
REVIEWS

Henrik Otterberg. *Hound, Bay Horse, and Turtle-Dove: Obscurity and Authority in Thoreau's Walden*. Meddelandeserien 31:

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Sitting on the banks of Walden Pond among the autumnal hues mingling to produce a jeweled-tone watercolor impression of the life-force surrounding this small bastion of peace, accompanied by the repeated chirps of an Ovenbird, one can almost hear Thoreau's writing tool scratching these words onto yellowed paper: "I've long ago lost a hound, a bay horse and turtle-dove, and am still on their trail" (10). While Henry David Thoreau in his book, *Walden*, writes with obscure authority on the necessity to leave civilization in order to appreciate it, his readers may question his central purpose for highlighting these allegorical figures in the "Economy" chapter. Henrik Otterberg assists these readers by taking them on a finely crafted sojourn of Thoreau's introspection of the intricate boundaries that defined his life choices, not only as a political or religious refugee, but also as a member of the Concord, Massachusetts community in the mid-19th century.

Otterberg begins with a discussion of the earliest biographers and scholarly analysis of Thoreau's animal trilogy and the possible religious associations. He includes Christian points of view as well as those that are associated with 19th-century Chinese Confucian beliefs, including those of Mark van Doren. He continues with thorough discourse on Thoreau's enrollment at Harvard, where he studied extensively the ancient rhetorical techniques of Aristotle, Quintilian, Cicero, and even Emerson under the instruction of Edward Tyrell Channing. Otterberg elucidates Thoreau's theoretical background in a manner that clearly identifies his intense desire to baffle his reader with this metaphoric language. The influences of George Campbell and Richard Whately bring this to the forefront of his argument, solidifying Otterberg's identification of the reader-response authority within Thoreau's literary structure.

Otterberg directs his analysis by means of biographical critics, rhetorical discussion, religious and political posturing as "justifications for obscure language" (38). His expansive references clarify his research and enable one to formulate an independent opinion regarding possible meaning of the three animal figures in relation to Thoreau's background and purpose.

Reading this monograph, a student of Henry David Thoreau more fully comprehends his intense need to express his independent theory of literary composition, while enjoying his clever manipulation of words and symbols through classic rhetorical techniques. His ambiguous manner of writing to and about the variety of religious, academic, and political philosophies of his contemporaries also adds to his enigma, which furthers the play on words that Thoreau seemed to employ as his personal source of entertainment.

Otterberg systematically takes the reader through a mingling of literary methodologies that reflect the obscurity and authority within this composition of Henry David Thoreau, whose nonsensical use of these three creatures to reference his own loss adds to his intrinsically eccentric quality. He leaves the conclusion to the reader, which gives one the feeling that Otterberg agrees with Thoreau when he states that “Successful *obscuritas* does not result from a lax writerly tactic, rather it skillfully constructs a text open to a wide array of interpretative possibilities” (60). Leaves continue to fall gracefully upon Walden Pond, each one floating across the accepting liquid mirror, making the smallest of sighing resonance, as a whisper of the secrets smiled by one who gazed upon their beauty 150 years before, now swallowed up and one with time and purpose. ✱