The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JEROME LAWRENCE AND ROBERT E. LEE

Lee and Lawrence both grew up in Ohio, and became writing partners early in their career. Together they wrote almost 40 works, most with social and political messages. They got started writing for radio, and quickly became one of the most prolific radio duos of the decade. They then turned to live theater, where they continued to have success. *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* is their most celebrated work, and was a wildly popular production in both 1969 and 1970.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail is a direct criticism of the United States government's decision to invade Vietnam in 1955. At the time of the play's first performance, a military draft for the Vietnam War was in effect and among some Americans the sense that the objectives of the war were both unclear and not obviously moral. Virulent protests broke out, especially on college campuses (this play was first performed at Ohio State.) The play is a kind of protest literature that likens Vietnam to other atrocities committed by the American government (like Slavery and other unjust wars, such as the 19th century war against Mexico) over the course of American history.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Lee and Lawrence numbered among a variety of writers, musicians, and artists who in the 1960s and 1970s used their work to contribute to a growing protest movement against the American war in Vietnam. In *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*, Lee and Lawrence also place themselves in a kind of dialogue with Transcendentalist author Henry David Thoreau, whose literary political protest (*Walden*) is used by this play to ask questions about Vietnam.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*
- **When Written:** 1969
- **Where Written:** United States
- **When Published:** 1969
- **Literary Period:** Midcentury; Protest literature
- **Genre:** Play
- **Setting:** Concord, Massachusetts / Walden Pond
- **Climax:** In a dream sequence, all the characters in the play become leaders and soldiers in the Mexican war.

EXTRA CREDIT

The Nation's Capitol. The first professional performance of *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* took place at the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. on October 23, 1970—a fitting location given the play's political significance.

PLOT SUMMARY

The play takes place over the course of a night that Henry spends in jail. In jail, Henry talks with his simple but earnest cellmate Baily, who is awaiting trial. The play incorporates various flashbacks tracking the series of events that led to Henry's arrest. The play's first flashback shows Henry sitting in on one of Waldo's lectures at Harvard, then shows Henry's brief career as a teacher, which ends when Henry is made to whip his students with a belt for asking too many questions and his subsequent decision to quit rather than having to perform such punishment again.

We learn that Henry and his brother John tried to start an alternative school, where instead of a classroom students met in a meadow to talk about nature and life—but Henry and John lose all their students, whose parents don't approve of their transcendentalist teaching. During one of these classes Ellen Sewell is introduced—Henry and John both find her lovely. Henry tries to teach her about transcendentalism but cannot make her understand. Later, John proposes to Ellen but she says no. Henry and John celebrate their own brotherhood in response.

This scene fades into the scene of John's funeral—a small cut from a rusty blade killed him, and Henry is disgusted at the meaninglessness of the death. After this tragedy, Henry begins working for Waldo on his property and builds his cabin by Walden, a secluded pond on Waldo's estate. He mentors Waldo's young son Edward, and forms a close relationship with Waldo's wife, Lydian.

The scene explaining why Henry is in jail closes out the first act. He refuses to pay his taxes because he will not give money to a government using its power to wage what he considers to be the unjust Mexican War. When Waldo hears of Henry's imprisonment he arrives at the jailhouse and asks Henry why he is in jail. In response, Henry asks Waldo why he *isn't* in jail.

In another flashback we see that one day an escaped slave called Williams stops by Henry's cabin at Walden Pond. Williams is trying to reach Canada to attain freedom. The two men talk about the nature of freedom and the depravity of laws

that victimize blacks. This scene gives way to one in which Henry and Waldo are having a heated argument. Williams was killed during his escape to Canada, and Henry wishes Waldo would wield his influence to speak out against slavery and the unjust war happening in Mexico. Waldo and Henry each criticize the other's view of activism, and both leave the conversation hurt. Waldo does promise, however, to speak in the town square against segregation and the war.

However, Waldo does not appear in the town square, and Henry becomes despondent. The action of the play takes on a dream-like quality, and though Henry screams he cannot make himself heard. The play's characters come onstage as soldiers and generals. Waldo becomes the US president. Everyone is carrying a gun and being made to shoot. Henry sees his brother John has been shot, and begs God not to let John die again.

Henry wakes up to the constable Sam telling him his taxes have been paid by his aunt. Henry does not want to go, but agrees on the condition that Baily be granted a speedy trial. In his closing speech, Henry says he cannot go back to Walden, because he is needed elsewhere.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Henry David Thoreau – Henry is the defiant, young, Harvard-educated protagonist and the play's imaginative interpretation of the historical Henry David Thoreau, who was a leading thinker in the Transcendentalist tradition and wrote the book *Walden*. Henry is deeply passionate about resisting both the United States government's war in Mexico and its segregationist policies in the North. He is imprisoned for refusing to pay his taxes because he does not want to contribute funds that will end up furthering what he sees as the slaughter in Mexico. The play dramatizes his thoughts and conversations regarding his ideas during the night he spends in jail.

Ralph Waldo Emerson – Henry's mentor, whom Henry met while at Harvard. "Waldo" is a deeply respected and famous scholar and lecturer. Though he is intellectually deft and very insightful with respect to abstract concepts, Henry argues that Waldo is too concerned about public opinion to speak out, as Henry does, against segregation and the war. Waldo is modeled on the real historical figure Ralph Waldo Emerson, whom the real Henry David Thoreau knew well and was a leading thinker in the Transcendentalist movement.

John Thoreau – Henry's beloved brother. John, like Henry, is thoughtful and passionate, and the only person Henry seems to love with unbridled affection. John dies from an infection caused by a rusty razor blade, a death that Henry sees as pointless and meaningless, and which he connects to the deaths of soldiers in war.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Bailey – Henry's cellmate in the jail, an uneducated man who is accused of arson and awaiting a trial. He is deeply impressed by Henry's intelligence. Henry eventually persuades Sam, the constable, to give Bailey a speedy trial.

Mrs. Thoreau – Henry's mother, who worries about her son getting into trouble more than anything else, and doesn't seem to have a moral compass. She fears shame more than she fears wrongdoing.

Lydian Emerson – Waldo's wife. Lydian and Henry have a deep mutual affection for one another that approaches attraction, but they are both too loyal to Waldo to ever act on it.

Edward Emerson – Waldo and Lydian's son. Edward is an inquisitive boy who wishes Henry were his real father, since Waldo is so often absent as he travels and lectures.

Deacon Ball – The authoritarian and highly traditional head of the school board where Henry once taught. Ball and Henry butt heads over Henry's refusal to follow the school board's directions about education policy, including its insistence that Henry dole out corporal punishment to students.

Ellen Sewell – Ellen is a beautiful young woman whom both Henry and John are attracted to. Though she is curious and fairly intelligent, she resists the Thoreau brothers and their thinking because her father disapproves of Transcendentalism.

Sam Staples – The constable who—unwillingly—takes Henry to jail. He follows orders even when he does not wish to. Though he is not a bad man, he is a deeply compliant one.

Henry Williams – The freed slave whom Henry meets at Walden. Williams dies while trying to escape to Canada.

Potter – A curious young boy in Henry's classroom, whom Henry is forced to punish.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

HISTORY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING FROM THE PAST

The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail draws a parallel between the U.S. war against Mexico in the 1840s and the Vietnam War of the 1960s, which was being waged at the time when the play was written and first performed. One of the most prominent overarching suggestions made by the play is that violence, war, evil, and corruption will repeat themselves over and over if we do not take it upon ourselves to examine

our history and learn from the past. Early in the play, for example, Emerson has trouble remembering Henry David Thoreau's name. This opening gesture suggests that it is all too easy to forget Thoreau and the historical moment that produced him.

In Henry's closing speech, he notes that he has "several more lives to live"—and cannot afford to spend too much more time at Walden Pond, where he has been living in relative isolation and writing his book *Walden*. The suggestion is that Thoreau, or a version of him, is also needed in the present moment. The Vietnam War (like the Mexican War) needs vocal, active people to resist it.

There is another parallel drawn between these wars and the treatment of African-Americans. Henry, when talking about escaped slave Henry Williams's flight to Canada, pronounces the word "Cañada" with a Spanish tilde. This gesture links the enslavement and persecution of Black Americans with the violence and barbarity of the unjust Mexican War. Vietnam, the contemporary war of this play, is then implicitly added to this lineage. The suggestion is that Vietnam—a mid-20th century foreign war—is a product of America's failure to learn from its worst mistakes of the past. Each new historical atrocity is a version of an old one.

PROTEST, RESISTANCE, COMMUNITY, AND ACTION

The play repeatedly wonders about civil disobedience, political action (and inaction), and protest. It asks: which forms of resistance are effective? What is the best way for a citizen to stand up against corruption? Must we work within the existing system to effect change or separate ourselves from the system and work outside of it? Early in the play, we see Henry struggle with how best to effect meaningful action. He is a teacher, and must temper his defiance against the school board in order to ensure he will retain his job and still be available to his students. But he is ordered to flog the students, and this violence disgusts him so much that he quits.

This question about working within a system or apart from it is one that endures throughout the play. Waldo (Ralph Waldo Emerson) wields an immense amount of influence, in part because he is careful about obeying rules and avoids being excluded by the community. Henry is the opposite—he is defiant, angry, and his retreat to Walden to live in and contemplate nature in isolation is criticized by Waldo as ineffectual and useless. How can he help people escape injustice if he is away in the woods? But Henry's criticism of Waldo also has merit. Waldo is limited by his abstract thinking and desire for belonging and respect—all of which stops him from speaking out against the Mexican War.

Another issue raised by the play is the problem of community—is it best to work alone as Henry and James (self-proclaimed "celibates") do? Or with others, as Waldo, the (admittedly inadequate) family man does? This discussion is yet again deeply relevant to Vietnam. Activists, artists and politicians were often at odds in their ideas of how best to effect change. A new culture of protest was forming, especially among young Americans and students who wanted to resist a war in which participation for many was, because of the military draft, literally compulsory? The play ultimately portrays resistance as not just lonely defiance (as it is for Henry) nor as merely removed and abstract (as it is for Waldo)—instead it is a complex combination of the two.

WAR

The play is decidedly anti-war, and promotes a generally pacifist message throughout. The play emphasizes what it sees as the senselessness of soldiers' deaths. When Henry's brother John dies from an infection after nicking his finger with a rusty blade, Henry is disgusted by the absurdity of such a death, and wonders how God could possibly let a good man die for such a silly reason. Later, Henry dreams in jail of fighting in the Mexican War. During the dream, John is shot—and Henry begs John not to die—"not again." There is a suggestion in these "two deaths" of John's that his wartime death is just as senseless and absurd and *meaningless* as John's original death.

The play itself engages in a kind of activism by demonstrating the uselessness of war during a time when a huge amount of America's resources were tied up in the particularly expensive (in terms of both capital and human lives) Vietnam War. The play asks its audience what, exactly, are those sacrifices in the name of? In doing so it joined a chorus of protest artists asking similar anti-war questions at the time.

EDUCATION, THOUGHT, INFORMATION, AND LEARNING

The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail focuses on the importance of teaching, learning, and education, especially because both Waldo and Henry are teachers of sorts. But the play also wonders what constitutes a "real" education. The school board controls the learning that students do in school, and Henry (when he is still employed by the board) laments that their learning is limited and controlled by administrative interests. At the same time, however, Henry notes that thought can't actually be controlled by governing bodies, no matter how hard the governing bodies try. When he is in jail, he gestures to (the notably imaginary) **walls** around him and victoriously notes that these walls cannot constrain his thoughts, which can sail through them like a "rock through the air." The government can control information, but it will never be able to control thought, so long as citizens like Henry keep

their minds open.

The play also explores the difference between practical experiential learning and abstract learning. Waldo learns from books and lectures, while Henry learns from "being"—he believes a classroom is an inferior place for learning. But Henry would never have become Henry without attending Harvard and being inspired by Waldo. The two of them together make up a kind of cycle of education and learning in which the "thinkers" and the "doers" both have their place.

COMPLACENCY, CONFORMITY, AND RESPONSIBILITY

This play is a resounding warning against complacency and conformity. Though it wonders about how best to resist authority, effect change, and educate, it is always steadfast in its stand against complacency, declaring that to obey your government without question is to be complicit in the crimes your government may commit. Henry is adamant that Waldo, by refusing to speak out against the war, is effectively endorsing it. This image is confirmed and underscored by the climactic dream scene in the second act, in which the play's characters become commanders, generals, and soldiers in the Mexican War. Each of them directly participates in the killing. Waldo even becomes the president—meaning that within the world of the dream, he assumes responsibility for the entire war, with the clear suggestion that by not advocating against the war he is therefore responsible for it.

The play insists that these are the stakes of complacency: blind obedience is the equivalent of active endorsement. We are all responsible for the actions of our government. Once again this is a striking message to Vietnam-era Americans, that ambivalence has no place in this social and political climate.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE CELL WALLS

The play is staged so that the walls that enclose Henry and Bailey in their cell are imaginary. There is an imaginary window in the back wall, and the beds sit up against the imaginary sidewalls of the cell. The walls are a symbol of the power and importance of freedom of thought. Physical walls that can contain or restrict thought do not exist—Henry points this out more than once over the course of the play. The fact that the walls are not even visible to the audience underscores their irrelevance to Henry. What's more, the walls in the play are "constructed" by the audience, in the sense that the audience imagines them into place around the characters on the stage. This emphasizes that thought can constrain as well as liberate if we are not diligent about wielding our intellect carefully and remaining open, inquisitive, and willing to challenge authority.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Hill and Wang edition of *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* published in 2001.

Act 1 Quotes

"I've forgotten the name of my best friend!"

Related Characters: Ralph Waldo Emerson (speaker), Henry David Thoreau

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In this opening scene, we're greeted by the sight of Henry David Thoreau in his (invisible) prison cell--and, on the other side of the stage, Ralph Waldo Emerson (or a literary version of Emerson called "Waldo," anyway), who is claiming that he's forgotten the name of his best friend. The mechanics of the scene couldn't be clearer--without an ounce of explanation, we understand that Waldo's best friend was Henry, the man who's in prison now.

In real life, Emerson and Thoreau were good friends who differed in their interpretations of social activism. At the end of his life, Emerson's memory began to fail him--an event that the playwrights take as a symbol for his ideological distancing from Thoreau's "radical" methods of political engagement.

"Cast conformity behind you!"
"Cast...Conformity...Behind You...!"

Related Characters: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, we see Henry learning from his great teacher, Waldo, during his time as a student at Harvard. Waldo is an important role model for Henry because Waldo celebrates the value of free-thinking and counterculture. And yet even in this early scene, the limits of Henry's collaboration with Waldo are clear. Waldo tells Henry to ignore conformity and all its forms--but, paradoxically, Henry is literally conforming in the act of learning from Waldo and repeating his words exactly.

The passage highlights the paradoxes of education itself: is it ever possible, the playwrights seem to ask, to learn how to rebel from another person? Henry thinks that Waldo can teach him how to be free, but by the end of the play, the limits of such a model of education are clear. Only Henry can teach himself how to fight conformity.

> I want to be as much as possible like Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Related Characters: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Henry is still a young, idealistic man--flirting with the doctrine of transcendentalism as pioneered by Ralph Waldo Emerson. And yet it's also clear that Henry doesn't really understand such a doctrine fully. Although transcendentalism and free thinking are all about individuality, Henry chooses to mimic a transcendentalist perfectly--he aims to be exactly like his teacher.

Henry, at this early point in the story, is something of an armchair adventurer. He likes Waldo's ideas about liberty and freedom, but only because he hasn't really thought them through--he's more interested in having a role model (Waldo) than he is in truly embodying the ideas that Waldo stood for. By the end of the play, however, their roles will seem to have reversed--Henry will have learned how to stand for his own beliefs, eschewing the empty comforts of role models, heroes, and self-described sages.

> I refuse to commit murder. That's why I'm here.

Related Characters: Bailey, Henry David Thoreau (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Henry explains his political ideals to his cellmate, Bailey. Henry explains that he's been sent to jail because of his refusal to pay taxes: as he knows very well, his taxes will be used to subsidize a bloody American war in the Southwest, which will result in the deaths of thousands of American and Mexican citizens. In short, Henry is in jail because he refuses to play along with such a murderous policy.

Henry's refusal has a lot of relevance for modern-day people (and the playwrights clearly are referring to protests against the Vietnam War, going on at the time of their writing.) Henry's great insight is that his passive acceptance of the order of society has concrete, real-world ramifications. Although the average human might want to believe that he or she is generally a "good person," whose actions cause no one harm, such a person may actually be enabling murder, genocide, or other atrocities by doing something as ordinary as paying taxes. In a time of growing bureaucracy and government control, Thoreau refuses to play along: he accepts responsibility for his own actions--as a mature adult, he refuses to allow his own money and manpower to be used for a cause he considers unjust.

> For you and me, deacon, the declaration of Independence has already been written. Young Thoreau has to declare it every day.

Related Characters: Ralph Waldo Emerson (speaker), Henry David Thoreau, Deacon Ball

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

In this revealing passage, Waldo, Henry's former teacher, arrives at the school where Henry teaches and makes some polite jokes with Deacon Ball, the head of the school. Waldo believes in freedom and independence, but he's more likely to accept the established social order. Henry, by contrast, needs to assert his freedom and independence every day, and isn't afraid to speak out against conformity even when it gets him into trouble.

The passage is important because it suggests the strengths and weaknesses of radicalism in America. America was built by radicals, who asserted their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And yet the very existence of a country founded on the principles of freedom has been enough to convince many people--including, it would seem, Emerson--that *more* rebellion and radicalism is pointless.

Act 2 Quotes

You might try getting yourself born in a more just and generous age.

Related Characters: Henry David Thoreau (speaker), Bailey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

Bailey, a fellow prisoner sitting with Henry in jail, asks Henry for his help. First, Bailey asks Henry to serve as his lawyer; then, when Henry refuses, Bailey asks him for any advice--Henry's only advice is for Bailey to be born in a better time, when justice and freedom are strong in society.

The passage is important for a number of reasons. First, the passage draws out attention to the similarities and differences between our own era, whatever it might be (during the Vietnam War for the playwrights), and Thoreau's. Are we really any juster or more honest with ourselves than were the people of Thoreau's society? It's a premise of the play that we have something to learn from Thoreau's courage--and therefore, our society isn't perfectly just, as *no*society is (there's no ideal "age" Bailey could really choose to be born in). Moreover, the passage emphasizes the importance of Thoreau's heroism. It's precisely because we *can't*just be born in a juster age--and that age that might not exist at all--that people like Thoreau, who fight for what's right here and now, are so valuable to our society.

I gotta git to Cañada!

Related Characters: Henry Williams (speaker), Henry David Thoreau

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

In this "flashback" passage, Thoreau gives aid and comfort to a runaway slave who's trying to get far away from his slave masters and move to Canada. Thoreau, a proponent of civil disobedience, believed that "an unjust law is not a law at all." Thus, Thoreau had no problem breaking the law to help runaway slaves--slaves who were, on paper, violating law and order. Thoreau exercised his own moral code, respecting the slaves' right to freedom and happiness. By 19th century standards, he was a criminal--by 21st century standards, he did the right thing.

The passage subtly underscores the similarities between the injustices of slavery and the injustices in Mexico that Thoreau is protesting in the play's present. With the Spanish tilde over the "n" in the word "Canada," the playwrights suggest that the American government's oppression of blacks is intimately tied to it's other bloody activities in South and Central America.

Always do the right thing, even if it's wrong.

Related Characters: Mrs. Thoreau (speaker), Henry David Thoreau

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

In this nightmare sequence, Thoreau is forced to take up arms as a soldier in the Mexican-American War; the very war he's in jail for refusing to support in any form. As Thoreau is handed a gun, he sees his own mother, urging him to conform with the rest of society. Thoreau's mother sums up her take on right and wrong by telling her son to "do the right thing, even if it's wrong."

Thoreau's mother (in her hallucinatory form here, at least) makes an interesting distinction between socially-determined morality--the morality of obedience, respect, and conformity--and individually-determined morality--the morality of individual responsibility, free will, and choice. She seems to be saying that Thoreau--and all people--should obey their laws and orders, even if they personally believe such laws to be immoral. In short, Thoreau's mother symbolizes the exact opposite of what Thoreau himself stood for all his life.

Seems to me I've got several more lives to live.

Related Characters: Henry David Thoreau (speaker), Bailey

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

The play ends with a bold call to the audience: translate Thoreau's political aims into the present day. Thoreau tells us that he believes he'll live several more lives--and the quote is interesting for a couple reasons. It seems to make Thoreau into something of a Christ figure, a martyr who's continually celebrated ("resurrected?") by later generations for living a "just life." By the same token, the passage hints at the influence Thoreau has had on modern political methods--the civil disobedience of luminaries like Martin Luther King, Jr., Harvey Milk, and Malcolm X might be said to continue Thoreau's legacy. In all, the playwrights urge us to follow Thoreau's example and stand up for what we know to be right, even if that means going against all of society.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

The play opens on a jail cell, center stage, with imaginary **walls** and windows. "Time and space are awash here." A man (Henry) sleeps on a cot, and another man, in shadow, sleeps on a cot next to him. Unrelated to the cell, on one side of the stage, an old man walks hand in hand with his wife.

The way the stage is set up immediately emphasizes the importance of thought and imagination. The audience cannot see the walls around Henry, which is an early indication that these walls don't truly contain him.

The old man, Waldo, stops suddenly and asks his wife, "What was his name?" Lydian is confused, and Waldo tells her he has forgotten the name of his best friend. Lydian wonders if he is thinking of "Henry" and Waldo says he keeps wanting to say "David."

This moment symbolically illustrates the ease with which we can forget about Thoreau and the conditions that produced him, and also foreshadows Waldo's eventual complacency and betrayal of Henry. Emerson the historical figure also suffered extreme memory loss late in life.

Henry's mother appears on another part of the stage, asking her son, whom she calls "David Henry," what he's done. He says he's gone and "not done" something. This conversation bleeds into the conversation being held between Lydian and Waldo, where they struggle to remember Henry. Lydian recalls that he was strange, but that she "almost understood him." Waldo recalls that he rested all week and worked on Sundays.

Henry's character is fleshed out further. He is in jail for "not doing" something, Meaning that his activism takes the form of resistance. Lydian and Waldo, continuing to illustrate the ease with which we forget the past, recall that Henry was "strange" and that he often disobeyed and even directly inverted societal norms. These are also forms of resistance—Henry works "outside the system."

Waldo stands up and appears younger. He takes his place at a podium. Upon seeing him at the podium, Henry sinks cross-legged to the floor to listen. Waldo orates: "Cast conformity behind you." Henry repeats these words "as if memorizing a commandment." Henry's brother John enters and approaches Henry with amusement. Henry, still in a trance, says to John that Waldo is the most captivating professor at Harvard—that the "light of all mankind" is within him.

The play transitions seamlessly into a flashback. Note the irony in Henry memorizing and chanting a phrase about abandoning conformity. The complexity of the educational relationship between these two activists begins to make itself more clear. Henry must learn from an authority figure the value of challenging authority. It appears that Henry has not yet recognized Waldo's authority for what it is.

Henry stands and sees John, as if breaking out of a trance, and embraces him. John asks if Henry has his diploma, and Henry explains that they wanted to be paid a dollar for it and he had refused. John laughs and asks his brother what he is going to do now that he has "turned his backside on Harvard." Henry says that he will strive to be as much like Ralph Waldo Emerson as possible.

Again the paradox of Henry's education makes itself apparent. In the same moment that Henry "turns his backside on Harvard" he professes his desire to live a life imitating a Harvard professor. The audience can see how Henry will need to overcome this dependence on Waldo in order to truly be anti-conformist.

The light fades on the brothers and rises on Waldo and Lydian again. Lydian tells Waldo that he gave a splendid lecture. Waldo worries aloud that he'd lost his place a couple of times, and he says he thought he saw one boy asleep in the audience, sitting with his eyes closed. Lydian reassures him the boy was just concentrating. Waldo seems almost comforted.

Here we see the events from Waldo's perspective, and one of his most important attributes becomes clear: Waldo is deeply concerned with how the public thinks of him. The irony should not be lost on us that Waldo expresses anxiety about public opinion of his lecture—a lecture whose subject is rejecting conformity.

In the jail **cell** area, snoring begins. It crescendos, and Henry gently wakes up his groggy cellmate. The man, whose name is Bailey, stops snoring but is still groggy. Henry tells him to be quiet so they can hear. The faint sound of a night bird comes into the cell, and Henry is rapturous. Bailey wonders at him, saying it's "just a bird." Henry demands to know if Bailey can make a sound like that, or feed on flowers, or fly.

This is an example of the power of thought to transcend confinement. Henry's nature-inspired rapture cannot be contained by the cell walls (themselves imaginary), and this intellectual freedom allows him to see things others miss (i.e. the beauty in a bird song).

Bailey asks how a man as educated and well-spoken as Henry ended up in jail. Henry says he has refused to commit murder. Bailey asks who Henry was meant to kill, and Henry says "Mexico." Bailey has not heard about the war with Mexico and does not understand. Henry asks Bailey why he is in jail, and Bailey explains he has been in jail for months, awaiting trial. He has been accused of burning down a barn, but he is innocent. Henry is outraged that his companion is still in jail awaiting his verdict.

The play's anti-war message begins to take shape in Henry's speech in this passage. Henry notably equates war to murder, and in doing so suggests that anyone who supports war supports murder. It is a powerful message about complacency amounting to guilt.

Henry listens at the imaginary window and hears footsteps through the square. Henry asks Bailey where the footsteps are going, but Bailey cannot answer. Henry explains that they are going where they are supposed to be going – that the man is walking the direction he feels he should be walking, so that he may be liked by others. Henry then calls America "a whole country of us who only want to be liked."

Henry expounds further on his philosophy. This is a moment where the play is taking the historical beliefs of Thoreau and redirecting them at the present audience. The accusation that Henry makes concerning Americans is one meant to encourage the audience to not simply do what they're told.

Bailey once again marvels at Henry's intelligence. He remarks that he'd love to learn to write his own name. Henry teaches him write in the dust on the floor of the **cell**. Henry makes the letters seem simple, and his teaching style is entertaining. Bailey says he has never heard someone make it so easy, and remarks that Henry must be a teacher.

Henry's educational lineage is here brought back into the foreground of the play. Henry did, we discover, become somewhat like Waldo, for he also is a teacher. Bailey's reverence for Henry's intelligence mirrors, in its unquestioning acceptance, Henry's reverence for Waldo.

Bailey sinks back into the shadows, and the light comes up on Henry, who is teaching a classroom full of students (who are not actually present as actors, but only imaginary). He is explaining how even the seemingly empty air around them is full of particles moving and flying around. Deacon Ball enters, and Henry is irritated at the interruption. Ball wonders why the students have no books. Henry explains that they are "huckleberrying'—that is, gathering up knowledge from the world around them, as if collecting huckleberries.

Henry clearly abhors conformity, and refuses to teach from books because they represent institutional control of learning. "Huckleberrying" is significant in that it encourages the students to look carefully and inquisitively at the world around them, while the play is asking its audience to do the same with respect to the Vietnam War. Huckleberrying is a kind of safeguard against conformity.

Henry goes on to explain that he was in the middle of answering a question of a student, named "Potter," who wondered how to be sure of God's existence. Ball is appalled, calling the question blasphemy. Henry explains that the sunrise is no accident—it cannot be. It is the result of an "intelligence" that governs the universe. Ball calls this "atheism" and Henry says he sometimes wonders if atheism is popular with God himself. Ball calls this "transcendental Blasphemy."

Henry approaches religion from an anti-authoritarian perspective. By suggesting that God Himself is an atheist, Henry implies that the only thing we ought to collectively agree to do, the only idea we ought to "conform to," is the idea that authority should always be questioned.

Meanwhile, on a different part of the stage, Waldo takes his pulpit and begins to speak about "the wonder of the Universal Mind." Henry speaks quietly to Potter, asking him if he understands. Ball says he does not understand. Henry begins to ridicule Ball and his proscribed textbook, sarcastically insisting to his students that they must not listen to a cricket or smell a flower unless it has been approved by the school board. John appears, and tells Henry to have an ounce of humility, or he will be fired, and then who will answer Potter's questions?

Henry's worldview is complicated. John's request that Henry have some humility for the sake of his students raises the important point that activism cannot be merely idealistic. There is a real world within which the activist must act and sometimes compromises must be made in order to actually effect change.

Henry apologizes, but Ball is not satisfied. He orders Henry to flog his students. Henry obliges, flogging each imaginary student with his belt and becoming increasingly repulsed by the violence. After the deed is done, Henry flings the belt offstage. He announces that he is resigning. Ball recedes into the shadows and the lights come up on Waldo, who announces that he is resigning as pastor of the Unitarian Church in Boston. Henry sits back down on his cot and says "I shall never teach again." Waldo says "I shall never preach again."

The compromises Henry is asked to make prove to be too much for him. He decides to resign, and the parallel action of Waldo resigning from the Unitarian Church suggests that Henry is still on his way to becoming like Waldo (his professed desire). Though Henry is walking away from conforming to a cruel and institutionalized school system, he is still imitating his mentor, and the play reminds us of that.

John and his mother stand on the edge of the stage. John says a school doesn't need books or a classroom—only minds. He approaches Henry and the two plan to open a new kind of school, one where class takes place in the countryside. Henry is re-energized, and turns to speak to a group of imaginary students, presumably gathered all around him. He talks about the varied flora of the meadow.

Henry decides he can continue to effect change—to teach and nurture young minds in his community—by working outside of the system. In opening his own school outdoors, he is also "outside" in a another significant way.

A strikingly beautiful young woman appears on the side of the stage, listening to Henry. Henry tells her that she seems too old to take this class. The woman, Ellen Sewell, says she just wants to listen. Henry is skeptical, and tells her she must be herself, and not anyone else's idea of herself. He tells the students to listen to the sounds, touch the grass, smell the air, and to pursue their own way.

Henry is doubtful of Ellen's presence because it is passive. When she says she just wants to listen, Henry emphasizes that his class is not a place for listening, but for acting. But in "telling" her to be herself, Henry ironically undermines his own message.

The lights fade on the "meadow" and Henry is back in the cell with Bailey, who is delighted that he has learned to write his name. Henry, dejected, tells him not to learn to write, or else he might write a book and get himself into trouble—the way Henry has.

Another conflict regarding Henry's activism is brought up here. Henry feels guilty about the prospect of putting others in the same danger he has put himself in. Perhaps this is why he becomes such a loner.

John enters and helps Henry pull an imaginary boat from an imaginary pond (they are back in the meadow). Henry is planning to take the children out in the boat for class, but John tells Henry that they have lost all but one student. Ellen enters and explains that her little brother, the last remaining student, will not be attending because their father believes Transcendentalism is an "affliction" and doesn't want his children exposed to it.

This scene reveals the failure of Henry and John's attempt to work outside the system. Their distancing themselves from the school board has ultimately deprived them of students to teach. This is the risk, the play informs its audience, of retreating from the society you want to change.

Henry, since he has no class to teach, asks Ellen if she would like to go out on the boat. She agrees, and out on the water, Henry tries to explain Transcendentalism to her. He explains to Ellen that she loves her father, and always will, even if he is not beautiful or talented, and cannot fly like a bird or swim like a fish. She loves something about him that transcends what he actually is. This does not make sense to Ellen. He tells her that Transcendentalism can allow her to "BE," rather than simply to "live." She responds that she likes living.

Henry's inability to reach Ellen reveals another difficulty of activism—proper communication. Henry cannot speak in a way that Ellen understands, and so he struggles to reach her. Because he is so far removed from Ellen's world—where unquestioning obedience is a virtue—he cannot so quickly convince her to see his way of thinking.

Henry starts getting intense, and demands that Ellen stand up to her father and be more open-minded about her ideas. Ellen doesn't like Henry rocking the boat (literally, for he is standing up in the boat) and wishes he would row her back to shore. She says she is not one of his fish or his birds and must simply wait for him to bring her back to dry land. Henry realizes that he has missed his chance and is frustrated. He agrees to take her back to shore on the condition that she attend church with his brother John, whom he believes is in love with her. She agrees. When they arrive back to shore, she asks Henry what will happen to his school. He answers by launching into a short rant about how men do too much talking anyway. His intensity frightens her and she runs away.

This scene offers us more of Ellen's perspective. Henry, incapable of reasoning with her in terms she understands, resorts to demanding of her that she become less amenable to authority. But his "rocking the boat"—a pun very deliberately employed by the writers—is scary to Ellen, and Henry loses her attention. Henry, seeming to accept his own loneliness and isolation, suggests that Ellen try to have a relationship with John instead. This is a moment where Henry's activism and his personal isolation are deeply connected.

The lights come up on the **cell** again. Henry asks a sleeping Bailey what he thinks of marriage, and Bailey only snores in response. Henry then looks out the window and reflects aloud that behind these bars, alone with his thoughts, he can see the world for what it really is. Jail has made him freer than anyone else in Concord.

Henry's question about marriage perhaps reveals that he regrets his own isolation to a certain extent—but this is tempered by the fact that from his removed position he can better see the world for what it is. Removal from the world offers a certain clarity of perspective.

The lights come up on Henry's family in church. Ellen sits beside John. Suddenly, Henry's mother sees with horror that Henry has come into church pushing a wheelbarrow full of dirt. She begs him, "not on a Sunday." Henry asks what they think they are doing in church. Deacon Ball responds, "feeding our souls!" Henry calls him selfish, and explains that *he* has been feeding the flora of Concord.

Henry's oppositional relationship with the community is intensified. His decision to work on Sundays seems more grounded in deliberate obstinacy than in a kind of productive activism (the way his teaching was).

Waldo steps in with some good-natured jokes, and explains that for Henry, the American Declaration of Independence is not enough—he must declare his independence every day. The group disperses, Henry with his wheelbarrow and John with Ellen, leaving Mrs. Thoreau alone. She prays to God that he will not make Henry too strange, and then asks the Lord to "slip the word 'yes' into that young lady's mouth."

Waldo once again demonstrates his ability to be popular and socially acceptable. Henry can be seen as the direct opposite of his mother, whose greatest desire is that her sons lead normal, conformist, happy lives.

Lights fade and rise on Henry and John, laughing in the meadow. Henry assumes John's laughter means that Ellen said yes to a proposal of marriage, and he congratulates him. John cannot stop laughing, and finally wheezes out that Ellen said no. Her father had forbid her to be with a Thoreau. John says he is laughing because he realizes that he and Henry are "a couple of monks." John worries that his life will be lonely, but Henry grabs his hand and assures him that they will have each other until they are both old and grey.

The "monkhood" of Henry and John affirms their total self- inflicted isolation from the society they criticize. Their tender affection for each other does gesture towards a kind of insular community between outcasts and activists, but the play will also show us that this community is ultimately fragile.

The lights black out and there is the sound of church bells. A ministerial voice announces the death of John Thoreau. The lights come up on Mrs. Thoreau and Henry. Henry refuses to pray—he believes his brother's death is an indication that God has stopped listening.

Immediately after Henry establishes a kind of community with his brother, he is deprived of that human connection. Now Henry is truly alone, and his activism is truly isolated.

Ellen hurries onstage and asks Henry what happened. Henry, with bitter wit, that his brother died a heroic, glamorous death. He had thought of something funny while shaving, and nicked his finger—and then he died of blood poisoning. Henry is appalled most of all by the meaninglessness of the death. Ellen slowly suggests that perhaps God makes us feel pain so we can learn to transcend it. She says she has just come to understand Transcendentalism. She wonders if—even though John is no longer living—he continues to "be."

John's death does have one positive outcome—it is shared ground over which Henry and Ellen can actually communicate. That Ellen finally understands Transcendentalism in this moment demonstrates the powerful advantage that shared ground gives us in communication and conversation.

The lights fade and then come back up on Henry and Waldo talking. They are making arrangements for Henry to work for Waldo—he wants to do manual labor. Henry will help with tasks around the house and gardens and look after Waldo's son, Edward. As payment, Henry will be allowed to live out by the pond on Waldo's property—the pond called "Walden." When Henry, satisfied with the arrangement, departs, Lydian remarks that he is a strange man, for he seems to want nothing. Waldo says it may be the case that Henry wants too much.

Henry retreats even further, returning to his mentor to work under him, no longer able to stand being a part of the larger community. Lydian says it is as though Henry wants nothing, while Waldo remarks that he wants too much. Henry wants nothing to do with his community, but he also wants comprehensive change. He is torn between wanting nothing and wanting everything.

The lights fade and come back up on Henry and Bailey back in their **cell**. Henry is telling Bailey about Walden, and Baily is thrilled and made envious by Henry's description. He can't imagine having such independence. Henry admits that sometimes he did have to go into town.

The power of thought to both liberate and confine us is highlighted again in this scene, as Bailey remarks that he can't imagine freedom and independence—while sitting in a jail cell whose walls are imaginary.

Lights fade and come back up on Henry walking down an imaginary street. Sam, the constable, approaches Henry deferentially and nervously about Henry not having paid his taxes. Henry defiantly says that he refuses to pay them. When Sam offers to pay them himself to keep Henry out of trouble, Henry commands him not to. A small crowd gathers, and Henry rhapsodizes about the unjust burden of taxes, saying he will not pay the salaries of the men in Washington so long as they do not serve him or his ideals. He says, "If I keep my mouth shut, I'm a criminal." The townspeople lament that Henry will break his mother's heart, but Henry insists that Sam take him away and lock him up.

Once again the play unequivocally makes the point that complacency equals guilt. If the government is engaged in an unjust war, and citizens mindlessly obey that government, giving them the money, labor, and human lives it asks for, then those citizens are just as guilty as the government itself. This is a direct message to the audience about their obligation to protest the Vietnam War if they believe the government was wrong to wage war in the first place.

Sam begrudgingly takes Henry into jail, where he collects his information. Henry makes a joke out of the simple questions Sam asks him. Then lights come up on Lydian reading a letter. She tells Waldo that Henry has been sent to jail. As Waldo takes the note, the lights rise on Mrs. Thoreau, who says that Henry being in jail is her worst nightmare come true.

Henry's mother's remark that Henry's arrest is her worst nightmare is significant—for the play will climax with Henry's own nightmare, which involves war, death, and bloodshed—a nightmare that makes Mrs. Thoreau's fears look trivial in comparison.

Waldo says he must go help Henry, and rushes out. Meanwhile, Henry is telling Sam that to ask him to pay for a rifle is the same as asking him to fire it. He says he will not let his government make him into a killer. Sam, dejectedly, leaves Henry in the cell. Waldo rushes in and asks Henry what he is doing in jail. Henry says, "Waldo! What are you doing out of jail?"

Henry's question to Waldo closes out the first act because it is deeply important to the overall message of the play. For the first time, Henry is questioning his mentor. In doing so, he is also realizing himself as a fully independent thinker.

ACT 2

Lights rise on Henry in the **jail cell**. Bailey is asleep. Henry is pacing and thinking aloud. He laughs at the notion that the government has taken his freedom. He is free, he says. He can touch his nose if he likes. He can stand up or sit down. And his thoughts cannot be contained by walls—he can think whatever he wants.

The jail cell is perhaps the reconciliation of Henry's desire to live outside society and also effect change within it. The jail is both within and without—it separates Henry without containing him, and gives him clarity without totally removing him.

Lydian enters, and tells Henry he should "go along." Henry erupts angrily, shouting "GO ALONG" at her. Then Lydian asks him to take Edward with him. Henry saunters out of the **cell** into the imaginary meadow, which he now shares with young Edward. Henry teaches Edward how to find the best huckleberries (by "knowing where to stand") and Edward runs around picking them up excitedly. He quickly fills his whole basket, but in his excitement he trips and spills them. When he starts to cry, Henry comforts him by saying that he has planted a whole new field of huckleberries.

Henry, though he is no longer a teacher, is responsible for the education of Waldo's son. Henry proves to be a good mentor to Edward, and there is the suggestion that Henry is less of an isolationist than he seems. His affection for Edward and his investment in Edward's education is clear to see.

Edward is comforted, and tells Henry he wishes he were his father. The light fades on them and rises on Lydian, writing a letter at her desk. Henry and Edward arrive home, and Edward tells Lydian that he's asked Henry to be his father. Lydian lightly asks Edward, what about his real father? Edward complains that Waldo is never around because he is always traveling and making speeches. He also asks his mother if she wouldn't be happier if Henry was her husband.

The irony is that Waldo, who is so concerned about the impressions he makes on strangers in his audience, has not even made a good impression on his own son. The implication is that there are personal (in addition to political) consequences of desiring only to be liked.

Things become awkward between Lydian and Henry. She says perhaps he should not work around the house while Waldo is away. Henry tells her not to be afraid of him, then remarks that he has too much respect for her. Love is everywhere and has no schedule, he notes, somewhat enigmatically. Lydian asks him why, if love is everywhere, does he choose to be alone?

Lydian is the first character in the play to directly question Henry's choice to seclude himself entirely from community, family, and love. Henry will eventually reject his secluded life at the end of the play, making this conversation especially significant.

Suddenly Edward, who has wandered outside, runs back in holding a chicken, saying the chicken is wearing gloves. Lydian says this can't be possible, but upon inspection realizes the chicken is in fact wearing gloves. Henry explains that he'd heard her complaining about the chickens scratching at her rose plants, and so had fitted their feet with homemade gloves.

Henry's solution to the problem of the chickens is strange to Lydian, but also notably effective. The message is that we should not reject ideas simply because they seem strange, for if we remain open to strange solutions, we can benefit from them.

Lydian, pleading now, tells Henry to get married—to find someone to love. She doesn't want him to be lonely. Henry says he cannot be lonely any more than the north wind can be lonely. He then asks her if she is not lonely, going to bed every night without her absent husband. He touches her sleeve and asks her if it is not a pity that she is so "safe" around him.

This is another moment where we can see Henry not only criticizing but almost betraying his mentor. His independence is beginning to become more definite.

Lights fade and come back up on the **cell**, where Henry and Bailey once again sit. Bailey asks Henry to be his lawyer, but Henry says he cannot be a lawyer. Bailey begs Henry to tell him what to do, and Henry suggests being born in a more just time. He then suggests prayer, and Bailey agrees. Henry delivers a wry, almost sarcastic prayer, telling God that Bailey deserves better than what God has given him.

The suggestion that there is a "more just time" into which Bailey can be born directs the audience's attention to the similarities between Thoreau's time and their own. The implied suggestion is that even now we have not yet seen the "more just time" Henry is hoping for.

As Bailey sinks back onto his cot, the lights come up on Henry and he moves out of the cell into the sunny meadow once again. A man, Williams, comes out of the woods. He is an escaped slave. He tells Henry he needs food so he has enough strength to get to "Cañada," where he can be free. Henry tells him to help himself to bread inside the cabin. Williams is startled at Henry's trust, but goes inside and takes the bread anyway. He comes out chewing ravenously.

The added Spanish "tilde" to Canada suggests an affinity between the mistreatment of African-Americans and the misconduct on the part of the U.S. government in the Mexican-American War. The suggestion is that American injustices are all part of the same historical lineage, and a result of not learning from past mistakes.

Henry tells Williams that he is glad he has escaped. Williams asks Henry why he lives in a "slave shack." Henry, amused, says that he is rich, but not with money. Henry then says that Williams needs a first name, now that he is free. Williams suggests "Mr. Henry's Williams" to which Henry angrily says "No!" He tells Williams that he doesn't belong to anyone anymore. But Williams likes the sound of "Henry Williams," and shouts the name to the sky.

Henry will not allow Williams to become like him. In other words, he will not allow the dynamic that existed between him and Waldo to be reproduced. Henry does not want students who try to follow or imitate him—he wants freedom for everyone.

Williams says he wants to stay here with Henry, where he feels free. But Henry says that in Massachusetts, his blackness is a red flag, and he must find a Walden somewhere where "sickening laws" against blacks don't exist. He tells Williams to "go to Can-ya-da!" The lights fade on them.

Because Williams cannot go to another time, he must go to another place. But again the pronunciation of Canada—as though there were a Mexican tilde over the "n"—suggests a morbid end for Williams, as history continues to repeat itself.

The lights come up on Henry and Waldo in the midst of an argument. Waldo is insisting that he's "cast his vote" and there is nothing more he can do. Henry tells him to vote with his voice, and use his influence to speak out against segregation. It becomes clear through their argument that Williams has been killed jumping from a moving train in his attempt to get to Canada. Henry argues that for Waldo, Williams is merely an abstraction—fodder for a lecture, but not a human, not a real tragedy.

The differences between Henry's philosophy and activism and Waldo's is made very clear in this argument. Waldo will not create trouble the way Henry has, and soothes himself by thinking of tragedies only in the abstract. The suggestion to the audience is that it is all too easy to think of war as abstract, and so avoid contending with the reality of it.

Henry pleads with Waldo—he is an Emerson, and he can make a difference if he would only use his voice. Waldo contemplatively notes that Henry lives the way Waldo talks. Henry becomes even angrier at Waldo, and Waldo retorts that Henry is not exactly inciting rebellion by retiring to the woods. Henry has no reply to this criticism. Waldo gently tells him that they must work within the existing framework in order to effect change. This disgusts Henry. He tells Waldo he was wrong about him, and starts to leave. Waldo, in pain, asks Henry what he should do. Henry tells him he must go to Concord Square and declare himself against the war and against segregation.

Waldo, in his turn, has a valid criticism for Henry as well. He notes that Henry is not effecting change very well by disappearing. The difference, however, is that Henry appears to take this criticism to heart at the end of the play, whereas Waldo never reforms his worldview—he remains too concerned with public opinion to speak out in meaningful ways against the American government and the War. To Henry's mind, this makes him just as guilty as the U.S. government itself.

Lights come up in the center of the stage, where Henry is rallying a crowd of people, telling them that Waldo will be making an important announcement. The crowd grows restless as time passes and there is no sign of Waldo. Lydian enters, and tells a crestfallen Henry that Waldo needs more time to "meditate" on these matters. Henry tells Lydian that Waldo is "drowning in his own success."

This disappointment cements the rift between Henry and the teacher he was once prepared to follow. Waldo cannot give up his success and his good name, even in the name of human life and America's integrity. This is why Henry says Waldo is "drowning in success."

Henry shouts to the citizens of Concord, trying to get their attention, but there is no one there. He grips the rope of a bell to ring it, but it makes no sound. A drummer boy enters, and a chant becomes audible: "hate-two-three-four!" A sergeant is handing Bailey a gun, insisting that he must learn to kill. Bailey resists, but a crowd of people turn on him, calling him a coward and a traitor. The sergeant is Sam and the General is Ball.

The action becomes dream-like and highly symbolic here. In the dream, the citizens of Concord are no longer just indirectly responsible for the violence in Mexico, but now directly perpetrating it. Their complacency is, in the dream, literal, direct guilt.

The sergeant forces a musket into Henry's hands. Henry resists, but his mother appears and tells him to "always do the right thing, even if it's wrong." Then the President appears: it's Waldo. Everyone begins to chant "go along" with "demonic glee." They begin to attack a Mexican soldier (Williams) but he escapes. Henry pleads with the president—Williams only wanted to gather huckleberries, Henry says. The president promises to write a lengthy essay on the subject.

The play, via this hellish dreamscape, takes every character to task for their hypocrisy. Mrs. Thoreau is exposed to care about "rightness" only in the sense of propriety, and not in a moral sense. Waldo, meanwhile, is made president—the man chiefly responsible for the violence—because he has refused to use his immense influence to protest the war.

Henry notices his brother John in the ranks, but just as he does, a volley of shots are heard. John is shot and Henry pleads with God not to let John die—"not again." The whole stage fades into darkness.

John dies again, and the suggestion here is that a soldier's death is as meaningless and accidental as death from a shaving cut.

Sam is waking Henry up from a bad dream. He tells Henry his taxes have been paid by his Aunt Louisa. Henry doesn't want to go, but agrees to leave on the condition that Bailey is granted a speedy trial. Sam agrees. Henry and Bailey say their goodbyes. Bailey asks Henry if he will go back to the pond, but Henry says no. He feels he has "several more lives to live" and is worried that if he becomes too comfortable at Walden, he will spend all of them there. "Escape is like sleep," says Henry, "and when sleep is permanent, it's death."

Henry decides to leave Walden, taking Waldo's criticism to heart and deciding to not run away anymore. The suggestion that Thoreau has "several more lives to live" is once again a call to the audience to revive Henry Thoreau in their contemporary moment, and to apply his philosophy (as it is outlined in this play) to their own activism.

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