear heart was described gradually.

As many radii can be drawn from the center of a cluster, there are many paths of life. Value is pluralistic, and life is pluralistic. It is not just a track and people can create more lives with different meanings. Living in the present is our best treasure of life. As Thoreau mentioned, "I entered the jungle because I wanted to live leisurely, just face the basic things in life and see if I could master the teachings of life, rather than finding myself never alive when I was dying." He cherished certain things, especially freedom, and was able to endure hard life and have fun in pain. The real freedom is the freedom of the heart and the freedom of the spirit^[5].

Thoreau's own Walden practice has a consistent proposition, and that is to return to nature. In his works, he repeatedly points out that most of us modern people are trapped by family, work and various material needs, losing our spiritual pursuit and living a materialistic life. This is still the case today, and it is getting worse. Many people's mental activities are too limited, who only concerned about material life and sensuality. In Thoreau's words, that kind of life cannot be called "real life."^[6] "Most people, in my opinion, don't care about nature," he said "As long as they can survive, they will sell their share of natural beauty for a glass of rum. Men, thank God, cannot fly, so they cannot spoil the sky as they spoil the earth. We are safe at the other end of the sky for the time being."

Thoreau yearned for nature, because only in there could his soul be enlightened and sublimated, and the wounds he suffered in reality could be repaired and eliminated. Thoreau lived in the embrace of nature and created himself. It is believed that only by devoting oneself to nature, sharing heart with nature and appreciating the significance of natural aesthetics can people be forgiven and renewed.

3. Conclusion

Thoreau described the magical, magnificent and unpredictable beauty of Walden Lake with his wonderful flower pen, leaving “a drop of heaven” in the hearts of readers for generations and making people fascinated. “The lake is the most beautiful and expressive appearance in the landscape. It is the eye of the earth, and those who look at it can measure the depth of their own nature.” Thoreau personally measured and learned that Walden Lake is more than 32 meters deep, surrounded by boulders, verdant mountains, and beautiful scenery in the four seasons. The lake water seen from different angles every day is of different colors, including dark green, light green, blue and yellow. If Thoreau lies on Walden Lake at night, he will enjoy the magical experience of Tang Gong’s “full of dreams and stars”. In the leisure on Walden Lake, Thoreau felt that such “wasted” time made him rich. “Laziness is the most attractive cause, and its output is also the most abundant”. What did Thoreau experience and realize during his two years in Walden Lake? From my perspective, it could be: luxury, clothes, house, study, reading, work, travel, diet, good and evil, wildness, desire, loneliness, life. These 13 words almost cover the whole life, which is also the most precious treasure Thoreau left us. Walking into the forest again and rereading Thoreau’s Walden once again, I could not help having a chance to talk with Thoreau for the second time. In this dialogue, I felt a lot of truth that I did not understand before. If people are confused in the crowd, what they should do is to find the answer in nature to purify themselves. It also gives me a new perspective on what is happening. The lightness and heaviness of life always influence each other. Everything in the world is changing, so grasping the present is a good way to face the future.

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