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# Walden's Dirty Language: Thoreau and Walter Whiter's Geocentric Etymological Theories

Michael West

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE the sandbank in the railroad cut near Walden fascinated Thoreau, and a memorable passage in his greatest book describes the striking phenomena that accompanied its thawing. Long recognized as a focal symbol in *Walden*, the inspiration for this passage has been sought by one scholar in Thoreau's reading of Hindu religion. The sandbank "becomes all of life with its apparently unattractive excremental aspects . . . It becomes a river like the Ganges which carries along the dead bodies of animals while at the same time providing life for those along its bank."<sup>1</sup> But while Indian philosophy helped shape this climactic vision, a much nearer and more important source has been overlooked. Sprinkled with philological analogies, the passage is a prime example of the penchant for wordplay and etymological speculation that characterizes Thoreau's style in *Walden*. Although Charles R. Anderson has recently claimed that Thoreau's punning etymologies and grotesque comparisons here are "entirely original," in fact they derive directly from some of the wilder doctrines that marked early nineteenth-century philosophy of language in England and America.<sup>2</sup>

While continental philology followed the lead of Sir William Jones and emerged triumphantly with the discovery of Indo-European, English philology languished under the influence of John Horne Tooke's *Diversions of Purley* (1798-1805). In a confused effort to give mental philosophy a materialistic basis in philosophy of language, Tooke's work involves the "unexpressed premise that the current meaning of a word is equivalent to the product of its etymological explanation"

<sup>1</sup> Frank MacShane, "Walden and Yoga," *New England Quarterly*, XXXVII (1964), 338.

<sup>2</sup> Charles R. Anderson, *The Magic Circle of Walden* (New York: Holt, 1968), p. 244.

and thus "contains a supreme mysticism, which was contrary to his professed aims."<sup>3</sup> Influenced by Tooke, Samuel Henshall's *Etymological Organic Reasoner* (1807) argued that "throughout all languages there is a resemblance in the sound, and an affinity of ideas, attached to the tones produced by the exertions of the same organic powers of human speech," while in his *History of the European Languages* (1823) Alexander Murray succeeded in deriving all language from nine primitive words — *ag, bag, dwag, gwag, lag, mag, nag, rag,* and *swag*. In his essay "On the Tendency of Some Late Philological Speculations" (1810), the Scottish common-sense philosopher Dugald Stewart protested that we really learn nothing about economics from the etymology of *pecunia*; but despite his criticism, what he described as an "etymological metaphysics" of Lockean cast continued to captivate English intellectual circles. Until mid-century, when the new philology from Germany swept all before it, British linguistic scholarship exhibited a curious blend of philosophical ambition and philological ignorance.

Although American thinkers like A. B. Johnson and Horace Bushnell evolved much more sophisticated theories of language, the taste for "etymological metaphysics" was also prevalent on this side of the Atlantic. Noah Webster was seduced by Tooke, citing him continually to the exclusion of other authorities; the great American dictionary of 1828 embodied Webster's "belief in the eternal truth of the *Diversions of Purley*" and cheerfully derived English words from oriental languages in a way that makes a modern philologist blush.<sup>4</sup> Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*, the hornbook of the Transcendental movement, extolled etymological speculation and was praised by its American editor James Marsh for "profound knowledge of the philosophy of language, the principles of its construction, and the laws of its interpretation."<sup>5</sup> In their various ways Sampson Reed, Emerson, and Bronson Alcott all sought to elaborate a transcendental philosophy of language.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780-1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 105-106. On Henshall, Murray, and Stewart see further pp. 77, 81-87, and 100-114.

<sup>4</sup> Charlton Laird, "Diversions of *The Diversions of Purley* in the New World," *Rendezvous*, I (1966), 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. James Marsh (Burlington, Vt.: Goodrich, 1829), p. liii. See esp. John B. Wilson, "Grimm's Law and the Brahmins," *New England Quarterly*, XXXVIII (1965), 234-239.

Thoreau's saturation in such ideas can be traced through his reading. His interest in language study is well known; although he dedicated his life to avoiding unnecessary impedimenta, his library contained some twenty dictionaries. On 5 September 1851 he confided to his journal that he "dreamed of" writing a book that would be "a return to the primitive analogical and derivative sources of words."<sup>6</sup> During his revision of the manuscript that became *Walden* he read Richard Chenevix Trench's *On the Study of Words* and borrowed from it. Among the books that he owned was a small pamphlet published in Boston by Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Charles Kraitsir's *Significance of the Alphabet* (1846). The Hungarian émigré Kraitsir was a *soi-disant* authority on language who enjoyed a brief vogue in Boston of the 1840s under the enthusiastic sponsorship of Miss Peabody. He subsequently elaborated his eccentric philological doctrines in *Glossology: Being a Treatise on the Nature of Language and on the Language of Nature* (1852), a copy of which formed part of Emerson's library. Thoreau promptly read it. Most of the philological comparisons that stud *Walden's* account of the flowing sand were suggested by Kraitsir, particularly by the following passage in *Significance of the Alphabet*:

An object or action which expresses the several dimensions of length, breadth and height, or depth, will need one [consonant] of each class; . . . thus *crp*, *glb*, *grp* . . . are roots of *corpus*, *globe*, *grope* . . . and words of similar meanings. . . . So an object or action . . . which is naturally symbolized by free outward motion, will need labials and the liquids, thus: *lb*, *lv*, *lp*, *lf*, *fr*, *fl* . . . are roots, (or different forms of a root,) which vegetate into the words *labia*, *live*, *lip*, *liber*, *love*, *laub*, *life*, *free*, *flow* . . . If the object or thing moves from within its own being, which implies deep, internal, essential action, we have a guttural and the liquid, thus *gl*, *ql*, *cl*, *gr*, *cr*, which are roots of *glide*, *globe* . . . *creo* . . . *columba*, *aquila*, *circle*, &c. (pp. 29-30)

As I have argued in detail elsewhere, Kraitsir's attempt at a semantic phonology is the immediate source of *Walden's* etymological equations between *leaves* and *lobes*, *lips*, *labor*, and *lapsing*, although in supplementing his authority's examples Thoreau did show himself capable of creative adaptation.<sup>7</sup>

This passage also encouraged Thoreau to imagine the globe as groping to express itself through vegetation, animals, and the forms of the

<sup>6</sup> *Writings*, ed. Bradford Torrey (Boston: Riverside, 1906), VIII, 461.

<sup>7</sup> See my "Charles Kraitsir's Influence upon Thoreau's Theory of Language," *ESQ, A Journal of the American Renaissance*, XIX (1973), 262-274.

human body. But although his specific philological comparisons are from Kraitsir, Thoreau was apparently indebted to another bizarre theorist of language for this fundamental conception of the sandbank. On the shelves of Emerson's library, where Thoreau often browsed, stood a copy of Walter Whiter's *Etymologicon Magnum, or Universal Etymological Dictionary, on a New Plan* (Cambridge, England: Printed by Francis Hodson, for the Author; and sold by J. Deighton . . . , 1800).<sup>6</sup> A fellow of Clare College, Whiter's study of Hebrew led him to ignore vowels and to analyze the English language like Kraitsir in terms of clusters of consonants:

If it is accordant to the genius of the Hebrew language, that similar ideas should be represented by the same consonants . . . it must certainly be true, that the *SAME COGNATE CONSONANTS*, through the whole compass of the language, will be impregnated with a train of similar ideas. As those principles of the human mind, which are effective in the production of one language, will operate in that of another, I again was led to conclude, that in every form of Speech the same fact will necessarily exist. I again referred to the English, Latin and Greek languages for the confirmation of this idea; and I found the most ample proofs . . . (p. xxi)

Believing that sounds had intrinsic meaning, Whiter found a profound resemblance between the English word *earth*, the Hebrew *aretz*, and the Arabic *erd*. Further, "We may well imagine, that the name of an object so important as the *Earth*, would supply the origin to a great race of words expressing the various operations, which are attached to it; and in all these instances likewise, should we expect to find the same coincidence. We shall instantly perceive, how by this idea the supposed similarity of languages is extended" (pp. xxii-xxiii). Since Whiter ignored vowels and viewed all cognate consonants as indiscriminately interchangeable, he was indeed able to demonstrate the similarity of all languages, especially when he discovered that under certain conditions even consonants that were not cognate could pass into each other (Aarsleff, p. 78).

Occasionally he could wonder whether "the reader perchance, in

<sup>6</sup>Walter Harding, *Emerson's Library* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1967), p. 299. For further details about Whiter, whose other works include a pioneering study of Shakespeare's punning as well as a discourse on death as a state of suspended animation, see Alan Over and Mary Bell, eds., *A Specimen of a Commentary on Shakspeare* (London: Methuen, 1967), pp. xvii-lxxxii. Whiter's work was known to Coleridge, who mentioned it in connection with a projected essay in defense of punning, and his central idea about language was further disseminated through a brief sketch in George Borrow's *Lavengro* (1851).

the spirit of captious objection, should be disposed to observe, that I have assumed to myself an ample sphere for the exercise of my Theory or my Invention; and that with such a latitude of change, transformations of every kind may readily be effected" (p. xvi). But such doubts were soon dispelled by contemplation of the magic radical RTH (convertible when necessary to virtually all other consonants) and the infinitely fertile concept of the earth, which bulks with peculiar importance in Whiter's theory: "Here at last we have obtained what has ever been sought, but never been discovered — the *Universal* or *Original Language* . . . those first and *Original Elements*, which *universally* pervade the whole machinery of Language" (p. xxiv). While sounds correspond to objects and have inherent, imperishable meanings, the earth looms in Whiter's imagination as the overwhelming object first confronted by primeval man: "It is impossible, I imagine, to deny or to doubt this fact" (p. xxv). Implied though never quite stated is his solution to the riddle of the origin of language: the earth apparently generated it.

Under Whiter's analysis an astonishing number of words are derived from terms for the earth. Saxon *gearth* generates *garden* and *bard*; in turn the Latin *durus* is connected with *terra*. *Garden* is related to *ward*, *yard*, *orchard*, and *guard*: "It will now be granted that HORTUS is the YARD — the EARTH-bed enclosure — the GARD-en." In turn "HORTUS, we see, and VILLA are the same — the EARTH-ed or GUARD-ed and WALLED place. HORTUS is derived from the *Earth* thrown up about the place; and VILLA from the *Vallum* surrounding it" (p. xxvii). Moreover, since "the business of Agriculture is the most familiar and necessary of our employments, the terms for *doing* or performing any business would be derived from the EARTH. To this idea we must refer our English term WORK." This word "appears again in the Greek language under its more familiar form. ERDEIN, (*ἔρδειν*, facere,) *to do*, we now perceive, is to ERD or EARTH. I shall here close my remarks on this Element, and I have produced only these few examples, as derived from so familiar an object, for the purpose of briefly illustrating the general principles of the Theory. My next work will probably be dedicated to an investigation of the Radicals, which are employed to represent the name of the *Earth*" (p. xxviii).

For Polonian reasons it is impossible to summarize the argument pursued by Whiter through over five hundred pages of his *Etymologicon Magnum*. Today they appear to have significance chiefly for the ar-

chives of clinical psychology. Throughout we find more evidence of his obsession with the earth's linguistic role. True to his promise, he did not relinquish this theme but sought to clarify it in his next book. Incorporating and greatly expanding his first work, the Cambridge University Press printed in 1811 two volumes bearing the title *Etymologicon Universale . . . in which it is shewn . . . that languages contain the same fundamental idea; and that they are derived from the Earth, and the operations, accidents, and properties, belonging to it.* Over twelve hundred pages of detailed exegesis are devoted to expounding the "one great Universal Language, which is itself derived from one great Universal object, — ever present — ever visible, and perpetually pressing on the attention of man" (I, 82). Indeed, Whiter insists that his etymologies are no dead language. Not only did the earth "seize on the mind of man, in suggesting the *first or prevailing* ideas communicated by Language" (I, 77), but "it may be well imagined, that the same potent cause must have operated in preserving the Language, which it originally formed" (I, 82). Thus he concludes that "THE ORIGINAL ELEMENTS OF LANGUAGE, which were once vocal with the inventions and emotions of primeval Man, still survive amidst the ravages of time; — They still continue to be instinct with the energies of Mind; and to record in mystic, though in faithful characters; the secret History of the Ancient World" (II, 1263).

Contemplation of this marvelous fact leads Whiter to make explicit an analogy underlying his conception of language: "The *Doctrine of Transmigration*, which in the dreams of the Poet or the Philosopher describes the progress of the Soul through various stages of existence, would afford a rich and abundant vein of materials for the elucidation of our Theory" (II, 1255). He believes that "The *Element*, by which a race of words is generated and preserved, may be compared to that *primitive and unperishing particle*, in which, according to the doctrine of these visionary Philosophers, consists the *Essence of the Soul . . .* The material vesture, with which the divine particle is enveloped, and through which it communicates with the world around it, is ever passing into an infinite variety of shapes and appearances; but the Soul itself still continues to preserve inviolate its peculiar force and characteristic energy" (II, 1256). Thus the capstone to his geocentric theory of language is a muddy metaphysic. Once we understand how words are derived from the earth, "It will surely be acknowledged, that the doctrine of these visionary Philosophers affords a strong and

striking resemblance to the principles of that Theory, which in the present Volume I have laboured with such solicitude to unfold and establish. The *Elements of Language* and of *Life* are employed in the same work, and their operations are directed to the same purpose" (II, 1257).

In 1825 Whiter crowned his labors with a third volume of the *Etymologicon Universale*, not only amplifying but slightly reformulating his theory. He still held fast to his central insight:

I suppose, that the prevailing ideas conveyed by Human Speech have arisen from the contemplation of the objects on the surface of the Earth, as *Dirt, Mud, &c.* . . . I must again repeat, what in fact all have allowed, that Language is composed of words originally denoting *material* objects, and that the operations of mind are expressed by a metaphorical application of these words: Now where is *Matter* to be found, with which Man is perpetually conversant, but that *Matter*, which exists on the surface of the *Earth*? (III, xiv)

But while he still believed "words to be derived from a *general impression* on the mind of the force annexed to the Elementary Character, which impression was originally formed from the *Dirt* of the *Earth*" (III, x), he was increasingly preoccupied with earth in fluid forms. Hence the third volume chronicles not the transmogrification of the elementary character *RTH*, but devotes more than five hundred pages to "the two forms BC &c. and MC &c.," which "may be considered as familiarly passing into each other in the same series of words" (III, 4).

Four hundred pages chronicle the adventures of the radical BC, the progenitor of such key terms as Bog, Pash, Peat, Puddle, Pit, and Bottom, "those words, which relate to the *BASE* or *Low Spot*, to the *PUDGE Spot* or matter" (III, 7). According to Whiter, similar sounds characterize an unusual number of "TERMS, which express the action of *Forming* the *Plastic* materials of *PUDGE* matter into certain *Shapes, Forms, Appearances, &c.*," and among them "we must class . . . *POTTER*" (III, 96). Throughout this volume particular stress is laid upon the derivation of anatomical terminology: thus "There are various terms, belonging to our Element BC, &c. which relate to the *Mouth, Lips, Cheek, &c.*," apparently "from the idea of . . . *PUDGING, PUSHING, or Swelling out*" (III, 206). Hence "the term *Kiss* belongs to *Squash* matter, or to the action of *Squashing*, if I may so express it" (III, 209). Likewise we find in the "words *Pulpa, Puls, Pulmentum, Pulmo*, the *Rising up* — *Swelling out* substances, as of *Mud-matter*." Not only the pulpy lungs but the legs are derived from mud, since the



Latin *Pedes*, feet, are apparently connected with the French "PATROUILLER, 'To tread in . . . a Muddy place'" (III, 31). When "The notions of BOGGY, and *Spungy* matter are directly combined with each other," we get VACHLO, WAGGLE, BOGGLE, and VAGO, "and hence we shall see how VAGINA . . . may belong to VAGO" as well as to WASTE and VACUUM (III, 267). Comparable derivations account for most of our organs. Thus the fingers are named from their capacity for poking in the mud (III, 278), while "The term VISCUS, *Visceris*, may be derived from . . . VISCUM, or VISCUS, under the idea of the *Glutinous* adhesion of the Bowels" (III, 216).

In explaining how we should trace "to the *Plastic* nature of PUDGE, or *v-Iscons* Matter . . . PHIZ, (Eng.) *Visage*, (Eng.) with its parallels" and also "WISE, WIT, WITTY . . . with their parallels" Whiter comes close to envisioning the actual genesis of mind from matter:

I might state my hypothesis by observing, that these Terms expressing *Form*, *Appearance*, *Sight*, *Knowledge*, are derived from the *Pliant*, *Plastic* nature of Oozy, *v-Iscons* matter, which is readily or easily moved, *Stirred* about, together, &c. which quickly, or readily gives way, so as to receive, or admit of *Form*, and hence it relates to that *Quick*, *Pliant*, or *Ready* Faculty of the Mind, able to *Form* images to *deVISE*, *Invent*, &c. or to the *Quick Powers* of the *Imagination*, as we express it. In the same manner we see, that the term *Imagination* belongs to *Image*, which I shall shew to be derived from the *Plastic Matter* of *Mud*. That the Greek words relating to *Sight* are connected with the notion of *Ooze* Matter, under some process, is evident from *Iuos*, (*Idos*, *Sudor*,) . . . (III, 391-392)

Whereas in the first volume of his *Etymologicon Universale* he had derived words meaning *sharp* and *acute* from the idea of harrowing the earth, he now differs "in nothing from my conceptions detailed on that occasion, but by supposing, that the *Agitated Ground*, or *Dirt*, more particularly relates in its original idea, to *Dirt* in a *WASHY*, or *Oozy*, *w-Er* state, as in *w-AsE* *Cœnum*, *Lutum*." Increasingly he seems inclined to "consider this idea of *WASHY Dirt*, if I may so say, as the original and prevailing notion; it will shew us more distinctly and unequivocally the state of the question. It will at once unfold to us, how *Races* of words are connected, which under another point of view do not exhibit such striking marks of affinity" (III, 382).

Whiter knew that time was running short, and that his grandiose theory of language might never be completed by his own hand. In the preface to the third and final volume of his *Etymologicon* he revealed that "three other Volumes are now ready for the Press, which would

equal in magnitude the present," but because of his ill health, "on the fate of these materials I dare not entertain any hopes, or form any conjectures." He trusted, however, that in his third volume "the broad outlines may still be drawn of . . . the whole System" (III, xvi-xvii), and his imagination moved tentatively but unmistakably toward its new goal:

. . . the reader, who is disposed to form Theories on the original germs of Language, may imagine, if he pleases, that such sounds, as we may express by GW, SHW represent the original germ for words, denoting OOZY WASHY, sQUASH Matter, if I may so say: — that from the portion G, arose the Terms under the form <sup>A</sup>G, <sup>A</sup>C, <sup>A</sup>S, as AQUA, OOZE, WASH, and when combined with a vowel breathing between them, SQ-aSH, GU-SH, and that from the portion W, or the Labial form B, F, M, P, are formed such Terms, as WAVE, AVON, &c. and that to the combination of the Labial and G, S, &c. with a vowel breathing inserted between them, belongs the form P-uDGe, P-aSh, B-oG, &c. To this theory, whether true or false, I can have no objection, as it will not disturb the facts which I detail on the original idea . . . (III, 365)

Here we seem close to a vision of language virtually erupting from the primeval slime.

Fittingly enough Whiter concludes his *Etymologicon* by passing from the radical BC to MC, MD, &c., which "receive their force, as I imagine, from such terms as MUD, MUCK, &c" (III, 4). His final one hundred and forty pages are, in effect, an extended meditation on "the MATTER of MUD." He finds it a "peculiar advantage to the Writer, who adopts the English Language . . . that he possesses a term, such as MUD, which is so common in every species of style, so comprehensive, and so intelligible to all . . . an advantage, which no other Language is able to supply" (III, 401). Perhaps colored by the consciousness of his own approaching demise, his etymologies have initially a rather somber cast. Upon analysis mud yields three leading ideas. First we have words "which relate more particularly to the *Ground, Dirt, Filth, &c.*" such as Mushroom, and hence "to What is *Foul, Vile, Bad, &c.*" (III, 402). As we might expect, this section demonstrates Whiter's mastery of a polyglot vocabulary for various forms of excrement. Secondly, we get "those Terms, which relate to a MASHED, or MUD like state, as of *Destruction, Dissolution, Decay, Disorder* . . . in the *Frame, or the Mind of Man, and other animals, as MUT, (Heb.) Death, Macies, (Lat.) Consumption*" (III, 403). However, the somewhat gloomy atmosphere inspired by such meditations is finally dispelled by contemplating a third quality of mud "in a state of *Consistency, as*

*Being in, or as Collected into a Mass, Lump, Heap, &c. or as Rising, Swelling, or Bulging up, out*" (III, 403). In this guise mud assumes a more benign aspect, and the *Etymologicon* concludes with an enthusiastic account of the

*Generative Powers, &c.* . . . which are derived, as I conceive, from the MATTER of MUD, under the idea of The MATTER, or Substance, The Formative, or Formed MATTER, or Substance, The Creative, Creating, or the Created Substance, The Creature, — The MAKING, or MADE MATTER . . . (III, 404)

This MATTER is obviously our MOTHER, and the reader accustomed to Whiter's linguistic legerdemain will experience no surprise in learning that mud is also to be connected etymologically with springtime, for "The term MAY, *Mainis*, quasi MAJ, MAJUS, is the Producing Month" (III, 528).

Considering Thoreau's pronounced linguistic interests, it is hard to believe that he frequented Emerson's library without ever glancing into Whiter's *Etymologicon Magnum*. In his reading at Harvard or elsewhere he may have encountered the *Etymologicon Universale*, although this supposition is not absolutely necessary, since the argument of the later work is largely implicit in the earlier version. Surely Whiter's full-blown philosophy of mud would seem to have contributed to *Walden's* vision in the railroad cut. For what Thoreau confronts in the flowing sand is not simply the birth pangs of vegetable and animal life. Because such life is mortal, it is inextricably mingled with excrement in what strikes the eye as a charnel house of destruction, "heaps of liver, lights and bowels, as if the globe were turned wrong side outward."<sup>9</sup> Thoreau is able to view this gruesome spectacle with high spirits because more than mortal life is involved. What he sees in the sand is a world travailing to give birth to speech:

You find thus in the very sands an anticipation of the vegetable leaf. No wonder that the earth expresses itself outwardly in leaves, it so labors with the idea inwardly. The atoms have already learned this law, and are pregnant by it. The overhanging leaf sees here its prototype. Internally, whether in the globe or animal body, it is a moist thick lobe, a word especially applicable to the liver and lungs and the leaves of fat, (*λείβω*, labor, lapsus, to flow or slip downward, a lapsing; *λοβός*, globus, lobe, globe; also lap, flap, and many other words,) externally a dry thin leaf, even as the *f* and *v* are a pressed and dried *b*. The radicals of lobe are *lb*, the soft mass of the *b* (single lobed, or B, doubled lobed,) with

<sup>9</sup> *The Variorum Walden*, ed. Walter Harding (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 233.

a liquid / behind it pressing it forward. In globe, *-glb*, the guttural *g* adds to the meaning the capacity of the throat. (p. 231)

Like Whiter, Thoreau sees the earth as the supreme matrix of a universal language. Life and language are not only coordinates, but all life seems to aspire to linguistic expression. The pulpy heaps of discarded organs and, indeed, the human body itself are joints and appendages that an essentially linguistic *weltgeist* may outgrow as it presses ever forward in an attempt to *articulate* itself more satisfactorily. With Whiter's aid, Thoreau inverts the Transcendental dictum that language is fossil poetry, by treating the earth as poetry and fossils as incipient language: "The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history, stratum upon stratum like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and antiquaries chiefly, but living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit, — not a fossil earth, but a living earth." Language and the other social institutions earth generates retain their vital impulse, remaining "plastic like clay in the hands of the potter." Certainly the *Etymologicon* purports to furnish ample evidence that in the formation of words "Earth is still in her swaddling clothes, and stretches forth baby fingers on every side," as Thoreau wrote apropos of the sandbank (p. 233).

Whiter would have encouraged Thoreau to imagine that as language "The very globe continually transcends and translates itself, and becomes winged in its orbit" (p. 231). The Yankee may have been sensible enough to view with some skepticism the implausible etymologies that buttressed the theory, preferring Kraitsir's slightly more sophisticated philology; nonetheless he could relish the fundamental premise of the Englishman's muddy linguistics. Whiter's influence may extend elsewhere in *Walden*, for like him Thoreau makes mud the nexus of an elaborate and conscious symbology.<sup>10</sup> This emerges perhaps most clearly in the chapter "Baker Farm," where the bog-trotting Irishman John Field is symbolically assimilated to the mire in which he wallows for his daily bread.<sup>11</sup> Thoreau's striking diatribe against a model farm as a "muck-heap" in the chapter "The Ponds" is similarly inspired. When he denounces it as "a great grease-spot, redolent of manures and buttermilk" (p. 149), his contempt may reflect Whiter's explanation that "TERMS, relating to what is *Fat*, to *Food*, to *Feeding*, &c. or con-

<sup>10</sup> For ampler treatment of this symbolism see my "Scatology and Eschatology: The Heroic Dimensions of Thoreau's Wordplay," forthcoming in *PMLA*.

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 131-143.

veying . . . *Plenty, Abundance, Fertility, Prosperity* . . . are all derived originally from . . . the FAT, PUDDING matter of the Earth" (III, 210). As the chapter "Higher Laws" shows, Thoreau's ascetic side was capable of appreciating Whiter's reductive equation of both riches and food with "the *Uliginous, Oily Matter of Clay, Mud* . . . &c." (III, 211). Thoreau delighted to pun repeatedly about "the grossest of groceries" (pp. 7, 47) in a way suggestive of the etymological importance that Whiter attached to the "FAT, *Oily, Uctuous* Substance of *Grease*" (III, 211), just as the hawk that appears emblematically at the end of *Walden* sports delightedly above the marsh. Thoreau's lifelong fascination with wading in bog-holes may well owe something to Whiter's emphasis on the primary creative importance of bogs. Indeed, when Thoreau contemplated his sandbank and cried, "What Champollion will decipher this hieroglyphic for us . . . ?" (p. 233), he probably had in mind an effort like Whiter's ambitious though ultimately absurd attempt to construe all language as mud.

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