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“Wendigo” (fiction)  
“Thoreau’s Animal Dualism in Walden” (critical essay)

The fiction and critical essay portions of my thesis center around the complicated ways in which humans interact with animals. Within the fiction portion, titled “Wendigo,” the symbolic aspects of this relationship are emphasized, manifesting themselves in a conflict between a child and the town in which she lives – a town that resorts to animal sacrifices in a desperate attempt to stave off a mysterious epidemic that only kills women. While the town, consumed by a radical brand of anthropocentrism and misogyny peddled by its de facto leader, attempts to reassert human (and masculine) dominance over the world by killing the deer that roam nearby, a child chooses to rebel, and in doing so she becomes aware of a connection between the subjugation of women and the subjugation of nature.

In addition, the accompanying critical essay examines Henry David Thoreau’s dual conception of animals as both independent, autonomous entities and as symbols. Focusing on Walden, the essay investigates Thoreau’s tendency to combine science and outright speculative subjectivity, ultimately finding that he does so purposely with the intent to illustrate how interactions between humans and animals operate simultaneously on the levels of objectivity and subjectivity. Moreover, this duality is synergistic rather than conflicting, which sets Thoreau apart from his contemporary, Walt Whitman. Indeed, the contrast between the symbiosis of this duality and the more traditional body-soul conflict is represented in the aforementioned fiction piece, in that the town is preoccupied with human exceptionality and the nature of the soul, while the rebellious child sees an animal in herself, allowing her to seek balance rather than conflict.