

## **Ecophilosophy of Natural Harmony and Pragmatic Naturalism in Thoreau's Poems**

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### **Abstract**

*Ecophilosophy, as a holistic view of nature is implied in the identification of nature and human relation with definite sense of harmony. Pragmatic naturalism, as the combination of reason and fact in nature, works in a common ground of harmony in nature as the practical part and the part of observing the human wisdom to and towards nature. This study probes into Thoreau's poetic imagination about nature and how Thoreau, as the transcendental naturalist, uses nature as a powerful means of understanding human essence to natural world. Also it examines how he has observed nature, though the life cannot be imagined detached from nature and natural force, as free and ontologically capable to exist with balanced relation with nature and society. Nature is self-regulating being but with unity for the sense of harmony through ecosystem and pragmatic aspect. As the ecological wisdom of realizing nature, he has seen nature as a metaphor of 'book' and thinks that nature provides the lessons to humans greater than anything else really could. This study is based on an identified problem - how Thoreau, through his poems, tends to illustrate the idea that nature is an already existing truth and guiding principle of human understanding and nature-human harmony.*

**Keywords:** *Ecophilosophy, ecosophy, natural harmony, naturalism, nature-ontology*

### **Introduction**

Henry David Thoreau believes in the unity of all ecological elements. It is his philosophy that nature has a life, change, process, and unity of existence with the idea that living things do not exist in isolation but in ecological communities, in which all the members have evolved together into a fine balance of interdependence. It is the ecological unity in modern environmental term. The world has harmony due to ecosystem in which life deeply affects, and is affected by, the atmosphere, the oceans, and even the solid matter. All it has the pragmatic part to the life to each other. Also he has realized that human actions have seriously disrupted local and planetary eco-

systems. And therefore, humans have to restore the lost balances in either of the ways- preserving nature with the supposition of divine or preserving it as the necessary part of human purpose. In both, the naturalism has pragmatic purpose. He regards the whole universe- nature, humans, ecology, living and nonliving having the divine essence, and the combination of all this, the chain of ecosystem in modern term, is the unity.

He has also continued his vision of nature itself both as a creation and as a creator. For this, humans must know the nature better or should read the nature properly, "read the best books first" from nature. Nature is greater than books and provides the knowledge better than the real books we read. This research article examines how Thoreau has adopted the sense of nature as essential ecological aspect to reflect the human realization of naturalism.

Studies on Thoreau have observed the spiritual aspect of nature as transcended in his writings. His life accompanied with the nature of Walden has attracted to a large number of writers. The point of departure for this study is that this article explores the ecophilosophical aspect in Thoreau's seminal (thirteen) poems, especially through his priority to pragmatic naturalism. This study tries to answer these research questions:

- a. What aspect of pragmatic naturalism has Thoreau rendered in his poetry?
- b. How has he comprised the notion of ecophilosophy through the sense of natural harmony in his poetry?

This study analyzes Thoreau's poems using ecophilosophy as the theoretical tool.

### **Ecophilosophy and Pragmatic Naturalism**

Originated from Naess, the notions of ecosophy and ecophilosophy share common ideologies observing the philosophical understanding of the ecology. Ecosophy examines nature and our relationship to it. Naess has defined it as a discipline, like philosophy itself, which is based on analytical thinking, reasoned argument, and carefully examined assumptions. Still Naess has distinguished ecosophy from ecophilosophy; it is not a discipline in the same sense but what he called a 'personal philosophy', which guides our conduct toward the environment. He has defined ecosophy as a set of beliefs about nature and other people, which varies from one individual to another. Everyone, in other words, has their own ecosophy, and though our personal philosophies may share important elements, they are based on norms and assumptions that are particular to each of us. As proposed, ecophilosophy functions as a model for individual ecosophies, emphasizing the intrinsic value of nature and the importance of cultural and natural diversity.

Ecophilosophy, as the etymology of the term, unites two strongly definable ideas, ecology and philosophy. Ecology provides the meaning to the level of nature, environment and the total system of the natural processes, and philosophy provides the wisdom and poignant ideas as the modes of inquiries and questions on and about the patterns of life and related issues. Ecophilosophy, hence, implies to a philosophical approach to the study of ecology. The quest for an environmental approach with a philosophical essence has received a feed back by the emergence of ecophilosophy. It is an attempt to render "a new philosophy of nature generated by the need to liberate nature from the inherently domineering disposition of human kind" (Shea xi). It is a mode of thinking for the ontological existence of nature as well as its engagement to human beings.

Ecophilosophical inquiry is a creative activity, which aims to clarify and understand the interconnections between various values, beliefs and action, and which produce scientific results for human-nature relationships. On the basis of the argumentations, ecophilosophy is the

common platform for the science and the philosophical enquiry. Hence, it is meeting point of science and philosophy as an inquiry in the art of living with ecological wisdom. It uses the basic ecological concepts to better define the place the human species hold within nature. Ecology and philosophy combined can help guide "the process of working out a total view" (Rothenberg qtd. in Naess, 3). Ontologically speaking, for the deep ecologist, the nature of reality (or the reality of nature) is that humans are inseparable from nature. Naess has proposed 'deep ecology platform' in points:

- The flourishing of life on Earth, human and non-human, has intrinsic value.
  - Non-human life has intrinsic value independent of any usefulness for human purposes.
  - Rich, diverse life forms on Earth contribute to the flourishing of life on Earth, both human and non-human.
  - Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
- (Naess 29)

With these ideas, Naess has introduced basic notion of ecophilosophy as the thought of nature having diverse qualities, distinct qualities, intrinsic values and the relation between humans and nature not as oppressor and oppressed, but as having mutual and interdepending relations. Nature is an object, but not just an object; it has the power and identity of its own.

Two distinctly meaningful terms, 'pragmatic' and 'naturalism' and two ideas are combined in pragmatic naturalism, and the term in combined form refers to a movement in the study of nature in general, the movement led by William James, George Mead and John Dewey, and is a philosophy on the method of thinking on the development of history and nature- human relation in particular, and hence, in combined form a pragmatic movement in philosophy. Every intellectual activity begins with the doubt to be justified at any mode of thinking, in Dewey's ideas, with two functions: analysis and synthesis are accompanied with the action and consciousness. Having many ideas related to the development of history, Darwin's notion of the development, reason and fact and many others, one of the issues of the pragmatic naturalists is the link between human beings and natural life, "human life is with an organism living by means of an environment" (Eames 42). There are two conditions of the link between humans and nature. The first condition is unchangeable and humans have to accept it unconditionally for example, the death- humans can not escape from the death, natural or due to any past errors of the person himself/herself. The second condition, as pragmatic naturalists call it, is 'adjustment' in which "human experience and nature can be changed"(9), for example, man can divert or change the way of the river and can save the life and other nature from the vast flooding though the river, in essence, cannot be controlled. Any way, some change is possible in the way we live in nature and we are made to think about nature.

Ecophilosophy, "fundamentally, a holistic view of nature in implied" (Mautner 140), and pragmatic naturalism, as the combination of reason and fact in nature, both work in a common ground of harmony in nature as the practical part and the part of observing the human wisdom to and towards nature.

### **Thoreau and Pragmatic Naturalism**

Human life can have the relation of accommodation, adaptation and adjustment with nature. Regarding accommodation Dewey states, "There are conditions we meet that cannot be changed" (15), and Thoreau has similar attitude, "All things decay, & so must our sleigh" (Atd 4421). Nothing remains constant, and there are so many things in nature that we have to grant

them as they are- the decay cannot be altered, and “if they are particular and limited, we modify our own particular attitudes in accordance with them” (Dewey 15), as it happens to the moon, “The moon moves up her smooth and sheeny path, Without impediment; and happily” (Tmmu 4395), that the moon has smooth movement ever appearing happy and with no weakness and disorder. We cannot stop her movement, her smoothness and her happiness, neither do we need so, but we can feel happy ourselves with her happiness, “we accommodate ourselves to changes in weather, to alterations in income when we have no other recourse” (Dewey 15). It is not possible to get rid of the condition of nature, good or bad in the situation of accommodation, “The sun may set, the silver moon may rise, But my unresting steed holds on his way” (L 4393), the life and movement of the sun and the moon has the link as they are the sources of life, energy of life, but still human life is unarresting and different, life “plows the shoreless seas of time” (L 4394), as we cannot make the sun stop, only we can move along him, hence we have to accommodate the nature as such.

Dewey elaborates the idea of adaptation, “we modify conditions so that they will be accommodated to our wants and purposes. This process may be called adaptation” (16), and Thoreau suggests to modify the situation for the proper use of nature, “Behold these flowers — let us be up with Time” (Btf 4334), since the time is not changed, and kept stand, it can be utilized properly connecting the time with the beauty of nature; whether we associate ourselves with the flower or not, the time certainly passes, and therefore “Erect ourselves and let those columns lie — not stoop, to raise a foil against the sky”(Btf 4334). Isn't it wise enough to change us in ourselves or change the situation for our better experiencing of the nature? It is the adjustment we need to make in the mode of “accommodation and adaptation make up” (Eames16). In these models “the pragmatic naturalist is pessimistic about some situations, those which cannot be changed and to which one must accommodate” (11) but they appear to be optimistic about other situations, “those which can be changed and molded to meet human needs” (11) and so does Thoreau when he opines, “I cannot leave my sky, For thy caprice,” (Mlmbf 4270), and he regards that the nature not separate from humans, and humans not from nature.

Conceiving humans as a part of nature is a principle of pragmatic naturalism with the notion that humans emerge above the animals in certain forms and functions. For instance, humans can construct symbols and languages, they can speak and write, and by these means they can preserve the past experiences, construct new meanings, and entertain goals and ideals and also they “can make plans and by proper selection of the means to the ends carry them through. They can write poetry and novels, compose music and painting, and otherwise engage in aesthetic experiences (Eames 40), and express their experiences with nature, it is the thinking about nature-mode of thinking as pragmatics, as a part of play of language, about nature and environment. Human organism is an entity of the worldly creation and the environment is another entity, but these two entities have the relation of balance, interaction and transection not as opposing elements but as balancing poles. The relation of organism and environment is a functional affair- one depends on another for the functional purpose of the one and another, and it is only in abstraction that one can talk about environment and organism as things apart. This relation is not one in which “a discrete entity (called the organism) and another discrete entity (called the environment) are viewed as separate and self-in closed and then are brought together in some kind of interaction with each other” (43). This interaction cannot be ignored and the life has long lasting interaction with nature as Thoreau says in his poem, “I was Born Upon Thy bank River”:

I was born upon thy bank river  
My blood flows in thy stream  
And thou meanderest forever  
At the bottom of my dream. (Iwbutbr 4264)

The poet feels himself interacted with the bank of river, the stream is full of his blood and the river is always at the bottom of his dream- his veins are the rivers and the circulation of the blood as the essential part of his life. Interaction in this sense is not seen, but it is felt. With such references, interaction never means the action and reaction between two separate entities, but the interconnectedness between them like the veins and the blood, and therefore it would suit to say 'transaction' "to describe the balance of energies which can be separated only in abstraction" (Eames 43). The poet, the representative of the man, born at the bank of the river- river as a natural flow of water and the flow of life and poet's blood in the river's stream, knows how the transaction between human organism and environment/nature has taken place.

Another example on how the poet feels himself attached with nature element is his feeling expressed in the poem, "I am the Autumnal Sun":

"I am the Autumnal sun,  
With Autumn gales my race is run.  
When will the hazel put forth its flowers,  
And the grape-ripen under my bowers?" (4262)

Either the poet himself or the sun is speaking; in either of the conditions, there is the extreme realization man as the sun or sun as the man, as the sun of autumn, where "human and nonhuman nature meet, but where nonhuman nature's dynamics are not wholly muted" (Stephens 284). The pace and race of his life is all directed as per the sun and the season, the season has its impact to the trees like hazel and pines. Thoreau views the same in his poem, "I am the Autumnal Sun":

When will the harvest and the hunter's moon  
Turn my midnight into noon?  
I am all sere & yellow,  
And to my core mellow. (4262)

The change has taken place in the appearance of the sun as the autumn sun, paleness and yellow appearance has still the smoothness in the way life does, and the combination of nature in this reference has no human instrumental activity, but nature has retained its own dynamics to change the environment as per autumn season and the change has ultimately taken place in the feeling of the poet, hence it becomes balance and transaction at a time. Thoreau further says in his poem, "I am the Autumnal Sun":

The mast is dropping within my woods  
The winter is lurking within my moods  
And the rusding of the withered leaf  
Is the constant music of my grief,  
My gay colored grief,  
My autumnal relief." (4262)

What is important in the poet's realization is his sense of living is a balance of energies and natural phenomena one after another, and "this balance is so intricate and delicate that it demands precision in the functioning of all its sustaining parts" (Eames 43). It is a precarious aspect to human existence and that human beings survive in a world, which is not completely organized and balanced in itself in the absence of other nature- the pragmatics of nature for the life of

human beings. The key to understanding in the poet's expression in nature is the continuity of all domains of nature- sun, moon, tree, cloud, river, flowers, fruits, woods and humans getting linked with the poetic image of autumn sun in which the nature, lower processes of organic life with out the ability to think and realize are tied to the humans, the higher processes of thinking and realizing faculty and the functions around.

Thoreau has the combination of dreams, and fantasies, "Forever in my dream & in my morning thought, Eastward a mount ascends" (Fimdimmt 4417), and picture of heaven above the earth, "I'll not forget the fair heaven" (Fh 4063) as the destined place for men, and the hell, generally the unwanted aspect of human imagination, which stimulates fears of everlasting torture and in many of his poems he has the imagination of the heaven most just in connection with the experience of earthly nature and the pleasure it provides. As a poet, he has created this picture of nature with growing functions of "symbolic behavior make it possible for humans to transcend parts of their immediate undergoing and experiencing and to know that death and all that it entails is a part of organic life" (Eames 41), and he cannot ignore nature from every imagination of the happiness function, pleasure function and the function of life in which the pleasurable existence of nature, in some conditions, can also be imagined.

Thoreau has not just talked about nature, rather he has planted the philosophy of life through nature symbols, created the curiosity of life through nature images, and imagined the life on earth and heaven with the philosophy of soul, or mind substance, or consciousness as "thought to designate an entity which exists outside the natural processes" (42). No doubt, human reason and intelligence emerge from the life of human beings in nature and with nature as the romantics believe nature as the source of creation, but at the same time there must be the naturalization of the intelligence which Thoreau has created giving pastoral scene and shaping of the nature identity with the picture of garden, river banks, mountain hills, woods, moony nights, fair heaven and many others. It means he has generated all symbolic behavior and forms of thinking developed in the course of human history as the part of the history of nature itself. The forms of reason do not descend upon humans from a transcendental realm, nor are they embedded in the heart of nature, nor are they born innately dormant in the faculties of human mind, but it is the combination of the environmental property, pure understanding and the culture of naturalism.

Seeking experience, Thoreau uses nature as a tool for learning, as an instrument, and also he focuses on making the wilderness in nature, his role model and reference point of his life. As humans, though the life cannot be imagined detached from nature and natural force, is generally understood as free and ontologically capable to exist with balanced relation with nature and society, so he regards nature and provides ample respect to nature as free and independently existing being.

### **Thoreau and Ecophilosophy of Harmony**

Honestly, the human condition requires some degree of disconnect from natural world in order to survive in a livable environment, but as humans we have the capacity to form a relationship between two opposing ideas of human nature and natural world; also the plants, flowers owls and many other elements have their own way of life, the romantic pastoral setting similar to that of Eden, and the setting "orientated towards the revaluation of non-fictional nature writing" (Gaard 49) with no expectation of any other assistance except the natural one. For him this is thus nature as "original, innate character", as 'uninterfered with', 'the thing we start from, the thing we have not yet done anything about' (Stephen 282). By studying Thoreau and putting his princi-

ples into practice, we could get much closer to reaching equilibrium between humankind and our environment because he appears to know that there is mere sensation of the type we share with other animals and the instrumental operations of human consciousness and previous symbolic constructions have not yet entered the picture, but exactly it is just human imagination; birds, animals, plants and every other nature domains are free to exist with their pleasure of life.

Methinks that Time has reached his prime,

Eternity is in the flower,

I hear their faint confused chime

Now ushering in the sacred hour. (Cc 4192)

Everything governed by the time; nature matures itself into eternity and confirms itself perfect in all modes as he has acknowledged that the creature like the cock, though domesticated, is wild, wild by nature of its naturalness, in the sense of being wild and possesses of its own dynamics, the animal is categorized as a sort of defective consumer item and the possibility of genuine encounter ruled out from the beginning by adoption of the policy mode in cognition, but it provides the awareness "upon my bed at early dawn" (4190) with intellect and security not less than any human being.

As an attempt to render "a new philosophy of nature generated by the need to liberate nature from the inherently domineering disposition of human kind" (Shea xi), Thoreau, with his ample regards to the plants and animal zones and his experience with them, has emerged to advocate the "need to get away from urban, industrialized areas" (Neimark 79) very strongly, and probably with the sense of the danger associated with urbanization and mostly with the sense of ontological existence of both humans and environment in which "The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (Buell 7). He is of the opinion that human activities should enhance the wilderness of the nature and its intrinsic quality because if "we say that human activity degrades the environment, we are often referring to the loss of or disrespect for intrinsic value" (DesJardins 131) and for which neither humans should disrespect nature nor nature does it to humans.

The pragmatic relation of humans and nature as inter connected, either as accommodated or as adapted or as adjusted, can never be questioned, but the question is still relevant on whether nature has individuality, freedom and ontology of existence. Ontology is one of the oldest forms of philosophy, especially in case of the nature; it goes back to the idea of Aristotle when he has proposed the theory of 'the ladder of nature'. It was then that some how the idea of the distinction between the nature and human was eminent as the nonliving beings are at the bottom of the ladder of nature, then up to plants, then animals and humans at the highest point of the nature and the over the humans is the creator. With centuries long debates on the importance of nature and its existence, the whole environmental philosophy has been guided by this principle supposing humans as supremely superior of all other nature elements- living, moving and thinking (humans), moving and living (animals), just living (plants) and just existing without life (nonliving ones). Hence, ontology, as the study of being, provides the queries on the existence and identity, and also a discussion on the philosophy of nature, and it provides a level of understanding the nature. Sensing nature everywhere, echoing the friendliness in nature, Thoreau says in "Great friend":

I walk in nature still alone

And know no one

Discern no lineament nor feature  
Of any creature. (4309)

Who is the friend for Thoreau- nature ever accompanying him and building a trust of life, he knows no one but nature, and what kind of person the poet is willing to make his friend is the one who can just respect the individuality and ontology of nature.

I still must seek the friend  
Who does with nature blend,  
Who is the person in her mask,  
He is the man I ask. (4309)

He expects his friend to be either nature in truth and the man with nature's face, the identity as nature but not as a modern man because he is aware that "human disturbances and restorations should be considered both natural and also anti-natural; our urge to decide what is healthy for an ecosystem is natural, but that decision also manipulates and attempts to appropriate nature, thus acting against it" (Kuperus 214). For the sake of his friendship, he/she can only be the friend "Who is the expression of her meaning, Who is the uprightness of her leaning, Who is the grown child of her weaning" (Gf 4309) for whom he has seen the expression of nature's meaning, upbringing of nature's learning and grown up with nature's preventing. With all this imagination, Thoreau anticipates that nature has a good way of showing the meaning of life, manner of upbringing the child in the way humans do and the ability to control one from evildoings, hence he realizes human accountability to the environment and nature's self-survived mode of life, is his part of the text's ethical orientation of making his ecopoetics. He has the reflection of nature within himself in his poem, "Great friend":

We twain would walk together  
Through every weather,  
And see this aged nature,  
Go with a bending stature. (4310)

The analogy developed from the very beginning of the poem, "Great Friend", the poet and the nature go together befriended until nature reaches itself up to the bending stature with no cross-roads passing through, but with essential solitude but feeling of friendliness but preserved individuality passing through every weather consciously because "consciousness is selective, and we attend to and construct our reality according to what interests us" (Stephens 280), and the poet has the same level of consciousness.

Thoreau as a pond poet, not in the metaphor of limitation, but in the sense of his environmental attachment, a poet belonging to a special location, and experiencing purity and diversity, keeps full awareness on the American culture generally "associated with technological development, imperialist politics, abstraction and distance with respect to the natural world, and a spiritualistic pretension to religious superiority" (Killingworth 12), and has a spirit of picturing nature with "the idea is that nature has systematic value, which is more than instrumental value, in virtue of the fact that nature gives rise to organisms that have intrinsic value" (Elliot 43), the value of perfection and self survival when he says in "Great friend":

The center of this world,  
The face of nature,  
The site of human life,  
Some sure foundation



And nucleus of a nation —

At least a private station. (4310)

Nature centric ideology becomes strong when he regards nature as the center of the world and the center of private station, not only for the humans but also for nature itself through which he attempts to define nature and the extent of naturalness of an area (of a nation) by inverse reference to the amount of it (the world) transformed through exposure to abstracted mechanism (foundation and nucleus). Structuring of this environmental physiology through his psychology is itself conditioned by his experience; subject and object are primordially unitary in the instant field of pure experience, subject as his experience and object as nature, and at the same time, he tends to construct the impression of nature and ecology as most harmonious and efficient to human psychological and physical needs, "The larger and more abstract the quantity of learnt abstractions and analogues from previous experience" (Stephens 280) that has acquired, as he supposes, in order to help humans boom in the world of nature.

Thoreau rejects dangerous purity and acknowledges that human experience is the unavoidable benchmark of ontological status "whilst enabling the establishment of an ontological spectrum of naturalness in which nature can remain nature even with many humans living in it" (289). Nature shows novelty and spontaneity whenever it is and wherever it is, "like the sun they shine forever bright; Ay, they are suns, though earth must in its flight, Put out its eyes that it may see their light" (Opswtow 4307), and "these stars are never paled, though out of sight" (4306) in the way we can correlate nature's element as purity to ontology and inner ontology to wilderness because nature's dynamics have never been edited and transformed as per human interest and human design; ultimately humans have to take part in nature's dynamics as accommodated. Thoreau further elaborates his belief to nature's ontology in the poem, "Ep on the World" as:

Here lies the body of this world,  
Whose soul alas to hell is hurled.  
This golden youth long since was past,  
Its silver manhood went as fast,  
And iron age drew on at last;  
'Tis vain its character to tell,  
The several fates which it befell,  
What year it died, when 'twill arise,  
We only know that here it lies. (4303)

This world, the combination of living and nonliving nature, has a life; it has the body and soul; it grows young and old, but humans only know the truth that nature rests and lives forever. With the qualities of living, aging, bodily and soul-based existence personalized and humanized, Thoreau tends to illustrate the idea that nature is an already existing truth about the world that we hold in our minds. Like humans, nature faces the fate. It undergoes changes in a process. In this sense, nature is self-surviving. And, also it has similar pattern of life. It never intends to harm humans and other being with its essential harmony with living beings.

We cannot exactly say whether nature can think in the way man does, but it is easy to say, as Thoreau has imagined in his poetry, that nature has the nature of keeping harmony with similarly existing beings on earth.

## Conclusion

Hence, Thoreau has strong devotion to nature and its harmony. For him, ecology provides

the meaning to the level of nature, environment and the total system of the natural processes, and philosophy provides the wisdom and poignant ideas as the modes of inquiries and questions on and about the patterns of life and related issues. Thoreau's poems, therefore show the essence of nature, the totality of natural elements rather than an individual event, though in some cases, he has addressed individual case of the sun, the moon, the hills, the woods and many other images, as the primary part of human life, learning and experiencing the life with nature's naturalness, purity and pragmatic essence which ultimately represents for the individuality of men and the individuality of everlasting natural chain as the worldly chain. It is a sense of nature trustworthy with our pragmatic bearings, as he supposes, since the contrast of the innate propensity with the realm of social constructions is kept alive by the daily experience of men as practical, not as hypothetical, beings.

Thoreau's theory of nature implies to a philosophical approach to the study of ecology, especially for the understanding of nature as an ever-harmonizing agent to and among the living beings though it exists of its own ontologically. He has composed his poems devoted to nature as the sources of environmental approach with a philosophical essence that can be a strong feed back to the emergence of ecophilosophy.

### Abbreviations and the titles of Thoreau's poems cited in the article

Atd	- All things decay
Btf-	- Behold these flowers
Cc-	- Cock-crowing
Eotw	- Ep on the World
Fh	- Fair heaven
Fimdimmt	- Forever in my dream & in my morning thought
Gf	- Great friend
Iatas	- I am the Autumnal Sun
Iwbutbr	- I was born upon thy bank river
L	- Life
Mlmbf	- My love must be free
Opswtow	- On Ponkawtasset, since we took our way
Tmmu	- The moon moves up

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