E. B. White and Henry Thoreau : a study of satiric technique related to world view

Ruth Lynn Craig

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LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
Graduate School

E. B. WHITE AND HENRY THOREAU--A STUDY OF SATIRIC TECHNIQUE RELATED TO WORLD VIEW

By
Ruth Lynn Craig

A Thesis in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in the Field of English

March 1972
Each person whose signature appears below certifies that he has read this thesis and that in his opinion it is adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SECTION I--INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION II--SATIRE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION III--THE SATIRE OF HENRY THOREAU</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION IV--THE SATIRE OF E. B. WHITE</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION V--CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION VI--BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION I--INTRODUCTION
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Satire has been, for many centuries, a means by which an author can indirectly state his values by poking fun at the values held by others. Satire has a long and distinguished history. It can take several tones, use several techniques, and center on virtually any subject imaginable. Satiric technique is as varied as the number of satirists and the number of subjects to satirize. Satiric technique varies from century to century, author to author, and work to work, emphasizing at one time the comic side of life, and at another time the tragic side of life. Values change, subjects change, techniques are modified--but satire remains a means by which an author can point out to his reader the discrepancy between what the world is and what the author thinks the world should be.

Because of the nature of satire, affinities between the philosophies of authors can be assessed by analyzing the techniques and subject matters chosen by the authors to express the satire. For some years, the works of Elwyn Brooks White have been linked with those of Henry David Thoreau.1 Often, when a popular critic cites

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the work of White, he also cites the work of Thoreau to complement White's writings. For example:

White is pensive, a blend of humor and melancholy; he is a brooder, a satirist, and in his sympathetic quiet way as fine an essayist as we have had since Thoreau.²

[White is] A city-dwelling Thoreau holed up very frequently on the first page of The New Yorker, but from that Tower of Irony remembering Maine, where he lived part of the time, and Walden Pond, where Thoreau lived briefly.³

One sometimes wonders what Thoreau might have written like, if he had lived for the most part in New York City a century later than he lived in Concord, Mass. I suspect he would have written about some of the things E. B. White writes about and in something of the way he writes. He could scarcely have done it much better. Here is the Thoreau of our day, the play of mind, the uncorrupted seriousness, the dry inquenchable humor, all in danger now of coming to be regarded as and eventually perhaps coming to be un-American activities.⁴

There may be several reasons for this: (1) most obviously, White discusses Thoreau at length in several places in his writings, (2) critics, by examining the stated opinions of the two men, can see philosophical affinities between the two authors, and (3) critics can see, by examining the satiric techniques of the two authors,


²Weeks, p. 76.

³Edman, p. 1.

⁴Ibid.
affinities in world view—i.e., in their views of man, his nature, and his relationship to the universe.

E. B. White discusses, examines, and makes reference to the works of Thoreau—particularly Walden and the Journals—in several places in his writings. There is a lengthy critical review of Walden in The Points of My Compass, entitled "A Slight Sound at Evening."5

In One Man's Meat White offers a satiric reaction to his contemporary world by using the words and ideas of Walden.6 Again, White uses the quotable words of Walden as darts to throw at his own contemporaries in "The Retort Transcendental," from The Second Tree from the Corner.7 References to various individual ideas and statements of Thoreau are made by White in three other places in his collected works, and in one uncollected piece.8 In all, of the 10 volumes of the collected works of E. B. White, five contain references to the works and ideas of Thoreau, several quite lengthy. Obviously, White feels the affinity in philosophy (if not in style) between him and Thoreau.


The two authors discuss many of the same topics in their works. A casual glance at chapter titles in the works of the two will reveal that they both discuss the natural world—farming, ecology, animals, landscapes, storms, etc. White, in a way, has his own Walden Pond in the form of his farm in Maine. Thoreau escaped from village life in Concord to the peace and quiet (and hard work) of Walden Pond. White escapes from the noise and confusion of New York City to the peace and quiet (and hard work) of his small farm in northern Maine. The authors also place great emphasis on such subjects as economy, war versus peace, city versus country life, politics and travel.

Granted that E. B. White and Henry David Thoreau discuss many of the same subjects. Granted that E. B. White admires and discusses the works of Thoreau. Both men, as any cursory examination of their works and their critics will show, are satirists. Both writers are praised for their satire. And, I believe, satire is an intrinsic and important part of the writings of each. But to say that the two men discuss the same topics on the same level and from the same vantage points would not be correct. E. B. White is our contemporary; Henry David Thoreau lived in the nineteenth century, at the height of the

romantic movement in literature in the United States. The world events each faced are different; the prevailing philosophies of their ages are different.

Henry David Thoreau's world was that of Emerson and Alcott. It was a world of positive views and theoretical debate. The nineteenth century romantic was very aware of his position among his fellow men. He was the "artist," the "poet," the man with the greatest insight into the nature of existence. This lofty vantage point had some effects on the romantic authors. They felt their superiority, their good connections with the Over-soul. Henry Thoreau shares this view. Although he laments the follies of men, he does not feel that he has a share in those follies. This superior attitude is clearly seen in his bipolar satire, in which Thoreau sees himself in the right, and everyone else (except a remarkable few) in the wrong. Thoreau wishes men to turn from their iniquitous ways, but he does not have much hope of it.

E. B. White does not have too much hope that men will change, either. He is discouraged with men, and with himself as a part of humanity. Men can do better, but they usually don't try to do better. Part of this failure to improve is a result of shortsightedness, part of it is a result of the pressures of the world that put men at a disadvantage. E. B. White does not see life as a bipolar world where he sides with the good and the reasonable, while everyone else perversely wallows in folly. Life is more complex than that, to him. Certainly, he claims insight into human affairs, but not superiority to other men. He sins, too, and he recognizes it. He is not the ideal
he would have men strive toward. Men ought to strive to go beyond the point at which they now are, but they must be realistic about the possibilities of total success.

On the surface the two authors seem to say the same things. And, partially, they do. White and Thoreau agree on certain things—that men need to improve, to become more spiritual. They agree that many men will not improve. But they do not agree in their views of man as a being, as an existence. Thoreau feels superior to the mass of men; White feels his brotherhood with the mass of men. Thoreau is utterly an idealist, at the cost of other people. He will have his ideals even if he is the only one who can ever reach them. White realizes that ideals must be tempered with reality. Maybe Thoreau can live his Walden Pond experience, but it is not practical for all men to do so. Men must improve, but they must also recognize and deal with the real world around them. They must work in cities, they must buy goods for their families, they must support and be supported by others.

These differing attitudes are clearly seen in an analysis of the forms and content of the satire of the two authors. Each author's satire, in content and in technique, conforms to his view of men and of the universe. Each author chooses techniques that clearly, although subtly, reveal his attitudes toward his fellow men. The use of satire is the key that will unlock the secrets of attitudes; each author will reveal his attitudes as much in how he satirizes as in what he actually says. By analyzing the satire, we shall see the underlying attitudes.
SECTION II--SATIRE
SECTION II--SATIRE

It is essential to the central thesis of my paper that I define what I mean by satire as a whole and what I understand to be the various satiric techniques. This is a difficult but not an impossible task. Satire has a long and distinguished history. Different generations of satirists have seen their roles differently--indeed, a satirist may see his role differently at different stages in his career, or even at the same stage in his career. Any artist may conceive his role as artist to be one thing as he pursues one of his labors, and yet another thing as he pursues another of his labors. The viewpoint may shift from painting to painting, sculpture to sculpture, symphony to symphony, or essay to essay. A satirist may laugh with us today, weep with us tomorrow--or do both next week.

Yet, a satirist chooses satire as a mode for a particular reason. Satire, as a mode, implies a particular viewpoint or world view. A satirist is a judge--he weighs the values and actions of men against his own values or another set of values (and sometimes his own actions), and draws conclusions. Herein, he may say, men act contrary to their stated values. Or herein men's values are shallow; they miss the mark.

A satirist is not only a judge; he does not only mete out judgment. A satirist usually also attempts to prescribe a cure for the problem--or at least to suggest how a cure might be achieved. Sometimes
it is enough to point out a problem. But usually a satirist will attempt to hint at how things might be improved. Of course, the message will vary with the subject. It is enough to describe a common fool. But to make a king a fool, without incurring the block, requires finesse and a delicate touch. There may be no cure for the common fool; common fools do not rule nations. But monarchs rule, and a satirist who wishes to depose a foolish monarch will suggest the cure along with the problem. Seen in this light, the satirist is a critic, an evaluator, a judge. And usually, the satirist implies a cure for the problem with which he deals. The satirist is a man with a thorn in his flesh, and his satire is the result of the pain.

How does a satirist look at the world? Obviously, he sees flaws in it. Somehow or other, people deviate from the satirist's conception of meaningful behavior. This, of course, means that the satirist assumes that there is some form of meaningful behavior in the world. The satirist accepts a standard of conduct, a law of order of some kind, even if his standard is that there is no law or order. Up until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the satirists assumed that men are rational creatures. If men could see the errors of their ways, they would change their ways. The point of this satire was to bring about change. And the satirist expected a great deal from mankind. Men would change if they once realized that they are wrong. Men are infinitely capable of change. One can scarcely think of satire without thinking of eighteenth century England. Such literary giants as Swift, Butler, Dryden, and Pope almost mean satire to the majority of literature students. Surely, these men were judges; they pronounced judgment
on other writers, on governments, on society and its mores, on each other. They expected cures. Rational men, heeding their suggestions, would change their foolish ways. These satirists used techniques that conformed to their philosophies.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, satire will not always assume the rationality of men or of the world. The twentieth century view of an irrational world affects the satirist of this century. Men must impose rationality and order, rather than deduce it and live in harmony with it. Still, this satire calls upon men to use their resources to improve human existence. Satirists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, due to the changes in philosophy, have developed new satiric techniques.

Satire may be divided into three basic types—invective, burlesque, and irony.¹ The satirist will choose his type or technique to suit his purpose. Invective is essentially a direct, unhidden

¹I am indebted for my terms, and partially for my interpretation of these terms, to The Art of Satire by David Worcester (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968). I surveyed some 10 works on the subject of satire (Ashley Brown and John L. Kimmey, eds., Satire (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1968); John M. Bullitt, Jonathan Swift and the Anatomy of Satire (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953); Jacques Guicharraud, ed., Moliere (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964); Gilbert Highet, Juvenal the Satirist (London: The Clarendon Press, 1954); Ian Jack, Augustan Satire (London: The Clarendon Press, 1952); Alvin B. Kernan, The Plot of Satire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965); Wyndham Lewis, Men Without Art (London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1934); John Russell and Ashley Brown, eds., Satire: A Critical Anthology (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1967); W. O. S. Sutherland, Jr., The Art of the Satirist (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1965); and Worcester.), and found Mr. Worcester's to be the most complete and the most lucid. No two authors agree on what satire is or what forms it may take, let alone on the terms to be used in identifying those satiric forms, but I have developed, with the help of all the works consulted, and particularly Mr. Worcester's, some terms and definitions which serve the purposes of this paper.
judgment—an attack. Invective may be satiric, and it may not be. Calling the President an ignoramus is not satire, although it is invective. The King of the Houyhnhnms' description of Gulliver's people (the English nation) is invective; it is also satire. Swift, had he merely said evil things about the English race or humanity as a whole, would have merely bred anger and contempt. He wished to get the sympathy of his readers, to enlist their aid in combatting the sins of mankind, so he used a more indirect approach—he put the invective into the mouth of a horse. Samuel Butler does the same thing. He makes accusations and slings mud by putting words into the mouth of the ludicrous fictitious character, Sir Hudibras. And Dryden does the same thing in *Absalom and Achitophel* by putting words into the mouths of biblical characters. Thus the reader gets the invective indirectly. He imputes the words of the Houyhnhnms, of Hudibras, of Achitophel to the satirist, but he does not take offense or get angry, because the satirist has put the load of blame on another character, a fictitious character whom the reader can dismiss, or at least feel superior to. Satiric invective, then, states the satirist's opinions directly, but puts them in the mouths of other characters.

Burlesque, as satire, can take two forms—high burlesque or low burlesque. High burlesque is parody, mock-heroic form. It treats a trivial subject in an elevated manner. One of the best known examples of high burlesque is Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. Here Pope treats a trivial subject, the cutting of a young girl's lock of hair, as an event to be immortalized alongside the adventures of Odysseus or the feats of King Arthur. Low burlesque takes the opposite viewpoint.
It treats an elevated subject in a trivial manner. The most famous example of this satiric technique is Butler's *Hudibras*, and the technique is often described as hudibrastic. This is the manner of travesty. As high burlesque would elevate a charwoman into a queen, so low burlesque would make a queen a charwoman. Burlesque, as satire, discusses the subject directly, but greatly exaggerates the point.

Irony is, by far, the most complex and the most pervasive form of satire. Irony can be and usually is a part of the other two forms. There are many types of irony, but these types have a major characteristic in common. Essentially, invective and burlesque have two points of view. The satirist is trying to point out the discrepancy between appearance and reality. So, in using invective or burlesque, the satirist juxtaposes these two viewpoints—life as we think it is against life as it is. Irony adds at least one other point of view. It is a type of dialectic. Here, in irony, appearance is juxtaposed upon reality. These two poles, at the suggestion of the ironist, evolve into a third, or even a fourth or fifth pole, each stage containing parts of previous stages, and adding something new. The ironist describes or implies two extremes—appearance and reality—and suggests or implies that the level of meaningful action will be at some third point, which combines parts of each extreme and becomes something new, something less extreme, more sensible. The audience and the ironist, must both have experienced the two extremes, before the dialectic can evolve into a more meaningful position or positions, neither appearance nor reality, but including aspects of each.
I n r o n y as dialectic resembles drama. Each character in a play shows his characteristics by reacting to the other characters and to the situations of the play. Each character is different from the others, yet each character contains elements of the others, adding its own unique dimensions. "Irony arises when one tries, by the interaction of terms upon one another, to produce a development which uses all the terms. Hence, from the standpoint of this total form (this 'perspective of perspectives') none of the participating 'sub-perspectives' can be treated as either precisely right or precisely wrong. They are all voices, or personalities, or positions, integrally affecting one another. When the dialectic is properly formed, they are the number of characters needed to produce the total development."2 Each term or character of the dialectic process contains an element of truth, and as the process develops, more pieces of the total pattern of truth are added. Thus, the final term or character, implicit or explicit in the ironic work, will contain most nearly the picture of truth the ironist is trying to convey.

Thus, the invective speech of the King of the Houyhnhnms is ironic. The King is a horse, the listener is a man (Gulliver). The horse, usually considered a brute animal, is the rational creature. The men he describes are not rational creatures. They are brute animals. Here we have at least four terms which, in the process of ironic dialectic, suggest a certain path of action for men to take—a path of action not precisely implicit in any one point of view, but containing elements of all of them and including something new as a result of the combination.

There are two basic types and eight basic techniques of irony. The basic types are verbal irony and irony of thought. Verbal irony includes the techniques of inversion, sarcasm, understatement, and overstatement. Irony of thought includes the techniques of irony of manner, ingenu irony, dramatic irony, romantic irony, and cosmic irony. The forms of verbal irony and the first three forms of irony of thought are the common forms of eighteenth century irony. The forms of romantic and cosmic irony are developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively.

Verbal irony is irony of the spoken word (possibly transcribed to the printed page). The word itself, in verbal irony, means the exact opposite of what the ironist states--or at least something quite different from the appearance. Inversion is what it states--the ironist states the exact opposite of what he means. Antony's speech to the Roman crowd in *Julius Caesar* is a brilliant example of inversion, and a good example of ironic dialectic. Antony calls the murderers of Caesar honorable men. In the context of the deed they have performed, however, they are highly dishonorable men. Here is a dialectic--honorable men, a dishonorable deed, hence a new definition of what these men are. What Antony means to suggest is that the murderers of Caesar are something other than what they appear. They are honorable but have performed a dishonorable deed. Hence, they are now something else. This something else, the third term in the dialectic, Shakespeare defines in the rest of the play, principally in the character of Marcus Brutus.
Sarcasm is another very common form of verbal irony. Sarcasm, as an ironic device, again shows a difference between appearance and reality. The sarcastic remark does not mean exactly what the speaker intends to convey. It does contain a partial truth, however. The speaker says less than he means to say. Sarcasm is related to invective, but unlike invective it is not always only two-sided. Invective implies two poles—the right and the wrong, the author being in the right. Sarcasm may imply more than two poles or terms. The speech of the King of the Houyhnhnms, mentioned earlier, is a good example. There are four terms involved in this sarcastic speech—the horse as brute, the man as rational, the horse as rational, and the man as brute. Again, we have an example of ironic dialectic. Understatement and overstatement also show a discrepancy between appearance and reality. They are related to high and low burlesque. A partial truth is stated here, where much more or much less is intended. Mark Twain was a master of both of these forms of irony. His remarks about humanity are stated either by exaggerating the case, or by placing little importance on it. Dialectic is not always involved in these two forms, since only two poles are often implied—appearance and reality (right and wrong).

Irony of thought implies that the irony of the author is sustained throughout the work, rather than merely encased in a word or a phrase. There are five techniques used in irony of thought—irony of manner, ingenue irony, dramatic irony, romantic irony, and cosmic irony.

Socrates' life is the best example of irony of manner. His methods were ironic in view of the lives and actions of the people who were near
him. The ironist of manner makes his life an object lesson to those about him. The life and actions of Henry Thoreau, particularly the deliberate actions at Walden Pond, are illustrative of this form of irony. This is the irony of a man who lives what he preaches. Or rather, the irony of a man who lives a certain way rather than preach. Socrates pretended to be a man ignorant of truth, but by his questioning showed others to be ignorant of truth. His questions of pretended ignorance both showed those to whom they were directed that they were ignorant and showed them what the truth really was. Thus, through dialectic, we get the truth—Socrates, the pretended ignorant, is wise, and the wise around him are foolish. Yet, Socrates learns from those around him and approaches a wisdom more nearly perfect through the ignorance around him.

Henry Thoreau's life at Walden Pond was ironic in the light of the lives of the men around him. The people of Concord thought that Thoreau's life was one of hardship and inconvenience. In *Walden*, Thoreau tried to show the men of Concord that Concord life, with all its modern inventions, was really the life that was full of hardship and inconvenience. Thoreau was not inconvenienced by material goods. He lived the convenient life of the spirit. Thoreau's Walden experiment is not dialectic as irony. Thoreau merely contrasts his life with the lives of those around him, and calls his life good and the lives of all others bad and inconsequential.

*Ingenu* irony was a major device of the eighteenth century. *Rasselas* is exhibit A, and *Candide* and *Gulliver* are exhibits B and C. The ironist here employs a mask of innocence, and becomes educated by
the cruel realities of life. Rasselas returns to his Happy Valley disillusioned with life outside its boundaries. Candide is the eventual possessor of a very different Cunegonde from the one he worshipped at the beginning of his adventures. And Gulliver becomes so disillusioned with men (Yahoos) that he cannot bear to live among them. Rasselas and Candide merely contrast appearance and reality. Life on this earth is not all virtue or even the best of all possible existences. The story of Gulliver is most clearly dialectic in nature. Swift, in his character Gulliver, seems to imply that men (Yahoos) are worthless and more harmful and stupid than beasts. Yet Swift, as ironist, implies that neither the virtue of the horses nor the stupidity of the men is the truth he is getting at. Men should live lives and do live lives which contain elements of each, yet not so simple as either. Meaningful behavior is at some third point.

The third form of irony is that of dramatic irony, or irony of fact. The proud King Lear must die a broken and humbled death with the Cordelia he spurned for her falseness. Oedipus must marry his mother. This is the irony of the great tragedies. A great man, like Othello, has within himself seeds of destruction which will make him still greater, but destroy him also. Dramatic irony presupposes a certain secret knowledge on the part of the audience. The audience have an insight into the future that the characters themselves do not. The previous forms of irony are usually linked to the comic side of literature. Dramatic irony is strongly allied to the tragic side of literature.
In dramatic irony, the hero will come to a point of knowledge which is close to the truth the author wishes to convey. Madness and pride bring Lear to a knowledge of the truth. Man is not all-wise, as Lear at first felt himself to be, nor is life without meaning, as the madness suggested to him. Lear reaches wisdom by experiencing both of these stages, and although he retains traces of each stage and learns of each, he reaches an insight beyond them. This, too, is ironic dialectic, although the truth comes too late to the hero in question.

The fourth kind of irony of thought is romantic irony. This form is a special, elite form developed and used primarily by the German Romantics, such as Schlegel and Schiller. The romantic ironist has a viewpoint different from that of the ironist of the other forms. The romantic ironist considered himself above, superior to, the mass of men. He was the "poet," the "artist," who viewed the world from a cut above the major part of society. His insight, in his own eyes, was superior to that of his fellow mortals. Indeed, he did not partake of their sins. This phenomenon of romantic irony was purely a form of the nineteenth century. It was a response to the "cultural philistinism" of the day. Romantic irony was a critical attitude. The nineteenth century romantics discovered the place of irony in great literature—or rather rediscovered it, and included with its discovery a careful critical evaluation of irony. The romantic ironist used the other forms of irony, known to previous generations, but he took a special attitude toward his work and his audience. Thoreau's

3Burke, p. 514.
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3Burke, p. 514.
life at Walden Pond, illustrates this attitude. Thoreau, "the poet," is right, and everyone else is wrong. This two-poled attitude is not dialectic in nature.

The final form of irony of thought is cosmic irony, and it is a phenomenon particularly of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. "Cosmic irony is the satire of frustration, uttered by men who believe that however high man's aspirations and calculations may reach, there is always a still higher, unattainable level of knowledge, in the light of which those aspirations and calculations must become stultified and abortive. Action loses all value in the light of this superknowledge. . ." Cosmic irony questions the foundations of the universe. The Romantics and the Victorians employed the form of cosmic irony to question what kind of God controlled the universe. Thomas Hardy's novels and poetry reveal this type of questioning. Perhaps the best example of this would be James Thomson's City of Dreadful Night. In the twentieth century, literature of the absurd could be said to be cosmic irony. Absurd literature questions the reasonableness of the universe, and implies that the universe is absurd and without meaning. Appearance might tell us that there are laws and standards at work in the universe, but this is not so. Meaning must come from within man himself, if it is to come at all. As dialectic, we see neither apparent order nor total absurdity and insanity, but a third realm of meaning imposed by the individual.

As perhaps can be seen by the last two examples of irony, romantic and cosmic, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have witnessed some

5Worcester, p. 129.
dramatic changes in satiric techniques and satiric emphases. It would be impossible to attempt to describe the philosophic movements of these two centuries--equally impossible to describe the cultural changes, in this work. Romanticism and Existentialism, these "isms" represent some fundamental changes in viewpoint from the eighteenth century. Following the great age of reason in the eighteenth century, men began to change their minds about the essential nature of man and the universe. The rational man, capable of infinite improvement, living in a world of inherent order and rationality, became increasingly remote in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Romanticism and Existentialism represent two alternative views to the nature of man and of the universe. Certainly, Romanticism held that men are rational. But this rational man was a part of the lower levels of human existence. The "poet," the "artist," whose mind was not only rational, but beyond the limits of rationality, existed on the highest level of human existence. The poet, the artist could communicate to the Eternal in non-rational (not to be confused with irrational) ways--through meditation, through reflection, through transcendental empathy with the universe and the Eternal. Most men, a Romantic might say, live only on the rational level. It is only an occasional man--one man in a million, or in ten million--who can achieve the more spiritual level of existence known to the poet, or philosopher, or artist. Not all men are capable of improvement--some men can improve and live on the spiritual level.

The rational universe, the "eternal timepiece," gave way to the natural world of the Over-soul, a world in which nature's God became
the goddess Nature. In the twentieth century, in Existentialism, the rational, sensible, meaningful universe gives over completely. An Existentialist does not see the universe as meaningful. He sees meaning imposed upon the universe from within man himself. Man is the only source of meaning, if meaning is to be at all. Meaning must be imposed upon the universe, and man is able, within himself, to find meaning, to develop meaning, and to impose meaning upon the universe. And, as each man is the ultimate arbiter of what meaning is, social standards, social values, become increasingly insignificant and meaningless. The values of the individual take the place of group values.

A satirist of the nineteenth or twentieth century cannot help but be influenced by these philosophical currents. Henry Thoreau was profoundly influenced by the Romantic movement; he was a product of Concord, the home of Emerson and Alcott. E. B. White is most assuredly a product of the twentieth century, and the influence of Existentialism is seen in several of his works. How can we expect the satire of these two men to be affected by their times?

Thoreau's satire is influenced by Romanticism. As I pointed out earlier, the romantic ironist has a viewpoint quite apart from other ironists. He feels superior to the mass of men, and he writes down to the level of other men. It would not be unreasonable to expect Thoreau's satiric techniques to be influenced by this attitude, and as we shall see, this is for the most part true.

Satire in the twentieth century takes a new twist even from that of the nineteenth. The development of cosmic irony, as described
earlier in this chapter, can be seen. To the absurdity of men's behavior, is added the absurdity of the universe. Cosmic irony is the answer the twentieth century ironist has for the complex form of the world's problems. E. B. White makes use of this intricate form of dialectic irony.

E. B. White and Henry Thoreau do not view the nature of man in the same way, partially because of the ages in which each has lived. This causes them to choose different satiric techniques to express their views. An examination of some notable examples of the satire of each man will bear this out, in the chapters that follow.
SECTION III--THE SATIRE OF HENRY THOREAU
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I have chosen, to represent the satiric efforts of Henry David Thoreau, two chapters from *Walden*--"The Bean-Field" and "The Village." These brief chapters, I feel, are representative of Thoreau's best satire--as, indeed, *Walden* is representative of his best writing. The techniques used are the most typical of Thoreau's satiric endeavors. All of *Walden* can certainly be considered satire, and should be considered as a whole. Unfortunately, *Walden* is too lengthy for me to attempt to analyze its satire in depth here. Because of this, I have chosen to analyze only these two, rather brief, chapters. I will attempt to link them to the rest of the book, without dealing with the other chapters in great detail.

Having described the planting of his beans in "Economy," and having in the previous chapter discussed his visitors, Thoreau begins his chapter, "The Bean-Field," this way: "Meanwhile, my beans, the length of whose rows, added together, was seven miles already planted, were impatient to be hoed. . ." (p. 171). Temporarily diverted by visitors, Thoreau must catch up with his cultivating. "The Bean-Field" is essentially a burlesque. It is a high burlesque, treating beans in a very grandiose manner. It is a parody--a parody of a

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1Henry David Thoreau, *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1906), II, *Walden*, 171-191. All further references to these pages will be made in parentheses in the text.
parable. The structure, relating his experience and then drawing morals from his experience, is related to that of a sermon. Throughout the chapter are references to classical heroes, biblical thoughts and phrases, and figures in English literature, giving the impression that tending a beanfield is in many ways a microcosm of acting in the universe. Of course Thoreau, if a preacher or maker of parables, has his tongue in his cheek. The chapter is not serious—it is mildly, wryly humorous. Yet, the morals at the end are serious enough business. Thoreau is not in this thing to entertain us merely.

The diction of the chapter is high—quite profound—as becomes high burlesque. Throughout the piece the reader is treated to epigrams and other moral quotables. Thoreau, the naturalist, is preparing, as he says, "as some must work in fields if only for the sake of tropes and expression, to serve a parable-maker one day" (p. 179). The basis for the chapter is, of course, the planting, hoeing, and harvesting of a small crop of beans. But this rather common subject leads to many subjects, many ramifications. As is true throughout Walden, Thoreau uses the first person—he relates a personal experience.

What are his reasons for planting this crop? "What shall I learn of beans or beans of me? I cherish them, I hoe them, early and late I have an eye to them; and this is my day's work. It is a fine broad leaf to look on" (p. 171). There is a history to his wishes to improve agriculturally the area of Walden Pond. He has loved the Pond since childhood. "Almost the same johnswort springs from the same perennial root in this pasture, and even I have at length helped to clothe that fabulous landscape of my infant dreams, and one of the results of my
presence and influence is seen in these bean leaves, corn blades, and potato vines" (p. 172).

Briefly, Thoreau describes the fine art and ritual of raising beans—the planting, the hoeing—especially the hoeing. "Early in the morning I worked barefooted, dabbling like a plastic artist in the dewy and crumbling sand, but later in the day the sun blistered my feet" (p. 173). As he works he listens to the sounds that surround him—people passing by, a brown-thrasher in a nearby tree, the tinkling of his hoe against the stones, the scream of a night-hawk overhead, a flock of pigeons overhead, and occasionally the martial music from the town. This martial music is excuse for a digression on war and peace.

To me, away there in my beanfield at the other end of the town, the big guns sounded as if a puff ball had burst; and when there was a military turnout of which I was ignorant, I have sometimes had a vague sense all the day of some sort of itching and disease in the horizon as if some eruption would break out there soon, either scarlatina or canker-rash, until at length some more favorable puff of wind, making haste over the fields and up the Wayland road, brought me information of the 'trainers' (p. 176-177).

Sometimes, indeed, this martial music would be so infectious, that "... I felt as if I could spit a Mexican with a good relish,—for why should we always stand for trifles?—and looked round for a woodchuck or a skunk to exercise my chivalry upon" (p. 177). Following this brief digression, Thoreau proceeds to describe his intimacy with weeds—discussing their names, and liking them to Trojan warriors, to further emphasize the military tack into which he has shifted. "A long war, not with cranes, but with weeds, those Trojans
who had sun and rain and dews on their side. Daily the beans saw me come to their rescue armed with a hoe, and thin the ranks of their enemies, filling up the trenches with weedy dead. Many a lusty crest-waving Hector, that towered a whole foot above his crowding comrades, fell before my weapon and rolled in the dust" (p. 178).

Thoreau concludes the description of his bean-raising enterprise with appropriate references from Evelyn and Mr. Coleman's agricultural report, which does not carry news of his crop. He then totals up expenditures and profits, carefully explaining each item and assessing his sense in buying. Having accounted successfully for his bean venture, he is ready to give advice—first of all advice about raising beans, and secondly advice about living life in general.

What are his moral conclusions? What is his advice for the world, following his experience in raising beans? First of all, that another summer he would plant the seeds of sincerity, truth, simplicity, etc. and try for a good crop of these (which crop, he explains, has since failed miserably). Secondly, he concludes that New England men should not always plant the same thing, but vary their crops. "Why concern ourselves so much about our beans for seed, and not be concerned at all about a new generation of men?" (p. 181). Thirdly, he concludes, too much respect for the divine art of husbandry has died. Men are degraded by husbandry instead of being elevated by it. And finally, he concludes that men do not see enough beyond the pecuniary rewards of their crops. "These beans have results which are not harvested by me. Do they not grow for woodchucks partly? The ear of wheat... should not be the only hope of the husbandman;
its kernel or grain... is not all that it bears. How, then, can our harvest fail?" (p. 184).

What makes "The Bean-Field" satire? Thoreau has written a parable here, by which we might infer that he means us to believe he is a teacher, a moral man whose life is worthy of emulation, like Christ. Upon what are Thoreau's moral conclusions based? Upon his experience (of one summer) in raising beans—a very few beans. Does the raising of a few beans qualify Thoreau to pronounce moral judgments upon other men? Obviously not. Nor is a beanfield very much like the rest of the world in scope or complexity. The objects of Thoreau's satire, his mock-parable, are both other sermon or parable writers, and the people who live around him. Thoreau is not serious in his suggestion that life is like a beanfield, or that a summer's worth of bean growing can make a man a moral judge. His parable is satiric in that he realizes he is not really qualified to be a parable-maker or sermonizer. He is no Christ. A beanfield is not so complex as the world, and makes an imperfect analogy. Thoreau realizes this and is consequently not serious in his suggestion that a beanfield is the world. However, despite the parody, Thoreau wishes us to take his conclusions seriously. Perhaps he makes too many broad generalizations for so small an experiment (also part of the satire), but he gets his moral conclusions across.

This humorous sermonette or parable by Thoreau has many of the qualities that mark his brand of humor. It is satire with a moral tacked on—a very noticeable and obvious moral. Thoreau does not wish one to miss the point through the subtle device of satire. The
lesson is plainly, though humorously, stated. Also, this is a rather uncomplicated, simple type of satire. Thoreau prefers the simple devices of word plays and sarcasm to more elaborate forms of irony. Finally, many references to the "noble and learned" are made—usually made for humorous effect. Thoreau will not use Evelyn's words for authority in literature, but rather for authority as a bean grower and cultivator.

"The Village" is the other side of the coin of satire. It is burlesque, also, but low burlesque—treating a rather important subject disrespectfully. In this chapter Thoreau discusses villagers and village life—to him the villagers are "as curious... as if they had been prairie dogs..." (p. 185). Indeed, perhaps prairie dogs are more interesting. The village itself ("society") is a trap, both literally and figuratively. This chapter is lighter than "The Bean-Field." There are no carefully stated morals here. But there is certainly a point. The diction is less formal, more "homey." The construction is not so tight as in the previous piece. But the "moral" is more enjoyable, easier to digest, because it is implicit rather than flatly stated.

The disrespectful tone of "The Village" is set in the very first paragraph. "In one direction from my house there was a colony of muskrats in the river meadows; under the grove of elms and buttonwoods in the other horizon was a village of busy men, as curious to me as if they had been prairie dogs, each sitting in the mouth of its burrow, or running over to a neighbor's to gossip. I went there frequently to observe their habits" (p. 185). Thoreau uses three devices
to suggest the "trap" metaphor for the village. The first is that of a metaphoric trap, a sort of Venus' fly trap to catch unwary travellers. "Of course, those who were stationed nearest to the head of the line, where they could most see and be seen, and have the first blow at him, paid the highest prices for their places; and the few straggling inhabitants in the outskirts, where long gaps in the line began to occur, and the traveller could get over walls or turn aside into cow paths, and so escape, paid a very slight ground or window tax" (p. 186-187).

The second device is a diversion or digression. As Thoreau discusses his pleasant nightly returns from the village to Walden, he gets carried away, and continues to discuss night travelling. He describes several instances in which it has become so dark at night, that he is asked to guide travellers home on paths very familiar during the day, but totally unseeable at night. Some even have become lost in the village street. He proceeds to draw a lesson from being lost in the dark.

In our most trivial walks, we are constantly, though unconsciously, steering like pilots by certain well-known beacons and head-lands, and if we go beyond our usual course we still carry in our minds the bearing of some neighboring cape; and not till we are completely lost, or turned around,—for a man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost,—do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of Nature. Every man has to learn the points of compass again as often as he awakes, whether from sleep or any abstraction. Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations (pp. 189-190).

The third device is that of the literal incident of his being thrown into jail in the village for not having paid a tax. He had
come to town merely to have a shoe mended. "But, wherever a man goes, men will pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions, and, if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate odd-fellow society. It is true, I might have resisted forcibly with more or less effect, might have run 'amok' against society; but I preferred that society should run 'amok' against me, it being the desperate party" (p. 190). Thoreau concludes this brief chapter by explaining that he never locked his house, and never missed any of his possessions because of it. "I am convinced that if all men were to live as simply as I then did, thieving and robbery would be unknown" (p. 191). He might have added, "as would going to jail."

Thoreau is not captured by the trap of the village. He escapes the first ploy of the village this way. "I was ever accustomed to make an irruption into some houses, where I was well entertained, and after learning the kernels and very last sieve-ful of news, what had subsided, the prospects of war and peace, and whether the world was likely to hold together much longer, I was let out through the rear avenues, and so escaped to the woods again" (p. 187). Thoreau was a wary traveller.

Nor can the darkness of night cause him to lose his way. His close affiliation with Nature allowed him to find his way home easily, on even the darkest of nights. Not even jail can imprison Thoreau in the village. He preferred to let it not bother him--society was, after all, "the desperate party" (p. 190). The natural man (the man well-acquainted with Nature and her laws of being) lives a cut above the herd. No "dirty institutions" can have any effect on him whatsoever. He cannot become lost in the darkness of the village street.
He is free, even if he is in jail. Let society run "amok" of him if it will.

What makes "The Village" satire? Thoreau is suggesting in this chapter that men are no better than prairie dogs. They inhabit traps in which they catch their fellow creatures. They are so ill-acquainted with their neighborhood that they cannot find their way home on a dark night. Obviously, Thoreau does not want us to believe literally that men are prairie dogs, or that a village is a trap. But, by saying these things--by exaggerating the case--he can make his points about the ways people live more clearly. It would not do to call a man a prairie dog to his face, but one can call a man a prairie dog in satire and get away with it.

What do these choices of satiric techniques reveal about Thoreau's world view? What does Thoreau think of men and of the universe which men inhabit? Burlesque is a simple form of satire. It does not have the complexity of irony; its message is nearer the surface. "The Bean-Field," as high burlesque, leaves something to be desired. Thoreau is not content to use the satiric form of burlesque to get his point across. He has to tack on a large, preachy moral to his chapter. The implication of this is that Thoreau does not expect us to catch the point on our own. He has to point out the superiority of his life and work in the beanfield to the lives and works of those in the village very specifically. The burlesque, particularly the digression on the "trainers," is clear enough. Thoreau is calling militarism a disease; in fact, he is calling village life a disease. Although his bean crop is not reported in Mr. Coleman's report, his crop is far superior to
the crops of those around him. His beanfield is a parable of how men should live. The very suggestion of a man making parables reminds us of Christ. And the implication of Thoreau's moral uprightness as a result of the suggestion is, although humorously stated, serious enough in intent. Thoreau means us to draw a parallel between him and Christ, between his life and Christ's life. Thoreau has a high opinion of himself, and although he feigns humor and humility, one cannot be sure he is not serious after all.

The implication of "The Village" is no less brash. In this chapter Thoreau calls men prairie dogs. This is not a very flattering metaphor. Not only are men prairie dogs, but their village is a trap—which, fortunately, enough, Thoreau can escape. Again Thoreau is stating quite obviously that he is superior to most men. He is the "poet," the "artist," the "philosopher." He has superior insight into life and the universe, and he is not shy to point this out.

Although Thoreau uses satire to show men the proper way to live, he does not employ, at least not in these chapters, the complex form of irony. He is describing two poles of existence—his and that of the people around him. He is not recommending to us some method of living different from either of the two he is describing, yet developed from both. He is recommending his way of life. This is the attitude of the romantic ironist. He employs the devices of satire to recommend his own method of existence. He does not identify with other men; he is superior to other men, and he wishes the point to be made clearly.

Thoreau does not have too much respect for the whole of mankind. He enjoys certain "enlightened" individuals, but he doesn't care to be
around people very much, on the whole. His choice of satire as a mode would indicate that he thinks men should change. But he doesn't have too much hope of it. This is demonstrated in Thoreau's life. Most of his published works deal with excursions into Nature. Thoreau could not bear the society of men for very long. He had to escape into the rational, indeed divine, world of natural existence that he could find in plants and animals. In nature he could function; he could develop his innate divinity. People dragged him down with their petty values and ordinary actions. Thoreau was a loner; he did not like people very much, except for an occasional person in small doses. This attitude of dislike, and his attitude of superiority, are brought out by his use of satiric techniques.
SECTION IV--THE SATIRE OF E. B. WHITE
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I have chosen to deal with three different pieces from the works of E. B. White--"The Door" and "The Second Tree from the Corner" from The Second Tree from the Corner,¹ and "Walden" from One Man's Meat.² I chose these three pieces because they are representative of Mr. White's satire in several ways. First, they represent several different techniques he commonly employs. Second, they represent several different tones which he employs. Third, they represent some of the best of his satiric work, in two of his most notable collections of satiric pieces.

The basic scheme of "The Door" is a narrative of a man's inner anxieties and frustrations—the story of his insanity. The world in which the story takes place is a sanitary world of synthetics. "The names were tex and frequently koid. Or they were flex and oid or they were duroid (sani) or flexsan (duro), but everything was glass (but not quite glass) and the thing that you touched (the surface, washable, crease-resistant) was rubber, only it wasn't quite rubber and you didn't quite touch it but almost" (p. 77). The character in the narrative is in a large department store—of all glass (but not quite glass) where windows look like doors and doors look like walls. One

¹White, The Second Tree from the Corner, pp. 77-82, 97-103. Each reference to these selections will be made in parentheses in the text.

²White, One Man's Meat, pp. 71-78. From now on, references to these pages will be made in parentheses in the text.
has to know the signal in order to know which wall is the door through which he can escape. The girl in the store (an otherwise unidentified character) is trying to sell the man some article, only there isn't really anything to buy, but she wants to send it to him. In short, the world looks to the main character much like an experiment with rats of which he has heard. In this experiment rats were forced to jump at cards behind which was either food or an electronic shocking device. The rats learned to jump at a card with a circle in the middle. But the scientists changed the card on the rats, and they first jumped frantically at any card, and then ceased jumping at all, and merely lay around and stared. The rats went crazy trying to figure out a problem which was beyond their scope.

So it was with the people. They were forced to jump at problem solutions which were nonexistent. At first there appeared to be answers, but then someone would change cards, and the answers would no longer work. One would jump frantically for any solution, then slowly go mad. "He caught a glimpse of his eyes staring into his eyes, in the thrutex, and in them was the expression he had seen in the picture of the rats--weary after convulsions and the frantic racing around, when they were willing and did not mind having anything done to them . . . . and that is what madness is, and things seeming different from from what they are" (p. 78). Life doesn't begin by being absurd or insoluble. At first there are clearly defined doors. But, "There have been so many doors change on me, he said, in the last twenty years, but it is now becoming clear that it is an impossible situation, and the question is whether to jump again, even though they ruffle you in the rump with a blast of air--to make you jump" (p. 79).
The doors had been simple to identify at first—religion, marriage, success in a career—but everything became confused. They kept changing the doors. "Being crazy this way wouldn't be so bad if only, if only. If only when you put your foot forward to take a step, the ground wouldn't come up to meet your foot the way it does" (p. 79). The main character remembers a man in Jersey whose door it had been to build a perfect house. But he went crazy, and in order to build a perfect house, he completely demolished the one he already had, and died insane.

Despite the man's apparent insanity, his exhaustion in jumping at doors that are wrong doors, or not doors at all, he negotiates the exit to the store. He jumps, this time, at the right door. Only, "As he stepped off, the ground came up slightly, to meet his foot" (p. 82). Like the trained rats, the man reaches a point, after frenzy and despair, when he no longer cares what happens to him—even the ground's rising to meet his foot when he steps off the curb. The values have changed too often, or been lost entirely. Nothing makes any sense, and he doesn't care whether or not it does, anymore. The world is absurd, and he is insane, and has given up hope that he will ever make sense out of anything anymore.

White achieves the effect of the wanderings of an insane mind by using several devices. First of all, the piece has no logical form—it jumps haphazardly from point to point, beginning in the middle, and moving in any direction thereafter. Second, White coins new words to distract the reader—words like thrutex and duroid, sounding familiar, and yet not quite sounding familiar. The words sound like brand
names for synthetic glass and other synthetic products—confusing and alike. Third, the sentences are incoherent. Coordinating conjunctions are reversed, and an "and" becomes a "but," and a "but" becomes an "and." There are many sentence fragments, and sentences do not break at logical points. They quit too soon, or run over into each other, confusing meanings. In all, what with the occasional inclusion of dialog among unidentified characters, the effect is that of insanity, of absurdity, of incoherence. The man in the story is insane, his world is absurd—nothing makes any sense and nobody cares anymore.

The tone of the piece is serious. What are its satiric elements? White has created or described several ironic terms in this piece. There is the apparent world of the main character's youth—a world of problems which have describable and workable solutions. Second, there is the real world of the main character's present—a world with no solutions to problems, no apparent or real rationality. Third, there is the implied world of order which the main character could create for himself, if only he could rise above the total dejection which he is experiencing. He need not be insane or let the world defeat him.

The object of White's satire is the world about him—the thrutex, the doors which are walls, the synthetic cities. As satire it is effective in labeling the world, once thought rational, as completely and inherently absurd and irrational. As dialectic it is not quite so effective. White is not careful enough to suggest the third term or state which the main character might attain. It is implicit, but not explicit. One has the feeling, at the end of the piece, of depression.
The main character has failed to go beyond the second stage to the third stage of understanding. He has learned to anticipate doors that are walls and curbs that rise to meet his foot, but he hasn't gone beyond this beginning to cope with larger problems. He has a start, but he seems to give up on finding any further meaning. The man has learned that meaning comes from within, but he has not yet created meaning within. In order to be most effective, satire should be more explicit in suggesting a cure.

"The Second Tree from the Corner" employs the satiric devices of ironic inversion and cosmic irony. The story is about a man suffering from a nervous disorder. He has severe symptoms of nervous strain—tightness in the back of the neck, dizziness, forgetfulness, headaches. He is a "classic" case for a psychiatrist, and he goes to a psychiatrist to be relieved of his distress.

The first thing the doctor asks Trexler (our hero) is, "Ever have any bizarre thoughts?". The psychiatrist, waiting for an answer, looks to Trexler like a lizard about to pounce upon a bug. Trexler moves back in his chair. He becomes increasingly nervous as he thinks about how he should answer the question. He has had nothing but bizarre thoughts all his life. But what will the doctor think if he tells him this? So, he answers that he has never had bizarre thoughts. The doctor, who has watched Trexler closely, tells him that nothing is wrong with him—he is just scared. Trexler leaves the office, and as he does, notices the man who is to go into the psychiatrist's office next. He feels sorry for that patient, and occupies his mind on the way home with thoughts of how scared the other patient must be.
As Trexler continues to visit the psychiatrist, he notices that he is not getting better. The visits assume a pattern of questions and answers. Only Trexler is increasingly identifying with the doctor. He feels sorry for the doctor, having to work with such a hard case as Trexler. The more he identifies with the doctor, as he always identifies with other people—the taxi cab driver, the barber, the dentist—the more he figures he is using a slick form of escapism. However, he enjoys the role of doctor, viewing the psychiatrist as the patient.

During one of Trexler's visits to the doctor, the doctor asks him, "What do you want?" He answers that he doesn't know, and then asks the doctor the same question. The psychiatrist has a very easy answer to this question. He wants a new wing on his house, more leisure time, and more money. Following this, the psychiatrist pronounces Trexler well, and they part, shaking hands.

As Trexler leaves the office he begins to think about this encounter. He feels that sane people really cannot express what it is they want out of life. What most men want is undefinable and unattainable—a goal only occasionally glimpsed, but a goal one can strive toward all one's life. Trexler feels sorry for the doctor's insanity. He Trexler is more nearly sane than the psychiatrist. Suddenly, all of his symptoms disappear. He feels well and whole, and he happily gets on the bus and rides home.

White, in "The Second Tree from the Corner," is describing an insane man, or rather a man who has nervous problems. But the apparent patient, Trexler, is not the only patient. The psychiatrist, who has
all the answers, is also a patient. Trexler knows how an insane man should act: "Trexler felt the time passing, the necessity for an answer. These psychiatrists were busy men, over-loaded, not to be kept waiting. The next patient was probably already perched out there in the waiting room, lonely, worried, shifting around on the sofa, his mind stuffed with bizarre thoughts and amorphous fears. Poor bastard, thought Trexler. Out there all alone in that misshapen antechamber, staring at the filing cabinet and wondering whether to tell the doctor about that day on the Madison Avenue bus" (p. 97).

Yet, despite the fact that Trexler knows he is crazy, he can't help identifying with the psychiatrist:

As he became familiar with the pattern Trexler found that he increasingly tended to identify himself with the doctor, transferring himself into the doctor's seat—probably (he thought) some rather slick form of escapism. At any rate, it was nothing new for Trexler to identify himself with other people. Whenever he got into a cab, he instantly became the driver, saw everything from the hackman's angle... saw everything—traffic, fare, everything—through the eyes of Anthony Rocco or Isidore Freedman, or Matthew Scott.... Perfectly natural, then, that Trexler should soon be occupying the doctor's chair, asking the questions, waiting for the answers. He got quite interested in the doctor, in this way. He liked him, and he found him a not too difficult patient (p. 100).

After Trexler hears the doctor's goals, he decides that he does not care whether he is crazy or not. He prefers his brand of insanity to that of the doctor. "Trexler knew what he wanted, and what, in general, all men wanted; and he was glad, in a way, that it was both inexpressable and unattainable, and that it wasn't a wing" (p. 102). He realizes that he isn't any more sick, in fact maybe less sick, than anybody else.
Suddenly his sickness seemed health, his dizziness stability. A small tree, rising between him and the light, stood there saturated with the evening, each gilt-edged leaf perfectly drunk with excellence and delicacy. . . . 'I want the second tree from the corner, just as it stands,' he said, answering an imaginary question from an imaginary physician. . . . He crossed Madison, boarded a downtown bus, and rode all the way to Fifty-second Street before he had a thought that could rightly have been called bizarre (pp. 102-103).

White here switches appearance and reality; he inverts it. The tone is humorous, yet the ironic undercurrent is serious. Through White's omniscient view into Trexler's head, he sees that what men call sanity is as insane as what men call insanity. The object of satire here is the definition of sanity which men have. The psychiatrist, the apparently sane man, has values which are shallow and materialistic. Most people would approve of the psychiatrist's values; hence, most men have shallow values. But what about Trexler's values, his wanting "the second tree from the corner"? This desire is not really reasonable either. The psychiatrist is mistaking what reality is, and Trexler is not really coming to grips with reality at all. Men can have material things, but they should want other things as well--things with spiritual value. What Trexler wants is totally unattainable; he needs to come to grips with attainable, earth-bound things as well as spiritual things. Hence, the truth White is getting at lies somewhere beyond either point of view, but includes elements of each. Men must be both spiritual and material; they must have toeholds in both worlds. Trexler, as well as the psychiatrist, is an object of White's satire. As cosmic irony, White concentrates on the definition of sanity which men hold, and calls it to task. The world is not so meaningful as
people believe that it is, nor are people creating inner meaning or
spiritual values in the way they should.

"Walden" is written in the form of a letter to Henry Thoreau. As
satire, it makes use of a number of ironic devices--burlesque, irony
of manner, and a modified romantic irony. White makes several people
the objects of his satire here: Thoreau, the people of twentieth
century Concord, and himself. The tone of the piece is semi-serious:
playful, preachy, light, and heavy. The piece begins briskly, as a
dictation to a secretary, Miss Nims. Thoreau is casually addressed
as Henry. The basic idea of the work is a description by White of
a trip to Concord and to Walden Pond, which is done by making constant
comparisons to the descriptions and expressions of Walden. The letter
begins familiarly, "I thought of you the other day as I was approaching
Concord doing fifty on Route 62. That is a high speed at which to
hold a philosopher in one's mind, but in this century we are a nimble
bunch" (p. 71). The first thing White sees as he enters Concord is
a woman mowing her lawn. "What made me think of you was that the
machine had rather got away from her, although she was game enough,
and in the brief glimpse I had of the scene it appeared to me that
the lawn was mowing the lady" (p. 71). Of course, this is a reference
to "Economy" in Walden. In Concord, machines still use men, instead
of the other way around.

White goes on to explain his purpose in going to Walden Pond
(as Thoreau explained his purpose in going to Walden Pond)--he wishes
to pay tribute to Thoreau and to Thoreau's insights. "The account
which you left of your sojourn there is, you will be amused to learn,
a document of increasing pertinence; each year it seems to gain a little headway, as the world loses ground" (p. 71). As White describes his approach to Concord, he again puns on Thoreau's words: "I could feel the road entering me, through tire, wheel, spring, and cushion; shall I not have intelligence with earth too? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mold myself?--a man of infinite horsepower, yet partly leaves" (p. 72).

White carefully describes the Concord of the twentieth century as Thoreau described it in the nineteenth century, by occasionally lifting whole phrases from Walden. "Under the portecochere stands the reconditioned station wagon; under the grape arbor sit the puppies for sale. (But why do men degenerate ever? What makes families run out?)" (pp. 72-73). After his supper in the inn which was once Thoreau's house, he began to look around the town afoot, "... to dream my shapeless transcendental dreams and see that the car was locked up for the night" (p. 73). Here, he inserts a careful description of the actions and motives behind the locking up of the car for the night.

He goes on to describe the sounds he hears, and the people he sees--such sounds as cars, fire engines, robins, ping-pong balls, and radios--most of the sounds unlike those Thoreau describes in Walden. In the morning, White walks out to Walden Pond, which is now a state preserve, complete with swimming hole and litter. "Leaving the highway I turned off into the woods toward the pond, which was apparent through the foliage. The floor of the forest was strewn with dried old oak leaves and Transcripts. From beneath the flattened popcorn wrapper (granum explosum) peeped a frail violet" (p. 75). The pond is
complete with frogs (which stop "troonking" when little boys throw stones at them) and a heap of stones piled up as a tribute to Thoreau. As White leaves the pond, boys are swimming in the pond, singing "America, America, God shed his grace on thee..." and White sarcastically suggests that the Golden Pheasant Inn beside the pond sell Indian pudding and rice, as well as tonics and ices.

At the end of the piece is a Thoreauvian list of total expenses incurred on the trip, fully explained. White apologizes for expending too much. "I cannot defend the shoes or the expenditure for shelter and food: they reveal a meanness and grossness in my nature which you would find contemptible" (p. 77). However, White defends an expenditure for baseball equipment. "The baseball equipment, however, is the kind of impediment with which you were never on even terms. You must remember that the house where you practiced the sort of economy which I respect was haunted only by mice and squirrels. You never had to cope with a shortstop" (pp. 77-78).

White uses the words of Thoreau to reiterate Thoreau's admonitions. Men in twentieth century Concord have still not got the point Thoreau was trying to make in *Walden*. In the incident of the lawn-mower which has got away from the lady mowing, White refers to "Economy." "I am wont to think that men are not so much the keepers of herds as herds are the keepers of men, the former are so much the freer" (p. 62). On page 72 of "Walden" he refers to "Solitude." "Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?" (p. 153). Again White makes a direct

3See footnote 1, Section III, page 25 for complete entry.
quote on page 73. How are these quotes used in the satire? Primarily, they serve the purpose of applying Thoreau's ideas about the materialistic nature of the people of Concord to the twentieth century people of Concord. White makes fun of contemporary materialism as Thoreau chastised nineteenth century materialism. By doing this, White assumes the same attitude Thoreau does—an attitude of superiority, the attitude of romantic irony.

However, White also makes fun of Thoreau. In the third paragraph of page 71 he says, "We may all be transcendental yet, whether we like it or not." The implication is that we are not sure that we like it. On page 73 he refers to the building of a small house by a group of boys. The inference is that Thoreau's housebuilding was likewise only a project of youth. But primarily White makes fun of Thoreau when he discusses the expenses he has incurred in making his trip to Concord. He apologizes for buying a baseball glove for his son. Yet, he scolds Thoreau. "You must remember that the house where you practiced the sort of economy which I respect was haunted only by mice and squirrels. You never had to cope with a shortstop" (pp. 77-78). White scolds Thoreau for not being realistic. Most men are married and have families. They have responsibilities which prevent their initiating a Thoreauvian Walden Pond experiment. Thoreau never had that kind of responsibility. It was easy for him to scold others for not living economically, because he simply had no impediments to doing it. Most men must sacrifice their high ideals, at least partially, to the realities of everyday life.
So, White makes fun of the materialistic Concordians and the idealistic Thoreau. He also makes fun of himself. First, he must have a secretary; he is that cumbered. Second, he must drive fast to honor Thoreau; he must hurry to honor the patient and slow Henry. Third, although he wishes to dream his transcendental dreams, he must lock up the car for the night. And fourth, although he wishes to practice the economy he admires Thoreau for, he must cope with a shortstop at home. White has several ironic terms in this work. There are the overly materialistic people of Concord whom both Thoreau and White disdain; there is the overly idealistic Thoreau whom White laughs at and chastises; and there is the idealistic White who must occasionally think materialistically. White believes in Thoreau's ideals, but he realizes that men must temper their ideals with reality. Thoreau is willing to sacrifice people to ideals, and White is not. White is willing to admit that he, too, is often materialistic and encumbered. Thoreau would never have admitted that; he did not believe that he sinned as other men do. Here most clearly we see the contrast between the two men. White is humble; he identifies with and likes his fellow men. Thoreau is proud of his elevated position as romantic "philosopher," and does not like nor identify with his fellow men.

How do these satiric techniques White uses reveal his world view? White chooses rather complex forms of satire, ironic forms, to express his thoughts. The various techniques that he uses in "The Door"—disjointed sentences, unfamiliar words, amorphous structure—create in the reader the feeling of irrationality, of absurdity that the main character feels as he views the same situations. These techniques recreate
in the reader what the hero (if he may be called such) feels, sees, and thinks. The reader sees through the eyes of the hero—the world is without form and void. Everything is out of reach, out of focus, and past credibility. This unreal world which White recreates in us is the world in which we live. The hero cannot contend with the absurdity, the incongruity of living in a world of synthetics. White sympathizes with the main character, but he does not mean us to infer that he believes no one can cope with this synthetic world. By using irony, this time cosmic irony, he implies that people can and must cope with this world. Obviously there are two poles in this satiric work—the absurd world and the rational man who has run out of solutions to problems. The cosmic irony, as dialectic, implies a third pole which incorporates man's rationality and the world's lack of rationality, and puts man on top. Men must face the world and apply rationality to it. They must accept the fact that the world is inherently disordered and impose their own order upon it.

The irony of "The Second Tree from the Corner" is what I have called inversion and cosmic irony. White wants his reader to understand that the character of the psychiatrist is as insane as Trexler the patient. Trexler cares about other people; he identifies with other people all the time. He has a remarkable ability to be someone else, and he understands something of how life should exist in this world. The psychiatrist, too, understands something of how existence should continue on this planet. Perhaps his answers are too pat, too easy, but he lives more comfortably on this planet than Trexler does.
Ironic dialectic in "The Second Tree from the Corner" would move toward a style of life not entirely Trexler's nor the psychiatrist's, but containing elements of each. White, by using irony, wants us to understand that although Trexler's viewpoint is closer to the truth, it does not in itself embody the truth. The psychiatrist's answers are too obvious, too materialistic. But Trexler is not comfortable in the world. There is another way to live, which contains elements of the psychiatrist's comfortableness with Trexler's wonder and mystic appreciation of life, but is something new and different still from either one. Cosmic irony, in this case, points out very effectively that society's definition of sanity may not be entirely accurate. Materialism is not sanity.

The sympathy that White displays in these two pieces is different from Thoreau's attitude. Thoreau is a moralizer, using himself as the standard of moral uprightness. The contrast between the two men in regard to their fellow men is seen most clearly in "Walden." Thoreau sees only two poles in the world: his existence which is the authentic existence, and everybody else's existence. For him there is only a right way and a wrong way, and he has chosen the right way. E. B. White sees the world as more than bipolar. He cannot claim total uprightness for himself, although he can claim some insight into the affairs of men. The better way, the way of truth, lies somewhere beyond the point to which even he has reached. The satiric techniques that each author uses dramatically reveal their underlying assumptions about men in the universe, and particularly in this world.
SECTION V--CONCLUSIONS
SECTION V--CONCLUSIONS

A satirist is a writer who deals with the problems of men. He sees flaws in the world and in men, and he suggests changes, or points the way to change. Henry Thoreau and E. B. White are both satirists. But they are not satirists strictly in the eighteenth century sense. The prevailing philosophical movements have greatly influenced each and thereby influenced the directions their satire takes. Thoreau, a product of Concord, Massachusetts, in the heyday of transcendentalism, takes an attitude toward men which an eighteenth century satirist would not have taken. Romanticism had an influence on Thoreau, which is certainly understandable and probably unavoidable. Thoreau sees himself as a member of an elite group of men who perceive the world and the universe correctly. He is an "artist," a "philosopher." Most men, he felt, clearly did not and probably could not come up to the height he had attained in understanding. Men must gain what insight they can into existence. Walden was written to help men gain insight into existence; however, although Thoreau wanted men to change, he didn't expect them to. Walden was written as much to express what Thoreau did right as to indicate what other men do incorrectly.

E. B. White's satire clearly reflects the twentieth century. Trexler, the main character in "The Second Tree from the Corner," lives in a world of Freudian analysis, a psychiatric-centered world of slick
escapisms and subconscious identifications. The main character in "The Door" lives in a world without inherent rhyme or reason. The influence of Existentialism is not hard to see in this work. In "Walden" White and Thoreau come quite close to each other in their comments about the world.

Obviously, both men have felt strongly about the way men live. In "Walden," particularly, their philosophical and attitudinal similarities can be seen. But also, in "Walden," their differences attitudinally are most clearly seen. E. B. White likes people, he likes to be around people, he admits to being human. He is tempted like as we are, and he does not always resist temptation. Thoreau scarcely feels the same temptations, much less succumbs to them. This difference in attitude, which is very basic to an author's view of men, is not easily identified. On the surface, judging by the amount of material White has written about Thoreau, and the amount of material other writers have written about the two of them, the two men think alike, except for the obvious changes in world situation between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century. But a study of their uses of satiric techniques, and a study of the implications these uses of techniques have regarding world view, will lead the student to see that their world views are dissimilar; their premises are different. Satire is a mode which is chosen because of a writer's attitudes. The choice the author makes of satiric techniques will reveal his attitudes quite clearly, as can be seen from this brief study of the techniques used by E. B. White and Henry David Thoreau.
SECTION VI—BIBLIOGRAPHY


E. B. WHITE AND HENRY THOREAU--A STUDY OF SATIRIC TECHNIQUE RELATED TO WORLD VIEW

By

Ruth Lynn Craig

An Abstract of a Thesis
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Master of Arts
in the Field of English

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ABSTRACT

Satire is a mode of literature that provides a good index to an author's value system. By analyzing the satiric techniques of an author, a student can assess what the author's values are and how he evaluates the conditions of the world in relationship to those values (either his values or a set of values to which he adheres). There are two kinds of satiric techniques—bipolar and dialectic. Bipolar satire expresses the point of view that there are two ways to live in the world—a right way and a wrong way. A satirist who uses this type of satire assumes that his way of life is the right way, and almost everyone else's way of life is the wrong way. Dialectic satire, as explained by Kenneth Burke in A Grammar of Motives, expresses the point of view that there is no one correct way to live in the world. There are a variety of ways of living, each of which contains an element of truth. All together, these different ways of life form a progressive dialectic, moving closer and closer to the truth. A satirist who uses this type of satire is aware that no man, including himself, has the whole truth about life, but men ought to and will progress toward a more complete truth by trying a series of value systems through which they learn more about the best way of living.

E. B. White and Henry David Thoreau have been linked together by several of E. B. White's contemporaries. White has been called the twentieth century Thoreau, because he expresses some of the same opinions
Thoreau does, because he writes a good deal about Thoreau and Thoreau's opinions, and because he writes something in the manner of Thoreau. Both men are satirists, and in order to discover whether or not White really is a contemporary Thoreau, it is necessary to examine their satiric techniques to determine their values.

Through the process of reading the entire works of White and Thoreau, the author has isolated several types of satiric techniques used by White and Thoreau. A detailed analysis of several representative passages by each has revealed that Thoreau primarily uses bipolar satire, while White primarily uses dialectic satire. Henry Thoreau, as seen in his satire, takes a superior attitude to his readers; he feels that he has progressed farther on the road to truth than most other men can ever hope to. E. B. White is sympathetic to his fellow men; he knows that he, as well as they, is not perfect. All men come short of perfect truth. He chides Thoreau for not recognizing this, although he praises Thoreau for attempting to achieve a perfect life in harmony with the natural world. White believes that, while we must have high ideals, we must also recognize that men will not reach their high ideals. Men can and must strive for a better life, even if they will always fall short of complete success.

The conclusion to this study is that E. B. White and Henry Thoreau do not have entirely similar systems of values. This can be seen by analyzing the techniques of satire which each man uses. On the surface the two men seem to be making similar statements about men and their world. But a closer examination of their works reveals that their basic value premises about men are not the same.