THOREAU AT TWO HUNDRED

Essays and Reassessments

EDITED BY
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and
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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10013

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107094291

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First published 2016

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Names: Van Anglen, Kevin P., 1953– editor. | Case, Kristen, 1976– editor.

Title: Thoreau at two hundred: essays and reassessments /
edited by K. P. Van Anglen and Kristen Case.

Description: New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016016145 | ISBN 9781107094291 (hardback)

Subjects: LCSH: Thoreau, Henry David, 1817–1862 – Criticism and interpretation. | Thoreau, Henry David, 1817–1862 – Philosophy. |

BISAC: LITERARY CRITICISM / American / General.

Classification: LCC PS3054.T54 2016 | DDC 818/.309–dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016016145>

ISBN 978-1-107-09429-1 Hardback

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Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the Boston University Center for the Humanities and its director, Prof. James A. Winn, for partially subventing the cost of publishing this volume. They also thank the Thoreau Society, Inc., and its president, Michael Schleifer, and executive director, Michael J. Frederick, for a similar subvention. In addition, K. P. Van Anglen is both personally and professionally indebted to Amélie Prusik for her help in preparing the manuscript of this collection for the press. Kristen Case thanks Kyle Manning for help in compiling the bibliography, Daniel Gunn for helpful feedback on the introduction, and Tom Jessen for the domestic labor and support that made her work on this volume possible.

James S. Finley thanks Katherine Gillen, Michelle Neely, Lance Newman, and Sandra Harbert Petrulionis for their generous assistance in his researching and writing "A Free Soiler in His Own Broad Sense: Henry David Thoreau and the Free Soil Movement." Additional support came in the form of a Barbara L. Packer Fellowship, for which he gratefully acknowledges the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society and the American Antiquarian Society.

Joshua David Bellin thanks Sandra Petrulionis, Laura Walls, and Joel Myerson for their support of his work on Transcendentalism and the American Indians. He'd also like to thank the editors of this volume for their helpful feedback on an early draft of "Red Walden: Thoreau and Native America."

Lawrence Buell extends sincere thanks to John Stauffer for his searching responses to an earlier draft of "Disaffiliation as Engagement"; to Rachel Levy and Margaret Doherty for valuable research assistance; and, for the opportunity to discuss some of the thorny underlying issues behind the chapter, to Michael T. Gilmore, Robert Gross, and Lawrence Rosenwald. Professor Buell dedicates this essay to the memory of Timo Gilmore, in friendship and in thanks.

- 58 Ibid., 92. Thoreau is punning on the British word for what Americans call railroad "ties": "sleepers."
- 59 Ibid., 116.
- 60 Ibid., 92.
- 61 Ibid., 118. Atropos, one of the three fates in Greek mythology, cut the thread of each mortal's life, thereby determining his or her longevity.
- 62 James Finley, "Justice in the Land': Ecological Protest in Henry David Thoreau's Antislavery Essays," *The Concord Saunterer: A Journal of Thoreau Studies*, n.s. 21 (2013): 5.
- 63 Elise Lemire, *Black Walden: Slavery and Its Aftermath in Concord, Massachusetts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 1–14.
- 64 Michelle C. Neely, "Embodied Politics: Antebellum Vegetarianism and the Dietary Economy of *Walden*," *American Literature* 85, no.1 (March 2013): 41–55.
- 65 Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, *To Set This World Right: The Antislavery Movement in Thoreau's Concord* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 92–95.

CHAPTER 2

A Free Soiler in His Own Broad Sense
Henry David Thoreau and the Free Soil Movement

James S. Finley

On July 4, 1854, Henry David Thoreau spoke to an antislavery rally organized by William Lloyd Garrison in Framingham, Massachusetts, where he delivered "Slavery in Massachusetts," a speech that the *Liberator* deemed a "racy and ably written" condemnation of northern complicity with slavery.¹ Thoreau's speech, with its critique of voting, has been read as "the epitome of Garrisonian skepticism toward party politics," consistent with his support for prominent Garrisonians Nathaniel Peabody Rogers and Wendell Phillips, his night in jail, and his dedication to individual moral perfectionism.² In addition to these Garrisonian strains, however, Thoreau was also deeply engaged with the political wing of abolition, the Free Soil movement, and he explores its ideological positions in "Slavery in Massachusetts," *Walden*, and "A Plea for Captain John Brown." But rather than simply reiterate Free Soil ideology, these works simultaneously critique and reimagine the political and discursive elements of the movement.

Free Soil emerged from the ferment over war with Mexico and privileged agrarianism and free labor in the antislavery struggle.³ Free Soilers agitated (unsuccessfully) for the Wilmot Proviso – which stipulated that no land gained from the war would become slave territory – and countered the unwillingness of Garrisonians to engage in politics, arguing instead that political agitation could undermine the government's protection of slaveholding. A heterogeneous movement, Free Soil advocated both immediate abolition and restriction of slavery. An environmental critique of plantation slavery united all factions. Arguing that bonded labor and extraction-heavy practices were unproductive and ecologically destructive, Free Soilers positioned "free labor" in contradistinction to chattel slavery, valorizing the republican ideal of the small producer. To underscore this distinction, Free Soilers juxtaposed the purportedly antiquated, inefficient, and unnatural economy of slaveholding, visible in the blighted landscapes of the South, with the political and economic liberty reflected

in the beautiful and harmonious environments of the North, especially New England, which Free Soilers celebrated as a paragon of ecosocial harmony. Southern and western spaces, they argued, would similarly benefit from the introduction of free labor.⁴

Although Thoreau did not believe that slavery could be abolished by political means, Free Soil's commitment to land, labor, and liberty appealed to him.⁵ Attending to the Free Soil valences in both Thoreau's antislavery writings and *Walden* provides a new approach to the vexed matter of how Thoreau's political writings and nature writings intersect – what Rebecca Solnit has identified as “the Thoreau problem,” the critical tendency to treat the “green Thoreau” and the “political Thoreau” as distinct.⁶ Taking up Solnit's challenge, ecocritics such as Lance Newman have demonstrated that Thoreau synthesizes “protoenvironmentalist attitudes with radical ideas about social reform” in his late career nature writings.⁷ Extending my earlier argument that we can see such a synthesis in the antislavery writings as well,⁸ this chapter explores Thoreau's engagement with Free Soil ideology and contextualizes Thoreau's ecologically oriented social reform. Thoreau, I argue, transforms the Free Soil position that slaveholding degrades labor and landscapes, making it more attentive to Transcendentalist ethics and ecological volatility. More specifically, the ecological vision of antislavery that Thoreau articulates in “Slavery in Massachusetts” and the individualist, anticapitalist free soil project that he fashions in *Walden* both point toward his embrace of John Brown as the apotheosis of a uniquely Thoreauvian version of Free Soil.

“Slavery in Massachusetts” reveals the environmental destruction caused by slaveholding, but instead of focusing on southern or western spaces, Thoreau attends to New England. In particular, Thoreau renders his native region as polluted by slavery, rather than as a pristine alternative. Thoreau argues that slavery is “vexing the land” to an extent that has worried farmers in “obscure country town[s]”; since the Fugitive Slave Law was imposed, the postlapsarian landscapes of the slaveholding South had shifted North. The law is suited to the “dirt . . . dust and mire,”¹⁰ and brought “slime and muck” to Massachusetts.¹¹ After 1850, Thoreau implies, Free Soilers must not uncritically celebrate the rural North as a distinct alternative to the South since slavery's pollution has transgressed both political and geographic boundaries. Moreover, Thoreau locates himself within and subject to the new corruption. No longer could he “foolishly [think] that [he] might manage to live here, minding [his] private affairs, and forget it.”¹² No longer can he access “the beauty of nature” or the

“serenity” of lakes, as slaveholding is “a decaying and a death, offensive to all healthy nostrils.”¹³ As such, “the remembrance of [his] country spoils [his] walk.”¹⁴

Free Soilers typically relied on census data, comparing agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing in slave and free states, so as to demonstrate the economic preeminence of free labor. The geographic and ideological dualism of this perspective has little in common with Thoreau's more Transcendental and ecological orientation. Although Thoreau does mention that “seed-corn is worth less this year,” he explains it in Transcendentalist terms: “all beneficent harvests fail as you approach the empire of hell.” The Edenic landscapes of the North, he argues, have been degraded by slaveholding and have become postlapsarian, “morally covered with volcanic scorïæ and cinders, such as Milton describes in the infernal regions.”¹⁵ Remaining faithful to the Free Soil argument that slavery is environmentally destructive, Thoreau replaces dualism with sensitivity to porosity and interrelation and thereby avoids celebrating northern environments as somehow separate from and inured against slavery's pollution.

Concerned with slaveholding's ecological destruction, the Thoreau of “Slavery in Massachusetts” joins Free Soilers such as Edward Everett Hale, part of Thoreau's circle in Worcester, in calling attention to the risk slavery poses to the natural beauty of nonslaveholding regions. In his 1854 book encouraging Free Soil emigration to Kansas, Hale describes “the most remarkable” environment, full of beautiful rivers, fertile soil, and all sorts of enticements for free laborers.¹⁶ Hale sees Kansas as containing “the fairest lands in the world” and worries that these landscapes and natural resources would be destroyed if settled by slaveholders.¹⁷

Whereas Free Soilers such as Hale mobilized around blocking the expansion of slaveholding into the West, Thoreau redirects Free Soil concern back home. He pleads that the battle over slavery and the fight to establish free soil should not focus entirely on “some wild lands a thousand miles off,” and suggests that it must also be fought in New England, the sine qua non of free landscapes and ecological harmony. In addition, he expresses regret that a June 22 antislavery meeting in Concord focused more on Kansas than on the recent arrest and rendition in Boston of Anthony Burns. Thoreau admires that “several of the citizens of Massachusetts are now in prison for attempting to rescue a slave from her own clutches,” while at the same time he bemoans the fact that “not one of the speakers at that meeting expressed regret for it, not one even referred to it.” Many of those imprisoned were, in fact, Free Soilers, already in Boston for a convention.¹⁸

Thoreau's critique of Free Soil's emphasis on the territories is even more explicit in the *Journal*. Writing on June 18, 1854, Thoreau explains that "What we want is not mainly to colonize Nebraska with free men—but to colonize Massachusetts with free men to be free ourselves—As the enterprise of a few individuals that is brave & practical—but as the enterprise of a state it is cowardice & imbecility... It is not the soil that we would make free—but men—."¹⁹ As he does at Framingham, Thoreau argues that Massachusetts requires a Free Soil project of its own, but with a specific focus on nonstate action. While this implies that Thoreau admires Free Soil generally, so long as it is an organic collective and not a political project, he also makes plain that it is people, not the land itself, that need liberating. Free Soil's principle that soil must be *made* free, especially on the scale of spaces like Nebraska, demands the sort of statist project that Thoreau despises. An alternative would be for individuals to free themselves through contact with the land. Later in that same entry Thoreau returns to the Free Soil movement: "It is not any such free soil party as I have seen—but a free man party— i.e. a party of free men—that is wanted."²⁰ The loosely chiasmic phrase here develops the antiestablishment position articulated earlier, as "party of" reflects an organic collective of free agents, modifying – and thus subordinate to – people, rather than vice versa. Despite its position that slavery is ecologically unsustainable, Thoreau finds Free Soil's response to slavery insufficient precisely because it works within the political system, drawing strength not from the land but from the state. Ultimately, the June 18 entry deemphasizes Free Soil's republican politics and injects instead a Transcendentalist concern with individual cultivation.

Thoreau's support for but simultaneous critique of Free Soil as both too normatively political and too celebratory of New England aligns itself with concerns expressed by Thomas Wentworth Higginson in his "Massachusetts in Mourning" sermon, delivered in Worcester on June 4, 1854, and quickly printed in Boston. Like Thoreau, Higginson portrays the Fugitive Slave Law as expansive and pollutive, wondering "what was the disease that smote this fair form, and are we safe from the infection?"²¹ Anticipating Thoreau's declaration in "Slavery in Massachusetts" that "The remembrance of my country spoils my walk," Higginson bemoans the fact that he has "lost the dream that ours is a land of peace and order."²² Higginson's solution – "The way to promote Free Soil is to have your own soil free" – stakes out a claim similar to Thoreau's June 18 entry, as both men posit a Transcendentalist commitment to individual agency and cultivation in place of traditional politics.²³ Although Higginson was

more supportive of Kansas emigration than was Thoreau, both underscore the urgency of a Free Soil project closer to home. In emphasizing disease and the expansive nature of pollution, both also respect ecological volatility and thus abandon Free Soil's static understanding of the nonhuman environment. Along with concern for individual cultivation, this emphasis on ecology and local conditions provides the foundation for Thoreau's critique of Free Soil ideology in *Walden*.

Thoreau worked on *Walden* during Free Soil's ascendancy and published it at the movement's peak. Its production was shaped considerably by Free Soiler Horace Greeley, who acted as Thoreau's de facto literary agent and publicized *Walden* any way he could, printing a letter from Thoreau in 1848, running excerpts prior to publication, and mentioning Thoreau in his lectures. Thoreau even included sections of Greeley's introductory editorial to the 1848 letter in the final version of "Economy."²⁴ The ideological connection between Thoreau and Greeley has been largely overlooked by scholars, however, most of whom follow Walter Harding in thinking that Thoreau's writings "were often somewhat alien to the general content" of the Whiggish *Tribune*.²⁵ Yet, Greeley's commitment to free labor, his condemnations of war with Mexico, and his affinity with Free Soil ideology bear striking similarities to Thoreau's positions. Like Thoreau, Greeley never officially joined the Free Soil Party but supported the movement generally, especially its union of land reform and abolition.²⁶

Walden contains only one direct reference to the Free Soil movement. In "Visitors," Thoreau contrasts his action in aiding "runaway slaves" with the inaction of abolitionists, both "men of a thousand ideas" and the "one idea" men.²⁷ Thoreau here alludes to the ideological divide between the big-tent Garrisonians, "men of a thousand ideas," and the "one idea" Free Soilers. His apparent dismissal of Free Soil is tempered, however, by what precedes it: an excerpt from Free Soiler Elizur Wright's "The Fugitive Slave to the Christian." Similar to Thoreau, Wright was committed to abolition, agrarianism, and economic justice, and after helping to found the Liberty Party in 1840 edited a series of Free Soil papers in Boston.²⁸ In 1851, Wright was arrested for assisting fugitive Shadrach Minkins in his escape from Boston. Minkins stopped in Concord on his way to Canada, an event that Gary Collison believes helped inspire the section on fugitivity in "Visitors."²⁹ This approving allusion to Free Soil enables Thoreau to fault "one idea" men for their ideological rigidity while also making plain his affinity for Free Soil rather than Garrisonianism.

Beyond these particular points, *Walden* engages significantly with Free Soil ideology and praxis. Specifically, the text's primary concerns parallel Free Soil's tripartite emphasis on land, labor, and liberty. Thoreau certainly considers each of these issues separately in *Walden*, approaching the topography of Concord with a surveyor's eye, interrogating the epistemological shifts brought about by the market revolution, and chaffing against various forms of social control. At the same time, *Walden* synthesizes these concerns in a manner that underscores the Free Soil heuristic: labor connects people and communities to the land in ways that either encourage or threaten liberty. Thoreau commits himself to the position that agrarian free labor can link people to landscapes in ways that are ecologically sustainable and supportive of liberty and autonomy. Yet despite *Walden*'s ideological proximity to Free Soil, the text contains two substantial and related revisions that, echoing "Slavery in Massachusetts," reflect a deep concern with the nonhuman environment and suggest, by extension, that the Free Soil critique of slaveholding is not sufficiently ecological.

First, Thoreau's detailed attention to Walden Woods reflects an ecological perspective lacking in Free Soil's general rendering of northern landscapes as distinct from and superior to southern spaces. This specificity serves as a rejoinder to the national vision of Free Soilers who suggested that certain ecosocial conditions could be broadly, and indiscriminately, transplanted. For Thoreau, this deracinated and empiricist approach appears decidedly antiecological. *Walden*, by contrast, implies that creating and maintaining truly free soil requires local knowledge. If, as David M. Robinson has suggested, Thoreau's commitment to a "natural life" was informed by "much vaster cycles of time than those generated by the American political system,"³⁰ it also privileged much smaller regions than those recognized by politicians.

Like "Slavery in Massachusetts," *Walden* also challenges Free Soil's hagiographic portrait of agrarian New England. In particular, *Walden* addresses the ramifications of the market revolution on rural New England and deromanticizes the independent farmer. The contrarian of "Economy," portraying his neighbors as laboring under a mistake, challenges the reiteration of the North as a metonym of free labor. Thoreau's position thus brings into relief the uncritical nature of many Free Soilers' celebrations of the northern yeoman. John Gorham Palfrey, for example, told a collection of Concord farmers that because Massachusetts's "soil is tilled by freemen," the state's productivity and natural beauty far exceed those of "nature's Edens" in the South.³¹ Thoreau, by contrast, "see[s] young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses,

barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. . . Who made them serfs of the soil?"³² Deploying the language of enslavement rather than liberty, Thoreau undermines the position of Massachusetts farmers as freemen. The market economy's transformation of farming, Thoreau implies, particularly the presence of debt, means that free labor – and by extension free soil – no longer exists in Massachusetts. Thoreau, thus, perhaps a bit dramatically, reformulates Free Soil's paragons into another form of bonded laborers.

Thoreau's claim that aspects of northern life mirror chattel slavery in the South, although it departs from the Free Soil celebration of northern farmers, nonetheless echoes Free Soil's concern over the expansive and threatening Slave Power, which Free Soilers saw as a threat to all sorts of American liberty, particularly free speech.³³ Thoreau thus sounds like a Free Soiler when he bemoans that "there are very few halls for free worship or free speech in this county," referring to the 1844 incident in which Ralph Waldo Emerson was denied permission by Concord ministers to speak on abolition.³⁴ But whereas Free Soilers painted a conspiratorial picture of a small band of Southern planters corrupting Northern society, Thoreau locates corruption within northern individuals everywhere, even in New England: "I sometimes wonder that we can be so frivolous, I may almost say, as to attend to the gross but somewhat foreign form of servitude called Negro Slavery, there are so many keen and subtle masters that enslave both north and south. It is hard to have a southern overseer; it is worse to have a northern one; but worst of all when you are the slave-driver of yourself."³⁵ Here Thoreau decenters the source of enslavement, expanding the Slave Power heuristic, impelling his readers to examine their own positions (in every sense) critically, and root out their own complicity with oppressive forces from every quarter. Admitting the extremity of his position with the qualifier "almost," Thoreau nonetheless seeks to shock northern readers into recognizing their own precarious position with regard to enslavement. Locating the pernicious influence of the Slave Power within seemingly autonomous and independent northerners, Thoreau reveals the truly expansive nature of slaveholding and instantiates the importance of Transcendentalist individuality for the Free Soil vision.

Further, his "experiment" at the Pond can be seen as a uniquely Thoreauvian manifestation of Free Soil ideology put into practice. This experiment, he notes at the outset, was not only "very natural" but also "pertinent."³⁶ Although Thoreau does not specify the pertinence he has in mind, *Walden*'s commitment to squatters' independence and autonomy implicitly calls to mind his friends' and neighbors' attempts to establish

Free Soil communities in Kansas. His "life in the woods" thus appears pertinent to the nationwide debate over what sort of labor will characterize the western territories. It also presents a specific reminder to members of the New England Emigrant Aid Society, which encouraged and supported Free Soil settlers in Kansas, to maintain their Transcendentalist commitments.

The model that Thoreau articulates in *Walden* suggests that Transcendentalist simplicity and individuality are necessary to realize a system of free labor and independence. As he explains in "Economy":

if one would live simply and eat only the crop which he raised, and raise no more than he ate, and not exchange it for an insufficient quantity of more luxurious and expensive things, he would need to cultivate only a few rods of ground... I desire to speak impartially on this point, and as one not interested in the success or failure of the present economical and social arrangements. I was more independent than any farmer in Concord, for I was not anchored to a house or farm, but could follow the bent of my genius, which is a very crooked one, every moment.³⁷

Although Thoreau claims that his vision for simple living has little bearing on "present economical and social arrangements," his specifically agrarian vision of liberating labor dovetails with the ideals of Free Soil. Since Thoreau argues that producing for the market negates the liberating potential of farming, the implication is that the Free Soil model – with its reliance on decidedly liberal concepts of economic liberty – risks succumbing to the very threats of bondage that it seeks to counteract. Rooted instead in simplicity and anticapitalism, Thoreau's Transcendentalist Free Soil vision is appropriately *extra-vagant* and can be seen as an experiment in the creation of truly free soil, free labor, and free men.

If *Walden* revises Free Soil ideology to incorporate locospecificity and Transcendentalist simplicity, a series of Journal entries in January 1856 envisions a more ecological manifestation of Free Soil. Over multiple days, during which Thoreau describes a magnificent American elm, taken down by the Davis family of Concord for fear that the old tree posed a risk to their house, he develops an extended analogy that positions the tree as a metonym for the United States.³⁸ First, he recounts closely examining the fallen elm and notes a "geographical look" to splotches of rot before honing in on the "decayed part of the butt end."³⁹ Free Soilers frequently relied on tropes of decay to underscore the threat that slavery posed to landscapes and to national politics alike. As the Free Soil *Boston Daily Republican* stated, "the seeds of decay and dissolution remain" as

long as the Slave Power is ascendant.⁴⁰ Thoreau's point that the rot looks "geographical" brings into relief the topographical inflection common to Free Soil discourses of decay.

Two days later, Thoreau praises American elms generally as "free-soilers in their own broad sense. They send their roots north and south and east and west into many a conservative's Kansas and Carolina, who does not suspect such underground railroads, – they improve the subsoil he has never disturbed, – and many times their length, if the support of their principles requires it. They battle with the tempests of a century."⁴¹ Unlike the 1854 Journal entry, which stated "it is not the soil that we would make free—but men," here he positions soil as the arena of struggle. Projecting a more ecocentric position, Thoreau moves away from the individualist labor of *Walden* to imply that the land itself can resist slaveholding's expansion. These arboreal free soilers, he claims, construct radical networks of antislavery activism that improve land blighted by slaveholding, work that is both ecological and liberating. In addition, these Free Soil networks expand "north and south and east and west," reflecting Thoreau's position in "Slavery in Massachusetts" that slaveholding hegemony has expanded throughout the entire nation. He specifically mentions Carolina, emblematic of used-up topographies, and Kansas, where Free Soilers "battle with the tempests of a century." Like decay, the trope of a proslavery tempest figured frequently in Free Soil discourse. John Parker Hale, for instance, exclaimed "now the whole horizon is overcast, and the tempest is upon us; the moral indignation of the earth and the judgments of God come in thick succession upon us."⁴² In addition, reference to these Free Soil "underground railroads" echoes – with a more ecocentric register – the passage in "Visitors" where Thoreau welcomes fugitives.

Furthermore, these Free Soil elms point toward Thoreau's embrace of John Brown at the end of the decade, for Brown embodies the sort of Transcendentalist and ecological Free Soil commitment that Thoreau envisions. In "A Plea for Captain John Brown," Thoreau relies heavily on ecological imagery, portraying Brown as a natural force ideally suited to battle slaveholding. Thoreau figures Brown as a volcano, as lightning, as "clear as a cloudless sky, true as the voice of nature."⁴³ Thoreau also presents Brown's antislavery labors as the work of a "good seed," which, when planted, makes "good fruit . . . inevitable. . . This is a seed of such force and vitality, that it does not ask our leave to germinate."⁴⁴ "A Plea" emphasizes Brown's agrarian antislavery commitment, which Thoreau portrays as a broadly ecological and Transcendentalist realization of Free Soil ideology. Radical like the Free Soil elms, Brown holds a principled understanding

of land and ecological interrelation and seeks to bring ecosocial justice into slave territory. Brown, in Thoreau's depiction, recognizes to a greater extent than other Free Soilers do the ecological threat posed by slaveholding. Dedicated to resisting the Slave Power and to establishing Free Soil communities in the West, Brown "sent several of his sons" to Kansas, like the roots sent by the Free Soil elms. If needed, "he would follow to assist them with his hand and counsel ... and it was through his agency, far more than any other's, that Kansas was made free." Hand, counsel, and agency all speak to the sort of individualist praxis that Thoreau envisions as necessary to create truly free soil. In addition, Thoreau explains that Brown gained relevant experience as a surveyor and a wool-grower. While traveling in Europe to purchase wool, Brown "had his eyes about him, and made many original observations. He said, for instance, that he saw why the soil of England was so rich, and that of Germany (I think it was) so poor."⁴⁵ Recognizing that dispossession and the closing of the commons has affected the soil, Brown is especially attuned to the ecological effects of injustice.

Thoreau notes that Brown was "by descent and birth a New England farmer, a man of great common sense, deliberate and practical as that class is, and tenfold more so."⁴⁶ This emphasis on class and yeoman virtue directly echoes the rhetoric of Free Soil ideology. Because of his background, Brown needed "no abolition lecturer" to change his heart and moral commitment. Further, Thoreau recognizes Brown as "an old-fashioned man in his respect for the Constitution, and his faith in the permanence of this Union."⁴⁷ In contrast to the Garrisonians, Brown supports the Free Soil position that the Constitution was inherently antislavery and that disunion would, in fact, support the proslavery cause. At the same time, however, Thoreau goes to great length to elevate Brown above antislavery politicians. He shows little interest in hiding his frustration, bordering on contempt, that Free Soil politicians have neither praised nor defended Brown in the wake of Harpers Ferry. "What a contrast," Thoreau exclaims, "when we turn to that political party which is so anxiously shuffling him and his plot out of its way."⁴⁸ For putting Free Soil ideals into practice, for battling the Slave Power, and for trying to "[establish] justice in the land,"⁴⁹ Brown was abandoned by those politicians who purportedly support Free Soil principles. Politics, Thoreau explains, cannot appoint an "agent to abolish Slavery"⁵⁰; only a truly Transcendentalist Free Soiler like Brown can bring about the necessary epistemological, ecological, and political revolutions. Brown's ecosocial sensitivity, coupled with his Transcendentalist commitment to individualist principled action and

antipathy to organized politics, represent the realization of what Thoreau had been calling for from Framingham, from Walden Pond, and in his Journal.

Thoreau's simultaneous reliance on and critique of Free Soil discourse aligns him with Black abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass and Henry Bibb, who both supported and sought to radicalize the Free Soil movement. For Thoreau, as for Douglass and Bibb, abolition was a matter of environmental justice, and while the Free Soil movement did point toward such a recognition, it did not go far enough in realizing it. In "Slavery in Massachusetts," *Walden*, the Journal, and "A Plea," Thoreau challenges Free Soil's emphasis on containing already existing slavery, its nearly exclusive attention to the West, and its hesitance to embrace radicalism. In so doing, Thoreau highlights two paradoxes within Free Soil. First, he demonstrates that relying on purportedly free people to free the land will not happen so long as they remain trapped within capitalism. Second, he illuminates that Free Soil, despite its resistance to ecological destruction, proffers an antiecollogical solution. Its emphasis on nonextension — on containing slavery within its current location so as to bring about its extinction — reflects a faith in borders and limits that is undermined by their own fears concerning the expansive, contaminating, and pollutive effects of the Slave Power. Not only are both material and moral forms of pollution notoriously difficult to confine or regulate, but also the premise of addressing pollution by cordoning it into a restrictive space reflects a willful ignorance of environmental interrelation, interpenetration, and porosity. Turning his attention, therefore, from Kansas and incrementalist politics, Thoreau aligns himself with the antislavery elms and John Brown to create radical networks of Free Soil activism. As a Free Soiler in a "broad sense," Thoreau recognized the paradoxes within the movement and was primed to respond when John Brown's actions made them impossible to ignore.

Notes

- ¹ "The Meeting at Framingham," *The Liberator*, July 7, 1854.
- ² Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1998), 444. For scholarship that treats Thoreau as a Garrisonian see Wendell Glick, "Thoreau and Radical Abolitionism: A Study of the Native Background of Thoreau's Social Philosophy," (PhD. diss., Northwestern University, 1950); Linck C. Johnson, "Reforming the Reformers: Emerson, Thoreau, and the Sunday Lectures at Amory Hall, Boston," *ESQ* 37, no. 4 (1991): 235–89; Len Gougeon, "Thoreau and Reform,"

- in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Joel Myerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 194–214. For the Garrisonian climate in Concord, see Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, *To Set this World Right: The Antislavery Movement in Thoreau's Concord* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).
- 3 Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824–1854* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 13–14.
  - 4 Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 40–42.
  - 5 Many of Thoreau's friends and acquaintances supported the Free Soil movement. Ralph Waldo Emerson stumped for John Gorham Palfrey's 1851 campaign for Congress on the Free Soil ticket. Thomas Wentworth Higginson campaigned for Free Soilers in Essex County in 1848 and himself ran for Congress as a Free Soil candidate in 1850. His childhood neighbor and classmate Rockwood Hoar helped organize a Free Soil convention in Worcester in 1848. Franklin Sanborn, who introduced Thoreau to John Brown, was an active member of the Free Soil Party in Concord, where he worked on behalf of Kansas emigration. Sanborn also edited the *Free Soil Boston Commonwealth*, where he published eight of Thoreau's poems. Thoreau's cousin George Thatcher was an active promoter of the Free Soil movement in Maine.
  - 6 Rebecca Solnit, "The Thoreau Problem," in *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, ed. Bill McKibben, 97–74 (New York: Library of America, 2008).
  - 7 Lance Newman, "Environmentalism Thought and Action," in *The Oxford Handbook of Transcendentalism*, ed. Joel Myerson, Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, and Laura Dassow Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 172.
  - 8 James Finley, "Justice in the Land: Ecological Protest in Henry David Thoreau's Antislavery Essays," *The Concord Saunterer: A Journal of Thoreau Studies* n.s. 21 (2013): 1–35.
  - 9 *RP*, 99.
  - 10 *Ibid.*, 97.
  - 11 *Ibid.*, 108.
  - 12 *Ibid.*, 106.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, 108, 109.
  - 14 *Ibid.*, 108. As Laura Dassow Walls has suggested, "Slavery in Massachusetts" reflects a green politics shaped by Alexander von Humboldt's claims that racism and injustice are unnatural ("Greening Darwin's Century: Humboldt, Thoreau, and the Politics of Hope," *Victorian Review* 36, no. 2 [2010]: 99–102). See also Finley, "Justice in the Land," 12–18.
  - 15 *RP*, 106–7.
  - 16 Edward Everett Hale, *Kansas and Nebraska: The History, Geographical and Physical Characteristics, and Political Position of those Territories; an Account of the Emigrant Aid Companies, and Directions to Emigrants* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Co., 1854), 61. Hale spells Kansas with a "z" so as to erase the etymological connection with proslavery Arkansas.

- 17 *Ibid.*, 243.
- 18 *RP*, 91. Albert von Frank, *The Trials of Anthony Burns: Freedom and Slavery in Emerson's Boston* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 53, 192.
- 19 *PJ* 8: 207.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 210.
- 21 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Massachusetts in Mourning. A Sermon, Preached in Worcester, on Sunday, June 4, 1854" (Boston: James Munroe, 1854), 3.
- 22 *RP*, 108; *ibid.*, 12.
- 23 Higginson, "Massachusetts in Mourning," 13.
- 24 Walter Harding, *Days of Henry Thoreau* (New York: Dover, 1982), 332.
- 25 Walter Harding, "Horace Greeley on Thoreau: A Forgotten Portrait," *Thoreau Society Bulletin*, no. 116 (July 1971): 5.
- 26 See Adam Tuchinsky, *Horace Greeley's New-York Tribune: Civil War-Era Socialism and the Crisis of Free Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).
- 27 *W*, 152.
- 28 See Lawrence B. Goodheart, *Abolitionist, Actuary, Atheist: Elizur Wright and the Reform Impulse* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990).
- 29 See Gary Collison, "Shadrach in Concord," *The Concord Saunterer* 19, no. 2 (1987): 1–12.
- 30 David M. Robinson, *Natural Life: Thoreau's Worldly Transcendentalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 7.
- 31 John Gorham Palfrey, "An Address to the Society of Middlesex Husbandmen and Manufacturers, Delivered at Concord, October 7, 1846" (Cambridge, MA: Metcalf and Company, 1846), 8.
- 32 *W*, 5.
- 33 See David Brion Davis, *The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969).
- 34 *W*, 57.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 55–56.
- 38 Thoreau is perhaps drawing on the Revolutionary-era tradition of towns designating an elm as a "liberty tree." See Alfred F. Young, *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
- 39 *J* 8: 130.
- 40 "The Progress of a Year," *Boston Daily Republican*, July 6, 1849.
- 41 *J* 8: 140.
- 42 John Parker Hale, "Massachusetts Liberty Convention and Speech of Hon. John P. Hale: Together with His Letter Accepting His Nomination as President of the U.S." (Boston: 1848), 4.
- 43 *RP*, 137.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 119.

- 45 Ibid., 112. Patrick Chura compellingly argues that Thoreau was attracted to Brown's use of surveying for antislavery purposes; see his *Thoreau the Land Surveyor* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 135–54.
- 46 *RP*, 112–13.
- 47 Ibid., 112.
- 48 Ibid., 126.
- 49 Ibid., 129.
- 50 Ibid., 135.

CHAPTER 3

Emancipation from the "Invisible Hand"
Thoreau's "Economy of Living"

Susan E. Gallagher

"Economy," the opening chapter of *Walden*, features Henry David Thoreau's most frequently studied commentary on the expanding system of production and consumption that transformed American life in and beyond his era.¹ Although this focus on "Economy" is certainly justified, it has obscured the consistent critique of industrial capitalism that runs throughout his writings. From his college themes to his final essays, Thoreau remained engaged with the basic principles of political economy, providing insight into topics ranging from the alienating effects of the division of labor to the role of economic self-interest in social development. Bringing these scattered insights together confirms that, as other scholars have suggested, his approach to economic topics was generally informed by Adam Smith, who was celebrated in Thoreau's time, as in our own, as the cardinal theorist of capitalism.² However, comparing their views more specifically not only sheds new light on Thoreau's contribution to economic thought but it also suggests that his lifelong effort to live deliberately evolved in direct opposition to Smith's mechanistic vision of the free market system.

In 1834, having been tasked by one of his Harvard professors to compose an essay on "The different ideas we form of men whose pursuit is money," Thoreau wrote disapprovingly of the drive to accumulate wealth. "When we hear it said of a man that Money is the idol which he worships," he observed, "we figure to ourselves one who is continually striving after something which he is destined never to obtain, and who does not enjoy life as it passes, but lives upon expectation." In Thoreau's view, the misfortune of the fortune-seeker is that he is condemned to the endless frustration that comes with insatiable desire. Thus,

...we imagine him one who is never satisfied with the wealth already amassed, but expects that when arrived at a certain pitch, everything desirable will be within his reach. But alas! when he has reached the summit of