

Henrik Otterberg, *Hound, Bay Horse, and Turtle-Dove: Obscurity & Authority in Thoreau's Walden*, Gøteborg: Litteraturvetenskapliga Institutionen, 2005. ISBN 91-86270-68-0

After listing some of his idiosyncratically self-appointed occupations in the first chapter of *Walden* ("Economy"), Thoreau launches into one of the most frequently quoted, discussed, and analyzed passages in the entire canon of his works:

I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle-dove, and am still on their trail. Many are the travellers I have spoken concerning them, describing their tracks and what calls they answered to. I have met one or two who had heard the hound, and the tramp of the horse, and even seen the dove disappear behind a cloud, and they seemed as anxious to recover them as if they had lost them themselves.

This passage is the main focus of Henry Otterberg's hundred-page monograph on Thoreau's *Walden*. The first part of Otterberg's treatise focuses on the reception of this paragraph that encompasses commentaries ranging from spurious biographical speculations and Thoreau's own guarded comments to various conjectures about arcane references and suggestions for intertextual sources and parallels. All of these Otterberg finds to some degree wanting as explications of the passage. This also holds true for more recent academic readings, most of which have followed in the path of Stanley Cavell's *The Senses of Walden* (1972), linking Thoreau's quest for the hound, horse, and dove to a deep sense of loss. To some readers, this is for instance seen as referring to the loss of a language or system of signification that could bridge the gap between man and nature, between subject and object. In his discussion of the reception of this enigmatic "animal passage," Otterberg shows persuasively how it has spawned a large secondary canon of commentary that in turn may be used to highlight and clarify various critical positions on *Walden*, including recent deconstructive and postmodern approaches.

Introductorily Otterberg notes that he will also discuss the placement of the animal passage within the "Economy" chapter itself and touch upon its role in *Walden* as a whole. To his reader's disappointment Otterberg's study does this only to a very limited extent. After having examined the critical reception of the animal passage, Otterberg proceeds to consider it in the light of Thoreau's own rhetorical schooling, providing an alternative interpretive perspective to Thoreau's obscure allusions to the hound, the bay horse, and the turtledove. In Otterberg's view, the obscurity of the passage is the result of a deliberate rhetorical choice. Otterberg grounds his argument in Thoreau's own education at Harvard: his introduction to Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian as well as to the scholars of rhetoric of his own time such as George Campbell, Richard Whately, and his own teacher Edward Tyrell Channing. Already in 1832 Channing introduced Richard Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828) to his Harvard classes, in which Whately finds obscurity to be a legitimate rhetorical device. This is the point of departure for Otterberg's reader-oriented discussion of what he sees as the deliberately enigmatic character of Thoreau's passage. To Otterberg the tireless search evoked by the animal passage cleverly establishes the narrator's authority and

fosters at the same time “the reader’s interest, sympathy, in some sense even participation in the narrator’s quest” (41). The reader’s curiosity with regard to the narrator’s loss is ignited by the paragraph’s fairy-tale opening of “long ago,” its intimation of the “many ... travelers” spoken to, and the richly allegorical associations evoked by its references to hound, horse, and dove. As Otterberg argues, Thoreau’s paragraph is thus an example of a rhetorical *obscuritas* that “skillfully constructs a text open to a wide array of interpretive possibilities” (60). However, although Otterberg stresses the ways in which Thoreau’s passage invites the reader to actively participate in its meaning-making process, he refrains from seeing its polysemousness as an illustration of (present-day) ideas of semiotic indeterminacy and the arbitrary nature of language. With reference to Thoreau’s Emersonian Transcendentalism Otterberg sees the animal passage as a parable that carries with it an expectancy of truth; its animals serve as vehicles of spiritual ideals, whose recovery is an urgent and shared concern of writer and reader (54).

Otterberg’s review of the reception history of the animal passage as well as his discussion of Thoreau’s rhetorical use of obscurity are convincing demonstrations of the richness of meaning of Thoreau’s text. As Otterberg is well aware, this richness is at the same time grounded in the readers’ almost irrepressible need to link the triad of hound, horse, and dove to some *specific* significations. Even Otterberg himself cannot resist giving Thoreau’s passage a particularly modern twist by arguing that texts may be seen as “ecosystematic,” analogous in their function to that of biological ecosystems (43, 44). Made only in passing, such an inroad to the reading of Thoreau’s animal passage is open to the critique that Otterberg himself launches at earlier attempts, namely that they are not well enough developed and argued to be fully satisfactory – which is to say that Otterberg’s own interpretive suggestion tantalizes more than it demonstrates and convinces.

This is, however, a minor point in this review and certainly also in Otterberg’s own pamphlet. Otterberg’s study is a pleasure to read precisely because it raises a variety of different perspectives and inroads to Thoreau’s *Walden*. Otterberg’s own notes, occupying a third of his treatise, function as much more than sources references; they are illustrations of Otterberg’s continual *conversation* with previous critics and scholars; as such they represent a treasure chest for Thoreauvians. Otterberg’s slim volume thus testifies to his familiarity with Thoreau criticism and functions throughout as a miniature reception history of *Walden* itself. It may be warmly recommended to anyone interested in Thoreau in general and *Walden* in particular.

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Andrew J. Williams, *Liberalism and War: The Victors and the Vanquished*, London and New York: Routledge, 2005. 262 pp. ISBN 0415359801. £65.00

When Felix Gilbert authored his classic study of early American diplomacy a half-century ago, he framed his argument around the debate between Hamiltonian realists and Jeffersonian liberal idealists. The latter, Gilbert argued, expressed the Enlighten-