CONSTITUTING COMMUNITY: EXPANDING PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY IN RAWLINGS'S *CROSS CREEK* AND THOREAU'S *WALDEN*

by

Julianne Curran

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Florida Atlantic University

Boca Raton, Florida

August 2010

CONSTITUTING COMMUNITY: EXPANDING PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY

IN RAWLINGS'S *CROSS CREEK* AND THOREAU'S *WALDEN*

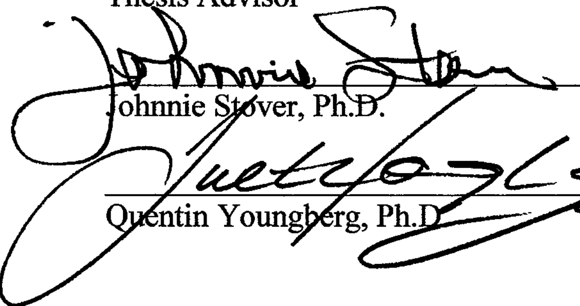
by

Julianne Curran

This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Andrew Furman, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

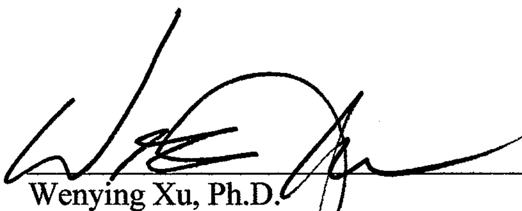
SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Andrew Furman, Ph.D.
Thesis Advisor



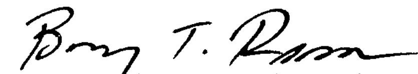
Johnnie Stover, Ph.D.

Quentin Youngberg, Ph.D.



Wenying Xu, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of English

Manjunath Pendakur, Ph.D.
Dean, The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters



Barry T. Rosson, Ph.D.
Dean, Graduate College

July 15, 2010
Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express her sincere thanks to her Thesis Advisor, Dr. Furman, as well as the members of her Supervisory Committee, Dr. Stover and Dr. Youngberg, for their guidance, feedback, and support throughout the entire writing process. She also is grateful to her family and friends who provided endless amounts of encouragement that helped to inspire her.

ABSTRACT

Author: Julianne Curran

Title: Constituting Community: Expanding Perceptions of Community in Rawlings's *Cross Creek* and Thoreau's *Walden*

Institution: Florida Atlantic University

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Andrew Furman

Degree: Master of Arts

Year: 2010

Both Thoreau and Rawlings call attention to humanity's need to expand its perceptions and interpretations of what it means to be a part of a community in *Walden* and *Cross Creek*, respectively. Building on the established idea of what it means to be incorporated into a human community, each author also implores his or her readers to extend the perceived boundaries of what comprises a "community" to include the natural world. Ultimately, both texts point to the need for the establishment of what Aldo Leopold calls a land ethic, which requires the re-drawing of communal boundaries to include the land with man as a citizen rather than a conqueror of Nature. Thoreau and Rawlings demonstrate how an individual can start to expand his or her conception of community to move closer to Leopold's ideal by recounting the different experiences they have with human society and nature while living at Walden Pond and in Cross Creek, Florida. However, each author uses different approaches. Thoreau concentrates primarily on reflecting upon improving his individual self in order to eventually

improve his Concord community. Rawlings, on the other hand, makes a greater effort to reflect upon her interactions with the people of Cross Creek in addition to her interactions with Nature in order to strengthen her bonds with these things. Such a difference causes Rawlings to be read as presenting a re-vision of Thoreau's ideas about the relationship between humankind, one's community, and Nature. While the kinds of experiences Thoreau and Rawlings encounter might be different, in the end it is their emphasis on the importance of an individual's relationship to the community—one that includes both humans and Nature—that resonates with readers.

CONSTITUTING COMMUNITY: EXPANDING PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY IN RAWLINGS'S *CROSS CREEK* AND THOREAU'S *WALDEN*

Introduction 1

Finding Community through Experiential Passages 24

"Holy Harmony," The Self and Nature, and Transcendence through the Daily 54

Conclusion 79

Works Cited 85

INTRODUCTION

In her 1942 book *Cross Creek*, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings begins her final chapter by invoking Thoreau:

> Thoreau went off to live in the woods alone, to find out what the world was like. Now a man may learn a deal of the general from the specific, whereas it is impossible to know the specific from the general. For this reason, our philosophers are usually the most unpractical of men, while very simple folk may have a great deal of wisdom. (Rawlings 371)

In this statement, Rawlings makes a multi-layered comment that explicitly refers to Thoreau and his project at Walden. In subsequent discussion, this statement leads her into an analogy for her own project at Cross Creek and what kinds of things each author learned in their respective places. But on another level, this statement also urges readers to question Rawlings's reception and interpretation of Thoreau and the ideas that he puts forth in *Walden*. For instance, it becomes important to consider how and why Rawlings considers Thoreau and such philosophers to be "unpractical" and to account for any implications that time period, place, and gender might have on her viewpoints surrounding the interaction between an individual and his or her neighboring human community and environment. In their respective texts, Rawlings and Thoreau emphasize the need for an individual to become an integrated part of their surrounding

communities. Although Rawlings revises the approaches that Thoreau uses to establish a strong foundation for a community, both authors maintain the ultimate position that an individual must expand their interpretation of what constitutes a community to include the natural environment.

According to this excerpt, it is the specific, particularly the specific at Cross Creek, that Rawlings deals with in the book *Cross Creek*: her specific experiences with the particular community and the particular environment at the Creek. Even though Thoreau might also be engaging with his own set of "specifics" at Walden Pond, the conclusions that he draws about nature and humans in general at Walden cannot necessarily be translated to teach others about the specific natures and relationships of the unique people and environment of another place, such as Cross Creek. It is for this reason—that the "general" cannot always be translated into the specific—that Rawlings sees philosophers like Thoreau to be "unpractical" to a certain extent. Even though Thoreau recognizes that there is meaning about nature to be made from his observations at Walden, he fails to make extensive meaning for Walden as a place in and of itself in the way that Rawlings makes meaning for Cross Creek.

In terms of creating meaning in the way that Rawlings makes meaning for Cross Creek, Patrick Henry proposes in his article "*Cross Creek*: Rawlings's Transcendentalism" that the reason a certain place garners any kind of significance for a person is because of the way that the place is deconstructed into its various parts and then reconstructed as a whole object that is made up of particulars. Thoreau goes to great lengths to dissect the various parts of Walden and then reconfigure them together to make a greater picture (or object) of Nature as a whole. The ultimate goal and

outcome of his project is to make new meaning for Nature using Walden as a vehicle for doing so. The resulting emphasis, then, is more on Nature as a place of particulars rather than Walden Pond itself as such a place of particulars. It is this emphasis on Nature that Thoreau wants to resonate with his readers.

Therefore, although Thoreau succeeds in reconstructing Nature into an object of particulars, he fails to complete a similar action for Walden Pond itself. Once Thoreau reconstructs the particulars he deconstructed at Walden, he leaves the pond. Subsequently, even though he can de- and re-construct the conception of Nature he carries away with him and thus create new meanings, he limits some of the meaning that can be made for Walden Pond as its own place. Thoreau's failure to portray Walden itself (as opposed to nature in general) as a place of particulars that make that place meaningful leads Rawlings to see that aspect of his approach as unpractical. Rawlings's "simple folk," on the other hand, unlike philosophers, often have great amounts of wisdom because in living in one location permanently, they become more intimately familiar with a place and its people. Because they are connected to a place as permanent residents, they have the opportunity to repeatedly de- and re-construct their community and environment, learning new things and creating new meaning with each process.

Cross Creek itself, then, would mean nothing unless Rawlings takes an interpretative action to recognize and weave together the specific nature, people, and experiences into something that becomes meaningful for her and for her to emphasize that meaning in her text. The important difference between Rawlings's and Thoreau's approaches to studying the specific aspects of their respective places is that when

Rawlings deconstructs the various elements at Cross Creek, she reconstructs them into a particular place and as a result that place becomes meaningful for her. Even though when Thoreau deconstructs Walden he does so after his specific inquiry of it, he does not reconstruct the elements of what he finds in his specific inquiry into a specific place. Rather, he reconstructs what he finds there into a more general conception of man and nature. In other words, he takes the specific elements and makes a general conception of them instead of taking the same elements and making new or different kinds of specific conceptions.

As a result of this difference in approach, Thoreau does not become as obviously attached to Walden as Rawlings does to Cross Creek since Rawlings is constantly learning to see the creek in new ways. This in turn affects why the two authors have differing approaches to how they envision the relationship between the human and natural communities. At the same time, however, to say that Thoreau does not develop a strong attachment to Walden Pond itself does not mean that he did not hold a strong attachment to the Concord society in general. It was his attachment to Concord in general that led him to retreat to Walden in order to reflect on ways to improve his individual self which would in turn lead to the first steps towards improving the society he found when he eventually returned to Concord. Walden is meaningful for Thoreau, but the actual society that he lives in, Concord, is more meaningful, just as Cross Creek is more meaningful for Rawlings because she has a home there.

Much of this kind of interpretive action in order to create meaning on behalf of both Rawlings and Thoreau deals extensively with how each author sees their surroundings. In terms of Thoreau, the notion of perception is central to his project.

Amidst the large body of criticism surrounding Thoreau's work and in particular surrounding *Walden*, the pieces that are most relevant to this project are those that deal with the way that Thoreau perceives of and relates to his specific natural and human communities and to the way in which he broadens his perceptions of what constitutes his world. Daniel Peck in particular seeks to define the "world" of Walden as well as to explain what the world consists of and how it comes into being. He identifies Thoreau's central question in *Walden* as being "Why do precisely these objects which we behold make a world?" and explains that "neighbors" Thoreau identifies are "constituents of a world already organized and prepared by nature for human perception" (117-118). Peck concentrates on the idea of perception, and the act of "beholding" nature demonstrates a subject-viewer in control of his perceptions (119). In answer to Thoreau's initial question of why do certain things make a world, Peck argues that objects themselves do not make a world, but rather are "made" by the interaction of the creative self and the world (123). These interactions influence our perceptions, and Thoreau extends his world by expanding his arc of perception. In his experiment at Walden, Thoreau demonstrates that perception can bridge the gap between spirituality and sensory experience and that "all the various 'worlds' we might inhabit were supported by one world—nature" (126-7).

However, while Thoreau would likely concede the importance of the individual "worlds" that one inhabits, such as the human community, Rawlings might argue that some of those various "worlds" can be just as important as the one "world" of nature that supports them. Hence, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings uses her text of *Cross Creek* to revise Thoreau's vision of the relationship between individuals, nature, and

communities in general into a new vision of her own about those same things that is more specifically tied to Cross Creek. In her revision, she makes a distinct effort to better balance her ideas and conclusions concerning general knowledge about people and place with her ideas and conclusions that concern specific knowledge about people and place. She also seeks to create a better balance between the importance of the relationship between conceptions of human and natural communities.

If readers are to follow Rawlings's logic about being able to learn a lot about the general from the specific (as Thoreau does), but not always necessarily be able to learn a lot about the specific from the general (which necessitates Rawlings's deconstruction of Cross Creek), then they will soon realize that Rawlings is performing Thoreau's course of action in reverse. Rawlings takes the kind of general knowledge about nature and human nature that Thoreau created while at Walden Pond and she uses it to create and better understand her own knowledge of her set of deconstructed "specifics" at Cross Creek. To successfully do this, she must be able to balance Thoreau's kind of knowledge with her own, and in doing so Rawlings pens a more nuanced book than Thoreau does.

When it comes to differentiating the ways in which Rawlings and Thoreau approach and interact with their respective communities, the terms experiential passage and experimental process will come into play. Whether it be to establish broad or particular knowledge, performing actions that actively engage an individual in learning about and becoming connected to one's own particular place are important and necessary for the development of an extended community with both the human and natural worlds. Rawlings performs this kind of action through of a series of experiential

passages. In her book *Cross Creek*, Rawlings recounts several small experiential passages within the human and natural communities that she encounters in Cross Creek, Florida. Such experiences lead her to conclusions about herself, human nature, and nature itself. Such experiential passages and the conclusions drawn thereof contribute to Rawlings's revision of Thoreau's experimental process and conclusions at Walden.

The idea of having experiential passages is connected to Rawlings and refers to the organic or naturally occurring kinds of experiences that Rawlings has at Cross Creek that contribute to her learning about herself as well as about her neighbors and the environment. Experimental processes, on the other hand, are more related to Thoreau and refer to experiences that are more deliberate rather than organic. For example, Thoreau refers to his moving to Walden Pond as an experiment, and he approaches his life there in a purposeful and planned manner, such as the way he plans out his supplies and groceries for the year or the way he sets out to cultivate a bean field not for the purpose of turning a profit but for the purpose of having the experience of doing so. Having different kinds of experiences is a central and crucial element for Rawlings and Thoreau and their respective works, but one of the main differences in their philosophies about living, or more specifically the way in which Rawlings revises Thoreau, is the way in which each author has their particular experiences.

While critical discussion surrounding Rawlings and her work has not yet fully examined all of the implications and impacts of her various writings, several authors have addressed Rawlings in relation to some major common themes including nature, region and place, race, and gender. Within this sample of themes, a few authors take ideas another step further and add discussion relating to Rawlings and her interpretation

of transcendent philosophy. Much of the critical work about Rawlings pertains specifically to her fiction, but the discussion at times either directly refers to or can be related to her creative non-fiction work in *Cross Creek*. In either case, the issues and interpretations brought up in criticism about Rawlings can provide some insight to her eventual revision of Thoreau's project and interpretation of the relationship between an individual and the communities of humans and nature.

One of the most dominant themes that scholars often address—and likely because Rawlings herself directly raises this theme—is nature as well as particular regions or places. Making her home at Cross Creek provided Rawlings with an opportunity to consider the kinds of impacts that these two things can have on a person as well as the extent of the relationship that exists between them and the individual person. She desired to live in a place where she could connect to both the environment and the people. In other words, Rawlings wanted a place where she could establish a balance between the natural and human societies, and she found this in the "Big Scrub"[1] region of north-central Florida. As Gordon Bigelow points out, "The Big Scrub at that time (the 1930s) was not a wilderness in the strictest sense, but it was wild enough to have many deer and an occasional black bear and to be virtually without human habitation except on its perimeter, wild enough to convey a strong sense of the true wilderness" ("Wilderness" 300). It was a place that provided Rawlings with enough nature to immerse herself in while still maintaining enough human habitation needed for survival, society, and subjects and inspiration for her writing. Living in a place that lies on the boundary between wild nature and a more cultivated society is necessary for

[1] The "Big Scrub" refers to a large expanse of region that is characterized by low-laying areas with dominant plants like shrubs and dwarfed oak trees.

Rawlings if she is to be successful in contributing to a new interpretation of community that encompasses both humankind and the environment, just as it was similarly necessary for Thoreau when he re-defined in his own way the idea of community in Concord. Ultimately, Rawlings and Thoreau will be simpatico with their similar goal of expanding humankind's conception of community to include Nature; it is in what they each consider the best approach to bring about such an expansion that the authors will differ.

However, as Rawlings continued to maintain her primary residence at Cross Creek, some critics such as Sudye Cauthen would suggest that the "places" Rawlings became attached to "have less to do with geography than with the quality of her perception in those places, a way of seeing" (62). It is from the kinds of heightened perceptions about humans and nature that Rawlings conveys in her writing that the idea of Rawlings having a "sense of place" is made in the scholarship about her. It is important, though, to keep in mind that the conception of a "sense of place" in Rawlings's writing is not solely to be interpreted as a preoccupied effort to convey description of setting in her stories. Rather, as Lamar York emphasizes, the idea should be used "in a broader critical evaluation of the artistic merit of her stories" (92). According to York, Rawlings uses place in her Florida stories (which he at times equates with setting) to be a main structural mechanism for relaying her main theme that in order to be happy a person must "know or discover a relationship to a suitable physical setting" (92). This theme and concept of "sense of place" will be important for Rawlings as she begins to revise Thoreau.

Another significant theme in the discussion surrounding Rawlings's work is the way she handles issues of race in her texts. From one perspective, Rawlings is credited as being progressive about her attitudes towards race, specifically her attitudes about blacks. However, despite this, many point out that her writing maintains some of the condescending and even racist tones that were still prevalent at the time. Rawlings is often contradictory in the way she interacted with blacks in her real life and how she wrote about them in her work. C. Anita Tarr believes that by the time Rawlings pens Cross Creek, her "public, social-reforming voice is beginning to manifest itself more clearly, though still in a noblesse oblige manner" (151). Nonetheless, *Cross Creek* still best "embodies Rawlings's conflicted attitudes towards racial reform" (152). For example, Tarr points out in some places Rawlings will talk about the "struggle for equality" and describe how she pays her black employees a higher wage than the going rate, but then will undercut such positive intentions with recounting her quest to find a perfect maid, who will invariably be black.

Carolyn Jones notes a similar duality in Rawlings's attitude when she discusses the kind of social geography in place at Cross Creek and how it was not only the black residents but also the white Crackers who were on the margins of the general society. Jones describes the Crackers in the South as people who were "poor, often landless, and largely uneducated, and who aligned themselves to the planter class only through race" (217). The only social advantage that a Cracker person would have over a black one was the simple fact that they were white. James Watkins also draws upon the idea that the presumed authority Rawlings writes with when it comes to blacks is a reflection of lingering white paternal attitudes towards blacks, which also points to what he argues is

"one of the most objectionable characteristics of white southern identity" (22). Furthermore, all of these critics somehow refer to the figure of Martha Mickens, a black woman who serves as a kind of matriarch to the community as well as a binding structural apparatus for many of the stories that Rawlings includes in the text. Some of Rawlings's contradictions at times are shown with her treatment of Martha. In any case, how Rawlings perceives the racial aspects of Cross Creek will play a role in how she reconstructs the particular elements that she breaks down there into a cohesive place as she redefines and revises what constitutes the Cross Creek community for her.

Although it is perhaps not discussed as extensively as race, the issue of gender is still something that must be kept in mind when reading Rawlings. As Peggy Prenshaw proposes, a big challenge for Rawlings in both her life and writing was "the powerlessness of the average woman, the powerlessness of even exceptional women in her society" ("Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings" 16). Prenshaw also notes how the form of the *Cross Creek* text itself and some of the resulting judgments about it reflect expectations of various autobiographical texts. In its traditional form (and the form more associated with male writers), the autobiography shapes itself into a logical whole by following a linear structure or narrative (12). Rawlings does not use this kind of structure in *Cross Creek*, opting instead for alternating between using anecdotes, describing her setting and neighbors, and reflecting on the larger implications about man and nature to create meaning. As a result, Rawlings, like other women writers who use similar form, is not included in a traditional genre like autobiography when judged by critical and artistic standards. Having her work in *Cross Creek* relegated outside of

traditional genre in this way illustrates one of the reasons Prenshaw sees Rawlings as being frustrated and somewhat "powerless" as a woman writer.

In the same line of considering both literary form and issues of gender, Thomas Dukes also looks at Rawlings's construction of *Cross Creek* and how it affects the portrayal of Rawlings's own as well as other female characters' gender. According to Dukes, in this kind of autobiography it is not only the chronological narrative that is of the most concern but also the authorial voice and persona of the self that is created (91). Rawlings creates a narrative self in *Cross Creek* and readers follow Rawlings's narrative self as she tries to orient herself within the community. Dukes sees Rawlings as well as many of the other female characters in the text (with the exception of Martha Mickens) as being somehow alienated from either emotional happiness or financial prosperity (93). In light of this alienation, some of Rawlings's interactions with her neighbors are geared towards bringing them "to the larger community of readers as she uses them to establish the Cross Creek community of her own vision, one that satisfies her own need to belong" (98). Again, even in terms of gender, Rawlings's effort to reconstruct notions of community in order to somehow broaden her perceptions of it—here in terms of extending the community not only to new residents and nature but to a reading audience as well—is prevalent in *Cross Creek*.

Finally, the last significant issue to be included in Rawlings criticism—and one of the most important ones in considering parts of Rawlings's work as an effort to revise Thoreau—is how she fits into or relates to the idea of transcendentalism. Again suggested by Patrick Henry, Rawlings places herself in the transcendentalist tradition by actively demonstrating subjective formulations. To clarify, instead of examining Cross

Creek as an abstract object, Rawlings instead breaks it down into its various parts and then re-formulates those parts into a cohesive whole (and in this case, a whole place) that has meaning. She does this by situating herself in relation to the incidences in each chapter, and from this Rawlings moves into interpreting what each incident means for herself, ultimately constructing how each of the events somehow culminate into an overall kind of meaning. Henry continues to explain that in order to reach the fundamental heart of meaning it must be approached as an event. In other words, the meaning of Cross Creek can only be understood as an experience—in Rawlings's case the experience of living there—which Henry says then becomes "infinitely mutable" for each person. This idea of the creation of meaning as an experience stems from transcendentalism.

Building on the idea of Rawlings within the transcendental tradition is Sudye Cauthen, who concentrates on the idea of sacred place within Rawlings's work. Cauthen defines sacred places as those in which Rawlings "paid such close attention that she saw beyond the actual, physical world, intuiting further dimensions—both inside and outside herself" (61). They are places in which she is most deeply and actively engaged in her surroundings. In describing how she sought to visualize the environment and people around her, Rawlings aimed for "divine detachment" (63). This, Cauthen argues, is the "language of transcendence: experience within sacred place not chosen, but revealed; ordinary place made extraordinary; sacred place recognized 'through a heightened state of consciousness;' a place in which the impulse is directed both outward and inward" (63).

Arriving at a sense of meaning derived from outward and inward reflection is a two part process for Rawlings. First, she experiences a heightened sense of reality in her environment and then she transmits that sense of reality that is beyond the just visible world to her readers and "discloses her own authentic experiencing" (Cauthen 65-6). Similarly, one of Rawlings's early biographers, Gordon Bigelow, also comments on the way Rawlings looks both into herself and into the natural world beyond her when she makes universal conclusions and meaning, stating: "Like the transcendentalists, whom she resembles so sharply in some ways, she often was willing to let her mind flow out from natural fact to an imaginative speculation which links the most unlikely categories and comes to rest ultimately in a moral observation" (94). Such moral observations about the relationships among the human and natural communities are what Rawlings arrives at when she reconstructs Cross Creek.

It is especially through the notion of transcendentalism that readers may begin to think of Rawlings and her writing in relation to Thoreau's. For instance, upon publication in 1942, *Cross Creek* received immediate acclaim from various reviewers who called her a "female Thoreau" (Silverman 207). Although this is a plausible comparison, it is not until Gordon Bigelow's 1966 biography that it is considered with more detail. Bigelow suggests that Rawlings is "best seen as one of that eminent line of nature writers of whom Thoreau was the first and most famous" (80). He elaborates to say that "[t]his means that she wrote of nature less as a scientist, observing, classifying, cataloguing (she did less of this than Thoreau), and more as a person determined to communicate personal experience" (80).

Despite acknowledging some similarities between Rawlings and Thoreau, not all of Rawlings's later critics herald Rawlings at the same volume as Thoreau. For instance, Samuel Bellman does not believe that *Cross Creek* and *Walden* compare closely and that while *Walden* is "directed to the reader as an *Imitatio Thoreauviani*, the other book [*Cross Creek*] is directed to the reader as a personal account of life in the woods, and it is not a biographical manifesto for social revolution or change" (105). But at the same time, Bellman later concedes that despite their differences in background, the two authors are "oddly related" and that the "important quality that Thoreau shared with Mrs. Rawlings is the tendency to observe, through one's prejudices, the passing parade" (110). While Bellman does not consider either writer to be a "genuine social reformer," he believes that both books offer much advice for readers about how to "live the good life" (110).

In a similar sense, when discussing Rawlings and Thoreau, some critics concentrate more on the parallels between each author's descriptions of nature rather than in depth consideration of their philosophies. Such is the case when Hiroshi Tsunemoto declares Rawlings "a female Thoreau in Florida" in an article that bears such a declaration as its title. For instance, Tsunemoto underscores what Bigelow says about how "[w]hat Rawlings mostly tried to do in her work is [exhibit a] 'rediscovery of the beauty and worth of the American scene as a subject for literature'" (107). Tsunemoto directs readers to specific passages in both texts to highlight each author's skill in describing details of their landscapes. In *Cross Creek*, readers are pointed to a passage depicting a post-rain shower sunset, while in *Walden* they are presented with a passage describing the backdrop of Thoreau's small lake. After such a comparison,

Tsunemoto declares that "both Thoreau and Rawlings are major artists of descriptive writing in America" (108). Although themes of the authors' overarching philosophies are mentioned, they are not significantly developed in this example.

When considering the critical body surrounding Thoreau, a major emergent theme is closely tied to Peck's previous question of what constitutes a "world" for Thoreau. Building on the idea of Thoreau and his world or universe, Leo Marx considers the importance of the particular location of Thoreau's experiment. Marx argues that the meaning of *Walden* is more complicated than simply a pastoral account of a hero's withdrawal from society into nature that ends with his return and a sense of redemption for what he has experienced there (101). Thoreau goes beyond the pastoral tradition because instead of "merely" writing about the withdrawal of the literary character, he tries it for himself and moves to the pond so as to make a symbol of his life (102). Marx points out that the location of Thoreau's experiment at Walden Pond is a "blend of myth and reality," meaning that it is situated on a middle ground with the village of Concord on one side and the "unmodified nature" on the other (103). As a result, the pond becomes the center of Thoreau's universe. In terms of finding value, Marx underscores that Thoreau does not think value resides in natural facts, social institutions, or anything else, but rather that value is the product of perceptions and the power of the mind. Because of this, a person's or writer's physical location is not of the greatest significance (111). The idea that actual location is not necessarily very significant will be a consideration when Rawlings attempts to revise Thoreau's vision in her own location.

The thought of finding value in nature is connected to the idea of going on a kind of "journey" to discover it, whether that journey be literally to an actual location or metaphysically beyond the self. For instance, Richard Schneider's discussion of Walden uses overarching themes of exploration, journey, and travel to address aspects of the text. He points out that "Thoreau himself presents *Walden* as, among other things, a travel book, which was the popular genre of his day, and himself as the tour guide" (93). From this position, Schneider looks at the "journey" of language in *Walden*, noting that Thoreau's belief in "the essential core of truth in language as reflecting a similar core of truth in nature…is affirmed by his discovery of fresh meanings through puns and revived clichés, because the new meanings might, in fact, be a rediscovery of the old, the original meanings" (95-96). In addition to the relationship between truth in language and truth in nature, the author also looks to the language used in the chapter titles, pointing out the symmetry of structure or "dialogic pairs," but goes on to state that within the chapters themselves further contrasts arise, and if one were to ignore this, they would be oversimplifying the text. Schneider argues that the reader is challenged to make a circle of "inward spiritual and psychological exploration" and that this is reflected in the text's structure that follows the cycle of the seasons (97). Most importantly, Schneider states that the purpose of Thoreau's life journey is to explore full spiritual potential. Nature provides the world and moral landscape in which to explore such potentiality, and Thoreau ultimately finds the spirit in nature, not through it, and idea that echoes Marx's conclusion that a writer's physical location is not necessarily of the greatest significance (100).

Finding value and exploring spiritual potential are things that Thoreau is able to do more effectively than his neighbors because he withdrew himself from the Concord society, thus calling attention to the paradox between the "private paradise" and "social wasteland," concepts that Joseph Moldenhauer considers. Moldenhauer identifies paradox as the dominant stylistic feature in *Walden*, and the impact of the paradox rests in our recognition that a meaning we expect has been dislocated by another meaning (74). The author maintains that paradoxes are an appropriate tool to the overall literary design of *Walden*'s themes symbols, characters, and plot (77). Two paradoxical worlds are represented in *Walden*: Walden Pond, the "private paradise" of the narrator, symbolized by images like freedom, health, the waking state, and birth, and Concord, the "social wasteland" that he has left, symbolized with images including imprisonment, disease, lethargy, and death (79). This paradox of the paradise versus the wasteland proves problematic because it is in the "wasteland" that the narrator's audience resides. Although dissatisfied with their lives, his audience is committed to that kind of life and its values. While the narrator may appear to be a "misanthropic skulker," his real desire is to "communicate his experience of a more harmonious and noble life" (80). Moldenhauer states that Thoreau is able to make sense of the world in his own terms, something that his audience cannot do in theirs. Ultimately, the pond becomes a symbol of the self, and when Thoreau chases the diving loon, he is acting out his "pursuit of higher truth" (83). Here again the thought that one should look to experiences in nature in order to gain a better understanding of the self are highlighted, and it is this kind of communication that will be imitated in the future by other authors such as Rawlings.

That Thoreau had a desire to communicate to his Concord neighbors his experience of how to live, in Moldenhauer's terms, a more "noble life" demonstrates how deeply Thoreau valued the concept of community despite his criticisms of it as well as his temporary withdraw from it. The idea of community is specifically called into question by Mary Moller, who uses Thoreau's texts to examine his feelings towards people and the concept of community, especially in the sense of Thoreau's desire to establish an expanded kind of community that includes both a community of humans as well as a community of nature. Moller's most relevant interrogation about Thoreau delves deeply into considering his attitude towards the society of men. She argues that unlike the less desirable image he portrays in *Walden*, Thoreau is "attracted to and comforted by another image of the village—that of a true community, small enough to be fully comprehended, made up of self-reliant, idiosyncratic individuals, whose self-reliance would be nurtured by familiar association and mutual respect (89-90). Aspects of Thoreau's feelings of community stemmed from his overall feeling for Nature and the love for the Concord township and the animal and plant life on it that was part of a specific portion of the world as well as from his interest in the town's human history (94). It was not just his own relationships to the village and to the wilderness that he was interested in, but also their relationship to each other (95). This idea helps the reader to realize the paradox that Thoreau touches upon in *Walden*. Moller's ultimate conclusion is that Thoreau's contradictions and ambivalences about society can be traced to his "profound humanism and his need for loving personal relationships," or in other words, his ideas of community (185). It is for this reason that a need to expand

perception in order to extend the boundaries of one's community to include both man and nature becomes prevalent.

For the purposes of this project considering Rawlings's *Cross Creek* as presenting a revision of a few of Thoreau's ideas put forth in *Walden*, an exposition of some key terms to be used in addition to the aforementioned experiential passage and experimental process is in order. First, there is a distinction to be made between the words nature and Nature. In the case of nature, the term will be used to refer to the actual elements of the physical environment and those things associated with it, such as plants, animals, landscape, and weather. Nature, on the other hand, embodies the perceptions and resulting conceptualizations of the parts that comprise the actual physical environment; it is the philosophical ideal of the environment which man connects to, and being connected to Nature can help one to better connect to the overall universe. For Rawlings, connection to Nature would be equivalent to reaching a kind of "holy harmony." Holy harmony is a term that Rawlings borrows from George Sand that refers to the state in which mind, heart, and arm work together under Providence. It is when man is fully connected to and in harmony with his place or environment. However, while Rawlings considers a state of "holy harmony" to be ideal, she acknowledges that actually achieving it does not always take into account the dualities of man and nature.

The next important key term to be defined in relation to this project is the idea of community. Here "community" will be used to refer to a collective assemblage of different entities that one interacts with, and particularly to neighbors or surrounding people as well as the surrounding environment. In the case of Thoreau and Rawlings,

each author in his or her own way makes a movement towards redefining what community means for them. At Walden Pond, Thoreau goes through the process of "re-worlding" that Daniel Peck suggests by expanding what can be included in Walden's "world," or, in this context, community. Rawlings performs a similar although modified process with the people and Big Scrub environment at Cross Creek. She also expands her community into nature, but recounts more of her human communal interactions than Thoreau does. In either case, both authors are actively engaged with their surroundings and how they relate to them.

Building upon an idea already referred to, the next term to consider is transcendentalism, or in some cases, depending on the application of the concept, transcendental or transcendent. Transcendentalism is the philosophy based on the doctrine that the principles of reality are to be discovered by the study of processes or thought and that emphasizes the intuitive and the spiritual over the empirical. At the same time, to be transcendental means to go beyond the contingent and accidental within the human experience, but not beyond all human knowledge. Finally, if something is considered transcendent, it means that it goes beyond the ordinary limits of experience, thought, or belief.

The validity of choosing Thoreau's Walden as a text worthy of study is affirmed by its position in the American literary canon. Rawlings and her text *Cross Creek* (as well as her other texts), although perhaps not as readily acknowledged as constituents within the canon, are equally worthy of inquiry and are strong enough to be held in comparison to authors and works like Thoreau and *Walden*. Rawlings is perhaps most famous for her Pulitzer prize-winning 1938 novel *The Yearling*, which was also made

into a film. However, *The Yearling* was not Rawlings's first writing endeavor. Publishing short stories as early as her high school years, Rawlings continued to write actively when she began attending the University of Wisconsin in 1915, being a regular article contributor to the *Wisconsin Literary Magazine*. After graduating from the university Rawlings pursued a career in journalism, which one might argue taught her the kind of attention to detail and description that will later become a focal point of her work. In 1930 Rawlings sold two short stories to *Scribner's Magazine*, which brought her to the attention of the famous editor Maxwell Perkins, who was known for his editing of authors like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. It is while working with Perkins that Rawlings will publish her novels *South Moon Under* (1933), *Golden Apples* (1935), and *TheYearling* (1938), as well as her collection of short stories, *When the Whippoorwill*— (1940) and her account of living in a small hamlet in north central Florida, *Cross Creek* (1942). She also published a number of short stories along the way. In 1953 she publishes *The Sojourner*, a piece that proved difficult for her to write due to the stress resulting from the invasion of privacy trial over *Cross Creek* and the death of Perkins.

The approximate ten-year period between publishing *South Moon Under* and *Cross Creek* (and its almost immediate counterpart *Cross Creek Cookery*) is arguably Rawlings's most productive period, and it is no coincidence that it began just a few short years after she moved to an orange grove in Cross Creek, Florida in 1928. It was at Cross Creek that Rawlings lost the sense of "spiritual homelessness" that biographer Gordon Bigelow suggests she felt (16). In addition to that, living among the inhabitants and environment of north central Florida gave Rawlings a wealth of material to use for

her stories, and she spent almost ten years collecting some of the vignettes that would eventually be woven together into a finished text of *Cross Creek*, vignettes that demonstrated to the book's different audiences the level of connectivity that Rawlings felt to both her human and her natural communities.

As Rodger Tarr and Brent Kinser, editors of *The Uncollected Works of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*, suggest, critics and theorists who do not take Rawlings's work fully into account "compromise the integrity of their own work" (Tarr & Kinser 14). Their reasoning for such an assertion is because they rightfully feel that Rawlings's work plays a role in the formation of a vast variety of topics, including American multiculturalism, identity politics, conceptions of race, narrative theory, community, ecocriticism, cultural history, cultural anthropology, language preservation, gender roles, literature of place, historiography, sexuality, and domesticity (14). With topics such as these in mind, the text that is the most rich in potential material to study is Rawlings's 1942 *Cross Creek*, which is why the text should be considered as part of the American literary canon. It is also why *Cross Creek* should be considered in relation to other major texts that helped to establish the basis of that American canon, such as Thoreau's *Walden*.

If Rawlings is to be validly called, as Tsunemoto proposed, "a female Thoreau in Florida, then her work in *Cross Creek* must be examined in relation to the text that so many say that it echoes. Although it may not have intended to be so, *Cross Creek* is analogous to *Walden* in the sense that it blends experiences at a certain place with reflections on larger meanings or implications.

FINDING COMMUNITY THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL PASSAGES

It is important for Rawlings to establish herself as a member of the community at Cross Creek. As a newcomer to the small settlement she is a foreigner, unaware of how the community is structured and unaware of the nuances among the different relationships present there. She also does not know the kinds of expectations that the other community members may come to have of her, especially since she comes to the Creek as a woman of relative status (or in other words, since she employs some of her neighbors). It becomes necessary, then, for Rawlings to learn about these different aspects of the Cross Creek community so that she might eventually gain access to them. In order to do this, Rawlings takes part in various experiential passages, meaning that she takes part in different situations that occur organically at the Creek. With each situation, Rawlings has a unique experience that teaches her about life at the Creek as well as gives her a better insight to the people there.

The kinds of experiential passages that will be highlighted in this section differ slightly from the kinds of experimental processes that Thoreau relates in *Walden*. As previously defined, the idea of having experiential passages in connection to Rawlings refers to the organic or naturally occurring kinds of experiences that Rawlings has at Cross Creek that contribute to her learning about herself as well as about her neighbors and the environment. Experimental processes, on the other hand, are more related to Thoreau and refer to experiences that are more deliberate rather than organic. Thoreau

calls his sojourn at Walden an experiment, and more broadly he refers to life itself as a kind of experiment. For example, early in his text he states "Here is life, an experiment to a great extent untried by me" (9). Soon after, in starting to describe how youths should conduct their lives, Thoreau suggests that "they should not *play* life or *study* it merely, while the community supports them at this expensive game, but earnestly *live* it from beginning to end. How could youths better learn to live than by at once trying the experiment of living?" (38). Again, he incorporates all people into his vision when he declares "We are the subjects of an experiment which is not a little interesting to me" (94). It is probable that at times that Thoreau uses the word "experiment" to describe aspects of life that one might also call a kind of "experience," but his choice of word may perhaps imply that like a scientific experiment, the optimum end result is found via a process of trial and error, as Rawlings learns with her experiential passages. However, while Thoreau extracts himself from the Concord society to Walden Pond, conducting an "experiment" on how best to live his life, Rawlings immerses herself in the community at Cross Creek, learning through the various mechanisms available to her—namely her experiential passages—that self discovery and developing one's community are inextricably related.

One of the primary ways that Rawlings embarks on her different experiential passages is through the use of food, among other things. In turn, what she learns from these passages give her a better position from which to gain access to the community. However, at the same time, it is from her experiences surrounding food that can show how Rawlings is different from, or at least has a different background than, the people she is interacting with. For example, it took Rawlings some time at the Creek before

she understood that newcomers to the Creek did not always stay there long enough to become fully integrated into the community. As she tells us when reflecting: "If I stayed, it was my own business, so long as I minded it. If I did not stay, no one would be surprised and there was no point in making overtures to me" (48). By the time Rawlings writes this comment in *Cross Creek*, she is aware of the typical reception of newcomers and often participates in such reactions as well.

However, as an initiate, that her neighbors might have this kind of attitude does not occur to Rawlings. "But how was I to have known that the Townsends' invitation to a pound party was not a social gesture? I took it at face value" (48). The way that Rawlings questions the situation before beginning to relate the story signals to the reader that somehow this story will go awry and that instead of the supposed party being Rawlings's first experience of social inclusion at Cross Creek, it instead serves to highlight how she is still an outsider. Upon being invited to the Townsend home by two of the numerous children, Rawlings realized that it was the first neighborly gesture that she had received. A pound party, they informed her, is one to which every guest brings a pound of something, such as sugar, butter, candy, cake or the like.

Rawlings was touched by the invitation that she believed would be a step towards becoming introduced to and integrated with the neighbors, and proceeded to double her largest cake recipe to bring to the house, remembering the large number of Townsend children and anticipating a house full of other guests. She carried her cake to the Townsend house for the party, where it was placed on the table with another cake, a small jar of peanut butter, and a box of crackers provided by the Townsend family. It did not take much longer for Rawlings to figure out that she was to be the only guest at

the party. This realization caused her to believe that she had likely been invited to the party because the many Townsends knew that she would bring a large dish, and this realization made her take only as much cake as she felt was necessary in order to be polite.

Even if the party was contrived so as to have its comparatively wealthy guest provide some of the food that the family was clearly in need of, it was at least in its own right an attempt on behalf of the Townsends to initiate Rawlings into the community of Cross Creek. Such differences in social relations initially keep her outside of the Cross Creek community. To gain access to the Cross Creek community, Rawlings must learn the nuances of how people interact with each other when food is involved. Through experiential passages like this one with the pound party, she must also learn the greater implications these interactions have about social class and expectations within the Creek community.

Thus, Rawlings's experiential passages are like a kind of trial and error method through which Rawlings figures out a working definition of what it means to have and be a part of a community at Cross Creek. Rawlings's open attitude that shows a willingness to learn is what helps her to revise what constitutes community at the Creek, especially when it comes to how she handles herself in the different kinds of experiences she has there. The encounters involving food among other things and the different people she interacts with in particular are necessary in order for Rawlings to realize what the community of Cross Creek is based on: the independence of the individual, or individual family; the respectfulness and dignity one has for and sees in

their neighbors; and the tacit agreement to be responsible for one another within the community.

In discussing issues of race at Cross Creek, Carolyn Jones suggests that there are several elements that lay out a certain "social geography" at the Creek, and that it is within that structure and set form of social interaction that "Rawlings must find a place and learn to negotiate" (218). Furthermore, Jones suggests that there are "levels of responsibility and obligation, but in a nuanced way that Rawlings has trouble grasping" (Jones 218). Such nuances are apparent here with the Townsends, a poor, white Cracker[2] family. The responsibility and obligation at hand were not for Rawlings to feel the need to "help" the family, but rather for the Townsends to be responsible and obligated to look after a woman in the town who lived alone. Jones cites J.T. Glisson on the matter of the different perspectives or interpretations of such responsibility and obligation:

> I am sure Mrs. Rawlings was unaware of the responsibility backwoods culture demanded of Crackers towards their neighbors, especially toward those who lived alone. Wealth and academic credentials were useless in the wake of fires, natural disasters, sudden sickness and unexpected death. Wives regularly stopped by to visit, using one pretense or another, to see if Mrs. Rawlings was all right. On two occasions, well-meaning families attempted to draw her into their community of friends, only to have her misinterpret their overtures as attempts to gain charity.

[2] In the same article, Jones describes the Crackers in the South as people who were "poor, often landless, and largely uneducated, and who aligned themselves to the planter class only through race" (217). The only social advantage that a Cracker person would have over a black one was the simple fact that they were white.

> She would later write of those sincere offers of friendship from the bias of her own misunderstanding. (Glisson qtd. in Jones 219)

One of those offers of friendship that Glisson refers to is from the Townsends. However, there is something more important than determining whether the family was trying to take advantage of Rawlings because she was an outsider unaware of Creek culture or if in fact their invitation was a genuine attempt to incorporate Rawlings into Creek culture. Ultimately, the significant outcome of the event is that it gives Rawlings a unique experience and brings her one step closer to being the kind of insider of the community that she will eventually become.

Eventually, Rawlings's revision of what constitutes community at Cross Creek will encapsulate not just the intimate relationships established among the neighbors in the village, but also the intimate relationship that is established with the region and surrounding nature itself. Community for Rawlings, then, involves not only the human society found in a place, but also inextricably involves the literal place itself as well. However, before Rawlings can develop a relationship with the literal place of Cross Creek, she must first develop relationships with the people there, and with the organic experiences that she has with her neighbors, and most often those involving food, Rawlings takes the first step towards her revision of what determines community.

For at least the first few months, Rawlings herself will be her own obstacle to becoming an integrated member of the community at Cross Creek. If the Pound Party is read as an attempt of the Townsends to gain charity, then she was susceptible to it because of her naiveté. But even after this initial encounter in which Rawlings was made aware of her social distinction, she will not fully comprehend the significance of

such difference until she has a series of similar experiences. The next incident happened a short time after the Pound Party on Rawlings's first Christmas day at Cross Creek; two of her new Creek neighbors made a formal call to her house to introduce themselves. As the afternoon wore on and the men did not leave, Rawlings grew increasingly anxious that her meal was being over-cooked and that her out-of-town guests were getting restless. In desperation, she invited them to stay for dinner, which in her previous experience had always been the signal for unexpected guests to leave.

However, when the men accepted the invitation, Rawlings quickly learned that "in rural Florida, to refuse an invitation to a meal, if one is there at the time it is ready or nearly so, is to insult hospitality so grievously that the damage can seldom be repaired" (117). So acting in accordance to their rural Florida background, the men stayed, and it was clear during the meal that both the hostess and her impromptu guests were uncomfortable. The local guests' discomfort was especially clear when Rawlings observed that the Creek men picked over some of the more fancy dishes, unsure of which things were meant to eat and which things were meant as ornament. Trying to dissipate some of the tension, Rawlings remarked that they had just experienced a "typical Yankee Christmas dinner" and asked them to tell her about the usual "Cracker Christmas dinner," to which she received the grave reply that such a dinner consisted of whatever they could get (118).

In this attempt to make conversation, the easiest thing for Rawlings to use as a starting point was to call attention to the difference between herself and her unexpected guests. Rawlings has a remorseful reaction to her own question: "I should have given the dinner and all my work over it, not to have asked that question" (118). In this

moment, her intentions were not to highlight the differences between her and her guests but rather to use the difference in their backgrounds as a starting point for building a connection between them; to find solidarity through finding similarities in their different traditions. Although this is not exactly what happened, Rawlings still learns a humbling lesson about how life in rural Florida is often hand-to-mouth. In addition, she also learns that this fact does not take away from the quiet dignity of Cross Creek inhabitants when it comes to building relationships with other members of the community. For instance, one of the unexpected visitors, Moe, knew that he might feel slightly ill at ease at Rawlings's home because he was accustomed to neither making formal house calls nor eating elaborate meals. However, he still made the social call anyway—and in a dignified manner, no less—because he believed it was the courteous thing to do and necessary in order to build a relationship with one of his neighbors.

Making similar efforts to build relationships with his own neighbors can at times be frustrating or uncomfortable for Thoreau as well, although perhaps in a different way than they were for Rawlings and the Florida men. What frustrates Thoreau is not the presence of unexpected guests and awkward conversation, but rather the absence of guests or neighbors and conversation of substance. "My neighbors tell me of their adventures with famous gentlemen and ladies, what notabilities they met at the dinner-table; but I am no more interested in such things than in the contents of the Daily Times" (221). The popular concentration on and interest in such matters as costume and manners are of little importance to Thoreau, for in his opinion "a goose is a goose still, dress it as you will" (221). In other words, a person can dress or behave in any way that they like, but it will not change the fact that they are still people and thus share

a common humanity. This is a fact to which many of Thoreau's neighbors are oblivious. It is when he finds himself in such conversation that Thoreau longs to separate himself from the society he is in and to not live in "this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century, but [instead] stand or sit thoughtfully while it goes by" (221).

It is because he is in search of truth rather than love, money, or fame that Thoreau is frustrated when he finds himself at a dinner table with those who are searching for the transient things that Thoreau is not. "I sat at a table where rich food and wine in abundance, and obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board. The hospitality was as cold as the ices" (222). He goes on to describe how the guests talk of the fame and vintage of the wine, but his thoughts were on a wine of a more "glorious vintage" that they did not have and could not buy, using wine as a metaphor for a kind of inner purity. It is after encountering such empty "hospitality" that Thoreau remarks: "There was a man in my neighborhood who lived in a hollow tree. His manners were truly regal. I should have done better had I called on him (222). One can liken Thoreau's acquaintance in the hollowed-out tree with Rawlings's Cracker callers. Although none of these people had any kind of high social station or means to put on an elaborate meal, what they shared was a noble and dignified sense of respect for their fellow man.

In both examples with Rawlings's and Thoreau's dinner parties and conversations with neighbors, attention is drawn to the differences between the party members. In Rawlings's and Moe's case, the obvious difference brought to readers' attention is the distance between their respective social classes, particularly in terms of

economics. With Thoreau, the difference lay not only in his and his neighbors' desire to discuss different subject matters, but more acutely in the fact that they held different kinds of values. Both authors become intensely aware of various disparities, but a difference between each of their situations is the fact that Rawlings calls attention to the perceived difference between the Crackers and the Yankees in order to bridge the gap and establish a basis for a relationship between them. In Thoreau's example he does not attempt to create such a bridge, most likely because in that specific situation an attempt on his part to call upon any kind of conception of common human dignity would be in vain since it would likely remain unmet by anyone else.

In addition to this, in both cases a key issue is the way in which each situation is perceived. In Rawlings's case, there is initially a perceived difference between herself, her Yankee guests, and her Cracker guests due to their different social customs, backgrounds, and economic standings. However, as Rawlings learns from talking with her guests, the things that she perceived as creating difference were not as important as what she really found in common: mutual respect and dignity. Once she realizes this, Rawlings's perception of her neighbors changes. This, however, does not happen in Thoreau's case. Rather, the situation turns out to be the opposite. Thoreau does not find himself seated at a table with seemingly diverse guests the way Rawlings does. On the contrary, the people appear to be cut of the same cloth that he is and at first no difference is perceived. It is not until the party guests begin conversing that Thoreau realizes that the people only care about discussing superficial matters and lack any personal depth. When this happens, readers can see Thoreau's perception of the people at the table change. Changing perceptions in each of these cases points readers in the

direction of realizing what Rawlings and Thoreau value: the importance of human character. Without what they believe to be strong character, a foundation for strong community cannot be laid.

After their somewhat uncomfortable first meeting, Rawlings and one of the Christmas callers, Moe, became good friends, mainly because of the respect that they gained for one another as they got to know each other: "Sometimes there are friendships that have no apparent reason for existence, between people set apart by every circumstance of life, yet so firm in their foundations that they survive conditions that would separate friends of more apparent suitability. My friendship with Moe was one of those" (116). Rawlings's close friendship with Moe was forged not because of their shared backgrounds, but rather their shared respect for each other. Their friendship also stems from their shared investment in the Cross Creek community, something that they both see at Rawlings's first Christmas when each in their own way tries to lay the foundations for incorporating Rawlings as part of that community.

With this scene at Christmas, readers are able to see Rawlings progress in the way that she responds to social discrepancies brought to her attention through encounters involving food. After being invited to the Townsend home and seeing that they were poor, thus suspecting that she was invited in hopes that she would bring a generous contribution to their "party," Rawlings took it upon herself to help the family's situation. Even though she notes how the family has "exquisite courtesy," "good blood and breeding," and "gracious manners," Rawlings felt that "[t]he two great needs, where I could give tangible help, were their [the Townsend children's] health and education" (53). She recounts how she gets the children medicine, enrolls them in

school, and makes them new clothes to wear, but immediately after tells readers how Mrs. Townsend refuses to give the children second doses of the medicine because it made them sick and that the children only went to school long enough for them to justify accepting the new school clothes. Rawlings's efforts, then, would seem to be in vain. However, looking back over her relationship with the family she sees that all of the children grew up healthy and are now comparatively successful adults without having had Rawlings's direct assistance. Years after the fact when writing *Cross Creek* she tells her readers, "I am sometimes haunted by the feeling that it is I who could have learned of the Townsends" (Rawlings 55).

But Rawlings was in fact the one who learned something from the Townsends, even though it may not have been immediately clear to her. She learned to see that the real needs of the family were not necessarily the same as the "tangible needs" that she took it upon herself to provide. The children grew up healthy and happy for the most part without following Rawlings's prescription. Primarily, this taught her that if she is to truly become a part of the community of Cross Creek, then she must learn to recognize that she is not the one responsible for determining and fulfilling what she perceives to be as everyone's needs. In other words, she learned to mind her own business. Again, Rawlings's unawareness of the social geography of the creek is demonstrated. In this case, her misunderstanding is tied to her involvement with the Townsend family and she takes on a kind of paternalistic and even somewhat condescending attitude towards them. It is this kind of attitude that Ary Lamme says Rawlings has when she writes about poor white Crackers: "[her writing about Crackers] was laced with the same condescending yet benevolent attitude [that she had towards

blacks]" (199). In the case of her ethnic, and to extend his argument, her social relations, Lamme suggests that she retains a "basic northern liberal paternalism," and for him this position can also extend towards whites as it does here with the Townsends.

While on the one hand it is true that Rawlings begins with a somewhat paternalistic and condescending attitude, it is not true that such an attitude remains intact, as Lamme suggests (199). Rawlings's self-initiated call to help the Townsends can easily be read as condescending; but in closing that section of the text she is "haunted" by the idea that she was the one that could have learned something from the family (55). In this way, through this example of an experiential passage Rawlings begins a progression away from condescension and paternalism. She still has progress that she needs to make in terms of how she is going to relate to her neighbors in the community at this point, a fact that is reflected in the way she constructs the afore mentioned sentence. Instead of making a direct admission that she could have learned from this family, she says that she is "haunted by a feeling" that she might have been able to do so. Such phrasing reflects how trying to do something like building relationships and finding one's place within a community or even just defining what community means are not concrete things, just as what she learns from the Townsends is not exactly concrete.

The first lesson Rawlings learns from interacting with her neighbors is not to overtly "meddle" in other people's affairs and that she is not directly responsible for determining and taking care of what she considers their tangible needs. The second lesson that Rawlings learns, at Christmas dinner, is that she needs to have a greater awareness of the living situations of the people around her. When Rawlings asked

about the Cracker Christmas dinner and got the humbling answer that it consisted of whatever was available to them, she learned the hard way of her neighbors' respectfulness and dignity despite their differences in social class and background.

A third encounter involving food also serves to highlight the social difference between Rawlings and her neighbors. But what is different and most significant about the third encounter from the other situations is that it sets up Rawlings in the role of employer in the community. This role as employer at times will influence how she is perceived by or how she interacts with the community. Living in the tenant house on Rawlings's property was a poor white Cracker couple. The man worked on her orange grove and Rawlings had only seen the woman from a distance. When the woman knocks on the door of the house to ask her to read a piece of mail for her, Rawlings does not immediately realize it is because she cannot read, and her ignorance to the woman's illiteracy indicates that Rawlings still fails to totally understand the living situations of her Creek neighbors. As the woman is returning to the tenant house, Rawlings suddenly forgets the social distance between them. Now seeing her as another woman with whom she can identify, she asks how the couple is getting on. The woman replies: "Nothin' extry. They ain't no screens in the house and the skeeters like to eat us alive. And I cain't keep the antses out of Tim's breakfast" (74).

While Rawlings herself can relate to the issue with the mosquitoes, she had not realized that the house was open to the elements and had no idea what to make of the woman's comment about her husband's breakfast. As it turns out, when she eventually learns of the cooking habits of the backwoods area, Rawlings finds out that food was typically cooked once a day and divided over the course of three meals. Since the

people got up before daybreak, they ate the leftovers from the previous day's food as their breakfast. If the people were living in a house that had rotten spots or missing screens, both of which were the case here, insects would come in during the night and eat the food. Hence, the woman was not able to protect her husband's morning meal.

Rawlings found the encounter with the woman so troubling that the experience stuck with her and the woman became the inspiration for poor Cracker women in a few of her stories. It was this conversation about the husband's breakfast that eventually made Rawlings aware of the tacit agreement and expectations among Creek community members, and here in particular the tacit agreement between employer and employee: that they are responsible for one another. "I did not yet understand that in this way of life one is obligated to share, back and forth, and that as long as I had money for screens and a new floor, I was morally obligated to put out a portion of it to give some comfort to those who worked for me" (Rawlings 75). This idea of responsibility for fellow members of the community is likely the most important of the lessons that Rawlings learns from her experiential passages.

Smaller instances that demonstrate the backwoods culture's unspoken agreement to be responsible for one another are also spread throughout the text, which underscores the importance of relationships between neighbors at the Creek. When describing the different kinds of people who settle briefly at Cross Creek, Rawlings relates that "The evil and dishonorable among them do not stay long at the Creek, for we are too busy to be bothered with neighbors we cannot trust. We leave our houses wide open" (131). This kind of trust that leads to unlocked doors and open houses provides part of the basis for residents at the Creek being able to look after each other.

For example, Moe and Rawlings look after each other in whatever unique ways that they are capable of doing: Moe performs odd jobs around Rawlings's home, for instance, or Rawlings loans him money when he needs it. Other examples of the idea of neighbors helping neighbors include unexpected or anonymous offerings like fruit or fresh fish left on Rawlings's doorstep or repairs done as payment for something that someone might have borrowed or taken from her without asking. Similar kinds of offerings might also come throughout the year as gestures of thanks for the boxes of treats and clothing that Rawlings distributes to some of the poor children during the holiday time. The understanding is that the people in the community are responsible for helping to take care of each other in whatever capacity that they are capable of doing so.

Although he may not have as direct of a moral obligation to take care of his community in the way that Rawlings does in the role of employer, Thoreau still places a similar kind of trust in his neighbors as Rawlings places in hers. Just like the Creek residents leave their houses "wide open," so too does Thoreau leave his door unlatched: "I never fastened my door night or day, though I was to be absent several days; not even when the next fall I spent a fortnight in the woods of Maine" (118). Thoreau may not be expected to directly contribute to the immediate welfare of his neighbors (such as the way Rawlings is expected as an employer to repair the tenant house), but he is nonetheless invested in the overall welfare of his community. His shared investment is likely the primary reason why his "house was more respected [in his absence] than if it had been surrounded by a file of soldiers" (118).

In leaving his door unfastened, Thoreau allows for passers-by to use what spartan resources he had:

> The tired rambler could rest and warm himself by my fire, the literary amuse himself with the few books on my table, or the curious, by opening my closet door, see what was left of my dinner, and what prospect I had for supper. Yet though many people of every class came this way to the pond, I suffered no serious inconvenience from these sources…. (118)

A nuanced difference in the way that each author leaves their house open is thus: Rawlings's visitors are most likely to be people she knows and who will return again whereas Thoreau's visitors (even though he may have known some of them) are more likely to be passers-by. Rawlings leaves her home open because of her faith and investment in her neighbors and her investment in becoming a member of the Creek community while Thoreau leaves his home open because of his faith and investment in mankind in general.

Even though visitors into each of their homes are likely to remain anonymous, the visitors to Rawlings's house might possibly return whereas there is a good chance that many of Thoreau's anonymous visitors were simply passing through and are not likely to return again. This difference would account for the reason that Rawlings often finds the different kinds of small offerings on her doorstep and odd jobs completed around her house while Thoreau later finds no traces of any visitors that he might have had. Despite this kind of difference, the important concept to take away from the example of Rawlings's and Thoreau's open homes is that each author harbors a kind of trust in and responsibility to their neighbors that compels them to share what they might have to contribute with their community.

Rawlings's approach towards her interactions as experiential passages—and especially those interactions involving food—to help establish relationships with her neighbors also extends to her negotiation of her role as provider in the Cross Creek community. In addition, it also applies to the way that she positions herself in relation to the traditional roles of women. Specifically, both of these things come together in one sense because Rawlings is in part a provider for Cross Creek residents since many of the people are employed on her orange grove, and in another sense by the way in which Rawlings takes care of her employees. Peggy Prenshaw argues that Rawlings's affinity for cooking showed a "womanly" willingness to "feed" others, in both the physical and emotional senses of the word (5). In other words, food has a dual purpose—to feed the body and to feed the spirit—and once Rawlings becomes aware of this and also becomes aware of the kind of unspoken agreement that one is responsible for taking care of their neighbors, she at times sees to it that both purposes are served.

For instance, one night during a grove firing Rawlings and her maid make sure that there is a constant availability of different kinds of hot food and coffee and even a little bit of liquor on hand so that the men may come inside in shifts to rest and warm themselves. Grove firings occur when there is a threat of temperatures reaching below freezing, which is a state of emergency for all people involved with the crop. At four degrees below freezing, or twenty-eight degrees, bonfires are placed between clusters of four trees and lit to keep the fruit from freezing. If the oranges freeze, the crop is lost, which means not only a loss of profit for the grove owner, but also loss of work for all of the grove employees. Therefore, everyone is invested in the survival of the oranges. Firings are long, cold nights of hard work and Rawlings is very much aware of this.

Thus, she takes what she feels is the appropriate action: "The work is so cruel that it seems to me the least I can do is take care of the men properly. We had pounds of hamburg, baked beans, bread and butter, jams and relishes, sweet buns and hot coffee….I had also served quarts of gin and whiskey, and I suspect that this heating medium is the source of my success in getting hands for firing" (343).

In light of Prenshaw's comment about Rawlings and her cooking, this story is an example of Rawlings blending the two notions of the idea of to "feed." Since they will be working all night and during the next day, the grove men will need to be fed, but Rawlings takes responsibility for feeding her workers instead of leaving them to provide for themselves. This demonstrates the kind of moral responsibility to provide for other people in need in the backwoods that she learned from the tenant woman who was trying to keep ants out of her husband's breakfast. Furthermore, by working throughout the night in the kitchen Rawlings shows solidarity with her employees, a good number of whom are also her neighbors. Just like Rawlings takes the initiative to take care of her neighbors who are working for her, so too do her neighbors make the effort to try to take care of and save Rawlings and her orange crop. Such support on behalf of Rawlings "feeds" the spirit of her grove hands, as does her knowledge that what would also help "feed" and "warm" their spirits in various senses of the word are spirits themselves, or the quarts of alcohol that she has on hand.

Metaphorically feeding the spirit provides another point of contact for Rawlings and Thoreau; however, their ultimate philosophies on food itself are vastly different. Rawlings holds food and cooking very close to her heart for she believes in the theory that "the serving of good food is the one certain way of pleasing everybody" (215). She

goes on to explain how she thinks that "[c]onversation is fallible, for not all want to talk about the same things, and some do not want to talk at all, and some do not want to listen. But short of dyspepsia or stomach ulcers, any man or woman may be pleased with well-cooked and imaginative dishes" (215). In short, Rawlings believes that food has unifying potential. She also finds the subject of food important enough to devote the lengthy "Our Daily Bread" chapter to descriptions of and anecdotes about the range of Florida cuisine and delicacies, including such fare as alligator steaks, hearts of palm, and hush-puppies. In fact, it was this chapter of *Cross Creek* that resonated with a number of Rawlings's readers, and many of them urged her to write an entire book on cooking, which she did when she penned *Cross Creek Cookery* (Silverman 210).

But although Rawlings takes great pride in her culinary prowess, as Prenshaw points out, Rawlings's thoughts were not solely on the literal notion of food as purely sustenance. The table acts as a gathering point for neighbors (and thus as an opportunity for Rawlings to have some of her various experiential passages), whether that gathering be in the event of some kind of party as it was at Christmas or with the Townsend family or in the event of some kind of emergency as it was with the grove firing. While he might approve of the fact that Rawlings's cooking can bring the Creek community together, Thoreau takes a different stance on food. As can be seen from his initial "grocery list" when preparing to move to Walden Pond, Thoreau kept his fare simple: "It was, for nearly two years after this, rye and Indian meal without yeast, potatoes, rice, a very little salt pork, molasses and salt, and my drink water" (45). To this he sometimes added what he might have hunted or caught, but later he comments that "I have found repeatedly, of late years, that I cannot fish without falling a little in

self respect" (145). After some time of living at the pond, Thoreau begins to find eating animals distasteful: "The practical objection to animal food in my case was its uncleanness; and, besides, when I had caught and cleaned and cooked and eaten my fish, they seemed not to have fed me essentially" (146). Philosophically, Thoreau found it more laudable to try to control the different "appetites" within himself, in this case the one that caused him to desire meat.

Rawlings's and Thoreau's standpoint on food is clearly different, but the common theme to which they guide their readers is the need for a person to metaphorically feed their spirit, which will in turn feed their community. Ultimately, both authors share similar goals, but Thoreau takes a more traditionally spiritual route that aims to suppress or at least limit any animal appetite within himself. He tries to sustain himself on as simple and natural a diet as possible, proclaiming that "[i]t is not worth the while to live by rich cookery," a perspective that Rawlings would probably balk at, giving her proclivity for preparing elaborate gourmet meals to bring her friends together (146). But what is more important is that both authors act in ways that encourage the cultivation of their selves. As Prenshaw notes, "[Rawlings] writes that her 'recognition of cookery as one of the great arts was not an original discovery,' but that she found it 'as important a one for the individual woman as the discovery of love'" (4). For Rawlings, cooking provided a means for her to experience self-discovery in a way that can be partly akin to the way Thoreau was able to experience some of his own self-discovery at the pond through his simple diet. In the end, it will be individuals who have discovered a strong sense of self that will lead to a strong community.

In addition to drawing attention to the dual notion of to "feed," Prenshaw goes on to add that "[w]hat was critical to one's integrity and sense of self, however, was that such nurturing be undertaken with deliberateness and creative imagination, as well as with love" (5). In line with Prenshaw's argument, Rawlings approaches food in just that sort of way. Even though her involvement with the Townsends did not turn out the way Rawlings expected, she still demonstrated these qualities of creativity and love when she doubled her biggest cake recipe and resourcefully baked it in a roasting pan. Similarly with the grove firing incident, Rawlings shows an even better understanding of how best to take care of her neighbors and workers: she keeps them fed throughout the night and is sympathetic to the notion that the extreme situation calls for a stronger kind of drink. Such understanding is born out of her having had different experiences with different relationships, having learned from those passages, and having been integrated into Cross Creek.

In terms of the community at Cross Creek, it is not necessarily that Rawlings helps to establish community, but more appropriately that she establishes her own place within the existing community. This is why Rawlings often has problems with understanding some of the local social customs and must learn to adjust herself accordingly, for she is the one who has not yet established a place, or has not yet been woven into the existing fabric. Upon her arrival at Cross Creek, Rawlings was an outsider and thus on the periphery of the community. Later, when she is incorporated into the Creek society and looks back upon the reception—or lack thereof—that she received, she will explain the kind of mindset that the people have about newcomers, a mindset that she shows her participation in by the use of the collective pronoun 'we':

> We pay no attention to a newcomer at the Creek….When anyone has been here long enough, sooner or later his path crosses that of the other inhabitants and friendship or enmity or mere tolerance sets in….If I stayed [in Cross Creek] that was my own business, so long as I minded it. If I did not stay, no one would be surprised and there was no point in making overtures to me. (Rawlings 48)

This attitude reflects the nature of life at Cross Creek. Because eventually Rawlings learns about, becomes part of, and relates the kind of solid society that exists there, readers cannot immediately dismiss this attitude as indifferent because ultimately it is not. Cross Creek is a simple, isolated, rural village and making a life there can be hard, something that people might not fully understand until they move there, try to make a life, and either succeed or give up in frustration over the amount of work or the level of isolation.

In a certain sense, then, one could misunderstand this seemingly aloof attitude as a shortcoming of the Cross Creek community, and encountering such an attitude might be a deterrent for a person who wants to become a part of the society. However, this kind of shortcoming or aloofness can be found to a certain extent in any group of people, society, or even individual. When pointing out some of the failings and limitations of the Concord community, Bridgman says that Thoreau was "equally vulnerable" to some of the same kinds of shortcomings as other members of the Concord society, at least in terms of his not having a considerably wide scope of reading. Bridgman argues: "Thoreau was quite as narrowly preoccupied with his own interests as his neighbors were with theirs" (88).

But if one is going to argue that Thoreau is preoccupied with his own affairs, they must acknowledge two things. First, it must be understood that the way Thoreau is immersed in his own dealings is different than the way other men are immersed in theirs. Thoreau is trying to actively participate in familiarizing himself with, apprehending, and re-conceiving his world; through his solitary reflections, he is awakening himself. Others in Concord are preoccupied with their own affairs without a kind of greater awareness of their world. The second thing that must be understood is that Thoreau, by way of his preoccupation and focus on himself, is trying to improve the state of the community. He believes that becoming more self-autonomous individuals will lay the best foundation for a strong community and society, and to assist in accomplishing this goal he is starting with concern for his own affairs.

As demonstrated by the attitude in the previous excerpt, residents of Cross Creek are starting off with interest in their own affairs, or perhaps more appropriately, disinterest in newcomers' affairs. Granted, such preoccupation with themselves may not necessarily be in line with the elevated kind of self-awareness that Thoreau is striving for, but nevertheless it results in the attitude of paying "no attention to a newcomer at the Creek" being applied to Rawlings when she arrives there. It is also likely that another result of this attitude was why Rawlings was so happy when she got the invitation to the pound party from the Townsend family. While the Townsends were in many ways a "community to themselves, aloof by choice," once it was apparent and understood that Rawlings was there to stay, she lost her newcomer status as she was now considered a resident and eventually an integrated member of the community (49). With the exception of calling her meal a "Yankee Christmas dinner," there is little

example of Rawlings associating with or identifying herself as a Yankee rather than as a Southerner, and more specifically as a Floridian from Cross Creek. Despite her own identification and her general acceptance, however, there were still some at the Creek who remained skeptical of her "Yankee" status.

In the main instance of a neighbor being skeptical of Rawlings's alleged "Yankee-ness," it did not mean that Rawlings is not accepted or not seen as incorporated into Cross Creek's community by the particular person. Rather it means that the individual, Fred, is not fully able to understand how identification with a certain land or place is not contingent on having been originally from there. The kind of connection that Rawlings has with the region of Cross Creek, despite not having spent her whole life there, will later contribute to the "sense of place" that she strives for in her writing as well as to the concept of the "holy harmony" that she argues man must feel with his environment in order to be happy[3]. In this example with Fred, his inability to fully understand Rawlings's self-identification as a Southerner comes to a head when he tells a traveling Yankee couple who he has literally just met that Rawlings would be happy to host friends during their weekend fishing trip (Rawlings 324). He was not trying to make any kind of statement about his opinion of Rawlings's status within the community, but was genuinely trying to make the out of town couple feel welcome, and thought the best way to do so was to send the visiting Yankees to the local Yankee.

James Watkins argues that it is unlikely Rawlings ever thought of herself as a Yankee and instead self-identifies as a Southerner. While for Watkins's purposes the distinction of "Southerner" is important as he goes on to build a case for Rawlings and

---

[3] The concept of "holy harmony" will be developed at length in the next chapter.

specifically *Cross Creek* as being important in defining what he calls the Southern autobiography, here the important distinction is broader. Yankee as opposed to Southerner in this case equates more loosely to outsider versus insider. By the time of the incident with the fisher-tourists, Rawlings as well as most of the Cross Creek community already considered her an integrated part of the neighborhood of the Creek.

It is questionable whether Watkins's classification of Rawlings as a self-identified Southerner makes a difference in how quickly she was accepted at Cross Creek. It is likely that because Rawlings put forth the idea that she was a Southerner other residents were spurred into thinking so as well. However, identification as a Southerner gets complicated within the context of Watkins's argument. Again referring more to the social geography involving race, Watkins proposes that "Rawlings lays claim to her Southern identity by seeking to demonstrate her mastery of the highly nuanced, unwritten rules of the black-white relations in the Jim Crow period" (18). She shows her mastery of relations by writing within, or helping to distinguish, what Watkins calls the Southern autobiographical tradition. He notes that some critics have begun to recognize that "like race, gender, class, or sexuality, regional identification can give shape to the representation of selfhood in ways that cause it [Southern autobiography] to differ from nationally dominant forms of autobiography" (Watkins 20). For Watkins, then, region emerges as another intersection at which one can interrogate notions of self and relationships with one's surrounding society. Furthermore, he explains that in expanding the definition of autobiography to include the idea of region, it shows that a "tradition of life writing" exists in the South and that that tradition is significant in articulating discourse of Southern difference (20).

Rawlings's alleged identification as a Southerner by Watkins—and more particularly his argument that she is a participant in Southern autobiography—is complicated, however, by Rawlings's own conceptualization of regional literature. In her 1940 essay for The English Journal, "Regional Literature of the South," Rawlings expresses her dislike for the phrase "regional literature," a category Watkins tries to place her in some sixty years later. While Rawlings is talking specifically about fiction and autobiographies are non-fiction, an artfully written autobiography can still have literary merits. Even though Rawlings tells her editor that *Cross Creek* is not intended as an autobiography, it would not have been this aspect of Watkins's classification that would have troubled Rawlings so much as his Southern label. In an essay eventually published in The English Journal, Rawlings states that she "believe[s] that the phrase 'regional literature' is not only false and unsound but dangerous to a sharp appreciation of values, for the linking of two words has brought in the connotation that if a piece of writing is regional, it is also literature" (89). From this, readers can clearly see that Rawlings sets a high standard for what can be considered literary. She feels that the sooner these words that make up the latest popular mode of expression of the time are separated, the sooner the reading public will discourage the "futile outpourings of bad writing whose only excuse is that they are regional" (90). Instead, Rawlings proposes that a better approach is to look for what she calls regional writing, a slightly nuanced form of the expression that was currently in vogue. This type of writing, she argues, may be done by an "insider" or an "outsider" and is most valid when its purpose is "sociological and scientific" rather that to generate sales (92).

Rawlings gives license to both insiders and outsiders of a given region to talk about it within her conception of regional writing. In doing so, she absolves herself from any possible sins or criticisms about not being able to write legitimately about the Florida backwoods because she is not originally from there, or not wholly an "insider." In the end, whether she is an insider or outsider becomes kind of a moot point since by penning *Cross Creek* she is showing readers how she makes the transition from being an outsider to being an insider of the community through her various experiential passages. On the one hand, one might imagine that Rawlings could be more objective as an outsider because she would have been able to see the society for what it was without being invested in it. The problem with this view, however, is that Rawlings is invested in the Creek community, and demonstrates this in her desire to make connections with her neighbors at Christmas dinner, for example. On the other hand, as an insider she can more easily defend her observations of the area and community, or have them more readily accepted by her neighbors. Because she can be perceived as occupying both perspectives is likely the reason that Rawlings must self-identify, as Watkins puts it, as a Southerner. Otherwise, misinterpretations of Rawlings's perspective as a writer could lead to misunderstandings of attitudes and images reflected in her texts. If, for instance, people thought she was an outsider looking in, they might think at times that Rawlings was passing judgment on the Cross Creek community in her text rather than reading it as an insider's realistic and invested glimpse of what was going on there and what kinds of experiences she had and learned from there[4].

---

[4] An example of Rawlings seeming judgmental of people arises with the accusation of libel and invasion of privacy suit brought against her by nearby Island Grove resident Zelma Cason because of passages in *Cross Creek* that allegedly brought her "severe pain and humiliation" (Silverman 215). The verdict was

Rawlings considers the valid, sociological and scientific approach to regional writing as "the approach of the sincere creative writer who has something to say and uses a specialized locale—a region—as a logical or fitting background for the particular thoughts or emotions that cry out for articulation" (95). It is from here—this kind of regional writing—that she thinks we might look for what is truly "regional literature." Rawlings goes on to elaborate on the artistry of such writing, explaining how the best writing shows a harmony between the writer and his material. It is to this idea that we can trace Rawlings's thorough familiarity with her subjects and surroundings, including, for example, the nuanced roles of relationships between blacks and whites that Watkins raises. More importantly, Rawlings familiarity of her subjects and region spills into the arena of her descriptions of nature and the development of her concept of the idea of "holy harmony" that she believes is necessary between man and his environment.

In terms of gaining knowledge and participating in the different organic experiential passages at Cross Creek, the incidents with food are not the only kinds of situations that teach Rawlings through experience and that help to incorporate her into the community at the Creek. However, for readers they are the most accessible since the idea of communal conceptions and importance of food goes beyond the boundaries of backwoods Florida. In addition, through looking at Rawlings's experience with food readers can also begin to become aware of and chart the progress that Rawlings makes as she transitions from being situated on the outside of the Cross Creek community to eventually becoming situated on the inside of it as an incorporated member of the society. The important idea to take away from reading the text of *Cross Creek* is that

---

in Rawlings's favor, but Cason's appeal reversed the verdict, only stipulating token damages (Bigelow 44).

Rawlings does not view any experience as too small for her to learn from or too small to lead to a greater insight about herself, the community, or ultimately, about Nature. As the previous examples suggest, Rawlings's experiences are rites of passage that lead her to the kind of introspection and reflection that will aid her when it comes to her re-vision of some of Thoreau's transcendent philosophies in *Walden*.

“HOLY HARMONY,” THE SELF AND NATURE, AND TRANSCENDENCE THROUGH THE DAILY

In the final chapter of *Cross Creek*, Rawlings draws upon and revises what George Sand calls “holy harmony” in nature. She quotes Sand as stating in “La Mare au Diable”:

> Nature possesses the secret of happiness, and no one has been able to steal it from her.… Happiness would be wherever the mind, the heart and the arm should work together beneath the eye of Providence, so that a holy harmony should exist between the munificence of God and the rapture of the human soul. (Sand qtd. in Rawlings 376)

Immediately following this, Rawlings agrees that what Sand calls a “holy harmony” is the ideal, but she points out that she does not think that this concept takes into account the dual natures of both man and the universe.

Embracing the ideal of holy harmony, Rawlings revises it by suggesting that “[a]ll life is a balance, when it is not a battle, between the forces of creation and destruction, between love and hate, between life and death,” and that it is difficult to determine where one thing ends and the other begins (376). Finding a balance between the forces such as creation and destruction might not be exactly the same as living in harmony with them, but it is one step closer to doing so. Rawlings reflects about crushing a caterpillar that was eating some leaves she was examining, remarking that

the creature would have been willing to eat leaves elsewhere had it meant that it would have lived: “We should be so happy to cooperate with the unvoiced demands if we were aware of them. … But in crushing the caterpillar, I have fed the ants” (376). In one sense such a statement can be read as purely a means of rationalizing her actions; Rawlings does not have to bear the consequence of killing something because she believes that some kind of greater good has come from it, or at least so she says to justify getting a bug off of her leaves. However, Rawlings instead is trying to call attention to the fact that people and the universe both have creative and destructive capacities, but the importance lies in recognizing that even destructive forces, such as Rawlings crushing the caterpillar, can contribute to creative ones, such as the ants being able to flourish as a result of the destruction of the caterpillar. Furthermore, being able to find balance between the dualities of man and Nature show that a person has reached a greater awareness of both themselves and their environment. If the “holy harmony” that Sand and Rawlings profess is ever to be achieved, it is through such an awareness.

In order to successfully live the kind of life that is simple and intimately connected to Nature that she tries to live at the Creek, Rawlings must realize that sometimes a person has to be realistic about things. There is a spiritual connection to Nature, but there is also survival, and from time to time “disrupting” Nature is necessary for survival. These kinds of alternating perspectives are demonstrated through Rawlings’s approach to hunting. For instance, when it comes to hunting small game such as squirrels for food when camping, Rawlings and her party emphasize how important it is to kill no more than the party shall need for the next day’s breakfast, and

it is only in this kind of situation that Rawlings feels “no compunction” in shooting the small animals (327-8).

At the same time, however, Rawlings puts forth a considerable amount of effort not in describing the “kill” of the hunt, but rather in describing the environment that the chase takes place in. To her, what really makes the sport worth pursuing is the “magnificent country” that it takes place in (330). For example, Rawlings relates part of a deer hunting trip:

> Of my deer hunting I treasure, not a kill, but a hunt deep in the Everglades when …I followed two great bucks from dawn to dark …. They were ghost deer…and they led us through a dream world of gray cypresses and silent Spanish moss and soft knee-deep watery sloughs. The trail once crossed a circular pond and growing on all the cypresses around the pond were orchids, and I stopped and let my companion and his dog go far ahead of me while I stood and stared and could not believe that I held orchids in my hands. (333-334)

Entering this “dream world” she finds herself in and experiencing a sense of awe through actually being able to touch what she feels is the beauty of the orchids. This experience is a direct result of her being drawn deeper into the woods due to tracking the deer on the hunting trip.

In the same scene, Rawlings goes on to describe how later in the evening she makes a lone stand in a thicket near a clear pool, and when the sun set, hundreds of herons and egrets came to drink at the pool and roost in the trees. She forgets about the deer and instead takes in the nature and wildlife. In doing so, Rawlings demonstrates

that while one can participate in a realistic kind of approach to nature such as recognizing that to a certain extent hunting is a necessary activity for survival, one can simultaneously use the activity as a vehicle for taking a step deeper into nature. Using an activity like hunting in this way results in achieving a better balance between the aforementioned kinds of creative and destructive forces of the universe. This improved balance will bring Rawlings or any other individual who makes the effort to enhance their awareness a step closer to the ideal state of holy harmony with nature.

Rawlings, then, uses hunting as a means to get to a higher state of being, something that Thoreau would approve of, for he at times shares ambivalent attitudes about hunting that are similar to Rawlings's. Thoreau is not necessarily entirely anti-hunting, and he admits that the "wildness and adventure that are in fishing still recommend it" to him (143). He also admits that one of the likely reasons that he loves spending his days in nature as much as he does can be attributed to going hunting when he was a boy.

It is the hunter, he proposes, that might actually be "perhaps the greatest friend of the animals hunted" (144). For Thoreau, it is the way that a person approaches Nature that affects what they experience within it: "Fishermen, hunters, woodchoppers, and others, spending their lives in the fields and woods, in a peculiar sense a part of Nature themselves, are often in a more favorable mood for observing her, in the intervals of their pursuits, than philosophers or poets even, who approach her with expectation" (143). Such people set out into nature regularly, and adding to this their specific purposes for their visits, whether it be to hunt of chop wood, they are more readily engaged with their surroundings. This engagement alone serves to heighten

their connection with the environment, and if they should have an experience such as Rawlings does with the orchids, it only adds to the connection, experience, and solidarity that they already had with Nature. At the same time, if the hunter or woodchopper is not so fortunate to have a unique experience like Rawlings's, they are still better off than they would have been for having engaged themselves with the environment at all. Simply being engaged with the environment solidifies one's relationship with it. It is due to appreciation of and solidarity with nature like the deer hunt example from Rawlings that Thoreau might consider hunters the best friend of the hunted, for having the kind of respect for Nature that is a result of plunging deep within it as hunters do will lead to a call to protect it.

However, in regard to some of Rawlings's other hunting habits, Thoreau would likely find any action that indicated sport for sport's sake or that was not necessary for survival especially troubling. Such would probably be his opinion about the snake that Rawlings killed in her garden. During her first year in Florida Rawlings maintained a phobia of snakes, even though she knew that the only poisonous snakes in Florida were the rattlesnake, the cottonmouth moccasin, and the coral snake, the last of which she was not yet familiar with. Armed with this knowledge, she resolved to force herself to hold her ground at the sight of a snake, even if only for long enough to determine whether or not it was venomous. Digging in the garden that first winter, Rawlings

> brought out in my hand not a snake, surely, but a ten-inch long piece of Chinese lacquer. … I thought, 'Here is a snake, in my hands, and it is beautiful as a necklace. This is the moment in which to forget all nonsense.' I let it slide back and forth through my fingers. … I played

> with it a long time, then killed it reluctantly, not for fear or hate, but because I decided to cure the skin for an ornament on the handle of a riding crop. (177)

When she showed the dead snake to a friend who was teaching her Florida flora and fauna, he remarked that "God takes care of fools and children," for what she had killed was the deadly coral snake (177).

From one perspective, a reader might find it troubling for a person who claims to be so intimately connected to her environment to so casually kill one of the creatures within it, especially if one thinks of the perspective where Rawlings seemed to rationalize crushing the caterpillar earlier. But from another point of view, the entire episode with the coral snake teaches Rawlings a valuable lesson that ultimately strengthens her connection to Nature. When she picks up the snake in the garden, she is unaware of its potential to kill her. In killing it, even though she says that she is reluctant to do so, and especially doing so for such an inconsequential purpose to be used for an ornament, it shows Rawlings trying to "master" not only her fear but also her environment. Once she learns of the severe danger that she was in from her friend, her casual attitude about the reptile disappears and is replaced again by her fear of the animal. Rawlings's mistake in this instance was not just simply being unaware of what a coral snake looked like, but was also in assuming that the best way to get over her fear of snakes was by attempting to master them—and in a larger sense, Nature— in some way.

A short time after the incident with the coral snake, Rawlings goes to the upper Everglades with a herpetologist, Ross, to collect rattlesnakes. She recounts: "There was

no better time than to see the thing [the invitation to collect snakes] through; to go down in defeat and hysteria before my fear; or, by facing it, to rip away the veil of panic that stood, perhaps, between me and the facts" (178). At this point Rawlings has lived at the Creek long enough to understand that it is difficult to be afraid of something when one knows more about it, and, accompanied by a very knowledgeable guide, it is in this spirit of learning that she goes on the trip.

During the trip Ross imparts different facts about snakes to Rawlings and, in an effort to help her learn more and get over her fear, offers her a harmless snake to hold. She accepts it, not because she is no longer afraid, but because she is ashamed that she has not yet overcome this barrier that is preventing her from having a closer relationship with her Florida environment. Rawlings describes the experience: "…I took the snake in my hands. It was not cold, it was not clammy, and it lay trustingly in my hands, a thing that had lived and breathed and had mortality like the rest of us. I felt an upsurgence of spirit" (180-1). In this moment, Rawlings sees the snake not as a menace but as another living thing and thus moves a step closer to having a better understanding of her environment. Later, she has an opportunity to catch a rattlesnake, but repeatedly drops it off her hook when trying to lift it into the basket, telling her guide that she is "just not man enough to keep this up any longer" (183). The scene may conclude with Ross picking up the snake for her, but this does not mean that Rawlings fails in addressing her fear. Instead, she passes another hurdle in her quest to learn about something in nature that she fears.

Rawlings still, however, has progress to make, as learning about nature is a process that does not occur overnight. Her comment to Ross on their way home reflects

the progressive character of her ongoing education: "'I believe that tomorrow I could have picked up that snake" (184). Perhaps she would have been able to pick up the snake the next day, but if she still could not carry through with doing so she and her audience would be reminded that just like Rawlings can be perpetually on the verge of picking up the snake, so too can man be perpetually on the verge of grasping nature but never being fully able to do so. It is too easy to misread the rattlesnake hunting trip as another attempt by Rawlings to "master" nature as she appeared to do with the coral snake in her garden. She is not trying to "conquer" nature in this example; instead, she is trying to gain a better understanding of what she fears in it which will ultimately lead to a more intimate connection with Nature as a whole.

After the whole snake experience, Rawlings concedes that even though she may now be "interested and tolerant" of them, she does not think it will ever be possible for her to feel affection for snakes (184). What is more important, though, is the new attitude that she takes away: "[W]ith the conquering of the horror, it has been possible to watch the comings and goings of various reptiles with conjectures as to their habits and to consider them as personalities" (184). It is not Nature itself that man must conquer, but rather the misperceptions that man has about Nature that must be conquered. In changing the way that she perceives snakes, Rawlings also changes the way that she perceives Nature and her environment, thereby expanding her world to encompass another creature into her community at Cross Creek. Had she not had either of these experiences with snakes that helped her to both learn about the animal and conquer her fear of them as a result of her new perspective, Rawlings would not have been able to later make an observation such as this: "I think the motion of all snakes, if

watched and studied long enough, would move any lover of rhythm" (187). In making this statement, she demonstrates her new understanding that having an overall affection for a place and for nature is rooted in having respect for the individual things that comprise it.

Furthermore, these snake examples reinforce Rawlings's idea about how a person's learning to adjust to their physical environment is a complex experience that she equates with adjusting to other people: "The matter of adjustment to physical environment is as fascinating as the adjustment of man to man, and as many-sided. The place that is right for one is wrong for another, and I think that much human unhappiness comes from ignoring the primordial relation of man to his background" (Rawlings 39). Rawlings feels that her place at Cross Creek is "right" for her, and for her to achieve happiness there, she must do so through establishing a community with both her human neighbors and her environment. For Rawlings, building a connection with one entity will lead to the strengthening of the relationship with the other, almost like an inverse kind of relationship that she is seeking to balance. In other words, sometimes understanding or working with the people help her get closer to Nature and connecting to Nature can help her better understand the people.

Unlike Rawlings, Thoreau does not place so much emphasis on connecting to a specific place as he does to connecting to Nature as a whole. As a result, his connection to "place" is constantly changing because he is constantly re-perceiving his place and what makes up his world. In the same way that Rawlings is learning to find balance between her human and natural communities, so too is Thoreau seeking to establish a balance between society and solitude (which for him is most often associated with being

in nature). Furthermore, in the same way that his connection to place constantly changes as a result of his continual re-perception does Thoreau's interpretation of his community change. Daniel Peck emphasizes the importance of perception when it comes to shaping and defining what constitutes our various "worlds," and the world(s) that we know as a result are "fitting," demonstrating both balance and symmetry (117). While living at Walden, Thoreau is attempting to lead a more balanced life than his compatriots by balancing his desire for solitude with his need for visitors and social interaction, similar to the way in which Rawlings points out a need for balance between the creative and destructive forces of the universe. At first encounter, though, it appears that such a balance between solitude and society is not attained, given that Thoreau seems to spend more time describing his own thoughts and surroundings than he does relating his interactions with his visitors or his trips to the village.

But with a closer look at his descriptions, the reader will learn that Thoreau does not share these kinds of common surface perceptions in all of the places that one might consider him alone or in solitude. Thoreau challenges these kinds of surface perceptions when he asks his readers, "What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary?" (93). The answer to a question like this can only be subjective and vary by person, similar to the way a question like "In what kind of environment will be right for a person, allowing them to experience an intimate connection to it?" that Rawlings might ask would also have an array of answers depending on the individual answering. As a result, from Thoreau's attitude about not being able to qualify how much space is enough space to be considered "solitary," the reader gets the sense that Thoreau does not ever wholly consider himself alone or

solitary and thus without some kind of community. Instead, he has, as Peck would say, "worlded Walden," re-constituating his world and community with not only humans, but also the wildlife and even the pond itself as neighbors (118). By changing how one perceives the world, one can participate in constructing it.

However, if one is to think of Thoreau as changing the way that he perceives his world, then the most important thing to consider is how Thoreau does this. Primarily, he alters his perception of what constitutes his world by changing the focal points within it. The first major shift of focus that leads to Thoreau's re-perceiving of his world is obvious: Thoreau moves from the village to the woods, which positions him to be read as a champion of nature, which he is, in part. But the real shift of Thoreau's focus is more subtle. In moving from the village to the woods he also moves from concentrating on the society of people as a whole to concentrating on the individual. At Walden, Thoreau has now become the proverbial center of his universe: "Wherever I sat, there might I live, and the landscape radiated from me accordingly" (58). Everything that entered the radius emanating from Thoreau consequently belongs to what Peck would call his "proximate world" (118). These objects, or more specifically the flora, fauna, and landscape of Walden, are what will comprise Thoreau's composite community.

Peck makes the statement that "Walden is that axial point from which, by simply watching and waiting, one may 'behold' the full kaleidoscope of nature's phenomena," but in reading this one must be careful not to confuse the importance of place as being emphasized over the importance of the individual (118). Yes, whatever Thoreau perceives is established through his proximity to Walden, but at the same time whatever

Thoreau perceives is because he is Thoreau; someone else, although they may ascribe to similar values and ideologies as he does, will have a slightly different radius or become a different axial point purely because as a different individual they will experience a different perception. In either case, because Thoreau has placed himself not only at the axial point but establishes himself as the axial or radial point, he thus places a human—and consequently idea of an individual person as a member of the human community—at the center of Walden's universe.

With Rawlings and *Cross Creek* it is slightly more difficult to identify a similar kind of axial point that can be found in Thoreau at Walden. The reason for this is that despite Thoreau's extensive discussion of Nature in both the physical and philosophical senses during the course of *Walden*, the ultimate focus of the text itself is the individual, and more specifically, how to better the individual so as to foster a stronger community. One way to look to the differences in the focal points in both books is to consider the points of view from which they are written. In *Walden*, the individual is represented by Thoreau, the narrator. At the very onset of the book, *Walden*'s narrator places himself firmly as the center by telling the reader his rationale for maintaining use of the first person pronoun "I:"

> In most books, the I, or first person is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were any body else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. Moreover, I, on my side, require of every

> writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men's lives. (5)

Two main ideas are to be taken from this excerpt. First, that the use of the first person pronoun is to make it clear from whose perspective things are being perceived, and second, that the particular individual's experience is emphasized. Thoreau feels that he must use the first person pronoun because he is limited in the what experience he has; he can only participate in and reflect upon what he himself encounters and does not believe that he should rely on the experience of others when trying to offer his own account of living.

In *Cross Creek*, though, it is not so easy to pinpoint the center of the "world." It would be true to say that Rawlings is the overall narrator, but at times—at least on the surface—she is not focused so much on the individual as Thoreau is, but rather on the environment or on Cross Creek itself. Such is the observation that Peggy Prenshaw makes when considering the extent to which *Cross Creek* could be considered an autobiography of Rawlings's life, despite Rawlings's denial that she intended to write such a book. Specifically, Prenshaw points out that at times the surface text "only obliquely reveals the author, and more often than not camouflages her" (13). This kind of disappearance so to speak would prevent the reader from concentrating on how the particular individual encounters their certain experiences in their environment as Thoreau intends for them to do.

An example of such a moment when Rawlings downplays her own individual experience of living at Cross Creek is in the very opening paragraph of the book, which presents readers with a narrator that Prenshaw describes as strangely absent:

> Cross Creek is a bend in a country road, by land, and the flowing of Lochloosa Lake into Orange Lake, by water. We are four miles west of the small village of Island Grove, nine miles east of a turpentine still, and on the other sides we do not count distance at all, for the two lakes and the broad marshes create an infinite space between us and the horizon. (Rawlings 9)

In the opening of the book Rawlings avoids the "I" and makes herself a part of the "we" and performs what Prenshaw calls an act of linguistic deference (13). Prenshaw argues: "Anticipating that a reader might still be put off and resistant to the textualized presumption of Rawlings's writing about herself, she performs one more linguistic act of deference; she acknowledges and thus seeks to subvert the potential charge of egotism" and opts instead to not always place herself at the center of the narrative (13).

By including herself in what comprises the "we" of Cross Creek, Rawlings makes it somewhat difficult for readers to view her text wholly as an account of her own experience of connecting to a place. Instead, in cases such as the example above, Rawlings's experience becomes blended with that of her neighbors at the Creek, thus at times describing the connections of a collective community. Thinking of this in terms of Thoreau's previous statement about the use of the first person pronoun, this approach by Rawlings could be viewed in a positive or negative manner. On the one hand, it can be seen as an effort by Rawlings to expand her limited experience as an individual by figuratively taking on and taking into account the experience of her neighbors. However, on the other hand, doing this prevents Rawlings from concentrating on herself

as an individual, something that Thoreau feels is vital in order to foster a more successful community.

Thoreau's emphasis on the individual can be attributed in part to what Joel Porte describes as his "self-culture," something that Thoreau uses his retreat into Nature at Walden to establish and reflect upon. Porte defines self-culture: "It [self-culture] represents consciousness—a 'self-searching' and 'self-comprehending power'—employed to the end of developing a 'self-forming power'" (xi). To simplify, a person must reflect on and try to understand the state of their own self and then use that understanding and awareness to develop a better self. Porte goes on to elaborate, arguing that "If the locus of this work is initially personal, its use is finally social: the nurturing and elevating of the individual soul for the purpose of improving the condition of all humanity" (xi). The entire purpose of Thoreau's retreat to Walden Pond is to try to become a more autonomous individual; to do this, Thoreau must reflect upon his state of self and experiment with ways to go about improving that state. He will then impart what he has learned in *Walden*, which would ideally serve as a testimony to the kind of autonomous living that he believes should be the foundation of any kind of strong community.

Although when considering Rawlings the same goals of building a strong community and having a personal connection with Nature are still present, she does not place the same kind of emphasis on the individual in the way that Porte describes Thoreau as doing with the concept of self-culture. Instead, for Rawlings, although the individual remains important, the greater stress is placed on the individual as being part of the larger body of Life or Nature. One example of a moment when Rawlings makes

this kind of stress is when she begins to talk about the onset of spring at the Creek, which leads her to reflect on the notion of time and timelessness. According to Rawlings, the individual is bounded by time, whereas Life and Nature are timeless and thus without bounds. This realization comes to her as she gazes upon her fruitful pecan trees:

> A knowledge brushed me as briefly as though a bird had flown past me from the tree. Lives are only one with living. How dare we, in our egos, claim catastrophe in the rise and fall of the individual entity? There is only Life, and we are beads strung on its strong and endless thread. (255)

In this instance Rawlings is pointing out that she is but one small person who will make their way in the world. Life has gone on before her and it will go on after her, and although she may have her various successes and failures as an individual, in the scheme of things the more important thing is the vitality and recurrence of Nature.

However, despite the fact that in the previous example Rawlings's ultimate concern appears to be the persistence of Nature, there are still other moments in the text in which a version of the self-culture that Thoreau embodies is apparent. In "Hyacinth Drift," one of the most famous chapters in *Cross Creek*, Rawlings recounts a boat trip down the St. Johns River that she takes with a friend when she feels that she has lost her connection to the creek. As they navigated their way down the river, at times they had difficulty finding the right channels. It was not until Rawlings realized that if they turned off the motor and watched the direction that the hyacinth flowers were drifting with the current that they could more easily find which direction to travel. "Like all

simple facts," Rawlings reflects, "it was necessary to discover it for oneself" (359). This moment as well as the entire trip in general serves as a reminder that it is necessary for a person to periodically step away from society into Nature and take the time to concentrate on the self. It is only when a person is separated from distraction that they may notice the small things around them that will help lead to better introspection of themselves. For Rawlings, this occurs when she cuts the boat motor in order to observe her surroundings on the water, which leads her to noticing the drift of the hyacinths that lead her on her path. Lamar York suggests that this chapter "is a precise summation of [Rawlings's] philosophy of the healing powers of running water, her curative for depressed spirits" (104). This idea of the healing power of water can be extended more generally to the healing power of Nature that can be found via self-reflection.

Just as Rawlings uses her literal journey down the river as a metaphor for making a figurative journey of self-discovery, so too does Thoreau use his surroundings at Walden Pond in order to heighten his own introspection, and both of these examples demonstrate the authors' participation in the construction of their own self-culture. If one allows for Walden Pond to be a metaphor for the self, then it is through his interactions with this self that Thoreau draws his conclusions about it as well as his conclusions about the idea of community in general. Walden Pond, with its water "full of light and reflections," becomes a metaphor and a mirror that assists in reflecting and establishing Thoreau's self-culture (62). As Joseph Moldenhauer suggests, observing the wildlife at the pond can play an important role in helping Thoreau to construct his metaphor for the individual's and thus the community's ultimate quest for higher truths. For example, Thoreau describes watching a diving loon as follows:

> As I was paddling along the north shore…having looked in vain over the pond for a loon, suddenly one…set up his wild laugh and betrayed himself. I pursued with a paddle and he dived. … He dived again…. Each time, when he came to the surface, turning his head this way and that, he coolly surveyed the water and the land, and apparently chose his course so that he might come up where there was the widest expanse of water and at the greatest distance from the boat. It was surprising how quickly he made up his mind and put his resolve into execution. (159)

According to Moldenhauer, when Thoreau the narrator chases the diving loon or pursues other endeavors such as fishing, he is acting out his pursuit of higher truth (83).

The loon that Thoreau describes in this scene is diving deep into Walden, appearing "to know his course as surely under water as on the surface" (160). If one recalls the analogy of Walden Pond to the self, the entire scene of the loon diving into the pond can be read as a metaphor for Thoreau "diving" deeply into his own self. It is in this way that Moldenhauer reads the passage, with the pond being most significantly among other things a representation of the self, "the beholder's own profound nature;" or, if one wanted to apply Peck's terminology about perception, the perceiver's own profound nature (84). In addition to looking at this scene as demonstrating the search for higher truths, it could also be seen as representing part of the development of Thoreau's self-culture. Recalling Porte's definition of the term, the first step in achieving this kind of consciousness comes from self-searching, or diving like the loon deep within the self. Next comes the idea of self-comprehending power or the power to understand or have an awareness of one's self; this we see in the way the loon

orchestrates his dives, "survey[ing] the water and land" and "[choosing] his course" so that he surfaces at the spot with the most distance between itself and the boat. The development of the self-forming power has yet to be implicated in the loon scene, but one can be confident that the narrator will reflect upon the other aspects of the metaphor and employ them towards molding the self-autonomous individual that he is striving to be.

As Gordon Bigelow describes in his biography *Frontier Eden*, Rawlings was stirred by place, and summarizes Rawlings's own assertion that it would be hard for a man to find happiness until he found a place with which his spirit could "live in harmony" (2-3). Furthermore, if a person was to live in a place where they were out of harmony with their surroundings, it would lead to "a frustration amounting to a kind of death" (Bigelow 3). Rawlings experienced such frustration until she came to reside at Cross Creek, and even though she still needs to establish and revise her position in the community there, she remarks how she has found the place that she was looking for: "And after long years of spiritual homelessness, of nostalgia, here is that mystic loveliness of childhood again" (16). For Rawlings, "mystic loveliness" is that which she sees as the spiritual aspect of the environment, and until she came to Cross Creek, she felt "homeless." In finding her spiritual "home" at the Creek, she can proceed to build a relationship with what she calls its "mystic loveliness." It is to this "mystic loveliness" that a person bonds and the concept is what reminds a person that they are a piece of a larger whole, connected to the universe.

It is questionable as to whether or not Thoreau felt a similar kind of spiritual homelessness as Rawlings did. For him, the specific place within nature was less

important than its qualifications of being in nature and away from Concord society. Thoreau was frustrated with the way that people lived their lives in his community and sought to improve it by separating himself and focusing on improving himself as an individual. For him, a better community was the result of the people within it working on themselves as individuals. In becoming self-reliant in this way, individuals would then lay a stronger foundation and foster a better society as a whole. Rawlings, on the other hand, was searching for a specific place where she felt that she could belong. While Thoreau may have been attached to Walden Pond, his larger concern was that he demonstrated how an individual needed to be connected to Nature and wildness, or rather the tonic of wildness, which could be found just about anywhere. Ultimately, according to him, it can be found within a person, a conclusion he came to after deep introspection. Even if the difference in time period is accounted for, such as improved and more widespread methods of transportation, Walden was not as isolated as Cross Creek, so in a way it was more important for Rawlings to feel a strong connection to her specific place since she would not be able to venture into the village as periodically as Thoreau did and was taking a bigger risk by investing more time and money in a more permanent settlement[5].

Later in his biography Bellman goes on to say that "Mrs. Rawlings was an environmentalist, and she clearly realized that not everyone would do well in any one particular place," hence why it was so important to pay attention what one found there

---

[5] Bellman notes that readers have to put aside their own preferences and preconceptions about a place in order to understand how Rawlings could give herself "so intensely—not completely, by any means, and certainly not permanently, just intensely" to a particular place (104). He is alluding to the fact that Rawlings's residence was not solely at Cross Creek since she bought an ocean cottage in Crescent Beach. The popularity of *The Yearling* caused many kinds of visitors to "drop by" at the Creek, which Rawlings found very distracting. She sometimes used the cottage to write or as a retreat for her and her husband, Norman Baskin, who owned a hotel in the nearby St. Augustine (Silverman 167-9).

(104). In relation to Thoreau and Rawlings, this notion can relate to their nuanced philosophies and outlooks on human relationships and is likely a reason why Rawlings becomes more connected to and dependent on her human community at Cross Creek than Thoreau did at Walden. Thoreau was less isolated than Rawlings was, but at the same time he was more actively trying to make a statement about a way of life and relay that to his neighbors (or rather, to the members of the neighboring society). At times Thoreau's writing can be more prescriptive as to what individuals need to do in order to improve their society as he sets out to live it by example, whereas Rawlings is usually more reflective about what she has learned through her experiences that eventually lead to improving the Creek society. Accounting for this difference in their approaches, for their own particular purposes, each author was successful in their respective places: each retreated into Nature with the specific purpose of connecting to it by learning about themselves as individuals. Without first understanding themselves as such, Rawlings and Thoreau would not have been able to successfully forge a relationship with either their environment or their fellow man.

Similar to the way Bigelow points out how Rawlings is stirred by place, Cauthen observes how a love of nature, mankind, and the universe puts a person in touch with the "great secret answer" and that "experiencing and writing with 'holy attentiveness'…was her [Rawlings's] truest expression of love" (67). As far as nature is concerned, Thoreau expresses a similar kind of love. But an important difference between Rawlings and Thoreau is that Rawlings felt a connection to nature that was tied to a specific place while Thoreau re-perceived his world so that it included the different aspects of Nature. Thus, Thoreau was able to find connection to Nature anywhere, and

especially within himself. This perhaps makes Thoreau more "transcendental" than Rawlings in the sense that he did not rely on the physical location of Walden Pond in order to be more connected with the universe. However, such a statement is not to suggest that because Rawlings was so connected to Cross Creek as a place means that she was not transcendental in her own way.

Not everyone has the means, opportunity, or desire to isolate themselves as much as Thoreau did, and so the extent to which they can remove themselves from the influences of society is limited. In making a loose comparison between *Walden* and *Cross Creek*, Prenshaw suggests that *Cross Creek* is a more personal book than Thoreau's because it is "more steeped in dailiness" ("Otherness" 21). She goes on to comment that *Cross Creek* is "predicated on the assumption that transcendent knowledge can only be trusted if it maintains constant intercourse with the changeable, immanent life we live as needy animals with active intelligence and spirit" (21).

According to this, the idea of transcendence and the constancy of the universe must remain connected to the variations of daily life. Although it is not always what is emphasized in *Walden*, Thoreau maintains a daily routine at the pond with things like long walks in the woods and visits into town. But despite this, he is not just living simply but living intensely (as in highly focused) while he is there. He may be connected to what changes or varies within nature, but because of his effort to isolate himself he would be less connected to the variety of life within human society. Since he was living with such focus and intent at the pond, the important question of what happened to his lifestyle upon leaving Walden arises, especially the question of if his experience of transcendence would remain intact when he "re-enters" the human world.

Prenshaw's crafting the phrase "steeped in dailiness" creates an interesting image because the verb "steeped" suggests a more slow and diffusive kind of action. Or, more specifically, it suggests that it might take a some time for an average person to recognize and understand the larger or transcendent aspects of life. On a similar note, it also suggests that such an understanding cannot be reached if the search for what could be considered transcendent occurs in isolation from daily life. In other words, experiencing the transcendent takes time and takes connection to one's everyday living.

Furthermore, Prenshaw thinks that a big challenge for Rawlings was being able to subordinate the "daily" in order to write about larger transcendent ideas. This is a fair statement that can be extended by acknowledging that at times Rawlings also struggles to balance the two entities of the daily and the transcendent, similar to the way that she previously tried to grasp the balance between her conception of the creative and destructive forces of the world. For example, Rawlings will be philosophical about life and nature in one place and then undercut it in another. Such a place that shows Rawlings struggling to create balance is in the opening of the "Winter" chapter when she begins by referring to hunting, remarking: "We have one fixed seasonal dividing line. While spring and summer and fall merge silently one into the other, we announce winter with the crackling of gun shot. On November 20 our hunting season opens" (322). What Rawlings writes in these first few lines is an example of man arbitrarily putting boundaries on nature by marking the seasons for himself with a gun shot and arbitrary calendar date. Man sometimes has difficulty finding his own way to differentiate the change from fall to winter within nature (especially in a place like Florida where the difference in season is not so extreme), thus showing how little

attention man often pays his environment. Instead of looking for natural signs in the environment, he announces the change himself with gunfire, showing that man still has a tendency to try to master nature. It also shows how man at times serves as a destructive force to contrast Nature's creative force.

Rawlings, at least, has a better awareness of this scenario, and is quick to follow her chapter opening with an explanation of why residents of the Creek get so excited when winter and thus hunting season begins: "Ahead of us is the good season, when growth is slowed and a very little hoeing keeps clean the farm fields, the groves and the gardens. It is the tidy time. The lush exuberance of summer is forgotten and the hurricanes of the fall. All is neat and ordered" (322). Because she strives to have a greater awareness of how people and their environment are tied together, Rawlings is able to recognize that part of the reason people are so exuberant when hunting season begins is because people do not have to worry as much about the hardships of nature and instead can enjoy what it has to offer. Again, it is somewhat problematic that a destructive activity like hunting is used in order to enjoy or appreciate nature, but at the same time, Rawlings in particular uses the sport as a medium (or even at times as an excuse) to go deeper into the woods and experience the "mystic loveliness" there.

Their particular approaches may vary slightly, but the fact remains the same that Rawlings and Thoreau are each actively engaged with their surrounding environment. It is such engagement that leads them to a stronger connection with their respective places, or, in a larger sense, to a stronger connection with Nature. It is also this kind of active engagement that brings Thoreau and Rawlings a step closer to what Rawlings

calls holy harmony, and still in turn a step closer to a transcendent knowledge of their surroundings that are tied to their everyday lives and experiences.

CONCLUSION

The concept of community for both Rawlings and Thoreau expands to include the environment through changing how they each perceive their worlds. For Thoreau, the cultivation of the community results from the cultivation of the self, and he leaves Walden when he concludes that reflection upon and cultivation of one's self is not necessarily dependant on physically being in a specific place. In Rawlings's case, cultivation of the self is just as important, but in addition to that she emphasizes man's need to be tied to a specific place. This connection will in turn help lead an individual to lose any potential sense of what she calls spiritual homelessness. Each author, though, makes an active effort to deconstruct the different elements of their surroundings and reconstruct them in a new way that expands their conception of what it means to be a part of a community. In addition, their reconstructions also contribute to the way in which they ascribe meaning to their communities.

This idea of expanding one's conception of what comprises a community can relate to Thoreau's idea of keeping some of the wilderness undisturbed and Richardson's similar interpretation that we should live out our lives within their boundaries or limitations. Richardson puts forth the idea that one of the ways that Thoreau "urges us toward socially responsible actions and lives is [his] acceptance of life within limits" (243). To support this point, Richardson turns to Wendell Berry, whom he quotes as stating: "The reason [for needing to maintain a human scale in a

world of ever larger buildings, cities, roads, and machines] is that we cannot live except within limits, and these limits are of many kinds: spatial, material, moral, spiritual. The world has room for many people who are content to live as humans, but only for a relative few intent to live as giants or as gods" (244). It is evident from Thoreau's mantra of "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!" in the "Where I Lived and What I Lived For" chapter that he is not striving to live as anything greater than he can be as an individual man, nor does he recommend that anyone else try to live beyond their literal and figurative capabilities.

Individuals are bound or limited by their physical self. People's limits expand when they turn to the limitlessness of nature. Rawlings makes a similar comparison when she reflects on how an individual is bounded by time, yet Life—or in this sense, Nature—is not. However, according to Thoreau's argument, parts of Nature's limitlessness should be left undisturbed, thus keeping an individual's boundaries in check. The individual or self is simultaneously limited and limitless. As one person we can only effect so much change, but at the same time we may "dive deep" like the loon into Walden Pond or watch for drifting hyacinths on the St. Johns River to heighten our introspection and advance our inner revelations.

Thoreau's perception of community does not align with the kind of homogeneity that Jones alludes to in her statement about Rawlings's "true community" at Cross Creek. In her essay Jones states "that ultimate tolerance of each other's differences and cohesion in the face of adversity—that vital union—makes true community and true home, which is not homogeneity, possible at Cross Creek" (230). When Jones says that Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's "true community" at Cross Creek is not the same as

homogeneity, she is referring more overtly to racial and social class issues. In her argument, she is suggesting that a true community does not mean the same thing as a white community or a middle class community, and that same conception of a community not necessarily being homogenous can extend to Thoreau. As he demonstrates in *Walden*, the definition of community can be re-perceived and re-constructed to include all elements of nature, just as Jones suggests that Rawlings's community expanded to include all elements of society. For Jones, in the case of Rawlings, community did not necessarily mean whiteness; instead it meant common humanity, or "human-ness." At the same time, one could make a similar argument that just as not everyone in Rawlings's community was not white, not everything in Thoreau's community was human. Instead, he espoused a perception of community that more directly encompassed the land and the surrounding elements of nature in a more universal definition.

In both cases, Thoreau and Rawlings have expanded or redefined what their community consists of. Their interpretation is not purely a white community or even a human one, but instead a more universal population, one that is inclusive of Nature. But the matter remains as to making an effort to define what "community" means, especially as it pertains not only to man's relationship to man, but to man's relationship with Nature. Aldo Leopold comes the closest to describing such a correlation of man to the environment in the forward to his book *Sand County Almanac*, stating "that land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that the land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics" (viii). He goes on to explain how land yields a "cultural harvest," which is a known but oft forgotten fact. In saying this, Leopold is

implicitly saying that human culture is established and developed not only through the social interactions between people, but also by the various interactions between people and the land. Finch's introduction to Leopold more explicitly states Leopold's project: to link the "profound aspects of human experience" to "proper understanding and perception of the natural world" and to point out that encounters with the wild can reveal important truths about human nature (xxii).

According to Leopold, all ethics are based on the premise that the individual is a member of a community that consists of interdependent parts. The individual's instincts push him to compete against the other parts within the community, but his ethics encourage him to cooperate with them (203). Given this scenario, in order to create a land ethic, all that one must do is "simply" broaden or enlarge the boundaries of the community to include the land along with its flora and fauna (204). Leopold's land ethic also calls for a recasting of man into the role of citizen rather than conqueror of nature. Aldo's idea of the land ethic can be viewed as reminiscent of transcendent ideas to look to the interdependent parts of the universe.

In their respective works, Thoreau and Rawlings are trying in their own ways to reap their own "cultural harvests." It is apparent that Thoreau and Rawlings are participating in reconstructing their localities in a such a way that aligns with Leopold's idea of a land ethic, but they are doing so in different ways. Thoreau is re-worlding Walden to include the environment like Leopold suggests, and in doing so his ethics and philosophies become more connected to the land. Although perhaps not his primary purpose in moving to Walden, once there Thoreau begins to espouse the kind

of attitude towards the land that Leopold will more directly articulate over fifty years later.

Rawlings, on the other hand, while also re-worlding Cross Creek in a sense, does not concentrate on the land aspect to the same degree that Thoreau does in his text. Rawlings makes a more conscious effort to depict specific people she knows and the relationships that she has at the Creek. Both Rawlings and Thoreau become intimately connected with nature and their environment, but Rawlings seems to become more attached to Cross Creek than Thoreau does to Walden, although arguably it is his attachment to the Concord society that prompts him to retreat to Walden in order to reflect on ways to improve it. The reason for such an assumption that Thoreau is not as attached to Walden as Rawlings is to Cross Creek is because he eventually concludes that the self-discovery and awareness that he seeks need not be tied to a particular place because it can always be found within himself. If Thoreau fosters what is considered a strong sense of self, then Rawlings develops and cultivates what her few critics have called a "sense of place," as pointed out by Lamar York. In *Cross Creek* Rawlings says that the adjustment to place is as important as the adjustment of man to man; it can also be said that the adjustment to place is as important as a new adjustment to the self (39).

The important thing to take away from reading Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's *Cross Creek* and Thoreau's *Walden* is that the best way for an individual to establish, define, or become a part of a community is to actively participate in its construction. For these authors, that means to break their specific places—including the environment and the human communities present there— down into that place's various parts and then put them together again in a way that not only expands the author's original

interpretation of the place and its community, but also gives a greater depth to that place's meaning and a greater depth to their individual sense of self.

“WORKS CITED

Bellman, Samuel Irving. “Land of Heart's Desire: *Cross Creek*.” *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*. New York: Twayne, 1974. 102-18. Print.

Bigelow, Gordon E. *Frontier Eden: The Literary Career of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*. Gainesville: University of Florida, 1966. Print.

---. “Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’ Wilderness.” *The Sewanee Review* 73.3 (1965): 299-310. Print.

Bridgman, Richard. *Dark Thoreau*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1982. Print.

Cauthen, Sudye. “Sacred Place in the Work of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings.” *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 11 (2002): 60-70. Print.

Dukes, Thomas. “*Cross Creek* as the Autobiography of an Alienated Woman.” *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 2 (1989): 89-107. Print.

Finch, Robert. “The Delights and Dilemmas of *A Sand County Almanac*.” Introduction. *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987. Print.

Henry, Patrick. “*Cross Creek*: Rawlings's Transcendentalism.” *Teaching Guide to Cross Creek*. University of Central Florida. Web. 11 Nov. 2009.

"Introduction." Introduction. *The Uncollected Writings of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings*. Ed. Rodger L. Tarr and Brent E. Kinser. Gainesville: University of Florida, 2007. 1-14. Print.

Jones, Carolyn M. "Race and the Rural in Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's *Cross Creek*." *Mississippi Quarterly* 57.2 (2004): 215-30. Print.

Lamme, Ary J. "Preserving Special Places." *Geographical Review* 79.2 (1989): 195-209. Print.

Leopold, Aldo. *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989. Print.

Marx, Leo. "Transcendental Pastoral." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Walden*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. 101-12. Print.

Moldenhauer, Joseph J. "Paradox in *Walden*." *Twentieth Interpretations of Walden*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. 73-84. Print.

Moller, Mary E. *Thoreau in the Human Community*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1980. Print.

Peck, Daniel. "The Worlding of Walden." *Thoreau's Morning Work*. New Haven/London: Yale UP, 1990. 117-33. Print.

Porte, Joel. *Consciousness and Culture: Emerson and Thoreau Reviewed*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2004. Print.

Prenshaw, Peggy Whitman. "Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings: Woman, Writer, and Resident of Cross Creek." *The Rawlings Journal* 1 (1988): 1-17. Print.

---. "The Otherness of Cross Creek." *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 4 (1992): 17-23. Print.

Rawlings, Marjorie Kinnan. *Cross Creek*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. Print.

---. “Regional Literature of the South.” *The English Journal* 29.2 (1940): 89-97. Print.

Richardson, Robert D. “The Social Ethics in *Walden*.” *Critical Essays on Henry David Thoreau's Walden*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1988. 235-48. Print.

Schneider, Richard J. “*Walden*.” *The Cambridge Companion to Thoreau*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1995. 92-106. Print.

Silverthorne, Elizabeth. *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings: Sojourner at Cross Creek*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 1988. Print.

Tarr, C. Anita. “The Evolution of a “Southern ‘Liberal’”: Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and Race.” *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 15 (2007): 141-62. Print.

Thoreau, Henry D. *Walden*. *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings*. 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2008. 5-224. Print.

Tsunemoto, Hiroshi. “A Female Thoreau in Florida.” *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 8 (1997): 105-11. Print.

Watkins, James. “Self-Location and the Racial Other: Reading *Cross Creek* as Southern Autobiography.” *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* 11 (2002): 15-43. Print.

York, Lamar. “Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’s Rivers.” *The Southern Literary Journal* 9.2 (1977): 91-107. JSTOR. Web. 19 Oct. 2009.