
Critical Review of the Sounds of the Art of the Essayist

THE ART OF THE ESSAYIST

Personification

Commerce is unexpectedly confident and serene, alert, adventurous and unwearied. (84)

Through the personification of commerce Thoreau is able to show that commerce fluctuates in the same manner as humanity. The adjectives he uses to describe commerce show that commerce has some of the same tendencies as humans, and Thoreau believes that it is these tendencies that make commerce so successful.

Solitude

Allusion who keeps himself more secret than ever did Goffe or Whalley. (96)

Thoreau is making a historical allusion to William Goffe and Edward Whalley who were English regicides during the English civil war. They were signers of the death warrant for Charles I then after his Restoration in 1660 they fled to America for a life of seclusion in Hadley, Massachusetts. The use of this allusion contributes to Thoreau's style because it expresses the remarkable secrecy and remoteness of the old settlers' life. This also shows the contrasts in this man because Thoreau says he is most wise and humorous (96) but also discusses his almost anti-social tendencies.

Visitors

Hyperbole speech is for the convenience of those who are hard of hearing (98)

In this hyperbole Thoreau is exaggerating his proposition that silence and space are effective tools for communication. Thoreau believes that big thoughts in big words (98) have to run a course or two (98) before comprehension is truly possible. For Thoreau, the best conversations travel through space and silence. The exaggeration that speech is a convenience for the hard of hearing is a hyperbole because that would be an impossible situation. He uses this hyperbole to show that humanity places too much emphasis on speech. For Thoreau, speech is more important to those who are hard of hearing than silence will ever be to the average person.

The Village

Metonymy perhaps my body would find its way home if its master should forsake it. (117)

Thoreau uses the word master as a substitute for the word I. Master logically connects to Thoreau's mind or intuition. Thoreau has no difficulty using the word I in other parts of Walden, but he uses master here because in this situation his mind is separate from his body. Therefore, the full I cannot exist because Thoreau's mind and body are so connected.

Higher Laws

Pun I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement to leave off eating animals. (147-148)

By using the words leave off Thoreau creates a paronomasia pun because leave off has a similar structure to live off. This creates the effect that to leave off eating animals, in reality, is an absurd suggestion because humans must live off eating animals.

Brute Neighbors

Metaphor

Suddenly your adversary's checker disappears beneath the board, and the problem is to place yours nearest to where his will appear again. (159)

Thoreau uses the metaphor of the checker board to provide a more familiar example for his readers in the description of a game he played with a loon. This metaphor gives the effect that people often find themselves in unexpected situations, and they may never suspect their adversary to play so well.

The Pond in Winter

Extended Metaphor the long lost bottom of Walden Pond (191).

Thoreau uses the bottomless aspect of Walden Pond to illustrate many different points. By using the pond as a metaphor Thoreau shows his readers that stories are often without foundation, like the pond.

He also says, It is remarkable how long men will believe in the bottomlessness of a pond without taking the trouble to sound it. (191) Using this metaphor for the pond and society, Thoreau tells his readers that they should investigate and not draw rapid conclusions because the depth of any aspect of society can not be known until it undergoes a thorough investigation.

Furthermore, Thoreau says, What if all ponds were made shallow? Would it not react the minds of men? I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol. While men believe in the infinite some ponds will be thought to be bottomless. (191) In this passage Thoreau tells the reader that he is using the bottomlessness of the pond as a metaphor for society. He makes the point that society will invent its own circumstances to remain inquisitive in an infinite search for truth.

Conclusion

Paradox the dead dry life of society (221).

Thoreau creates a paradox by using the adjective dead to describe life. This is a paradox because life is impossible if one is dead. Thoreau expresses his attitude about materialistic societies in this paradox. Life has become so trivial that, in effect, any hope of a real,

meaningful life is dead.

Simile The life in us is like the water in the river. (221)

For Thoreau, life may be similar to the water in the river, because it flows over anything in its path, it babbles or communicates with everything it meets, follows many different directions, continually has something to keep it connected, or on a transcendental level, it would have no clear beginning or end. Thoreau uses this simile to achieve a philosophic effect and as the beginning of a metaphor.

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