plications of either factor. Critics (and editors) have tended to discard the rest of the poem in favor of its ending. Odell Shepard, for instance, insisted that "the final lines of the poem... alone have made it memorable," that Longfellow "uses imagination rather for escape from reality than for penetration of it," and that "his grasp of contemporary fact was weak and incomprehensive." This betrays the same confusion that Lefcourt, an otherwise astute critic, evinces: "Cette apostrophe est sans doute la partie la plus belle et la plus émouvante du poème; elle est assurément la plus citée, et, en effet, l'une des plus grandes créations du génie de Longfellow." The construction of the poem has shown us that the revised ending, while politically motivated, was not a sudden visionary outburst attached to an otherwise weak and vaporous concoction but a fitting conclusion to a creative endeavor which precisely rendered details and maximized their potential connotations.

22 Odell Shepard, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (New York: American Book Co., 1934), pp. 555, xxvii, and xxviii. A random sampling of thirty general anthologies of American poetry showed that only two printed "The Building of the Ship." In both cases, only parts of the poem were reproduced and, predictably enough, only the final passage was saved from mutilation.


**MEMORANDA AND DOCUMENTS**

**TITUS MUNSON COAN:**
**AN EARLY DEFENDER OF THOREAU**

ROBERT J. SCHOLNICK

TITUS MUNSON COAN (1856–1921), if remembered at all, is mentioned today for his friendships with two of America's greatest—and least public—writers, Herman Melville and Edwin Arlington Robinson. Historians have not previously recognized, however, that Coan should also claim their attention for his criticism of another great literary figure, Henry David Thoreau.

Born in Hawaii of prominent missionary parents, Coan was a physician, magazine, and editor. He first met Melville in 1859 when, as a Williams College student, he went to Pittsfield with a classmate to see the author. Coan settled permanently in New York in 1865 after resigning from the navy, and in "Herman Melville," published in the *Boston Literary World* on 19 December 1891, claimed that he had "visited [Melville] repeatedly in New York, and had the most interesting talks with him. What stories of reading, what reaches of philosophy, were his!" Coan may well have been one of the few literary men who saw Melville with any regularity during this phase of his life.

In December 1896 Robinson, who had read a quatrains Coan had published in the *Century* (most likely "Look in Thy Heart," April 1894), was moved to include Coan's name on the list of prominent literary figures and potential reviewers to whom he sent copies of his privately printed first volume, *The Torrent and the Night Before.* Coan sent Robinson a most appreciative and


4 Herman Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York: Macmillan Co., 1909), pp. 110–11. Hagedorn suggests that Robinson first read Coan's poem in January 1897, but since Coan had written to Robinson sometime in December 1896 (see n. 5 below), Hagedorn must be in error.
enthusiastic letter of thanks in return. When Robinson moved to New York in 1897, he sought Coan out and joined his circle of rather disreputable friends. One member was the voluble Alfred Louis, the probable model for the protagonist of “Captain Craig,” the long title poem of Robinson’s 1892 collection. Robinson eulogized Coan’s group in “Calverly’s,” included in his 1910 volume, The Town Down the River.

It may not be surprising, then, that such an unusual man as Coan was one of the few critics during the post–Civil War decades to recognize the genius of Thoreau, another reclusive writer. In a humorous Galaxy essay, “To Marry, Or Not To Marry?” (April 1869), Coan included a perceptive paragraph, previously unnoted, about Thoreau:

The best example of this social protestantism [the decision not to marry] that I know is the example of Henry D. Thoreau. Thoreau represented a subtle reaction against popular ways of thought, feeling, action, against whatever habits of mind and of life have proved themselves to be adapted to the majority of men. A product of the highest civilization, he built a hut for himself upon the shore of Walden Pond, and lived in it like an Indian; an American, he read the Vedas and the Bhagavad-Gita instead of the newspapers; a descendant of the Puritans, he denounced marriage. Thoreau illustrated that occult quality of opposition and counter-statement which nature introduces into all of her domains, as the darkness in the light, the heat of the ice, the pause in a symphony or in a storm, the trace of goodness in the most debased and the tinge of evil in the best of men. Coleridge recognized this truly universal principle, and named it “the actual Immanence of All in Each.” A philosopher of our own day and country calls it “the Inexpugnability of Prime Elements;” and the formula of the French is “Tout est en tout.” In every domain which Thoreau entered, he saw and expressed those subtle and latent truths which seem the most widely opposed, to outward appearances, but which, underlying them, are yet essential to the understanding of the simplest fact. Every life that is based upon deep principles tends to isolation. A great thought is always a protest. Thoreau’s “Walden” is a minority report upon the universe.

Thoreau’s reputation at this time was “limited,” as one scholar has observed, to his writing on nature, and “other phases of his writing were considered at least extraneous. His Orientalism, for example, was a ‘most objectionable’ peculiarity.” But clearly Coan saw the larger picture and defended Thoreau precisely on the point on which he had been attacked most vehemently by James Russell Lowell, William R. Alger, and others, his advocacy of solitude.

It is doubtful that Coan’s brief exposition of Thoreau’s genius, buried in an iconoclastic article on marriage, did much good for Thoreau’s reputation with the general public. Indeed, since Coan follows his discussion of Thoreau with a sympathetic exposition of Shelley’s ideas on marriage and links both as critics of that institution who are “entitled to a hearing,” the effect of the article on middle-class readers may have been entirely negative. However, Coan’s essay does demonstrate that Thoreau had appreciative readers outside the Concord circle. Perhaps Coan even discussed Thoreau’s “minority report upon the universe” during those “interesting talks” with Melville or Robinson at “Calverly’s” New York bar.

DICKINSON, POE, AND BARRETT BROWNING: A CLARIFICATION

VIVIAN R. POLLAK

IN August 1854 Emily Dickinson sent the following letter to her friend Henry Emmons, a senior at Amherst College with whom she had been exchanging manuscript poems:

I find it Friend—I read it—I stop to thank you for it. Just as the world is still—I thank you for them all—the pearl, and then the onyx, and then the emerald stone.

My crown, indeed! I do not fear the king, attired in this grandeur.

Please send me gems again—I have a flower. It looks like them, and for it’s bright resemblances, receive it.

A pleasant journey to you, both in the pathway home, and in

Robinson included an excerpt from Coan’s letter of appreciation in his letter of 22 December 1896 to Harry de Forest Smith: “I call it unmatchable poetry—most of it, indeed, of the ‘inevitable sort’; and in many of the lines there is a deep and moving music.” In Untriangulated Stars, ed. Denham Tuttle (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 268.
