

Rhetorical Analysis of “Walking”

In the essay “Walking” by Henry David Thoreau, one of the “Seven Elements in Nature Writing” which is continuous throughout the entire essay is the philosophy of nature. Thoreau begins his three-part essay by referring to human’s role in nature “as an inhabitant, or a part or parcel of Nature.” He later criticizes members of society for their lack of such a relationship with nature. Thoreau also uses an experience from his own life to represent a personal account in nature, more specifically his experiences while walking into the forest near his property. Eco-social politics can be seen in this essay, when Thoreau analyzes building development as a taming and cheapening of the landscape. Thoreau brings the reader into a spiritual realm when he associates the divinity of nature and the spirit of walking with Christianity and Greek Mythology. In addition, when describing the Mississippi River, Thoreau describes the river as a kind of enchanted Holy Land.

Throughout all parts of the essay, including Thoreau’s description of an ecological psychology and philosophy on nature, the use of figurative language is prevalent. Before one can truly become a walker, one must be prepared to “send our embalmed hearts only, as relics to our desolate kingdoms” (page 1). Thoreau uses a simile to describe a village with roads springing from it as a lake with rivers springing from it. He also uses questions to impact the reader: after describing the mythological wonders Thoreau sees while witnessing a sunset, he uses a question to challenge the reader if they have looked at the sunset without imagining the mythological wonders themselves.

This essay is divided into three distinct parts. One commonality in this reading is that each part relates nature to being good and each part provides a piece of poetry to help illustrate this. In the first part the reader, who is probably the general public, develops a sense of inferiority. The author asserts that the kind of relationship he has with nature is one that is innate. In part two, the author speaks of nature as magical and criticizes the negative effects American society has had on the environment. In the third part, Thoreau leaves us stimulating our sensitivity toward the existence of nature and the spirituality it beholds. The structuring of the essay into three parts is effective in progressively showing that walking goes beyond the physical activity, but into an appreciation of nature.

Concerning Thoreau’s stance, this essay seems to arise out of the author’s negative view of American society, and is an attempt to open-up the reader’s sensitivity toward nature. At times he seems like a preacher at mass, using personal experiences with nature and relating those experiences to a higher being. The author effectively influences the reader to believe he or she is part of a Holy Land; the Holy Land has as

personality, much like that of the reader. However, if the reader only sees nature to be instrumentally valuable, this reading may not be very effective in addressing the ecological effects of environmental degradation.

