Universidade de Aveiro Departamento de Línguas e Culturas
Ano 2013

Maria Isabel de Sousa

As Questões Ecológicas em *Moby-Dick,* de Melville, e *Walden*, de Thoreau

Environmental Concerns in Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Thoreau's *Walden*

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O júri

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palavras-chave

natureza, preocupações ecológicas, progresso, industrialização, capitalismo, catástrofes ambientais

resumo

A presente dissertação procura analisar *Moby-Dick*, de Herman Melville, e *Walden*, de Henry David Thoreau, narrativas que, em meados do século XIX, alertavam para a necessidade de preservar a natureza, num tempo em que os Estados Unidos da América começavam a explorar as potencialidades da revolução industrial. Afirmando-se, de certo modo, como profetas dos excessos que o homem viria a cometer na era pós-industrial, prenunciavam já os desastres ecológicos que atualmente conhecemos e que têm sido praticamente ignorados. Assim sendo, há todo o interesse em revisitar estes textos, visto terem teorizado, de uma forma literária, mas simples, muitos dos aspetos presentes no discurso da ecocrítica atual. Além disso, este estudo pretende demonstrar que é urgente o homem compreender que é moralmente inaceitável violar as leis da natureza. Para o seu próprio bem e de todo o universo, é imperioso que a respeite, tal como Melville e Thoreau prudentemente preconizaram.

Keywords nature, ecological concerns, progress, industrialization, capitalism, environmental catastrophes
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Abstract This dissertation aims at analyzing Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, mid-nineteenth-century American narratives where both authors called attention to the need to preserve nature, at a time when the United States of America was beginning to explore – and possibly exploit – the potential promised by the industrial revolution. To a certain extent, they stood out as prophets of the excesses that man would commit in the post-industrial era, hence foreshadowing the ecological disasters that we have witnessed of late but, unfortunately, have practically ignored. Thus, there is much to be gained when revisiting these texts, since both voices theorized, in a literary, but simple way, many of the issues present in current environmental discourse. Furthermore, this study aims at demonstrating that it is urgent man finally realizes that it is morally unacceptable to violate the laws of nature. For both his own and the universe's sake, it is imperative that human beings respect nature, as Melville and Thoreau wisely advocated.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims at rereading Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) in the light of current ecocritical scholarship or perspective so as to reflect on these works in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to today's environmental crisis. By understanding these authors' thoughts and ideas regarding nature and how they conceive the relationship between man and nature, these works can help us to fully realize and actively engage in the resolution of the environmental problems humankind has created.

By re-evaluating and analyzing these works from the perspective of ecocriticism, this procedure will certainly provide fruitful insights to modern readers who commit themselves to environmental issues. In effect, this literary and cultural criticism, which has developed in North America and Europe since the 1990s, is a reaction to the degradation of the global environment. Whereas for Cheryll Glotfelty ecocriticism is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment,"[1] for Lawrence Buell "ecocriticism might succinctly be defined as [the] study of the relation between literature and [the] environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis."[2] Considering these remarks, *Moby-Dick* and *Walden* gain a new relevance, deserve even more attention in the twenty-first century as both works can effectively awake people to "a committed environmental praxis."

By analyzing and reflecting on Melville's and Thoreau's writings, mainly *Moby-Dick* and *Walden*, I intend to emphasize the importance of rethinking and changing the relation between humans and Nature while trying to figure out a way to balance humankind, nature, and civilization. Thus, to achieve this purpose, I will compare and contrast both works, analyze both authors' treatment of nature, especially during a time in America, the American Renaissance, when American intellectuals and Transcendentalists viewed Nature as a means to connect with God or showed how it should be respected, not tampered with.

Throughout my analysis, I intend to extract useful meanings, show how both writers were forerunners of modern ecological thoughts and point out the right path for

humanity, although Nature has unfortunately been carelessly ignored. Both American authors and contemporaries, Melville (1819-1891) and Thoreau (1817-1862), developed a different worldview, yet they shared an unconditional love of nature and their country, even if they criticized the maladies that affected it. However, it is important to underline right from the outset that, despite the differences, their views as regards nature, at the core, overlap. Whereas Thoreau, imbued with the spirit of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1872), viewed Nature as a means to aspire for a spiritual realm, where nature should be treated as a sacred entity, Melville, in contrast, uses nature to criticize man's unlimited, insatiable selfishness, highlighting the ongoing conflict between man and nature, where those human beings like Ahab wish to control it, disrespect it, exploring Nature to the point of exhaustion, and ultimately depleting its resources.

In this study, I will also attempt to assess Emerson's profound influence on Thoreau and, to a lesser extent, Melville's character, and how this influence is reflected in their works, namely in their views regarding Nature and the divine. After all, nature and the divine, in the mid-nineteenth-century were not dissociated but intimately related. In fact, Thoreau and Melville did not need the help of any institution or the clergy to be profoundly religious men like Emerson, who had been a Unitarian reverend, but later resigned from the Unitarian Church. Thus, in addition to my analysis of the relationship between man and nature in both works, it is with great interest and fascination that I explore these masterpieces from a religious perspective, since I, myself, consider that man without the divine is totally devoid of sense.

Thus, the first chapter of this thesis analyzes the ecological concerns implicit in *Moby-Dick*. First, it focuses on how Melville perceives the relationship between humans and nature; the sea and Moby Dick, as symbols of nature. Then it goes on to offer the author's critique of capitalism, animal suffering, and his reflection on the extermination of the whale. This chapter also focuses on the threatening nature that has been exchanged for nature under threat and today's culture that should deify nature but is engaged in plundering it, instead.

The second chapter provides Thoreau's ecological thoughts in *Walden*. This chapter also offers a detailed analysis of Thoreau's time, how he considered nature as a

living being, man as an integral part of nature, and nature as the embodiment of the divine. It also focuses on the implications of Thoreau's adoption of simplicity as a mode of life, the value of simplicity and vegetarianism. Along with this, there is also a reference to the menace of industrial progress, the author's urge for the need of a spiritual awakening and *Walden*'s challenges.

The third chapter discusses the ways in which the cultural and literary movements of Romanticism and Transcendentalism influenced both Thoreau and Melville, while contrasting their similarities and differences as far as nature and the relationship between man and nature are concerned.

Finally, the Conclusion provides additional insight on the practical significance that may be extracted from our rereading of *Moby-Dick* and *Walden* in the twenty-first century. Analyzing and reflecting on these masterpieces may shed new light and bring invaluable benefits for nature and humankind.

Notes

[1] Cheryll Glotfelty, *www.asle.org/site/resources/ecocritical.../glotfelty/*

[2] Quoted in Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature In America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003), p.160.

CHAPTER ONE

MELVILLE'S ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS IN *MOBY-DICK*

1.1 Relationship between Man and Nature/the Sea and Moby Dick

Bearing in mind Melville's and Thoreau's different outlook on Nature already presented in the Introduction to this thesis, my purpose in this chapter is to delve into Melville's implicit ecological concerns in *Moby-Dick* in a more detailed manner.

First and foremost, I will analyze the way in which Melville's time contributed to the formation of his thoughts, how he was imbued with the intellectual trends of his time and how these are reflected in *Moby-Dick*. I will also explore how this author regards the relationship between humans and Nature / the sea / Moby Dick, how he implicitly embraces a mystical union with Nature and the nonhuman world urging humankind to a peaceful coexistence with it. In this connection, I will also consider Melville's condemnation of capitalism, animal suffering and his ambivalent attitude towards the extermination of the whale. Finally, I will reflect on how man's mindless attitude toward Nature has caused an irreparable harm and put it under threat, showing that it is urgent to reassert man's place in the world. As a matter of fact, my ultimate goal is to show how *Moby-Dick* mirrors the profound changes in humans and Nature induced by the mid-nineteenth century industrialization and, above all, the author's implicit prophecy of Nature's victory over man if he does not learn to coexist peacefully with it.

To fully understand Melville's relation to Nature in *Moby-Dick*, it may be worthwhile to consider his rich experience as a seaman on board two whalers during his youth. This fact undoubtedly made him love and admire the peaceful, wondrous but revolving turbulent ocean, which he so wonderfully described in *Moby-Dick*. Although Melville had already left maritime life when he wrote *Typee* and *Omoo,* in 1846 and 1847, respectively, he tried to narrate sea adventure stories based on his true experiences in the South Seas. It was different in *Moby-Dick* for he had gained maturity (despite being only thirty-two years old), he embraced urgent, real issues of his time like the pillage of natural resources, the super exploitation of workers and slavery, returning once again to

the sea setting. This time he was more concerned with presenting the problems America was facing, as he really saw them, namely the rapid territorial expansionism, the industrial power and the emerging capitalism.

There are undoubtedly several major themes pervading *Moby-Dick,* such as the permanent search for life's meaning, the sharkishness of human nature, man's alienation from nature and himself, the whale's symbolism and good versus evil. Yet, my analysis will focus on current theories related to ecocriticism and how they may help us to understand Melville's profound reverence and respect toward Nature, which transcended mid-nineteenth-century America and are of great interest today.

Although this study offers an ecocritical reading of *Moby-Dick*, where Nature is of paramount importance, my view is that one cannot dissociate it from other issues in the novel, but in order to understand them, it is really important to keep in mind Melville's time. He witnessed the United States undergoing profound social, economic and political changes. During his time it evolved from a country that had declared its independence a few decades before (1776) to a respected country, trying to break free from European models and cultural trappings and chart its own path. When Melville wrote *Moby-Dick*, his country was still relatively young, with little tradition, a country whose progress was taking place at a high speed, with technological innovations occurring at a pace never seen before. The invention of the railroad (1830s) and the telegraph (1832), meant easier and faster communication and travel, which revolutionized Americans' life in an unprecedented way. The wild west still remained unconquered, virgin and promising which, on the one hand, made agriculture flourish and helped to develop various industries and commerce but, on the other hand, aroused Naturalists' and Transcendentalists' attention, like Emerson and Thoreau, with both calling our attention to the destruction of the wilderness and forests. After all, Romantics tended to value, deify Nature, to see it as a means through which God's presence could be felt, as a source of inspiration and a generous supporter, as the poetic voice in Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* feels:

> … well pleased to recognize
> In nature and the language of the sense
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,

> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being.[1]

To a certain extent, it can be said that Melville is imbued with Emerson's doctrines and his writings reveal how influenced he was by them. But there is, obviously, a crucial distinction between Emerson, the "philosopher of optimism,"[2] as Bénédicte Leude called him, and Melville, the novelist who questioned his idealism, excessive faith in the individual and his ethics of self-improvement. Despite having attended only one of Emerson's lectures in 1849, Melville frequented the circles where Transcendentalism was discussed, read magazines and newspapers, and through his conversations with his friend the writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne, he kept up to date with the current trends of the movement. This connection to Transcendentalism contributed, nonetheless, to some skepticism concerning its main thoughts, namely the defense of individualism as the supreme value, which is highly criticized in *Moby-Dick*, in Ahab's character. But to say that Melville is highly critical of Emerson's praise of the individual and self-reliance, is not to say that he could be totally indifferent to his somewhat "new" conception of Nature as it is presented in his book *Nature* (1836). Here, as Leo Marx notes, "He easily reconciles what often seem in retrospect to have been irreconcilable tendencies."[3] In Marx's words, Emerson manages to harmonize Nature and industry, considering that both can be complementary and that man, as Emerson notes:

> no longer waits for favoring gales, but by means of steam, he realizes the fable of Aeolus's bag, and carries the two and thirty winds in the boiler of his boat. To diminish friction, he paves the road with iron bars, and, mounting a coach with a ship-load of men, animals, and merchandise behind him, he darts through the country, from town to town, like an eagle or a swallow through the air. By the aggregate of these aids, how is the face of the world changed, from the era of Noah to that of Napoleon!.[4]

On the one hand, as the following quotes suggest, Emerson embraces an anthropocentric view of Nature: "All the parts incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man,"[5] or "Nature is thoroughly mediate: It is made to serve. It receives the dominion of man as meekly as the ass on which the Savior rode. It offers all its kingdoms to man as the raw material which he may mould into what is useful."[6] Moreover, he seems to defend that nature is at man's disposal, in contrast to a Christian

vision of it: “cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.”[7] On the other hand, it is surprising, that it is when Emerson is in contact with nature that he recognizes he is similar to God, that he becomes part of Him, of the divine. When he experiences nature, he manages total communion, absolute ecstasy, a mystical experience:

> In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, — no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, — my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, — all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.[8]

This inner transcendence is only achieved because man is at one with nature and perceives the Over-Soul or Spirit that pervades all nature and speaks to him. For Emerson, nature is beneficial to man’s body and soul, “to the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone,”[9] which represents a step forward as regards Americans’ vision on nature. Melville’s view on the healing powers of nature in *Moby-Dick*, also resonates with the one Emerson had presented, especially when Melville writes: “Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is damp, drizzly November in my soul; … I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can”(3).

Like Emerson, Melville also showed contempt for conventional society, human hypocrisy and materialism and had unlimited confidence in the resources of the self. He also “preached” the positive values and life, but he was a step further, in the sense that he did not conform to the soft romantic pastoralism, which was so characteristic of the mid-nineteenth-century. He broke free from romantic writers who praised nature for its beauty and benevolence to man, and considered it a shelter, a sanctuary, where they could seek refuge from the fear of the coming industrialization and the nightmare of industrial cities. By highlighting the contradictory states of Nature, he wanted to show exactly this – that Nature is inscrutable, unpredictable, intriguing, untamed and vulnerable. In this sense, it can be argued that Melville criticizes Transcendentalists’ views and intends to stir, shake Americans’ consciousnesses, have them react and have an

impact on society, by reflecting and writing about one of the utmost matters of his epoch, the predatory whaling industry.

It is no wonder that Melville, who had first-hand information and knowledge about whaling, who was an acute observer and novelist, had seized the whale hunting to compose the first American epic, once the whaling industry peaked in the United States in the 1840s, especially on Nantucket Island and New Bedford, Massachusetts, where the most important whaling ports in the world were located, as Ishmael notes:

> Besides though New Bedford has of late been gradually monopolizing the business of whaling, and though in this matter poor old Nantucket is now much behind her, yet Nantucket was her great original - the Tyre of this Carthage;- the place where the first dead American whale was stranded. Where else but from Nantucket did those aboriginal whalemen, the Red-Men, first sally out in canoes to give chase to the Leviathan? (9).

Since whale hunting played such an important role in nineteenth-century America, engaging thousands of people who devoted their lives to serve this exploitative industry, Melville could not help seizing this theme to show his concern for the emerging capitalistic society. In effect, *Moby-Dick* can be interpreted as a reaction to industrial civilization, where people earned money and gained honor by exploiting nature's resources to exhaustion. The emerging capitalism is surreptitiously showing its claws, Melville is fully aware of that, and intends to alert America to the disastrous consequences that it may bring to the young nation, if people follow Ahab's path. He is the incarnation of the age of Machinery, as Captain of the *Pequod*, he is determined to conquer the sea master, the monster, the Leviathan, the White Whale, whose conquest symbolizes the total dominion over Nature. Ahab embodies, thus, the great capitalist, whose subordinates are transformed into objects, slaves, also victims of a system from which they cannot escape. Ahab's quest is their own, too, as Ishmael says:

> They were one man, not thirty. For as the one ship that held them all; though it was put together of all contrasting things - oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp - yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull, which shot on its way, both balanced and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities of the crew, this man's valor, that man's fear; guilt and guiltiness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to (606).

Ahab's egocentric, insatiable nature is representative of the archetypal nineteenth-century American, who is too self-confident, who trusts in his capacities beyond limits, implying that no superior force can restrain him from anything, which can, indubitably, lead to ruin and disaster.

By depicting Ahab's hostility toward nature, his disrespect for his own and the crew's lives, not only does Melville show how mean, evil and corrupt is the human soul but also foreshadowing a dark future for humankind, especially if man does not refrain his attitudes and learns to love, respect and worry about the preservation of the intrinsic natural value of all things in creation.

It is precisely because of Melville's awareness of the interdependency and connection of everything to everything else in Nature and his concern about man's encroachment upon it, that an ecocritical reading of *Moby-Dick* makes sense in the twenty-first century.

Throughout the book, Melville implicitly challenges his readers to accept and behave as components of Nature and not as its superiors, respect humans' and nature's rights, which obviously reveals his moral values towards Nature. He knew that man's obsessive individualism, like Ahab's, especially his will to control Nature, harmed and killed human beings, threatened Nature, put it at risk and would cause unthinkable environmental disasters. As Andrew Delbanco points out in the Introduction, "He wrote *Moby-Dick* in a messianic fervor because he wanted to save his country from itself."[10] The young democracy, the accelerated pace of expansionism, the strong desire for economic and industrial power, and the great scientific, philosophical and religious questions of the nineteenth century are all part of Melville's meditation on America and are present in *Moby-Dick*. Therefore, as Carl Bode has shown, it cannot be doubted that Melville was not imbued with the spirit that "the thinkers in a society, writers among them, are the persons most likely to examine prevailing values and to discern flaws in the social structure before these flaws have been recognized by society as a whole."[11] As I see it, the "flaws in the social structure" to which Melville wished to alert American people were the prevailing unlimited, greedy, selfish American spirit, which he knew were undermining

Americans' soul. The unlimited greed that leads man to disrespect himself, other human beings, the laws of nature, this is the cause of all evil on earth.

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville not only affirms the rights of the individual but also alerts to the necessity of the balance between humans and Nature, considering man a creature as important as any other being or any tiny atom in the intricate web of life. He abandons a self-centered anthropocentric view of humans in favor of an earth-centered one, since he knows that man cannot continue to extract benefits from nature, exploit and plunder it lavishly, without causing irreparable harm. This is evident in chapter 105, "Does the Whale's Magnitude Diminish? Will He Perish?" for instance, in the following excerpt: "and the thousand harpoons and lances darted along the continental coasts; the moot point is, whether Leviathan can long endure so wide a chase, and so remorseless a havoc" (501). The author certainly expresses his deep concern for the extermination of the whale while attempting to change the way people understand their relationship to other living creatures and the earth.

Thus, the voyage of the whaling ship *Pequod*, its final destruction, the death of the crew, with the exception of Ishmael, is a warning for American people of the dangers of expansionism, considering that the *Pequod* symbolizes hundreds of whaling ships sweeping the seas in the 1840s, being nothing more than machines subdued to the enterprise of exploiting the oceans' resources. By naming the ship *Pequod*, after a Connecticut tribe, whose village was burned and the inhabitants slaughtered in 1637 and "with other New England tribes, … may have been as 'extinct as the ancient Medes,' as Melville says," (638-639) is by itself, a premonition of the doom and death that awaits this ship's voyage.

Throughout the voyage of the *Pequod*, which contains various social and ethnic groups and their reactions to the chase of the White Whale, Melville reveals his complex concept of Nature and the relationship between man and Nature. His ecological view is at odds with the Judeo-Christian concept, presented in the book of Genesis, which defended man's dominion over Nature: "and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."[12] This

mindset was also expressed by his contemporary Transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau, whose views will be explained in the second and third chapters of this study. And it is precisely because of the fact that he lived in an age of crisscross doctrines, which makes him a complex man, who contains multitudes and contradictory points of view on Nature and life. His works, *Moby-Dick* in particular, reflect the inconstancy, the turbulence, the ambiguity, the yearnings and the skepticism of Melville's character and thoughts. He wanders to-and-fro, as Elizabeth Hardwick points out when stating that: "Melville himself, as a sailor in real life, was perforce a wild man wandering in the wilderness of the Atlantic and the Pacific."[13]

It is no wonder, then, that *Moby-Dick* reflects the turbulent forces of opposition warring within the author and his inability to resolve life's contradictions. Notwithstanding the fact that Melville in one moment expresses faith in progress and in the next swears with Solomon that "there is nothing new under the sun"(228), on the whole, I contend that, unlike most Americans of his time who contemplated progress with exultation, Melville is skeptical about it, and advocates that man's attitude toward Nature should be essentially of respect, as can be easily seen in the various descriptions that convey his deep reverence for Nature, which is totally in accordance with his noble, religious, spiritual character. As his friend, Nathaniel Hawthorne, said, "If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature."[14] Consequently, it would not be wrong to conclude that, despite being different from Thoreau, Melville also recognizes that Nature should be considered sacred, and man's attitude toward it should be a religious, spiritual one.

However, the difference lies then in the fact that, at the same time, he recognizes nature's paradoxes, the powerful forces of opposition that struggle within man's soul, and these are the same dichotomies that are also found both in the sea and in Moby Dick, symbols of nature in the novel:

> Consider the subtleness of the sea; how its most dreaded creatures glide under water, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden beneath the loveliest tints of azure. Consider also the devilish brilliance and beauty of many of its most remorseless tribes, as the dainty embellished shape of many species of sharks (299).

It cannot be doubted that both man and nature, either the sea or the whale, share the same ambiguity and the same inconstancy, both are paradoxically benign and malevolent, beautiful and hideous and destructive:

> When beholding the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean's skin, one forgets the tiger heart that pants beneath it; and would not willingly remember that this velvet paw but conceals a remorseless fang (534).

The sea which provides the setting but is also part of the story, and Moby Dick / the White Whale, a central character, are symbols of Nature whose meanings overlap. One moment the sea represents life in its richness and profound mystery "It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life, and this is the key to it all" (5), while in the next it is "an everlasting terra incognita" (298) of which man has not enough knowledge. One moment he compares the sea to man's foe, to show its powerful strength to humankind and gives full vent to his hatred on the creatures in it: "But not only is the sea such a foe to man who is an alien to it, but it is also a fiend to its own offspring; worse than the Persian host who murdered his own guests"(299). The next, he acknowledges its healing powers and considers it a refuge from the trials and troubles of man's existence, as Ishmael notes:

> Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off - then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship. There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me (3).

And yet, in my view, throughout the novel, the sacredness of nature prevails over evil, there being abundant references which corroborate this point of view, for instance, the following ones: "Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and make him the own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning"(5); "There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a gentle

rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God" (173); "so that all deified Nature" (212); or "The sky looks lacquered; clouds there are none; the horizon floats; and this nakedness of unrelieved radiance is as the insufferable splendors of God's throne" (543).

It would not probably be wrong to infer that Melville identifies Nature with God and sees in it the nature of God himself, and therefore, after the struggle between man and Nature, i.e., between Ahab and Moby Dick, only Nature could win the struggle. In my view, the author, as has already been stressed before, considers Nature sacred and acknowledges its spiritual side. For him God is everywhere, he is a pantheist as he himself once admitted to Hawthorne, and as John Gatta refers: "How else to explain the sacramental intensity of his famous disclosure to Hawthorne: 'I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the supper and that we are the pieces' Even if God were dead and fragmented, or eternally hiding out, God's ghost refused to go away. 'Take God out of the dictionary,' he confided again to Hawthorne 'and you would have Him in the street.'[15] Thus, it is through both protagonists of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael and Ahab, that the author reflects his views as regards the existence of God in the universe. As John Bryant claims, both face transcendental problems, but while Ishmael fears there is nothing beyond our existence and goes to sea to accept and deal with the possibility of a nonexistent transcendent reality, Ahab is an atheist in denial who faces a constant inner struggle to deny the possibility of nothingness, to accept that behind the pasteboard mask of Moby Dick, there is nothing at all. Consequently, in my view, through Ishmael and Ahab's visions we can infer Melville's doubts, his permanent search for an individual truth, for God, as Gatta claims, he "retained to the end an insatiable hunger for the numinous."[16]

As a matter of fact, this is crucial to understand the way he perceives, depicts, and sacralizes Nature and his contempt for man's greed and voraciousness, his repulsion for the developing economic system of America, as it is revealed in Fleece's sermon to the sharks:

> Your woraciousness, fellow-critters. I don't blame ye so much for; dat is natur, and can't be helped; but to gobern dat wicked natur, dat is de pint. You is sharks, sartin; but if you gobern de shark in you, why den you be angel; for all angel is

> not'ing more dan de shark well goberned. Now, look here, bred'ren, just try wonst to be cibil, a helping yourselbs from dat whale. Don't be tearin' de blubber out your neighbour's mout, I say. Is not one shark good right as toder to dat whale? And, by Gor, none on you has de right to dat whale; dat whale belong to some one else. I know some o' you has berry brig mout, brigger dan oders; but then de brig mouts sometimes has de small bellies; so dat de brigness of de mout is not to swaller wid, but to bit off de blubber for de small fry ob sharks, dat can't get into de scrouge to help demselves (321).

It is really surprising and curious how this passage resonates with an excerpt of the famous Portuguese sermon that Father António Vieira preached in São Luís de Maranhão in 1654: Santo António's sermon to the fish, which takes place after disputes between the Jesuits and the colonizers of Brazil, because of the enslavement of Indians:

> Before, however, that you should go, as you have listened your praises, now listen to your faults. They will serve you as confusion, since they will not serve as amendment. The first thing that demoralizes me, fish, is that you eat each other. This is a great scandal, but the condition makes it even greater. Not only do you eat each other, but the big eat the small. Were it the reverse, it would not be so bad. If the small ate the big, a big one would be enough for many small, but as the big eat the small, one hundred or one thousand small, are not enough to feed a big one. See how St. Augustine finds it queer: homines pravis, praeversisque cupiditatibus facti sunt, sicut pisces invicem devorantes is: "Men with their evil and wicked greed, are like the fish that eat each other." This is so strange, not only of the reason but of the same nature, once we are all created in the same element, all citizens of the same country and all brothers, you may live to eat each other! St. Augustine, who preached to men, to make clear the ugliness of this scandal, showed it in the fish, and I, I preach to the fish so that you can see how ugly and abominable it is, I want you see it in men.[17]

Although the economic, political and social contexts of Brazil in the seventeenth-century and of America in the nineteenth-century were very different from each other, the core of the problem is exactly the same, both authors use allegories to alert and move people against the gluttony of the most powerful ones who, like the fish, wolf each other. Besides, like António Vieira, Melville also plays brilliantly with words, uses biblical texts skillfully and "preaches" subtly with the noblest ideals. Interesting may be the fact that, despite the resemblances, it is difficult to prove whether or not Melville read Vieira's sermons, while it is clear Camões' influence. This is precisely what the famous Argentinean writer, Jorge Luis Borges notes:

> I'm only sorry that Melville, being fluent in the Portuguese language and a reader of Luís de Camões, did not sneak in a reference to Father António Vieira's sermon "The Sermon of Saint Anthony to the Fish," Portugal's modest contribution to fish literature. But there might [be] a reference to *The Lusiads* in the novel. In the chapter "The Prophet," Ishmael meets a man called Elijah at the start of the voyage who casts a dark shadow over Ahab's intentions. This ill omen is reminiscent of the episode narrated in Book IV of Camões' epic poem, one of the most memorable episodes of the poem. As Vasco da Gama sails out to India, an old man on the pier admonishes that nothing good will come from the voyage.[18]

Borges's comment on Melville's familiarity with the Portuguese language is debatable. What we do know for sure is that he read Camões in English translation, especially the translations of the Lord Viscount Strangford and others.

It is interesting to point out that George Monteiro, in his chapter "Melville's Figural Artist," has also called his readers' attention to the striking similarities between the Old Man's and Elijah's speeches at the start of the voyage:

> (…) the connection touched upon by Severino as early as 1972 (…) between the Old Man's speech at the end of Canto IV of *Os Lusíadas* and that of Elijah, the "ragged old sailor" Ishmael and Queequeg encounter as they leave the *Pequod* having just signed the ship's articles ("The Prophet," chapter 19 of *Moby-Dick*).[19]

According to Monteiro, there is ample evidence of Camões's and Melville's personal and intertextual relationships, as he notes in the following excerpt:

> Of Herman Melville's interest in the life and works of Luís de Camões there exists ample evidence. First, there continues to sing out from the pages of his novel *White-Jacket* (1850) the cries of the "matchless and unmatchable Jack Chase," who appears to have been the young sailor Melville's beau ideal: "For the last time, hear Camoens, boys!"[1] Secondly, from the pages of Melville's encyclopedic novel *Moby-Dick* (1851) come unmistakable references to Camões's poem of empire *Os Lusíadas* (1572), "the great epic of the ocean."[2] Third, among the books in Melville's library (including books owned by Melville or known to have been read by him) we can with confidence number *The Lusiad: or the Discovery of India*, translated by William Julius Mickle (1776); *Poems, from the Portuguese of Luís de Camoens*, translated by Lord Viscount Strangford (1803); and *Poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (1854), the last of which includes Miss Barrett's "Catarina to Camoëns," a poem well known to Melville and useful to him, it has been proposed, in the writing of his ambitious long poem *Clarel* (1876).[3] Fourth, several of Melville's poems allude to or draw upon Camões's work. And, finally, as culminating evidence of his abiding interest in the Portuguese poet, Melville has left us "Camoëns," a poem made up of paired sonnets entitled "Camöens" and "Camoëns in the Hospital."[20]

Returning to Ahab, from my point of view, it would not probably be wrong to compare Ahab's paranoiac quest for Moby Dick to the sharks' uncontrollable voraciousness, since Ahab and the sharks are unable to control their instincts.

It is important to understand, however, that Ahab has a personal reason that urges him to seek revenge against that "dumb brute", "it was Moby Dick that dismasted me; Moby Dick that brought me to this dead stump I stand on now" (177) and even admits "I'm demoniac, I am madness maddened […] I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer" (183). On an apparently personal level, Ahab hates Moby Dick because he robbed him of his leg, unmanned and dismasted him. His revenge grows out of control as he becomes totally obsessed and only has an objective in life, which is to hunt the White Whale, nothing else matters, not even his life or the lives of his crew members.

But, on a higher level, Ahab views Moby Dick as the embodiment of evil. As such, Ahab considers that he has a special mission; he was predestined to eradicate that malicious force from the Earth's surface. He acknowledges that his quest stems from motives he can neither understand nor control and that he cannot turn back as he himself notes:

> What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is as an errand boy in heaven; nor one single star can revolve, but by some invisible power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living, and not I (592).

At this moment in the voyage, however, the "grand, ungodly, god-like man" has learnt that superior forces exist beyond himself, a "nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing" which contrasts with the arrogant, egotistic, powerful attitude that he had revealed before. Yet, it is hard for him to acknowledge the horrifying idea that there is an authority, some inscrutable forces in life such as Nature or Fate, an unknowable God, some supreme, ultimate truth or knowledge. The inability and impotence to reach and control those forces overwhelm, destroy and undermine his tortured, tormented soul,

causing him awe, anguish, an insufferable pain. Ahab does not admit the possibility of being defeated, he is convinced that he can impose his will upon the cosmos, as is evident in his speech:

> All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event - in the living act, the undoubted deed-there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike though the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But not my master, man, is even that fair play. Who's over me? Truth hath no confines (178).

To Ahab, then, the whale represents a mask, a façade behind which lurks ”the inscrutable thing,” that force, a wall that he cannot transgress to reach the ultimate power or truth. He feels limited as a human being, imprisoned, dominated and submitted to higher powers, and this he cannot stand.

Since Ahab wants to be God himself, he cannot bear the insult of an authority beyond himself, but at the same time he panics before the possibility of nothingness: “sometimes I think there’s naught beyond. But ‘tis enough.” As John Bryant states, “His core awareness is that behind the pasteboard mask of Moby Dick, there is no god, evil or otherwise; and this primal doubt he cannot bear: ’tis enough.”[21]

In effect, it is through Ahab’s struggle to kill Moby Dick, i.e., to impose his will upon Nature, no matter how disastrous the consequences may be, and Ishmael’s reasonable thirst for knowledge, spiritual growth, and achieving fulfillment in the sea/nature, that we understand Melville’s concept of Nature. Yet, to fully grasp his environmental vision, it must be remembered how he was influenced by the dominant perspectives that existed in America in the antebellum period. Even though he was not a true follower of Transcendentalism, there is no doubt that its religious, philosophical and

social ideas exerted a huge influence on the formation of his character and permeate *Moby-Dick*. As Andrew Delbanco notes in the Introduction to *Moby-Dick or, The Whale:*

> It is a time-bound book of distinctively American accent, mainly in the sense that Melville realized, with his great contemporaries Emerson and Whitman and Hawthorne and Thoreau, that the very idea of America entailed an obliteration of the past that placed unprecedented demands on the resources of the self.[22]

Elizabeth Shultz, another critic who analyses how Melville's time and existing theories influenced his writings, states that:

> Donald Worster's pioneering 1977 study, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, identifies two dominant perspectives toward nature in the antebellum period, one which he associates with Thoreau, the other with Charles Darwin. […] Worster's differentiation of these two dominant nineteenth-century perspectives is useful in examining the environmental vision which Melville constructs in *Moby-Dick*. While endorsing both of these perspectives, Melville also questions them and in the process reveals not only an environmental position whereby nature and culture might co-exist.[23]

What is really important to highlight here is Melville's awareness that Nature has an inherent value and power beyond human control. It has its natural laws, mysteries and wonder and man would be wise if he would not interfere, if he could reconcile nature and culture trying a balance, beneficial both to humankind and nature. This is precisely how Schultz interprets Melville's thoughts:

> Skeptical with regard to interpreting nature according to either a transcendental or a scientific perspective, Melville, I argue, developed a third perspective, one based on an understanding of a unity between humanity and nature, a unity derived from an emotional and social kinship … . through this third perspective, an anthropocentric perspective which counters Buell's reading of Melville and supports a bonding of humans and nature, it is possible to see that Melville evolves an environmental vision with a conscience.[24]

Despite supporting an anthropocentric view, according to Schultz, I dare say that Melville was an innovator in the sense that he recognized that humans must be at one with nature and it is totally wrong to think that they can subdue it, as Captain Ahab tries to do. The total, unlimited confidence in the self that Emerson so well defended in "Self-Reliance" which, when carried to its extreme can lead to destruction, even death, as in Ahab's case. For all this, I contend that Melville is a precursor of modern ecology, a man

with a rare intuitive insight and intelligence, able to read beyond the surface of things. This is the reason why he "preaches" a more balanced relationship between humans and nonhumans, in accordance with modern perspectives, as Susan Kalter points out:

> Like the so-called 'deep' ecology of the twentieth century, Melville's ecological ethic embraces three main premises: that anthropocentric views of existence must be replaced by biocentric ones; that nonhuman beings 'have intrinsic worth'; and that nonhuman beings have the right to exist for their own sakes. I concur with Elizabeth Schultz that Melville's discourse surpasses the 'two dominant perspectives toward nature' that characterized the antebellum period: subjective transcendentalism and objective science. However, I do not accept her characterization of his 'third' perspective as 'anthropocentric' or 'homocentric.' I would argue that *Moby-Dick* presages the radical ecological movement by positing a cetocentric perspective, though one that stops short of the self-loathing extremes characterizing some forms of deep ecology.[25]

Despite the differences, on the whole, both Schultz and Kalter's Melvillean perspectives clearly maintain the author's utmost concern about the natural world. Through the experience of Ishmael, who not only transmits his own thoughts, but is also a witness of Ahab's actions and of the other crew members' on board of the *Pequod*, Melville conveys his vision on nature and on the relationship between man and nature, which is undoubtedly a harmonious one. Melville was a pioneer, a precursor of modern ecological perspectives, who transcended his time and presaged the environmental disasters that the world is facing today, since he was conscious that man's avarice, greed, and mindless attitude toward nature would lead him to future disasters, as happened to Ahab, whose will had no frontier or barrier.

In contrast, Ishmael undergoes a process of transformation and growth during the voyage of the *Pequod*. There is a time when he seems to have subdued to Ahab's purpose, joining him in his mad quest, but he has a different attitude from his captain as regards humans and nonhuman beings. He admits right from the start how important it is to be on friendly terms with all the inmates:

> Chief among these motives was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself. Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity. Then the wild and distant seas where he rolled his bulk; the undeliverable, nameless perils of the whale; these, with all the attending marvels of a thousand Patagonian sights and sounds helped me to sway my wish (…) since it is but well to be on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one lodges in (7- 8).

Also it is not before long that Ishmael recognizes Queequeg's noble character, dignity, good heart and generous spirit, even though he had considered him a cannibal when they met:

> For all his tattooing he was on the whole a clean, comely looking cannibal. What's all this fuss I have been making about, thought I to myself – the man's a human being just as I am: he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him. Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian (26).

In essence, what is important to highlight is not only Ishmael's capacity to accept diversity and racial difference: also it is implied that the relationship between him and other people aboard the *Pequod*, parallels the relationship between him and nature. Considering its deepest meaning, we may conclude that, when people live harmoniously as brothers, the very same feelings are extended to nature, as they intuitively know that man and nature cannot be separated from each other and are totally interwoven, interrelated, and interdependent. Ironically, this unquestionable truth is also acknowledged by Ahab: "O nature, and O soul of man! How far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! Not the smallest atom stirs or lives in matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind"(340). Had he not been as he himself declares "madness maddened", he would have dismissed the idea that he had been predestined to fight evil or nature or God, that "nameless inscrutable, force unearthly thing" hidden behind the façade, mask of the White Whale. However, "seeking vengeance on a dumb brute," as Starbuck says, seems blasphemous, but blasphemy was to challenge nature, to revolt against nature, to be mad to the point of thinking that nothing "cannot swerve me," and "I'd strike the sun if it insulted me" (178).

While Ahab's anguish, revolt, suffering and misfortune are caused by the want of knowledge from which he cannot escape, by believing that the ultimate truth is only achievable through the confrontation with Moby Dick, which would give him access to a reality beyond human comprehension, Ishmael would like to believe that the world speaks to us, however incapable we may be of understanding it: "some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty *cipher*" (470). He is intrigued by nature, the whiteness of the whale, which

simultaneously suggests contradictory meanings as well as the possibility of meaning nothing at all, but unlike Ahab, in a moment of self-discovery, he discovers that he will achieve it:

> Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever! For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. In thoughts of the visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti (456).

In a transcendental reverie Ishmael appeals to human beings to live in a harmonious way, cultivating love and brotherhood:

> Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness (456).

Also in "The Mast-Head" Ishmael experiences communion with Nature, nothing disturbs him, the waves lull him and make him indolent. In this state, his soul seeks peace, refuge and quietness in nature. As he himself recognizes, his identity dissolves, merges into the natural world in a kind of ecstatic mystic experience, a transcendental encounter between him and nature, where his soul seems to get loose from the real world:

> but lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernible form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it. In this enchanted mood, thy spirit ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space; like Crammer's sprinkled Pantheistic ashes, forming at last a part of every shore the round globe over (172-173).

Ishmael surrenders to the "all" feeling, as Melville writes in a letter to Hawthorne: "This 'all' feeling, though, there is some truth in. You must often have felt it, lying on the grass on a warm summer's day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head. This is the all feeling."[26] As Leo Marx refers:

> What Melville is describing, of course, is a consummate Emersonian experience of nature. Natural facts are blended with Ishmael's thoughts by the rhythm of the sea, and so he merges with the all. …Or, as Emerson had said of a similar experience, ˚I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God' [27]

Also in the episode "A Squeeze of the Hand," Ishmael surrenders, once more, to the "all feeling":

> As I sat there at my ease, cross-legged on the deck; after the bitter exertion at the windlass; under a blue tranquil sky; the ship under indolent sail, and gliding so serenely along; as I bathed my hands among those soft, gentle globules of infiltrated tissues, woven almost within the hour; as they richly broke to my fingers, and discharged all their opulence, like fully ripe grapes their wine; as I snuffed up that uncontaminated aroma,--literally and truly, like the smell of spring violets; I declare to you, that for the time I lived as in a musky meadow; I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible sperm, I washed my hands and my heart of it; I almost began to credit the old Paracelsan superstition that sperm is of rare virtue in allaying the heat of anger; while bathing in that bath, I felt divinely free from all ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any sort whatsoever (455-456).

In this case, however, this experience takes place not through a contact, a communion with nature, but through human contact, as he feels kinship with his shipmates: "and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules," transporting himself to an imaginary world, "a musky meadow" inhaling the "smell of spring violets."

There can be no doubt, then, that Melville had the capacity to experience a mystical union with nature and was surely raising people's awareness to the importance of coexisting peacefully and maintaining harmony between man and nature and building a harmonious society. He subtly asserts that man should really respect, care about each other, and their hearts should be imbued with nobler feelings, as he exemplifies with Ishmael and Queequeg's friendship. Also, by juxtaposing Ishmael and Ahab's characters, by confronting their contradictory views on man and nature, Melville extinguishes our doubts, if there are any, about man's place in the world.

Unlike Ishmael, Ahab tries to impose and inflict his will both on the crew that must jump at his orders and on nature. He seeks the whale to assert man's supremacy over what swims before him as "the monomaniac incarnation" of a superior power, which he

cannot bear. Basically, he is the spokesman or the hero for all men who cannot find out their right place in this world, who pursue an unattainable truth and suspect that "though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright" (211). He tries to reassert man's place in nature, however his anthropocentric beliefs definitely lead him to be blind as regards the power of nature. The White Whale, i.e., Nature responds to his challenge: "Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled" (622). In this encounter between man and nature "men and timbers reeled" evidence of the warring forces between man and nature, presented in *Moby-Dick.*

In my opinion, here Melville definitely expresses the incredible power of nature, the need to respect nonhuman beings and, above all, reminds man that the power of nature should be taken into account, as Nature will revolt against its violation and destruction, taking revenge on those who mistreat it.

1.2. Critique of Capitalism

In contrast to Ishmael, Captain Ahab symbolizes the insatiable capitalistic mind whose ambition has no limits, and therefore exploits natural resources to exhaustion, as John Bryant explains:

> Surely we can extract from the novel's veil of allegory a prophetic warning that the American ship of state is heading toward the disaster of Civil War. We can even trick out certain political readings: Ahab as hunter is the capitalist whose rapacity commodifies nature and destroys the communal values.[28]

In *Moby-Dick* Melville criticizes man's obsession with accumulation, the whaling industry that transforms men into instruments: "They were one man not thirty" (606), and savages: "your true whale-hunter is as much a savage as an Iroquois. I myself am a savage, owning no allegiance but to the king of the Cannibals" (295), as Ishmael puts it. It is, then, the whaling industry, i.e., the capitalistic society that turns men into savages, bestializes workers, corrupts their souls, despising and disregarding man's life to the extreme. This is precisely what the insensitive, racist Stubb, the *Pequod*'s second mate, openly expresses when he undervalues an African American boy's life to the point that he

defends a whale would sell thirty times what Pip would in a slave state like, for example, Alabama:

> Stick to the boat, Pip, or by the Lord, I won't pick you up if you jump; mind that. We can't afford to lose whales by the likes of you; a whale would sell for thirty times what you would, Pip, in Alabama. Bear that in mind, and don't jump any more." Hereby perhaps Stubb indirectly hinted, that though man loved his fellow, yet man is a money-making animal, which propensity too often interferes with his benevolence (452).

There can be no doubt that Melville, like the contemporary Transcendentalists, recognizes the dangers inherent in a society so deeply concerned with material gain, criticizes it and shows how it is related to the degradation of humans' moral value and is the root of so much evil:

> The urbane activity with which a man receives money is really marvellous, considering that we so earnestly believe money to be the root of all earthly ills, and that on no account can a monied man enter heaven. Ah! how cheerfully we consign ourselves to perdition! (6-7).

Melville satirizes the capitalistic direction that his country has chosen for itself and shows his contempt for man's hypocrisy and materialism, tokens of a dehumanized civilization that in the long run will bring suffering and ecological crisis. On different occasions, Melville addresses the readers and shows the sharkish side of human nature and wants to speak to us, however incapable we may be of understanding his message: "Oh, horrible vulturism of earth! from which not the mightiest whale is free" (336). He still adds:

> considering the inexhaustible wealth of spices, and silks, and jewels, and gold, and ivory, with which the thousand islands of that oriental sea are enriched, it seems a significant provision of nature, that such treasures, by the very formation of the land, should at least bear the appearance, however ineffectual, of being guarded from the all-grasping western world (415).

It must be remembered that mid-nineteenth-century America was undergoing a profound economic and social transformation, as Lawrence Buell states:

> *Moby-Dick* was written in and about the moment when the world was coming under the regime of global capitalism. It is the first canonical work of Anglophone literature to anatomize an extractive industry of global scope- an industry, furthermore, where American entrepreneurs had become the leading edge.[29]

It becomes evident, then, Melville's concern about the depredation which the whaling industry was inflicting on the environment, about the pillage of natural resources and man's losses with the industrial development. In the 1840s, the United States dominated the world's first oil industry as well as the first international capitalist enterprise. The owners of whale ships made huge fortunes and whales were given as dowry in New Bedford, such was their value, as Ishmael describes:

> In New Bedford, fathers, they say, give whales for dowers to their daughters, and portion off their nieces with a few porpoises a-piece. You must go to New Bedford to see a brilliant wedding; for, they say, they have reservoirs of oil in every house, and every night recklessly burn their lengths in spermaceti candles (37).

It is also this whaling industry that makes a lot of people rich in New Bedford, more than in any other part of America, as the narrator explains:

> nowhere in all America will you find more patrician-like houses; parks and gardens more opulent, than in New Bedford. Whence came they? how planted upon this once scraggy scoria of a country?
>
> Go and gaze upon the iron emblematical harpoons round yonder lofty mansion, and your question will be answered. Yes; all these brave houses and flowery gardens came from the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans(37).

Yet, by stating these facts, Melville was not condemning them in the way we do today. At the time whale hunting was considered fair and brave, however, he could perceive the birth of an alienated capitalistic system, where man would become enslaved by his consumer eagerness.

We are now in a better position to understand the author's irony, when Ishmael addresses *Moby-Dick*'s readers saying: "For God's sake, be economical with your lamps and candles! not a gallon you burn, but at least one drop of man's blood was spilled for it" (224). However, besides the precious oil from the whale, there are still several references to the exploitation and use of the different parts of the animal. In fact, man's rapacity makes him grasp every tiny part of the prey, nothing is "wasted", everything is changed into objects, some of them luxurious dispensable items that humankind has learnt meanwhile to live without, since ambergris is scarce nowadays:

> but ambergris is soft, waxy, and so highly fragrant and spicy, that it is largely used in perfumery, in pastiles, precious candles, hair-powders, and pomatum. (…) Who

> would think, then, that such fine ladies and gentlemen should regale themselves with an essence found in the inglorious bowels of a sick whale! Yet so it is (447).

On this matter he explains the different ways men choose to represent whales, as appears in the title of chapter 57 "Of Whales in Paint; in Teeth; in Wood; in Sheet-Iron; in Stone; in Mountains; in Stars." In the following excerpt he describes how fishermen get the most of these mammals in their hours of ocean leisure, extracting and exploiting every possible inch:

> Throughout the Pacific, and also in Nantucket, and New Bedford, and Sag Harbor, you will come across lively sketches of whales and whaling-scenes, graven by the fishermen themselves on Sperm Whale-teeth, or ladies' busks wrought out of the Right Whale-bone, and other like skrimshander articles, as the whalemen call the numerous little ingenious contrivances they elaborately carve out of the rough material, in their hours of ocean leisure (294).

Not only does Melville consider the slaughter of whales and its usefulness but also shows that it is wrong to kill and exploit other animals and makes man rethink his attitude towards nonhuman creatures, and eventually appeals to treating them as brothers:

> Look at your knife-handle, there, my civilized and enlightened gourmand, dining off that roast beef, what is that handle made of?—what but the bones of the brother of the very ox you are eating? And what do you pick your teeth with, after devouring that fat goose? With a feather of the same fowl (327).

1.3 Animal Suffering and the Extermination of the Whale

Lawrence Buell notes that nineteenth-century whaling narratives hardly touched upon the suffering of the whale: "Whaling narratives of Melville's day stressed the daring, risks, dangers, and excitement of whaling far more than the suffering of the whales when driven, maimed and killed."[30] I contend that in *Moby-Dick* Melville actually explicitly refers to the suffering of the whale more than once in an attempt to arouse his readers' compassion and emotions. Above all, he aims at showing his sentiments against man's brutality, butchery and questions the ecological destruction that the industrial civilization was inflicting on nature. On the one hand, Melville likens whales to humans, makes them

share characteristics, emotions and behavior, i.e., whales are humanized, implying an acceptance and valorization of other species. In the following passage it is easy to perceive the author's deliberate, careful use of certain phrases or words like "umbilical cord"; "Madame Leviathan"; "young cub" and "maternal" to bring whales closer to humans, especially when

> Starbuck saw long coils of the umbilical cord of Madame Leviathan, by which the young cub seemed still tethered to its dam. Not seldom in the rapid vicissitudes of the chase, this natural line, with the maternal end loose, becomes entangled with the hempen one, so that the cub is thereby trapped (424).

In addition to this, the description of the new-born whales suckling from their mother's breast is also really moving and striking:

> and as human infants while suckling will calmly and fixedly gaze away from the breast, as if leading two different lives at the time; and while yet drawing mortal nourishment, be still spiritually feasting upon some unearthly reminiscence;—even so did the young of these whales seem looking up towards us, but not at us, as if we were but a bit of Gulfweed in their new-born sight. Floating on their sides, the mothers also seemed quietly eyeing us. One of these little infants, that from certain queer tokens seemed hardly a day old, might have measured some fourteen feet in length, and some six feet in girth. He was a little frisky; though as yet his body seemed scarce yet recovered from that irksome position it had so lately occupied in the maternal reticule; where, tail to head, and all ready for the final spring, the unborn whale lies bent like a Tartar's bow. The delicate side-fins, and the palms of his flukes, still freshly retained the plaited crumpled appearance of a baby's ears newly arrived from foreign parts (423-424).

As Ishmael remarked in chapter one: "Surely all this is not without meaning," i.e., this reveals Melville's love and great appreciation of nonhuman beings, his ability to observe them, and, above all, to arouse exactly the same feelings in readers. We cannot help admiring and smiling at his sense of humor when he says that "the delicate side-fins, and the palms of his flukes, still freshly retained the plaited crumpled appearance of a baby's ears newly arrived from foreign parts." Furthermore, the whole passage mirrors his paternal, sentimental side, as he depicts those little infants as if he were a father observing his newly born child.

The author still adds that: "after a gestation which may probably be set down at nine months" (424), implying that whales and humans are alike as regards gestation, one more common resemblance that brings them closer.

Concurrently, he stresses the fact that it is illogical for humans to inflict suffering on their fellow creatures. He confirms this position as Ishmael, Queequeg and Starbuck develop a relationship of brotherhood with whales:

> however it may have been, these smaller whales—now and then visiting our becalmed boat from the margin of the lake—evinced a wondrous fearlessness and confidence, or else a still becharmed panic which it was impossible not to marvel at. Like household dogs they came snuffing round us, right up to our gunwales, and touching them; till it almost seemed that some spell had suddenly domesticated them. Queequeg patted their foreheads; Starbuck scratched their backs with his lance; but fearful of the consequences, for the time refrained from darting it (423).

It is difficult for environmentally concerned modern readers not to feel impressed and marvelled at these touching and wondrous descriptions that reflect quite clearly the author's sensitivity toward nature. It is impossible to remain indifferent and not feel sympathy for the defenseless whales that cannot escape their predators.

When Ishmael sees Stubb killing the first whale he feels with the whale rather than against it, he feels pity and compassion and gradually learns to perceive nature with different feelings:

> And now abating in his flurry, the whale once more rolled out into view; surging from side to side; spasmodically dilating and contracting his spout-hole, with sharp, cracking, agonized respirations. At last, gush after gush of clotted red gore, as if it had been the purple lees of red wine, shot into the frighted air; and falling back again, ran dripping down his motionless flanks into the sea. His heart had burst!
> "He's dead, Mr. Stubb," said Daggoo.
> "Yes; both pipes smoked out!" and withdrawing his own from his mouth, Stubb scattered the dead ashes over the water; and, for a moment, stood thoughtfully eyeing the vast corpse he had made (311-312).

Buell also points out that "In *Moby-Dick* as well, most of the sympathy is reserved for sailors working under hazardous conditions, and humanitarian side glimpses at their quarries are sparing but they are also more pronounced."[31] In my view, Melville is not particularly interested in exploring and stressing the whalers' working conditions. But to

say that he focuses on the suffering of nonhuman creatures is not to say that he values them more than human beings, simply that he stands up for a balanced quasi-equivalent relation between humans and animals. His noble and sensitive feelings toward nature and its species appeal to modern ecocritics and readers. His descriptions of the agony of a whale's suffering and death are much more poignant than the sailors' working conditions as well as the prolonged animal maim and suffering. As Elizabeth Schultz writes:

> Throughout *Moby-Dick*, Melville's illustrations of dying whales graphically project revulsion and remorse at the waste and loss of cetacean life, revulsion and remorse which is underscored because of the kinship between whales and humans.[32]

Quite obviously, I share Schultz's opinion regarding Melville's descriptions of dying whales which arouse revulsion and remorse. I still claim that modern readers certainly feel deeply hopeless and disturbed by the cruel butchery that occurs due to "the unimaginable accidents of the fishery," as the narrator seems to suggest:

> But agonizing as was the wound of this whale, and an appalling spectacle enough, any way; yet the peculiar horror with which he seemed to inspire the rest of the herd, was owing to a cause which at first the intervening distance obscured from us. But at length we perceived that by one of the unimaginable accidents of the fishery, this whale had become entangled in the harpoon-line that he towed; he had also run away with the cutting-spade in him; and while the free end of the rope attached to that weapon, had permanently caught in the coils of the harpoon-line round his tail, the cutting-spade itself had worked loose from his flesh. So that tormented to madness, he was now churning through the water, violently flailing with his flexible tail, and tossing the keen spade about him, wounding and murdering his own comrades (425).

In the following passage, Melville also underscores the appalling suffering of the whale while being attacked. He draws a parallel between the whale and a bird's suffering when attacked, while stressing the fact that the bird has a voice to express its fear, whereas the whale has no voice, which made the sight of him unspeakably pitiable:

> It was a terrific, most pitiable, and maddening sight. The whale was now going head out, and sending his spout before him in a continual tormented jet; while his one poor fin beat his side in an agony of fright. Now to this hand, now to that, he yawed in his faltering flight, and still at every billow that he broke, he spasmodically sank in the sea, or sideways rolled towards the sky his one beating fin. So have I seen a bird with clipped wing, making affrighted broken circle in the air, vainly striving to escape the piratical hawks. But the bird has a voice, and with

> plaintive cries will make known her fear; but the fear of this vast dumb brute of the sea, was chained up and enchanted in him; he had no voice, save that choking respiration through his spiracle, and this made the sight of him unspeakably pitiable; while still, in his amazing bulk, portcullis jaw, and omnipotent tail, there was enough to appal the stoutest man who so pitied (388).

In chapter 81, in the description of the killing of the blind old whale Ishmael exposes whaling as both wanton butchery and war against a kindred species. The following detailed description intends, once more, to arouse the readers' interest as well as their compassion and sorrow for the whale's suffering and atrocious death. Even though the animal was already maimed, which was "horribly pitiable to see", there was no mercy, "pity there was none." Interesting may also be the fact that the "protruded blind bulbs" are compared to "strange misgrown masses … of the noblest oaks" reminding us of the whales' high rank or value within the ecosystem:

> As the boats now more closely surrounded him, the whole upper part of his form, with much of it that is ordinarily submerged, was plainly revealed. His eyes, or rather the places where his eyes had been, were beheld. As strange misgrown masses gather in the knot-holes of the noblest oaks when prostrate, so from the points which the whale's eyes had once occupied, now protruded blind bulbs, horribly pitiable to see. But pity there was none. For all his old age, and his one arm, and his blind eyes, he must die the death and be murdered, in order to light the gay bridals and other merry-makings of men, and also to illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all. Still rolling in his blood, at last he partially disclosed a strangely discolored bunch or protuberance, the size of a bushel, low down on the flank.
> "A nice spot," cried Flask; "just let me prick him there once."
> "Avast!" cried Starbuck, "there's no need of that!"
> But humane Starbuck was too late. At the instant of the dart an ulcerous jet shot from this cruel wound, and goaded by it into more than sufferable anguish, the whale now spouting thick blood, with swift fury blindly darted at the craft, bespattering them and their glorying crews all over with showers of gore, capsizing Flask's boat and marring the bows. It was his death stroke. For, by this time, so spent was he by loss of blood, that he helplessly rolled away from the wreck he had made; lay panting on his side, impotently flapped with his stumped fin, then over and over slowly revolved like a waning world; turned up the white secrets of his belly; lay like a log, and died. It was most piteous, that last expiring spout. (391-392).

Firstly, it is evident the ironic look Ishmael casts on this butchery and on the hypocritical society that uses the oil of an elderly victim to "illuminate the solemn

churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all." Secondly, humane Starbuck contrasts with the mindless, insensitive Flask who seems to have fun attacking the animal: "A nice spot, "cried Flask; "just let me prick him there once."

In chapter 105, "Does the Whale's Magnitude Diminish? – Will He Perish?" Ishmael wants us to understand the enormity of the whale hunt and questions the survival of whales as a species. It is quite understandable that Ishmael could not anticipate the advance of technology which decimated and endangered whales in an unprecedented way.

First, he ponders whether whales have grown smaller, but based on the fossil record he concludes that they are actually slowly getting larger. After this consideration on the magnitude of the whale, follows Ishmael's contradictory, dubious opinions regarding whether the whale will thrive or perish which, in my opinion, give rise to several interpretations.

On the one hand, Ishmael admits that whaling ships used to find plenty of whales more easily, but, on the other, he also explains that it is because the whales used to roam in many smaller groups, and now they move around in a few large ones. Besides, he also admits that around 13,000 whales are slaughtered every year by the Americans alone, although he says that far more elephants than this are killed in hunts each year and have been since ancient times, and they are not endangered yet. So, he cannot predict to what extent the great whale may be on the brink of extinction, as the following excerpt seems to suggest:

> And there seems no reason to doubt that if these elephants, which have now been hunted for thousands of years, by Semiramis, by Porus, by Hannibal, and by all the successive monarchs of the East—if they still survive there in great numbers, much more may the great whale outlast all hunting, since he has a pasture to expatiate in, which is precisely twice as large as all Asia, both Americas, Europe and Africa, New Holland, and all the Isles of the sea combined (503).

In addition to this, Ishmael also implies that the whales' number does not dwindle easily, since many generations of whales are alive at the same time due to their great longevity. One of the most important reasons, though, why Ishmael thinks whales will not become extinct, is that there are two places they can go – the North and South poles where they have an enormous home environment which is inaccessible to men: "they

have two firm fortresses, which, in all human probability, will forever remain impregnable" (502-503). According to him, whales are even likely to endure a flood, if there is another Noah's flood they will not drown:

> and if ever the world is to be again flooded, like the Netherlands, to kill off its rats, then the eternal whale will still survive, and rearing upon the topmost crest of the equatorial flood, spout his frothed defiance to the skies(504).

Taking all these things into account, Ishmael considers "the whale immortal in his species, however perishable in his individuality" (503-504). There are some critics who oversimplify Melville's complex thoughts and advocate that he failed to foresee the whale as an endangered species. Buell, for instance, says that: "certainly Ishmael longs to believe 'the whale immortal in his species, however perishable in his individuality'. But the book raises the endangerment question only to dismiss it."[33] John Gatta, in turn, states: "That is not to say that Melville can be enlisted under the banner of present-day campaigns to save whales. Nor was he in a position to acknowledge that sperm whales faced a serious risk of extinction."[34]

In spite of trying to convince himself and readers of this reality, personally I think that Ishmael really doubts whether whales will ever survive such a wide chase. Had he been sure about the immortality of the whale, why would he decide to write the chapter "Will He Perish?" And would it make any sense to compare the hunt of whales to the hunt of the buffalo?

On this issue, Charles W. Hughes has argued that:

> Melville was not, however, ignorant of what men were doing to the wilderness areas and creatures in his own country. Even by the middle of the nineteenth century it was clear that man could wreak havoc upon his fellow creatures, and Melville knew this.[35]

As regards the depredation of the wilderness, Ishmael compares the act of dragging out the teeth of the whale to the Michigan oxen dragging stumps: "With a keen cutting-spade, Queequeg lances the gums; then the jaw is lashed down to ringbolts, and a tackle being rigged from aloft, they drag out these teeth, as Michigan oxen drag stumps of old oaks out of wild woodlands" (362-363). This is brilliantly depicted by Hughes in the following manner: "The sound of the axe was the music of the age, and the pioneer was

the hero,"[36] and is a clear reference to man's intrusion into the vast wilderness, the destruction of the forests, with man aiming at conquering more space for himself to settle down. Thus, Hughes' statement "the sound of the axe was the music of the age, and the pioneer was the hero" epitomizes the spirit and practice of that time, when man was fully convinced that he could own and exploit the land as if he were really its Lord and master. This attitude definitely shows how man was influenced by the Book of Genesis where he found justification for his incursion and dominion over nature. Moreover, this point is further clarified when Ishmael compares:

> the humped herds of whales with the humped herds of buffalo, which, not forty years ago, overspread by tens of thousands the prairies of Illinois and Missouri, and shook their iron manes and scowled with their thunder-clotted brows upon the sites of populous river-capitals, where now the polite broker sells you land at a dollar an inch; in such a comparison an irresistible argument would seem furnished, to show that the hunted whale cannot now escape speedy extinction (501-502).

The narrator is, undoubtedly, exploring the possibility that the whale can be hunted to the brink of extinction, alerting mankind to this cruel reality, that is, if buffalos have been extensively hunted, how can whales survive? Perhaps, this is why he says "But you must look at this matter in every light," (502) permitting every possible interpretation.

Melville was aware of the penetration of whale ships from diverse countries into the world's seas, leading him to ponder "whether Leviathan can long endure so wide a chase, and so remorseless a havoc; whether he must not at last be exterminated from the waters, and the last whale, like the last man, smoke his last pipe, and then himself evaporate in the final puff" (501).

As we have already seen, Ishmael is hesitant and doubtful, he thinks that whales will survive "since he has a pasture to expatriate in" (503), and as he had noted before: "the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two thirds of this earth" (465), but he also ponders the possibility of the whale's extinction. A similar optimistic expectation about the condition of the planet, minimizing the risk of man's impact on it, is shared by Luiz Carlos Molión, the Brazilian climatologist, who still claims that the present weather climate is not too alarming. Regarding the question: "Is there no influence of human activity on climate change on Earth?" he replies: "Exactly. The Earth's surface is

71% and 29% of oceans and continents. Of these 29%, 15% consists of ice land and sand. That leaves 14%. Of these, fortunately 7% are still covered by tropical rainforests. There remains 7% of the land surface that is manipulated by man and what man does is a change in the environment where he lives."[37]

Consequently, I fully agree with Schultz's answer to the question "Will he Perish?" when she says that: "From a late twentieth-century environmental perspective, which considers the sea's pollution and the whales' diminishing numbers, Melville's defiant and deifying response, (…) reflects wishful, if not desperate, thinking."[38] Schultz adds that "Melville's inquiry regarding the continuation of species hunted by humans persists in *Pierre* (1852): "say, are not the fierce things of this earth daily, hourly going out? Where now are your wolves of Britain? Where in Virginia now, find you the panther and the pard?"[39] Thus, I claim that Melville is apprehensive about the consequences of overfishing, that he recognizes the inextricable connection between species and, above all, the implications of species' loss. The lines "and the last whale, like the last man, smoke his last pipe, and then himself evaporate in the final puff," (501) simply say it all.

1.4 The Threatening Nature Exchanged for Nature under Threat

Unlike most Americans, Melville is aware that the global spread of industrial capitalism and rapid development bring about profound irreversible changes, arouse man's desire for more power, domination and exploitation of nature. As we have seen, when Melville wrote *Moby-Dick* the Transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau were also spreading their doctrines on positive life, which caused a great impact on him and on society. He was obviously influenced and communed with some of Emerson's transcendental thoughts, but to a certain extent, he showed contempt for transcendental optimism and disagreed with some transcendental attitudes toward nature, however, on the whole, he also valued and ennobled it. In an implicit way, he became a prophet of doom, whose intuitive spirit and knowledge transcended his time, in the sense that he could foreshadow the necessity of reversing the threatening in nature for nature under threat.

In the mid-nineteenth-century Americans were eager to conquer more land, more opportunities, more freedom and to earn more than ever, exploiting and exploring nature as if its resources were inexhaustible. The fact that Melville raises the endangerment question is a giant step in terms of moral values, once he raises and cultivates an ecological consciousness, something unusual at his time. By comparing the humped herds of whales to the humped herds of buffalos which overspread the prairies of Illinois and Missouri where now brokers sell land, the author is really pondering on "whether Leviathan can long endure so wide a chase, and so remorseless a havoc" (501). He simply arouses the readers' interest to other creatures, making them reflect on the extinction of the buffalo, as well as the extinction of other species, including the whale:

> Comparing the humped herds of whales with the humped herds of buffalo, which, not forty years ago, overspread by tens of thousands the prairies of Illinois and Missouri, and shook their iron manes and scowled with their thunder-clotted brows upon the sites of populous river-capitals, where now the polite broker sells you land at a dollar an inch; in such a comparison an irresistible argument would seem furnished, to show that the hunted whale cannot now escape speedy extinction (501-502).

Here he affirms "that the hunted whale cannot escape speedy extinction" although later he contradicts this hypothesis, confusing readers who fail to understand that he intended to shake people's feelings and consciousness as regards their relation toward nature.

Returning to America's reality, it must be remembered that, on the one hand, Americans saw the wild west as threatening, unknown and unexploited, but on the other hand, they also saw man as a menace to it, since thousands of people sought refuge in nature, fleeing from the hustle and bustle of the fast growing areas.

Walt Whitman, in his poem "Give me the Splendid Silent Sun," depicts Americans' ambivalent feelings, their longing for solitude, quietude, rural closeness and their simultaneous desire for urban life:

I

> Give me a perfect child, give me away aside
> From the noise of the world a rural domestic life,
> Give me to warble spontaneous songs recluse
> By myself, for my own ears only,

Give me solitude, give me Nature, give me
Again O Nature your primal sanities!
(…)
While yet incessantly asking still I adhere
To my city,
Day upon day and year upon year O city,
walking your streets
Where you hold me enchai'da certain
time refusing to give me up,
Yet giving to make me glutted, enrich'd of
Soul, you give me forever faces;
(O I see what I sought to escape, confronting, reversing my cries,
I see my own soul trampling down what it ask'd for.)

II

Keep your splendid silent sun,
Keep your woods O Nature, and the quiet
Place by the woods,
…
Give me faces and streets-give me these
Phantoms incessant and endless along
The trottoirs!
Give me interminable eyes-give me women-give me comrades and lovers
By the thousand! [40]

In this poem it is evident Whitman's glorification of two different kinds of life: rural and urban. First, he hymns the glories of nature and rustic life, wishing that the American landscape remained unaltered: "keep your woods O Nature, and the quiet places by the woods"; then he wants America to give him "faces, streets, women, comrades, lovers" i.e., a life full of variety, excitement and comradeship. This is probably because the poet feels torn between these two different kinds of life; he is unable to leave his present life behind, but longs for a very different one. At first sight it may seem that the poet contradicts himself longing for urban and rural life simultaneously. Nevertheless, on the whole, I think that he feels divided between lonesome reflection in nature and the urban life in company of other human beings. Yet, more significant is the fact that Whitman wants to praise life, express his love for his country either in the countryside or in the city, considering that he wrote the poem in the last months of the American Civil War.

Like Whitman, Melville also uses, on several occasions, antagonistic combinations, which are characteristic of their internal tensions. Buell says that "Melville was acutely aware that under paleotechnic constraints of 1840s whaling whales posed a greater threat to their human pursuers than their pursuers did to them. He might have thought differently had he seriously believed that sperm whales were an endangered species – a point of dispute in his day, as he well knew."[41] I, like many other modern readers, wonder who the real predators were after all, whales or humans? What is important to stress, then, is that the concern for nonhuman beings and their valorization is not a recent phenomenon. In *Moby-Dick* there are abundant examples of this, like the vivid descriptions of the animals' suffering and death already described, the aversion to cruelty displayed by humane Starbuck, Queequeg's affectionate attitude when patting the whales' forehead or Ishmael's question regarding the survival of whales, "will he Perish?."

Quite obviously, the actual degradation of global environment that has been taking place, mainly since the second half of the twentieth century, has shown how Melville was totally right as regards human's interdependency and interrelationship with other species and with nature. And this was precisely what aroused ecocritics' interest in *Moby-Dick*. Through his environmental vision in *Moby-Dick*, they can play a significant part in solving the real ecological problems humankind has been creating. This ecocritical rereading and reinterpretation of the novel intends, thus, to help man rethink the relations between himself and nature, urging everybody to an ethical commitment as regards environmental matters.

1.5 Deification of Nature instead of its Plundering

It is absolutely necessary and urgent to change people's mentality and make them understand that today's culture should deify nature instead of being engaged in plundering it, since the environmental crisis is a direct consequence of man's mindless attitudes. As man has evolved and gained scientific knowledge, he has got accustomed to recognizing and judging the world according to his own interests. He has regarded himself as the center of nature and the universe and has deified money and well being instead of God and His creation.

As a result, we are witnessing and undergoing different environmental catastrophes such as tornadoes, global warming, droughts, floods, ice melting, endangered species, among other environmental ills. However, man remains indifferent to what is fundamental to his survival, that is, coexisting with nature in friendly terms. Unfortunately, he has not recognized yet that this profit-oriented, competitive tendency has segregated man from nature and violated the equilibrium between the two. The insatiable desire, the sharkish side of human nature has guided and coordinated man's actions and it is precisely this attitude that man needs to change, to reverse in order to reconcile ecological environment and development. Here lies the key, to achieve a balance between sustainable economic development and man's materialistic lifestyle.

Unfortunately, humankind has not realized, yet, that what is at stake is man and the planet's survival. Throughout history man's animal side has always prevailed over man's humane nature and the consequences have been disastrous, as we can see now. During, and mainly after the industrial revolution, the essence of man's soul altered. Little by little his moral values, attitudes and aspirations started to be conditioned by the economic values and his spirituality has been vanishing. Man's lack of spiritual values has meant a wide range of freedoms, freedom of thought, freedom of expression and religious freedom, making him act like Ahab, who believes nothing can limit his role in the world or stop him in his conquest of and fight against nature.

Had humankind sought to live according to the laws of nature and/or paid attention to Melville, Thoreau and other visionaries' ideas, the planet would not be aching and under threat. The truth is that, from Melville's time onwards, man has been giving in in his human character to adopt a more animal one, target and victim of a hyper consumer society. So, we have witnessed in the past century humankind's consuming and wasting attitude being considered as quite normal, as it still is today. Few people today recognize the magnitude and urgency of the planet's problem and therefore persist in their madness and in their monstrous crimes against nature, forgetting that they are being totally unjust and inhumane towards today's children and future generations. It is, therefore, urgent to make radical changes, mainly in our inner values, attitudes, and

priorities in order to replace today's prevailing non-sustainable economy for a sustainable one.

In the last two decades there has been a great emphasis and development of ecological ethics, urging man to pay more attention to his behavior towards the natural environment, especially to the preservation of bio-diversity and to the responsible use of natural resources. Seeing man's big impact on the Earth, it is his duty to divulge and stimulate every individual and society in general to treat nature responsibly, and leave the most imperceptible ecological footprint. In order to achieve this goal, there must be progress, both in man's heart and head, so that he can discover that he is not in the right path and may reconsider his attitude and place in the world. Only by changing his irrational, irresponsible behavior for life in agreement with nature, where its preservation is a top priority, will man choose a different kind of development for all humankind. In such a world everybody will be imbued with the same universal moral theory and embrace the care and preservation of the environment as a common task, for his own and the Earth's sake.

For all that has been said, I conclude that *Moby-Dick* is really immortal as Ishmael had prophesied, since the author's meditation on the need to refrain man's plundering of nature represents the biggest challenge man has faced since Melville's time. By raising some of the most relevant American issues of his time, like the depredation of Nature, man's assumption of his unlimited power, the condemnation of capitalism and the absolute need to respect Nature and the nonhuman world, Melville embraces a new vision of the world that rings so true to modern readers as Thoreau's *Walden*. But this, I will deal with in the second chapter of this thesis.

Notes

[1] William Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*, www.blupete.com/.../Poetry/WordsworthTintern...

[2] *BénédicteLeude, "Transcendentalism at the Core of American Identity,"* www.world-religion-watch.org › Book Reviews.

[3] *Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden (New York: Oxford UP, 1964, rpt. 2000), p. 231.*

[4] *Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature in Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems (New York: Bantam Dell,1990), p. 20.*

[5] *Emerson, p. 20.*

[6] *Emerson, p. 35.*

[7] *Genesis, 3:17-19.www.openbible.info/topics/adam_and_eve*

[8] *Emerson, p. 18.*

[9] *Emerson, p. 22.*

[10] *Herman Melville, Moby- Dick or, The Whale (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), p. xiii.*

[11] Carl Bode, *Highlights of American Literature* (International Communication Agency; Washington, D.C.1981), p. 52.

[12] *Genesis, 1:28.bible.cc/genesis/1-28.htm*

[13] Elizabeth Hardwick, "*Moby-Dick*," *Herman Melville* (New York: Viking Books,2000), p. 69.

[14] Emory Elliott, " 'Wandering-To-and-Fro' Melville and Religion," *A Historical Guide to Herman Melville* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005), p. 168.

[15] John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (New York: Oxford UP, 2004), p. 117.

[16] Gatta, p. 117.

[17] Padre António Vieira, *Sermão de Santo António aos Peixes e Carta a D. Afonso VI*, 6ª ed. (Lisboa: Seara Nova, 1972),p.*37*; my translation.

The original, in Portuguese:

Antes, porém, que vos vades, assim como ouvistes os vossos louvores, ouvi também agora as vossas repreensões. Servir-vos-ão de confusão, já que não seja de emenda. A primeira cousa que me desedifica, peixes, de vós, é que vos comeis uns aos outros. Grande escândalo é este, mas a circunstância o faz ainda maior. Não só vos comeis uns aos outros, senão que os grandes comem os pequenos. Se fora pelo contrário, era menos mal. Se os pequenos comerem os grandes, bastara um grande para muitos pequenos; mas como os grandes comem os pequenos, não bastam cem pequenos, nem mil, para um só grande. Olhai como estranha isto Santo Agostinho: *Homines pravis, praeversisque cupiditatibus facti sunt, sicut pisces invicem se devorantes*: «Os homens com suas más e perversas cobiças, vêm a ser como os peixes, que se comem uns aos outros.» Tão alheia cousa é, não só da razão, mas da mesma natureza, que sendo todos criados no mesmo elemento, todos cidadãos da mesma pátria e todos finalmente irmãos, vivais de vos comer! Santo Agostinho, que pregava aos homens, para encarecer a fealdade deste escândalo, mostrou-lho nos peixes; e eu, que prego aos peixes, para que vejais quão feio e abominável é, quero que o vejais nos homens.

[18] *storberose.blogspot.com/.../on-not-liking-moby-*

[19] *George Monteiro, The Presence of Camões: Influences on the Literature of England, America and Southern Africa (Lexington, KY: The UP Kentucky, 1996), p. 165.*

[20] *Monteiro, p. 51.*

[21] John Bryant, "*Moby-Dick* as Revolution" in *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, ed.Robert S. Levine(New York:Cambridge UP, 1998), p. 74. [65-90].

[22] Quoted in Melville, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

[23] Elizabeth Schultz, "Melville's Environmental Vision in *Moby-Dick*," 2000, pp. 97-98.http:// isle.oxford journals.org.

[24] Schultz, p.100.

[25] Susan Kalter, "A Student of Savage Thought: The Ecological Ethic in Moby-Dick and its Grounding in Native-American Ideologies." *ESQ, A Journal of the American Renaissance* 48:1-2 (2002):1-40, p. 4.

[26] Marx, p. 279.

[27] Marx, p. 290.

[28] Bryant, p. 70.

[29] Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001), p. 205.

[30] Buell, p. 208.

[31] Buell, p. 208.

[32] Schultz, p. 105.

[33] Buell, p. 210.

[34] Gatta, p. 120.

[35] Charles W. Hughes, "Man Against Nature: Moby-Dick and 'The Bear' "A Dissertation in English, Texas Tech University. 1971. *repositories.tdl.org/ttu.../31295002143237.pdf.* p. 78.

[36] Hughes, p. 34.

[37] Virgílio Azevedo, "Molión, o climatologista cético,"Revista Única, Expresso, 30 de julho 2011, pp. 60-63; my translation.

Em suma, não há influência da atividade humana nas alterações climáticas da Terra? Exatamente. A superfície da Terra tem 71% de oceanos e 29% de continentes. Nestes 29%, cerca de 15% são constituídos por terras geladas e areias. Sobram 14%. Destes, felizmente 7% ainda estão cobertos por florestas tropicais e temperadas. Fica então apenas 7% da superfície terrestre que é manipulada pelo Homem. E o que o Homem faz é uma modificação no ambiente local onde vive.

[38] Schultz, p. 106.

[39] Schultz, p. 108.

[40] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Boston, 1965), pp. 312-313.

[41] Buell, p. 210.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Thoreau's Ecological Thoughts in *Walden*

Thoreau and Melville are both writers and contemporaries of Emerson, but what are their differences and similarities, regarding their insights toward Nature? In this chapter I aim at focusing my attention on Thoreau's views on Nature, his contribution both to an environmental ethics and environmental protection, by analyzing his masterpiece *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, (1854) from an ecocritical perspective.

I will discuss his period in some detail, the relationship between man and nature, man as an integral part of Nature and, finally, nature as the embodiment of the divine. By highlighting his emphasis on the value of simplicity, as a means to reach the essential, and his defence of vegetarianism as an alternative to today's dietary regimes and avoidance of animal suffering, I intend to clarify Thoreau's views on a simple life and show that his anxiety regarding industrial progress continues to worry modern man. His understanding of the need for a spiritual awakening as well as his challenges will also be analyzed. In doing so, I aim at wresting meaning from a masterpiece that may have an unpredictable influence on slumbering minds, especially on those that still have not found out the kind of life that could fulfil his own self and the surrounding nature.

Briefly, while Thoreau was a true follower of Emerson, a man profoundly inspired by the doctrines of his mentor, who put his beliefs into action, and experimented with his life, Melville, in contrast, was less influenced by the founder of Transcendentalism, even if he shows certain transcendentalist leanings such as his profound love, respect and reverence for nature, recognition of its intrinsic value and an incredible faith in the human progress, to name only a few. Furthermore, their education, life experiences and cultural backgrounds influenced their growth in a different spiritual, intellectual dimension. But, in essence, both have an incredible faith in the individual, a result of the growing awareness that American people had to trust in themselves rather than in the values of the Old World, and more importantly, both love, celebrate, and show reverence toward Nature. In this respect, what is worth highlighting is the fact that both authors had

a special intuition, an extraordinary power and knowledge to understand Nature and man's place in the world. Their perception that Americans were trying to subdue Nature to serve human interests pervades *Moby-Dick* and *Walden*, and it is precisely their calling attention to the harmful exploitation of Nature, to man's control and manipulation of it that has aroused the attention of many literary critics and environmentalists since the late twentieth-century. However, I believe it would not be wrong to argue that while Melville shows an ambivalent attitude toward Nature, as his concept of Nature and his views on the relationship between man and nature must sometimes be inferred from his text, Thoreau's thoughts, however, are far more obvious resulting, thus, in an easier reading and interpretation of his points of view.

An understanding of Thoreau's thoughts and unconditional love for Nature cannot be fully achieved without a brief incursion into the historical moment and the society that shaped him. In fact, it is Nature that really fulfils his "self" and it is the oneness of man and Nature that he looks for and intends to leave as a legacy to future generations. How, then, did Thoreau become so profoundly attached to Nature?

2.1 Thoreau's Time

Thoreau was born on July 12, 1817, in Concord, Massachusetts, a time when many literary figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Bronson Alcott and William Ellery Channing also lived. Somehow, they all determined his future, since Emerson fathered the literary movement, Transcendentalism, which would shape this whole generation and his, in particular. In my view, his profound love of Nature developed mainly because of the rural scenery that surrounded him during his childhood, and was primarily awakened in him thanks to his family, as Walter Harding notes:

> His mother, eager to foster a love of nature in her children often took them out into the dooryard to call their attention to the songs of the wild birds. On bright afternoons she would gather them together and walk out to Nashawtue Hill, the Cliffs at Fairhaven, or the "little woods" between the river and Main Street, and there, after building a rough fireplace, would cook their supper while they enjoyed the flowers and birds songs.[1]

It is no wonder, then, that *Walden* has abundant reminiscences of his childhood which are remembered nostalgically, such as the one when he was taken for the first time

to the pond at the age of four: “It is one of the oldest scenes stamped on my memory” (201), or even the one where he expresses an awesome feeling of irreparable loss:

> When I first paddled a boat on Walden it was completely surrounded by thick and lofty pine and oak woods ... But since I left those shores the woodchoppers have still further laid them waste, and now for many a year there will be no more rambling through the aisles of the woods, with occasional vistas through which you see the water (238-239).

He himself wrote in his Journals one month after settling down at Walden:

> Twenty-three years since when I was 5 years old, I was brought from Boston to this pond, away in the country which was then but another name for the extended world for me – one of the most ancient scenes stamped on the tablets of my memory – the oriental Asiatic valley of my world – whence so many races and inventions have gone forth in recent times. That woodland vision for a long time made the drapery of my dreams. That sweet solitude my spirit seemed so early to require that I might have room to entertain my thronging guests, and that speaking silence that my ears might distinguish the significant sounds. Somehow or other it at once gave the preference to this recess among the pines where almost sunshine and shadows were the only inhabitants that varied the scene, over that tumultuous and varied city –as if it had found its proper nursery.[2]

Here it is interesting to underline the fact that this is typically Romantic, a recollection of Wordsworth’s “Spots of time” in his poem “Tintern Abbey” where the poet revisits a locale from the past which brings memories of such a past.

Walden Pond exerted such a profound influence on the young Thoreau that it would be his source of inspiration for the greatest nature book that had ever been written in American literary history. But it was not Walden Pond that contributed to building Thoreau’s soul and let Nature and heart rule his head. The rivers, the woods, the several small ponds, and the rich fauna that existed in Concord fascinated, almost bewitched him. As Walter Harding writes, the eulogy made by Barzillai Frost, the minister of the First Parish Church who delivered it on the day of the funeral of Thoreau’s brother, could have just as appropriately been read for Henry Thoreau himself:

> He had a love of nature, even from childhood amounting to enthusiasm. He spent many of his leisure hours in straying over these hills and along the banks of the streams. There is not a hill, nor a tree, nor a bird, nor a flower of marked beauty in all this neighborhood that he was not familiar with, and any new bird or flower he discovered gave him the most unfeigned delight, and he would dwell with it and seem to commune with it for hours. He spent also many a serene and loving

> evening gazing upon the still moonlight scene and the blazing aurora, or looking into the bright firmament, radiant with the glory of God.[3]

In effect, Thoreau's splendid, unique, enlightened, and sensitive character flourished due to the seeds of love, virtue and truth that had been seeded at home. Yet, he came to this world in the nick of time, since in the mid-nineteenth-century the town of Concord, Massachusetts was flourishing due to literary, economic, social, religious, and political changes.

His writings, mainly *Walden*, portray the concerns of many of his contemporaries as he is one of the most faithful spokesmen of American Transcendentalism, even ahead of his mentor, Emerson. He feels the moral duty to alert his townsmen and American people that it is necessary to reverse the path America is following as he witnesses the alterations that industrialization is provoking in the world around him. He sees and feels both the threat of the destructive force of industrial progress, technological innovation, the new means of communication and the factories upon the life of people and man's desire to tame and control Nature. The fact that he is dissatisfied and troubled with the poor working conditions of laborers who were transformed into numbers, the men who "have become the tools of their tools" (80), and with mass production, makes him grow spiritually, and hinders him from adapting to a society characterized by dehumanization, commercialism and materialism. As Norman Foerster refers, fifteen years before the Civil war, "Concord, in Thoreau's day was the center of American culture; in it converged a veritable multitude of influences."[4] Concord was an antislavery locale where certain intellectuals, mainly Transcendentalists, came together to promote the abolitionist cause and to exchange ideas on the complex issues of the time, like the degradation of American moral values, slavery, imperialism and the need to start a reform of the individual. The dissatisfaction with the established religion and the existing spiritual inadequacy of the Unitarian Church called for a living religion, a religion of their own. On this issue, as Basil Willey notes in the Introduction to *Walden*, Emerson is reported to have asked: "why then 'should we not have a religion by revelation to us,' and not merely a history of someone else's,"[5] so that the break with the Old World might be complete? This reform impulse against the rather rational, dry church of the time intended to fight

against the lack of integrity the inhabitants of Concord saw in American life and made them pursue a life with principles, where man cultivated and invested more in his intellectual, spiritual growth than in material progress and success.

Transcendentalists, and Thoreau in particular, had great interest in and studied Oriental literature and religions, which helped to revolutionize his thinking:

> To Oriental literature, as has long been recognized, his debt was great. He immersed himself in that literature, especially in the "vast and cosmogonal philosophy of the Bhagvat-Geeta," as in the bracing waters of a newly discovered ocean. In addition to the Bhagvat-Geeta, he read with particular keenness the Vedas, the Vishnu Purana, the Institute of Menu. He liked to speak of the "Scriptures of the nations," – "the collected Scriptures or Sacred Writings of the several nations, the Chinese, the Hindoos, the Persians, the Hebrews, and others"; these, he believed, ought to be printed together as the true Bible, "which let the missionaries carry to the uttermost parts of the earth.[6]

This philosophy pervades throughout *Walden* as it is epitomized in the following excerpt:

> Most of the luxuries, and many of the so called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meagre life than the poor. The ancient philosophers, Chinese, Hindoo, Persian, and Greek, were a class than which none has been poorer in outward riches, none so rich inward (56-57).

Or in the following one, too:

> Why should not our furniture be as simple as the Arab's or the Indian's? (78-79).

This influence, no doubt, contributed to Thoreau's valorization and faith in the great capacity of man to cultivate a rich spiritual life, to love Nature and other nonhuman beings as equals, and to the positive thinking and repudiation of the traditional social institutions and beliefs. It was evident the call for a simpler life, where everybody would live content with the "necessaries", and surplus things would be redistributed so as not to be necessary any kind of philanthropy. As a matter of fact, Thoreau does not think that a philanthropist is rich inwardly because he helps others in need, as he himself notes:

> A man is not a good man to me because he will feed me if I should be starving, or warm me if I should be freezing, or pull me out of a ditch if I should ever fall into

> one. I can find you a Newfoundland dog that will do as much. Philanthropy is not love for one's fellow-man in the broadest sense. Howard was no doubt an exceedingly kind and worthy man in his way, and has his reward; but, comparatively speaking, what are a hundred Howards to us, if their philanthropy do not help us in our best estate, when we are most worthy to be helped? I never heard of a philanthropic meeting in which it was sincerely proposed to do any good to me, or the like of me (118).

In addition, philanthropy cannot solve the social inequality as he states: "he who bestows the largest amount of time and money on the needy is doing the most by his mode of life to produce that misery which he strives in vain to relieve" (119).

Probably, it would not be far from the truth to say that Americans were so sunk in materialism and fascinated by the commodities brought about by industrialism that they started to work harder and harder to satisfy all the material comfort and produce more income than they had ever dreamed of, forgetting that "Goodness is the only investment that never fails" (266) and that "superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul" (377). I claim that Thoreau's message rings truer today than it did in his time, since the ecological crisis humankind is currently facing would be less threatening had man sought Thoreau's way of life, in perfect harmony with Nature. In his opinion, Americans had gone too far from their original aim of building a "true America." Unlike Benjamin Franklin, who advocated the beliefs that one should work hard and save one's money, stressing and spreading the principles that had been current since Puritan times, expecting the frugal to get richer and richer, Thoreau "was less interested in the self-made man than he was in the self-made soul,"[7] a point that Michael Meyer has made, claiming that a minimum of material goods made men more sensitive and kept them closer to nature. Also crucial to his formation was his involvement in the local history, his profound love for his birthplace and surrounding areas, as Norman Foerster notes:

> Far more important than literature, in the formation of Thoreau's mind and character, is his reading in what might be termed local history, the tradition of the environment in which he lived. ... Ardently devoted to the soil on which he was born, Thoreau dwelt on its past almost as eagerly as on its present. Aside from his interest in oral tradition, he read sympathetically in the literature (nearly as worthless as literature) that revealed the past of his Concord, his Massachusetts, his New England.[8]

All things considered, I contend that both the family and cultural background, the milieu where Thoreau studied and lived, made him search for a simple, contemplative life and turn him into a son, a part and parcel of nature, and who has once said "what in other men is religion is in me love of nature."[9] This opinion was shared by Edwin P. Whipple, a literary critic, who also referred that: "Thoreau seemed to me a man who had experienced Nature as other men are said to have experienced religion."[10] Such a view justifies Philip Cafaro's statement when he says that: "He was one of the earliest and remains one of the strongest critics of anthropocentrism: the view that only human beings have rights or 'intrinsic value', and that other creatures may be used in any way we see fit."[11]

His spirit is imbued, then, with the eastern aesthetics which, in turn, had been marked by an ecocentrism that advocates equality among creatures within the ecosphere and presupposes a caring and respectful relationship with Nature. Thoreau discovered very early in his life that humans must serve Nature's ends for it to serve their lives, and showed that it is totally wrong to have a sense of dominion and superiority over Nature. Throughout *Walden*, he points the way for each individual to discover his proper ethical and spiritual place in Nature. In the chapter "Solitude", which, at first, may mislead readers about its content, it is also evident the author's same thought:

> there can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still. There was never yet such a storm but it was Æolian music to a healthy and innocent ear. Nothing can rightly compel a simple and brave man to a vulgar sadness. While I enjoy the friendship of the seasons I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me ... I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and uncountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me (176-177).

This ideology is possibly best understood in one of Thoreau's most often quoted statements: "We need the tonic of wildness" (365), which may be one of his strongest outcries to alert man that his mental and spiritual health depends on an intimate and moral connection with Nature. And here I agree with the difference between "wildness"

and “wilderness” as presented by John Gatta, when arguing that “as Sherman Paul and others have stressed over the years, Thoreau’s primary interaction with nature’s wildness at *Walden* occurs not amid geophysical wilderness but in more settled territory. For Thoreau, as for Aldo Leopold, ‘wildness’ is not synonymous with ‘wilderness.’ *Walden* conspicuously lacks the emphasis on exoticism, on images of scenic grandeur, associated with most wilderness travel literature”[12] even if what really matters is Thoreau’s recognition, valorization and appreciation of nature’s intrinsic value. He reminds us that we are not essential to nature’s health, but the opposite is true:

> The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature, - of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter, – such health, such cheer, they afford forever! And such sympathy have they ever with our race, that all Nature would be affected, and the sun’s brightness fade, and the winds would sigh humanely, and the clouds rain tears, and the woods shed their leaves and put on mourning in midsummer, if any man should ever for a just cause grieve. Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself? (183).

He is an acute critic of the exploitation of the Earth’s resources which goes on without disturbing humans’ consciousness. His thoughts contrast with the idea that nature was created for the sake of humans, which is deeply rooted in Christian Theology. In the Bible, God said to men, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that move upon the earth.” God went on saying, “see, I have given you every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.”[13]

For him Nature and nonhuman beings have intrinsic value regardless of their differences and similarities or the use they may have to us. By recognizing Nature’s value, man shows an environmental virtue ethics which brings great benefits for himself and the Earth. He knows that he can learn much from Nature, that he can enrich his life, and therefore, he himself went to live at Walden Pond to experience the world and find the “self” through Nature, since he wanted his life to have meaning, to pursue self-development and artistic development. He did not fit in and was not satisfied with the living conditions of Concordian society, and discovered that only by withdrawing from the burdens of it, could he live an organic life and live according to truth and principles.

As noted earlier, throughout *Walden*, Thoreau sustains a non-anthropocentric ethics and teaches us that Nature is our greatest resource which provides everything man needs to flourish and lead a happy life. But to achieve this, we must pay attention to our actions, work to know Nature and move beyond the superficial views with which most people content themselves. "I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things. We think that that is which appears to be" (140), which, in turn, resounds with Emerson's belief:

> To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth becomes part of his daily food.[14]

Thoreau's ideal is to read and interpret Nature and by interpreting it, the integrative imagination reunites the divided realms of human and nonhuman life. In his opinion, humankind needs to decipher Nature, as when he states: "The Maker of this earth but patented a leaf. What Champollion will decipher his hieroglyphic for us, that we may turn over a new leaf at last?" (356), so as to approach the nonhuman world and grasp its religious signification. Man takes for granted the earth's gifts and does not feel gratitude for what is divinely offered as Thoreau states:

> And, by the way, who estimates the value of crop which Nature yields in the still wilder fields unimproved by man? The crop of English hay is carefully weighed, the moisture calculated, the silicates and potash; but in all dells and pond holes in the woods and pastures and swamps grows a rich and various crop only unreaped by man (203).

2.2 Nature as a Living Being

As a Nature lover, Thoreau thinks it is wrong to live separate from it. According to him, by failing to recognize Nature's intrinsic value man is failing to see its true essence, goodness, beauty, and healing powers, which are fundamental to man's equilibrium, survival, and happiness. As a Transcendentalist and Romantic, influenced by Emerson, Coleridge, Wordsworth, among others, he thinks that man is corrupted by civilization, and creativity and nature are the sources of strength, spirituality and inspiration for the soul,

allowing him to focus on the details and the beauty of life. Therefore, he is not indifferent and insensitive to the dehumanization and materialism brought about by the increasing industrialism in the early nineteenth-century, which appeals to more and more consumption of material goods, superfluous luxuries, and, in turn, made man pay little attention and invest little in what is really essential, his cultural and spiritual growth. He decides to live "truly", as Emerson had posed the problem in "Self-Reliance," when he stated that:

> To be self-reliant was to live an organic life, to cut the bonds of artificial social life and remake one's relations according to the primary laws of Nature; it was self-culture, nothing less than making one's life one's vocation tending it as one would a plant or as a poet shapes a poem.[15]

He builds his refuge on the shores of Walden Pond, the holy sanctuary where he can commune with Mother Nature, worship her and wrest meaning from her so as to make his life significant. Only there can he find the peace and the tranquility he needs to be a Creator (it was during this stay that he wrote *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* and the first draft of *Walden*) and live the transcendental life that was "agreeable to his imagination."

Thoreau does not conceive his life as the majority of his contemporaries do, passive and shallow. He confesses:

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear, nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world, or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion (135).

He gives several reasons for his choice, and yet, he starts by claiming that: "I went to the woods" clarifying, right from the start, that he chose Nature, not civilization, and there, he would "live deep and suck out all the marrow of life". He knew that his self-realization and happiness could only be achieved if he lived in communion and union with Nature, in total harmony with it, caring, respecting, loving it as a son loves his mother. Only by

establishing this filial relationship can he find the emotional balance, achieve self-realization, and deal with the social reality successfully. It was precisely because he wanted "to front only the essential facts of life," to search for self-realization, truth, knowledge, and happiness that he chose to live at Walden Pond, renouncing all the unnecessary material comforts and goods in order to strive after perfection. By being one with Nature, he could live a true, full life truly, a life with meaning and principles, as Michael Meyer says in the Introduction to *Walden*:

> In this innocent environment he can shed imposed social identities to discover an essential self not dependent upon 'the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance.' His essential self is nature's self: free, autonomous, and symbolic of an infinite spiritual identity that all human beings can potentially become.[16]

2.2.1 Man as an Integral Part of Nature

The statement, "His essential self is nature's self", is the highest point, the culmination of Thoreau's transcendental philosophy, the recognition of man as part and parcel of Nature. As he himself assumes, when he describes his life at Walden Pond, there "I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself" (174) or in the excerpt "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil,- to regard man as inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society."[17] This interest, valorization, and admiration for Nature were not common in the nineteenth-century. Even Emerson, Thoreau's mentor and friend, who had stirred his mind while he was a student at Harvard, only understood the latitude of his experiment and admitted his value at the end of his life, as he said in his funeral tribute, "to refuse all the accustomed paths and keep his solitary freedom at the cost of disappointing the natural expectations of his family and friends."[18] Earlier he had regarded Thoreau's decision of withdrawing from society with a certain amount of scepticism. However, Thoreau did not feel discouraged as he knew very well that "to be great is to be misunderstood" as Emerson had proclaimed in his essay "Self-Reliance," in 1841.

While living at the pond, Thoreau puts himself on the same moral level as animals, trees, fish, birds, geese, owls, all of them being neighbours that inhabit the same space. As he states in the chapter "Solitude," "I have a great deal of company in my house; especially in the morning, when nobody calls…I am no more lonely than the loon in the pond that laughs so loud, or than Walden Pond itself" (182). He is a true defender of animals' rights; he believes they exist for their own sake, that they are part of the ecosphere and have their intrinsic value as human beings have. For this reason, he is sorry for not having been able to resist the impulse of devouring a raw woodchuck, and explains that his animal side won the struggle against the spiritual one. He says "I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good." He confesses "I love the wild not less than the good…I like sometimes to take rank hold on life and spend my day more as the animals do" (257). As a naturalist, and so deeply "attached to the Earth" he knows and draws readers' attention to the necessity of preserving the web of life, as all species are fundamental to the balance of the ecosphere:

> What is a country without rabbits and partridges? They are among the most simple and indigenous animal products; ancient and venerable families known to antiquity as to modern times; of the very hue and substance of Nature, nearest allied to leaves and to the ground, - and to one another; it is either winged or it is legged. It is hardly as if you had seen a wild creature when a rabbit or a partridge bursts away, only a natural one, as much to be expected as rustling leaves. The partridge and the rabbit are still sure to thrive, like true natives of the soil, whatever revolutions occur (328).

It is amazing how the animals approach Thoreau, give him companionship and accept him as a familiar part of their environment whose reverse is also true. In the chapter "Winter Animals," although one can perceive a certain melancholy induced by the winter season, one feels delighted by his observations of the animals' behaviour and sounds. Another example of Thoreau's oneness with nature is the fact that he knows the woods so well that, late at night, he does not need to think much to find his way through the trees in the dark to his door:

> Sometimes, after coming home thus late in a dark and muggy night, when my feet felt the path which my eyes could not see, dreaming and absent-minded all the

> way, until I was aroused by having to raise my hand to lift the latch, I have not been able to recall a single step of my walk, and I have thought that perhaps my body would find its way home if its master should forsake it, as the hand finds its way to the mouth without assistance (216).

This demonstrates clearly how he has symbolically become a part of the woods, of Nature. But, paradoxically, he advocates that Nature must remain separate from humans and they should not think that it exists to satisfy their limitless desires. He felt one must behave as morally toward Nature as toward man, and the claims he made during his time against American culture, which he regarded as being corrupted by materialism, certainly fits today's world as never before. He has become the prophet of wilderness for our contemporary environmentalists and, thanks to him, Americans have a considerable number of green parks. He was one of the first pioneers to advocate that each town should set aside extensive acreage in its natural state: "I think that each town should have a park, or rather a primitive forest of five hundred or a thousand acres, either in one body or several, where a stick should never be cut for fuel, nor for the navy, nor to make wagons, but stand and decay for higher uses – a common possession forever for instruction and recreation."[19]

Worried about the consequences of the destruction of forests, Thoreau wrote "Thank you God they can't cut down the clouds."[20] Were he alive today, he would feel a great distress and grief, since man wants to be God to subject Nature to human will, to manipulate the whole environment, independently of the tragic consequences he may cause to our "home." He would certainly be very apprehensive about the effects of man's interference in the clouds to provoke rain in some parts of the world, where it does not rain naturally.

Through his simple life in the woods, Thoreau demonstrates that man can lead a happy and successful life in the midst of Nature, as Sherman Paul has stated: "The success he sought became the moments of ecstatic communion with Nature."[21] There is no better example than this passage to understand how Thoreau achieved total ecstasy, a mystical state, "rapt in a revery" where time is suspended only to be disturbed by intrusions:

> Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a revery, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sing

> around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or the noise of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much over and above my usual allowance (156 -157).

When he says "I grew in those seasons like corn in the night" he admits that in this moment of contemplation, he is not wasting his time but achieving both peace and deep knowledge. In this moment of contemplation, he celebrates total communion, integration with Nature, exemplified by his oblivion of the hour, which is completely in accordance with Nature, that knows no time. This communion, this unbreakable link that Thoreau establishes between him and Nature arises from his belief that he is a part of it, and that both are entitled to the same rights and rules and from his recognition of Nature as the embodiment of the divine.

2.2.2 Nature as the Embodiment of the Divine

As a Transcendentalist, a Romantic, and a lover of nature, Thoreau develops his own concept of Nature, which is different from Emerson's, although both are mystic, both believe in a universal soul and locate God within one's soul and in Nature. As Tong Huiyan writes: "Thoreau once walked behind Emerson along the road of Transcendentalism, but there came a time when he parted with this transcendentalist leader and took his own path towards nature. The Walden experience was exactly an action symbolizing his independence."[22] But, while Emerson believes that Nature is a symbol of the divine, and that the individual can reach God or as he calls Him, the Over Soul, without the help of churches and clergy, Thoreau believes that the individual can have a direct relationship with God, find and experience God directly in Nature. There, in Nature, man can discover God and truth and live according to His higher principles. Important is the fact that both Emerson and Thoreau believe that God addresses humans through Nature or in Nature, so man depends on Nature, he needs to embrace it in order to discover and experience the divine. This helps to explain why Thoreau searches to find a meaningful life, faith, spiritual growth and self-development on the shores of Walden Pond. In order to make his inward journey, he needs to retreat to discover the divinity in Nature as he himself

states " 'I love nature,' he insisted in 1853, 'partly because she is not man, but a retreat from him.' " [23] His quest to embrace Nature as a sacred reality, his will to feel the presence of God beyond himself, permeates all of *Walden*. In Nature and in solitude, he becomes fully aware of God's presence, of his infinite power, and grandeur, and learns that man's goodness grows more within his heart if he searches for Him in Nature rather than in the shallow, busy daily life, that most of his contemporaries lead. When Thoreau talks about God, he does not mean the Christian God, but a Creator, a spiritual authority that transcends humans and is beyond the human soul that pervades Nature, and gives true meaning to human life:

> Despite Thoreau's rejection of organised religion and his unceasing jibes against Christian churches and clerics, his allusions to biblical texts actually became more pervasive in *Walden* than they had been previously in the *Week*. And despite disdainful remarks about God's personality, Thoreau's version of nature mysticism incorporates elements of traditional Christian belief in a personal creator and in the world as divine Creation. [24]

More important, however, is the fact that, implicitly, Thoreau is sharing his deepest concern about the distance that man has created between him and God/Nature, about man's contempt and disrespect for the Higher Laws that should rule the world and whose violation has ruined the man-nature relationship. He criticizes the dominance of man over Nature, and he is one of the earliest prophets to show the profound ecological implications brought about by industrialization. Through his experiment at Walden Pond he attempts to teach that it is possible to build a better world if man rediscovers that in order to live well, he must not view Nature as just a resource to be exploited, but as part of a whole that has to be loved, respected and cared for.

Thus, Walden Pond assumes such importance to the author, that it is repeatedly personified, it is the character that allows him to celebrate total envelopment within Nature and through which he manages spiritual and physical renewal. The pond is the principal symbol of divinity in *Walden*, it is the closest he can come to God and Heaven: "I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven than I live to Walden even" (241). This "God's drop" as "One proposes that it be called" (241), is "the baptismal font" where Thoreau goes to take a bath: "I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did" (132) in order to renew himself, purify his soul and

get rid of all the stains and corrupt values of society. Probably, this is one of his most challenging commandments: "Renew thyself completely each day; do it again, and again, and forever again" (133). This, he notes, allows you to become pure and experience on earth God's goodness as he himself assures:

> In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these times and places and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality which surrounds us (141).

Returning to the ritual of bathing, it has both a religious, spiritual meaning, when the human spirit cleanses itself in the pond's pure water, and a physical one, since the water is so crystalline that the body's whiteness is similar to alabaster, as he notes:

> this water is of such crystalline purity that the body of the bather appears of an alabaster whiteness, still more unnatural, which, as the limbs are magnified and distorted withal, produces a monstrous effect, marking fit studies for a Michael Angelo (225).

However, much more important than cleaning the body, there is an emphasis on the soul's purification, once Thoreau chooses the word "whiteness" to symbolize the spiritual purification man undergoes when he immerses in the crystalline pure water of the pond. In an earlier passage, Thoreau had said "yet this pond is so remarkable for its depth and purity as to merit a particular description" (223) implying a spiritual, mystical depth in Nature and a moral purification that man can attain when he is not "contaminated" by society. Thoreau's emphasis on Walden's divinity is also stressed by his regular use of the opposing adjectives "sacred", "…are thinking to bring its water, which should be as sacred as the Ganges at least" (239) and "profaned", "Since the woodcutters, and the railroad, and I myself have profaned Walden,"; "This pond has rarely been profaned by a boat" (245-246), and the noun "purity", which appears several times throughout the chapter "The Ponds." As John Gatta states: "For Thoreau, the 'profane' is associated not just with overt degradation but also with commonplace dullness or inertia, with failure to realize the divine fullness of Transcendental imagination. Often, too, he links the profane quite physically to human alterations or deformations of the landscape." [25]

Also, the metaphors of the eye, for example, the color of its "iris" or the "earth's eye" to describe Walden Pond reflect the profound impact that the pond has upon Thoreau's ever changing consciousness. To say that "A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature" (233) is to be aware of the fact that it can see or reflect oneself and recognize that it plays a fundamental role in his self-development. Without this "mirror" he would not be able to look at and know himself profoundly. As Danielle Travali also claims, "One might understand that Thoreau sees the pond as the central object or 'core' of nature which he seeks in his journey through the wilderness. This is the 'core' that unifies man and nature - it brings man closer to the divinity of nature through its mysterious depth and perfection." [26]

Even more noteworthy, however, is Thoreau's use of some passages of the Christian Bible, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again" (*Luke* 15:45), to parallel the rebirth of the pond to his own spiritual rebirth: "Walden was dead and is alive again", or "O Death, where was thy sting? O Grave, where was thy victory, then?" (365).

Without a doubt, Thoreau reaches his plenitude in Nature, there, in the presence of God, and with God, he finds the answers to metaphysical key questions of his existence on earth, leaving his testimony to those who want to follow him, and want to "live deliberately" as he did. In effect, more than words, he left his successful experiment at Walden Pond, where he practised what he preached, i.e., his profound love of Nature and the unbreakable tie that man should establish with Nature without which he cannot survive. I believe that the implication is ultimately that man should not pave his way without the divine, either God or any other divinity, or sooner or later he will feel entrapped in a futile, shallow existence.

2.3 Simplicity as a Mode of Life

2.3.1 The Value of Simplicity

Throughout the different chapters of *Walden*, but mainly in the chapter "Economy," Thoreau convincingly demonstrates that man can flourish, pursue self-development, and personal achievement by leading a very simple life.

As noted earlier, Thoreau went to live in the woods at a time when New England was becoming industrialized and most people were changing their inner values and lifestyles dramatically due to the abundance of material goods they could afford. Having been educated at Harvard and being imbued mainly with Emerson's transcendentalist ideas, Thoreau could not disagree more with the direction American society was taking. That is the reason why he feels that it is his moral duty to "wake up" his townsmen and readers so that they stop living "lives of quiet desperation."

In the first and longest chapter of *Walden*, "Economy," Thoreau presents a method, he proposes starting a "revolution," a silent, inner, individual revolution that could bring about a tremendous impact on the world: has man the capacity to listen and follow his life motto "simplicity, simplicity, simplicity" (135)?

At first, a less attentive reader might think that the chapter "Economy" would deal with "production, trade, and supply of money," but he soon finds out that the word "economy" is a metaphor, that it has a symbolic meaning that is more in accordance with "the use of time, money, etc. that is available in a way that avoids waste."[27] In fact, the ultimate message that Thoreau conveys throughout the chapter is that in life "The false society of men - for earthly greatness - All heavenly comforts rarefies to air" (76), an idea expressed later in his famous essay "Life Without Principle," where Thoreau asks "readers the perennial question: "What shall it profit a man to gain the world and lose his own soul?."[28]

Since economics plays such an important role in people's lives, Thoreau dedicates the longest chapter of *Walden* to this subject, and in an earnest, ironic way, answers basic economic questions, as Philip Cafaro mentions: "What is the best way to earn a living? How much time should I spend at it? How much food and what kind of shelter are necessary to live, or to live well?"[29] Living at a time of great social changes, Thoreau can contrast the primitive way of life with the modern one in Concord, and unlike most of his neighbors, he is not dazzled by the comforts and luxuries they have at their disposal, as they are. Therefore, he criticizes them, and shows how they easily search for self-realization following a wrong principle: "Most of the luxuries, and many of the so called comforts of life, are not only indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of

mankind" (56). Instead, he gives the examples of philosophers who are poor in outward riches but rich in inward ones: "with respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meagre life than the poor. The ancient philosophers, Chinese, Hindoo, Persian, and the Greek, were a class than which none has been poorer in outward riches, none so rich in inward" (57) and he continues emphasizing that "To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, not even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust" (57). According to Sherman Paul, for Thoreau:

> There are two kinds of simplicity, (...) one that is akin to foolishness, the other to wisdom. The philosopher's style of living is only outwardly simple, but inwardly complex. The savage's style is both outwardly and inwardly simple. The complex and refined life of society, however, did not necessarily yield a complex inner life. And when he proposed that the civilized man become a more experienced and wiser savage, he hoped that he would retain the physical simplicity of the one in order to achieve the complex goals of the other, that he would 'spend as little time as possible in planting, weaving, building, etc.' and devote his freedom to cultivating 'The highest faculties.' This could be done, he believed, as he had done it, not only by simplicity, but by making the organic communion of the sylvan the foundation of a higher life.[30]

The striking fact here is that Thoreau wants readers to understand that to know life's true meaning and sublimity, it is necessary to live a simple life as he himself lives at the shores of Walden Pond, "what we should call voluntary poverty" (57). He knows that New Englanders live in such a hurry, so obsessed with the outward riches that they do not even notice how mean and superficial their lives are. What he advocates, then, is a voluntary poverty, a voluntary simplicity, one equivalent to Richard Gregg's concept:

> Voluntary simplicity involves both inner and outer condition. It means singleness of purpose, sincerity and honesty within, as well as avoidance of exterior clutter, of many possessions irrelevant to the chief purpose of life. It means an ordering and guiding of our energy and our desires, a partial restraint in some directions in order to secure greater abundance of life in other directions.[31]

Here, it is interesting to note the similarities, how both authors consider possessions a hindrance to achieve "the chief purpose of life."

Thoreau is clearly against materialism, the superficial lifestyles that most of his contemporaries adopt, neglecting the investment in self-culture and spiritual

development. He criticizes people's concern for fashion, outward appearance, and is eager to show how much more important it is to have a sound conscience: "Yet I am sure that there is greater anxiety, commonly, to have fashionable, or at least clean and unpatched clothes, than to have a sound conscience" (64). This notion is further conveyed in the following quote: "people are judged by their clothes. Even in our democratic New England towns the accidental possession of wealth, and its manifestation in dress and equipage alone, obtain for the possessor almost universal respect" (65). It seems as if Thoreau considers a scandal the fact that "Even in our democratic New England" people are respected by wearing certain clothes, meaning that clothes give status and define people's character. What he expects, then, is that people stop being superficial, unconscious consumers and alerts readers to "... beware of all enterprises that require new clothes. If there is not a new man, how can the new clothes be made to fit?" Moreover, he makes fun of people who blindly follow fashion: "It is the luxurious and dissipated who set the fashions which the herd so diligently follow" (79).

After all these considerations on fashion and clothing, Thoreau still reflects on the exploitation of the capitalistic system, whose main objective is not the well being of man but profit:

> I cannot believe that our factory system is the best made by which men may get clothing. The condition of the operatives is becoming every day more like that of the English; and it cannot be wondered at, since, as far as I have heard or observed, the principal object is, not that mankind may be well and honestly clad, but, unquestionably, that the corporations may be enriched (69).

In this respect, he also condemns the shanties which border the railroads and the Brahmins' life, but to this, I shall have to return at a later point, when I discuss Thoreau's vision about the menace of industrial progress.

Regarding housing and furniture, Thoreau is also a very acute observer and critic of his neighbors' ostentatious dwellings and material aspirations. Instead of "creating palaces" it would be better if man chose to live as simple as the Indians whose wigwams satisfy their needs completely. He points out that:

> The most interesting dwellings in this country, as the painter knows, are the most unpretending, humble log huts and cottages of the poor commonly; it is the life of the inhabitants whose shells they are and not any peculiarity in their surfaces

> merely, which makes them picturesque; and equally interesting will be the citizen's suburban box, when his life shall be as simple as agreeable to the imagination, and there is as little straining after effect in the style of his dwelling (90).

Finally, he addresses readers directly and asks "Why should not our furniture be as simple as the Arab's or the Indians?" (78-79).

These are the life principles that Thoreau praises and advocates for humankind, instead of opulence, superfluities, false manners and false character. He condemns the fact that "the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" because they become enslaved by money and possessions which hinder them from pursuing higher values. And then, he asks "why has man rooted himself thus firmly in the earth, but that he may rise in the same proportion into the heavens above?" (58). Up to a certain point, it could be said that Thoreau is more interested in supporting life in eternity, as he also affirms "When he has obtained those things which are necessary to life, there is another alternative than to obtain superfluities"(58). However, not intending to underestimate this viewpoint, I contend that he really believes and wants us to understand that happiness can be achieved here and now: "In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line" (59). Later on, he adds "In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these times and places and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages" (141). How is it not possible to perceive Thoreau's appeal to a better life, a life with principle?

Thoreau himself affirms that there is something true and sublime in eternity, therefore it is worth persevering in the essential. This faith in the immeasurable infinite is clearly revealed in his answer to his friend Edmund Hosmer, as he fully realized his end was near, when he told him of seeing a spring robin: "Yes! This is a beautiful world; But I shall see a fairer."[32] His ascetic life reflects his noble soul, his belief in a divine Creator or God, although he rejects any form of institutional religion. No doubt, one is now in a better position to understand his answer to his aunt Louisa when she asked him if he had

made his peace with God, to which he replies: "I did not know we had ever quarrelled, Aunt,"[33] which reflects his coherence epitomized by the principle "he who lives truly, sees truly."

It's no wonder, then, that Thoreau fails in his adaptation to the Concordian society and is considered a crank, even by his mentor Emerson, as Sherman Paul says: "seizing upon the dramatic act of his withdrawal from society, they thought him uncivil and, like Emerson who provided his Walden acres but did not approve of the experiment, branded him a hermit."[34] However, notwithstanding the discordant voices, Thoreau pursues his inner retreat overcoming every kind of obstacle and prejudice, as he is fully convinced that "the greater part of what my neighbours call good I believe in my soul to be bad" (53). As Basil Willey notes, "Thoreau is a follower of John the Baptist rather than of Christ, he is a voice crying in the wilderness, and he prefers living in solitude upon its locusts and wild honey to consorting with publicans and sinners."[35] His experiment had indeed its economic side; he wanted to prove that "a man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone" (126). He addresses his readers directly and endeavours to awaken their consciousness when he asks "Shall we always study to obtain more of these things, and not sometimes to be content with less?" (78). What is at stake, then, is the fact that Thoreau challenges his neighbours and readers to discover the ultimate purposes of their economic activities, to discover when they have got enough. As Philip Cafaro notes:

> Thoreau says we can have enough, but most easily and certainly by scaling back our material wants and finding inexpensive paths to personal fulfilment.
> One half of saying "enough" involves recognizing happiness and such higher goals as self-development, an enriched experience, or increased knowledge as the ultimate purposes of our economic activities. The other half means seeing the limited value of money and possessions for achieving these goals.[36]

Thoreau insists on the development of the whole person instead of "laying up treasures which moth and rust will corrupt and thieves break through and steal" (47), adding that "It's a fool's life, as they will find when they get to the end of it, if not before" (47-48). Thoreau simply rejects man's greed, obsession and enslavement to material goods and exemplifies brilliantly how he achieved self-fulfilment and a good human life by living and eating simply and plainly in the modest cabin at Walden Pond, with few pieces of

furniture and utensils. He reduces to four the necessaries of life food, shelter, clothing, and fuel, and stresses that "Most of the luxuries, and many of the so called comforts of life, are not only indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind" (56). This quotation brings me to consider Naess' opinion that if one has more than one really needs the things will possess him:

> I am reminded of an old saying: "If you own more than three things, the things will own you." This is naturally an oversimplification, but by reducing our standard of living and the number of things with which we surround ourselves, we may actually raise the quality of life.[37]

Aiming at a better quality of life Thoreau also advises: "I say, let your affairs be as two or three, not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb nail" (135). His concept of life shocked his contemporaries, not only because he challenged them to "simplify, simplify" but also because he was considered a crank, someone who deliberately chose poverty when he could live comfortably. His emphasis on moral principle and simpler life did not make any sense then, as it still does not, to many people today, but how could it make if, as Sherman Paul notes:

> they saw in this simple means of dodging the pressures of society an end they considered worthless. Did this crank (and there were cranks aplenty in New England preaching the salvation of fresh air and water, of graham flour, of going without money) expect them, so happily satisfied with the luxurious benefits of civilization, to listen to his exultation over a needless belt-tightening?[38]

Currently, more so than in the nineteenth century, Thoreau's words should be read and interpreted literally, and, more importantly, they should encourage people to adopt a simpler lifestyle. His fierce attack on superficial life permeates throughout the whole of *Walden*, but especially in the chapters "Economy" and "Where I lived", where Thoreau alerts his readers not to be attached to possessions because they distract them from what is truly important, as the following quotes suggest: "while civilization has been improving our houses, it has not equally improved the men who are to inhabit them. It has created palaces, but it was not so easy to create noble men and kings" (77); "We worship not the Graces, nor the Parcae, but Fashion" (68); "Our outside and often thin and fanciful clothes are our epidermis or false skin" (66); "We inhabitants of New England

live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things" (140).

In effect, for all that has already been said, I contend that the chapter "Economy" is extremely challenging, since Thoreau clearly exemplifies through his own "economy" how little man really needs to live a happy, fulfilled life. He shows the small amount of work that man needs to do to live a content life and tries to convince readers to simplify their lives in order to be happier, so that "to maintain one's self on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime" (114).

2.3.2 Vegetarianism

As far as food is concerned, Thoreau's defence of a simple diet and his urge to eat locally, appeal to modern readers who have a sound conscience and wished the earth's food supplies could feed the whole humankind. Although Thoreau does not have in mind the millions of people, mainly children, who starve or are malnourished worldwide, he alerts readers that it is absolutely necessary to be a conscious consumer and avoid overconsumption. In effect, his attempt to teach and change people's eating habits could be underestimated and be considered worthless at the time, but he knew quite well that man's gluttony would turn him into a "savage," unable to pursue higher inner principles and activities. Throughout *Walden* there is a true call for a simple life, and, since food is one of the four necessaries of life that interests everybody, Thoreau could not help discussing this subject. Evidence of this is right at the beginning of *Walden*, in the second paragraph, when Thoreau explains that his townsmen had made some "particular inquiries" concerning his "mode of life," which curiously starts with a question concerning food "Some have asked what I got to eat" (45). As he explains a little bit later, "The grand necessity, then, for our bodies, is to keep warm, to keep the vital heat in us. What pains we accordingly take, not only with our Food, and Clothing, and Shelter" (56). Obviously, food is essential to stay alive, therefore Thoreau emphasizes its importance, but simultaneously he wants to help people reflect upon the great effort and investment they do to get it. Is not this irrational? "Why will men worry themselves so? He that does not eat need not work" (270). If, on the one hand, I think Thoreau is right, since the simple life

he pursues is totally in accordance with his mode of life, on the other hand, I believe it could have other moral implications to defend: “He that does not work need not eat”, not only because implicit there is a certain moral responsibility for the consumer, but also because Thoreau’s quotation might foster a sort of idleness.

The chapter “Higher Laws” illustrates Thoreau’s concept of a simple diet and his support of vegetarianism. According to Kathryn Cornell Dolan, “Thoreau was not alone in his concern for the national diet, and his experiments with diet were not the most extreme of his era. During this time of national and dietary restructuring, a surge of writers and reformers focused their attention on matters of foods.”[39] For this reason, I question Richard J. Schneider’s point of view when he says: “Most readers find ‘Higher Laws’, the most obviously Transcendentalist chapter in the book, to be exasperating in its puritanic insistence on the virtues of a vegetarian diet and sexual chastity and in its apparent denial of the value of nature.”[40] As I see it, Thoreau’s main aim is to alert readers that he considers killing and eating animals unethical since they have the same rights as men, their killing representing a lack of respect for all nonhuman beings and a subsequent menace to Nature and humankind. One of the reasons Thoreau supports vegetarianism is the fact that he condemns animal suffering and killing. He may even shock sensitive readers, mainly mothers, when he says “The hare in its extremity cries like a child. I warn you, mothers, that my sympathies do not always make the usual philanthropic distinctions” (260). Thoreau’s reverence and respect towards Nature and nonhuman beings have already been underscored, thus, according to him, it does not make any sense to destroy a creature that is “a part of oneself.”

It is precisely this sense of “brotherhood,” the notion that it is ethically wrong to kill and eat animals, that gives rise to Thoreau’s inner conflict and struggle, when he devours a raw woodchuck on his way home, as described right at the beginning of the chapter “Higher Laws.” As Thoreau asserts, “I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good” (257). There is, undoubtedly, a recognition, an acceptance of man’s animal and spiritual side, Thoreau “reverences them both” and loves them equally, although he

stresses that the spiritual side should always prevail: “It may be vain to ask why the imagination will not be reconciled to flesh and fat. I am satisfied that it is not. Is it not a reproach that man is a carnivorous animal? True, he can and does live, in a great measure, by preying on other animals; but this is a miserable way,- as any one who will go to snaring rabbits, or slaughtering lambs, may learn” (263). It is clear Thoreau’s desire to influence and make people rethink about their eating habits. Therefore, he points out the health, the intellectual and the economic benefits of a simple vegetarian diet, as the following quotes indicate: “I believe that every man who has ever been earnest to preserve his higher or poetic faculties in the best condition has been particularly inclined to abstain from much food of any kind” (262); “I learned from my two years’ experience that it would cost incredibly little trouble to obtain one’s necessary food, even in this latitude; that a man may use as simple a diet as the animals, and yet retain health and strength” (104). Also, through the use of irony, Thoreau wisely challenges his readers’ knowledge about the true benefits of food:

> One farmer says to me, ‘You cannot live on vegetable food solely, for it furnishes nothing to make bones with;’ and so he religiously devotes a part of his day to supplying his system with the raw material of bones; walking all the while he talks behind his oxen, which, with vegetable-made bones, jerk him and his lumbering plough along in spite of every obstacle (51-52).

Besides, he wants to believe that humankind will evolve naturally and will reject meat consumption: “I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact with the more civilized” (263).

Yet, Thoreau still claims there are certain jobs that help people observe and love nature, for instance:

> Fishermen, hunters, woodchoppers, and others, spending their lives in the fields and woods, in a peculiar sense a part of Nature themselves, are often in a more favourable mood for observing her, in the intervals of their pursuits, than philosophers or poets even, who approach her with expectation (257-258).

He also affirms that fishing and hunting may help to arouse children’s interest for nature: “we cannot but pity the boy who has never fired a gun; he is no more humane, while his education has been sadly neglected” (259), but underscores that “No humane being, past

the thoughtless age of boyhood, will wantonly murder any creature, which holds its life by the same tenure that he does" (260).

By following a strict, simple diet for two years while living at the pond, Thoreau tries to show, through his example, how man can balance a simple diet with a simple life. It is advantageous to man and Nature to abstain from animal food since meat eating is unclean and unnecessary, and a rich diet demands much effort and work to get it, which can be absurd, as Thoreau tries to demonstrate to John Field:

> I tried to help him with my experience, telling him that he was one of my nearest neighbors, and that I too, who came a-fishing here, and looked like a loafer, was getting my living like himself; that I lived in a tight, light, and clean house, which hardly cost more than the annual rent of such a ruin as his commonly amounts to; and how, if he chose, he might in a month or two build himself a palace of his own; that I did not use tea, nor coffee, nor butter, nor milk, nor fresh meat, and so did not have to work to get them; again, as I did not work hard, I did not have to eat hard, and it cost me but a trifle for my food; but as he began with tea, and coffee, and butter, and milk, and beef, he had to work hard to pay for them, and when he had worked hard he had to eat hard again to repair the waste of his system- and so it was as broad as it was long, indeed it was broader than it was long, for he was discontented and wasted his life into the bargain; and yet he had rated it as a gain in coming to America, that here you could get tea, and coffee, and meat every day. But the only true America is that country where you are at liberty to pursue such a mode of life as may enable you to do without these, and where the state does not endeavor to compel you to sustain the slavery and war and other superfluous expenses which directly or indirectly result from the use of such things (252-253).

John Field, the man who cannot control his own appetite, symbolically represents all "gross feeders", who feel content satisfying their animal nature, as Philip Cafaro refers: "…many of us do fail to explore life's higher or more challenging activities due to our satisfaction with lower ones. We sacrifice the greater to the less."[41] On this issue, Thoreau notes: "The gross feeder is a man in the larva state; and there are whole nations in that condition, nations without fancy or imagination, whose vast abdomens betray them" (262), changing from an individual to a national sphere, conveying the idea that men and nations are insatiable. According to Kathryn C. Dolan, Thoreau was a "prophet" who was able to see at the time the "birth" of expansionism which would give rise to modern globalization. When he observed his townsmen's eating habits, who did not mind getting their foods and spices from distant countries like Indonesia and Australia, thanks to new

means of transport, like steamboats and trains, that facilitated their acquisition, this could not leave him indifferent and insensitive. As Kathryn Dolan has argued: “Thoreau’s writings show that the newly developed dietary habits and ‘gross’ appetites of the growing U.S. middle and leisure classes mirrored the country’s expansionist habits to the extent that a writer like Thoreau would have been “almost consciously opposed to the (new) rich with their rich food.”[42] Aware of American’s desire to value material goods, to eat and consume irresponsibly and to think that “Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body,” (269) and not as St. Paul who wrote in 1 *Corinthians* 6:19 “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?.”[43] Thoreau urges his readers to moderate their appetite, but, essentially, to be responsible consumers who should “feed” their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit.

On the whole, it is important to consider Thoreau’s concern for the development of every individual, who, according to him, should pursue a simple living, never neglecting the essential, just the way he did, although idealistic and some of his options may be considered unthinkable in the twenty-first century.

2.4 The Menace of Industrial Progress

In effect, most modern readers cannot help smiling at Thoreau’s romanticism, since some situations he describes would be totally unimaginable nowadays, as is the case illustrated in the following passage:

> One says to me, "I wonder that you do not lay up money; you love to travel; you might take the cars and go to Fitchburg today and see the country." But I am wiser than that. I have learned that the swiftest traveller is he that goes afoot. I say to my friend, Suppose we try who will get there first. The distance is thirty miles; the fare ninety cents. That is almost a day's wages. I remember when wages were sixty cents a day for laborers on this very road. Well, I start now on foot, and get there before night; I have travelled at that rate by the week together. You will in the meanwhile have earned your fare, and arrive there some time tomorrow, or possibly this evening, if you are lucky enough to get a job in season. Instead of going to Fitchburg, you will be working here the greater part of the day. And so, if the railroad reached round the world, I think that I should keep ahead of you; and as for seeing the country and getting experience of that kind, I should have to cut your acquaintance altogether (96).

This example does not mean, however, that one should interpret it literally as it could be at Thoreau's time. Considering the price of the ticket to Fitchburg, Thoreau concludes that "I am wiser than that. I have learned that the swiftest traveller is he that goes afoot," since it is unwise to spend time working to earn enough money to buy the ticket, as one arrives at the destiny on foot, first. Besides, nothing could compare to the pleasure he would get, "experiencing, communing" with Nature, enjoying the travel in a unique way, as only a lover of nature as Thoreau could do. This is a point Philip Cafaro clearly and wonderfully illustrates:

> The suggested goals are "to travel" and "to see the country," broadened slightly at the end of the passage to "seeing the country and getting experience." But the fastest and most efficient means of transportation are not the best ones for these purposes, for there is a world of sights worth seeing along the country roads to Fitchburg. Thoreau wants to look closely, find new plants, sample the huckleberries, note the colors shining in a pond at dusk, compare the ways people talk or farm in different townships. He wants not merely to see, but to see, hear, smell, taste, touch. He wants not merely to see, but to understand. This takes time. For this sort of seeing, covering less ground more slowly is better.
>
> Thoreau the traveller wants to "get experience," but the experience of walking the roads and riding the rails to Fitchburg are completely different. In walking, you experience changes in the weather (not always pleasant) and hear birds calling and people working. You feel changes in the topography in your bones and muscles, while the train's bed has been graded and smoothed. You might have to walk up to a farmhouse and ask for directions, food and lodging – and who knows whether they will be forthcoming? On the train, these matters are largely settled beforehand, and the people you interact with are being paid to serve you. This has its positive side, but also its limits. People usually disclose more of themselves when encountered in situ and sometimes offer genuine hospitality, one of life's greatest gifts. If it is chiefly these experiences that we value in travel, then slower means are better. If we simply want to get to Fitchburg as quickly as possible and we have the fare in our pocket, then perhaps the train is better. But then we must recognize that we are giving up "experiencing" or more deeply "seeing" the countryside. There is a trade-off.[44]

Bearing in mind that the railroad in *Walden* is a symbol of technology, this passage does not illustrate Thoreau's vision on it. He simply intends to draw people's attention to its drawbacks and benefits, but above all, to make people reflect on whether the advantages always outweigh the disadvantages, or even if it would not be better to renounce some technological devices, when they can be totally dispensable. We know about the millions of people addicted to the Internet, television, mobile phones and video

games and the pernicious effects these gadgets and means of communication have had on their lives. Instead of contributing to self-development, self-culture, and bringing people closer, sometimes they have actually created a gap, a cold distant relationship among people who live under the same roof. For this reason, Thoreau's claims that "Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an improved end and an end which it was already but too easy to arrive at" (95) fits today's world, as people have progressively stopped worrying about the essential questions of life, i.e., what is their ultimate goal in this world. In fact, Thoreau warns us to look upon technologies with scepticism, to be careful when making our choices because he knows that "We do not ride on the railroad, it rides upon us," (136) and while "some have the pleasure of riding on a rail, others have the misfortune to be ridden upon" (137). He adds that "…so with a hundred 'modern improvements;' there is an illusion about them; there is not always a positive advance" (95). He is particularly interested in alerting people to the fact that there is an illusion about technologies, that there is not always a positive advance when using them as they distract us from more important activities and goals. On the one hand, they facilitate people's life, create more free time, but on the other, humankind continues to spend their spare time pursuing false ideals, instead of devoting themselves to cultivate their spiritual, cultural sides or embrace noble projects. In fact, in my opinion, technologies have contributed to widen the gap between the "haves" and "have nots," shaping man's character and mode of life, sometimes creating unhappy, frustrated creatures, victims of the industrialised world.

Despite being suspicious of technology, Thoreau was also able to recognize the benefits of human achievements, for instance some positive aspects of the railroad. He was creative, and was himself an inventor, as Philip Cafaro refers: "Thoreau himself developed a new pencil-making process that revived his father's flagging business. He also attached little leather booties to Mrs. Emerson's chickens, when she asked him to stop their digging in her garden."[45]

Thus, throughout the fourth chapter of *Walden*, "Sounds", one can perceive Thoreau's ambivalence towards the railroad, the locomotive, i.e. technologies in general.

One moment he compares the train to a comet, praises its velocity, believes it deserves to be put into the new mythology, and accepts the fact that the earth has now got a race worthy to inhabit it:

> When I meet the engine with its train of cars moving off with planetary motion-- or, rather, like a comet, for the beholder knows not if with that velocity and with that direction it will ever revisit this system, since its orbit does not look like a returning curve,-- with its steam cloud like a banner streaming behind in golden and silver wreaths, like many a downy cloud which I have seen, high in the heavens, unfolding its masses to the light ,-as if this travelling demigod, this cloud-compeller, would ere long take the sunset sky for the livery of his train; when I hear the iron horse make the bills echo with his snort like thunder, shaking the earth with his feet, and breathing fire and smoke from his nostrils (what kind of winged horse or fiery dragon they will put into the new Mythology I don't know,) it seems as if the earth had got a race now worthy to inhabit it. If all were as it seems, and men made the elements their servants for noble ends! (161 - 162).

The next moment he deplores the fact that people choose “to do things railroad fashion” (163) and asks “Why should we live with such hurry and waste life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry” (137) implying that men live at an accelerated pace, unable to really enjoy life, “to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life,” the way Thoreau managed to do. He had already stated before that “Men think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt, whether they do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain” (136). Here – as in the following quote – he questions if this really means “true” progress, if technological innovations really improve our lives and are necessary:

> We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate… As if the main object were to talk fast and not to talk sensibly. We are eager to tunnel under The Atlantic and bring the Old World some weeks nearer to the new, but perchance the first news that will leak through into the broad, flapping American ear will be that the Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough (95-96).

Here it is evident Thoreau’s acute criticism of man’s eagerness to develop quicker means of communication, which are used to transmit gossip instead of significant news. Is it worth reducing distances, when people are not worried about bridging the gap between them? Certainly this is the perennial question that Thoreau raises.

Yet, I contend that the prevailing tone of the chapter "Sounds" is one of admiration, excitement, fascination and wonder, as far as the railroad and the train are concerned. It would not probably be wrong to conclude that, in Thoreau's view, the benefits outweigh the side effects, as is easily seen in the following passages: "we have constructed a fate, an Atropos, that never turns aside" (163); "I watch the passage of the morning cars with the same feeling that I do the rising of the sun, which is hardly more regular" (162); "Have not men improved somewhat in punctuality since the railroad was invented?" (163); "I am refreshed and expanded when the freight train rattles past me, and I smell the stores which go dispensing their odors all the way from Long Wharf to Lake Champlain, reminding me of foreign parts, of Coral reefs, and Indian oceans, and tropical climes, and the extent of the globe" (164-165); culminating with the question "What's the railroad to me?... I will not have my eyes put out and my ears spoiled by its smoke and steam and hissing" (168). This is not to say that Thoreau was dazzled by industrial progress as most of his contemporaries were, but simply that he was able to integrate and reconcile industrial development with his concern for Nature, as Lawrence Buell points out:

> Filtering his perceptions through the slow dawn following a night time walk (one of dozens reported in the Journal), Thoreau experiences 'The sound of the (railroad) cars' as "that of a rushing wind" and hears "some far off factory bell" as a "matin bell, sweet & inspiring as if it summoned holy men & maids to worship" (PJ 4:65). At first glance these might seem like classic "machine- in- the- garden" defensive reactions; but this entry registers no discomfort about the baleful effects of industrialization, only a desire to make the ordinary seem poetic.[46]

At this stage, it is still interesting to consider Greg Garrard's view when he says that "... American literature, emerging in the nineteenth century in the midst of massive industrialisation, can attempt to mediate between competing values, 'the contradiction between rural myth and technological fact,'[47] evidenced in this passage: "The whistle of the locomotive penetrates my woods summer and winter, sounding like the scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer's yard, informing me that many restless city merchants are arriving within the circle of the town, or adventurous country traders from the other side" (160-161). When the cattle train passes and Thoreau comments "So is your pastoral life whirled past and away" (167) this could show his rejection of technology, since it means

the destruction of Nature, the wilderness, where he finds peace and quietude. Garrard refers that "as Marx points out the quote above naturalises the sound of the train, comparing it to the call of a hawk, and throughout his meditation Thoreau betrays a profound ambivalence towards technology."[48]

All in all, what is important to bear in mind is Thoreau's alert as regards "modern improvements." He addresses readers, urging them to reconsider if new technologies further their self-development, or are simply mere gadgets that distract them "from serious things," from their true goals.

2.5 The Need for a Spiritual Awakening

It is evident Thoreau's constant alert to the need for a spiritual awakening, the need to invest more in moral, personal flourishing than in material goods. He considers that he has the duty to awaken people to reflect on the purpose of their lives as he himself affirms in the Introduction of *Walden*: "I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbours up" (43). Thoreau is a nonconformist who cannot live according to the American values of mid-nineteenth century, since they dehumanize man, separate him from God and Nature and make him live a life of "quiet desperation". Although Sherman Paul argues that "The life of quiet desperation that he so brilliantly anatomized, however, had been (or was) his own, and the economic anxieties merely pointed to deeper anxieties - those of a life gone stale, without savor or animating purpose,"[49] in my view, Leo Marx's perspective is much more in accordance with Thoreau's feelings:

> By 1845, according to Thoreau, a depressing state of mind - he calls it "quiet desperation"- has seized the people of Concord. The opening chapter, "Economy" is a diagnosis of this cultural malady. Resigned to a pointless, dull, routinized existence, Thoreau's fellow-townsmen perform the daily round without joy or anger or genuine exercise of will. As if their minds were mirrors, able only to reflect the external world, they are satisfied to cope with things as they are.[50]

This does not mean, however, that Thoreau led a fulfilled, contented and happy life before seeking refuge on the shores of Walden Pond, but simply that he always sought a

meaningful life, pursuing self-realization and a mode of life in an extravagant way, according to his contemporaries. Therefore, his life could not have "gone stale, without savor or animating purpose", as Sherman Paul says and as most of his townsmen thought at the time. The striking issue here is precisely the fact that they did not recognize their shallow superficial existences, so convinced were they that money and possessions would bring them total self-fulfilment. Aware of "this cultural malady" as Leo Marx refers, Thoreau needs to flee from civilization to find the true self, to discover a higher, spiritual life, the faith that he cannot find in the middle of a noisy, hasty, stressful life. At Walden, and in solitude, communing with Nature, he finds himself, fronts "only the essential facts of life", and it is precisely the result of his experiment that he wants to share with his readers and townsmen. He simply wishes to reveal himself, the way he searched for self-realization, urging each one to search for his own and avoid copying his, as he himself says:

> I would not have any one adopt my mode of living on any account; for, beside that before he has fairly learned it I may have found out another for myself, I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue his own way, and not his father's or his mother's (114).

On the one hand, Thoreau advises each and everyone to pursue his own way and says "I would not have any one adopt my mode of living on any account," and, yet, he seems to transmit many principles and to be giving many clues to guide one's life. On the other hand, through his experiment at Walden Pond he intends to influence readers, awaken them to the need of building a life with foundations based upon higher principles, as he says in the chapter "Conclusion": "I learned this, at least, by my experiment; ... Now put the foundations under them" (372). It is also interesting to note that in this chapter Thoreau often uses the imperative to appeal to his readers directly, to praise life and to feel gratitude for it no matter how hard the circumstances may be: "However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richer. The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise" (376). It cannot be doubted that only a noble soul as Thoreau could offer such brilliant commandments, which were able to stir, bother and disturb the most unsound

consciences as he well knew. When he went to the pond, his ultimate purpose, as stated earlier, was to "drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, … publish its meanness to the world" (135). Both Thoreau and Emerson knew quite well that they were totally right, they could perceive that America was declining and losing its soul and its integrity, but Thoreau was the one who dared speak louder, live a life of principle, the one who did not care about "worldly treasures" so as to invest more in the "Celestial Empire." His concern about humankind's fate pervades throughout *Walden*, where he regrets the fact that people have become indifferent, insensitive and distant from Nature as well as from a higher, spiritual life: "The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?" (134). The perception that only a few are awake to a poetic or divine life is what really worries him, therefore he says "we must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake," (134) not in the literal but in the spiritual sense, in order to live and be in full harmony with God and Nature. His faith and religious beliefs were quite true, unique, even if he did not attend any services in churches, as Emerson remarks in his essay "Thoreau," (1862):

> whilst he used in his writings a certain petulance of remark in reference to churches or churchmen, he was a person of a rare, tender and absolute religion, a person incapable of any profanation, by act or by thought. Of course, the same isolation which belonged to his original thinking and living detached him from the social religious forms." This is neither to be censured nor regretted. Aristotle long ago explained it, when he said, 'One who surpasses his fellow citizens in virtue is no longer a part of the city. Their law is not for him, since he is a law to himself.'[51]

There is no doubt that Aristotle's theory totally fits Thoreau, since he surpassed his fellow townsmen in virtue, and committed himself to living according to the higher principles he proclaims. In the aforementioned essay, Emerson also refers that "In his youth, he said, one day, 'The other world is all my art; my pencils will draw no other; my jack-knife will cut nothing else; I do not use it as a means'"[52] adding that: "He thought that without religion or devotion of some kind nothing great was ever accomplished; and he thought that the bigoted sectarian had better bear this in mind."[53] Therefore, Thoreau

insists on the need of the personal, spiritual flourishing, he proposes man's rebirth, since he himself has found out that without faith, a belief and commitment to higher principles, man leads a discontented, empty life, where "Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only" and asserts that "Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul" (377). He struggles and walks along a solitary track to show how most men's material, routinized existences need a radical change, need a spiritual awakening, since they live in a dormant state. Like God on his throne, he observes humankind digging his own tomb, but he feels discontented, and so he tries to convince his readers that it is better to seek a new mode of life, as he himself did:

> I delight to my bearings, - not walk in procession with pomp and parade, in a conspicuous place, but to walk even with the Builder of the Universe, if I may, - not to live in this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century, but stand or sit thoughtfully while it goes by. What are men celebrating? They are all on a committee of arrangements, and hourly expect a speech from somebody. God is only the president of the day, and Webster is orator (378).

The typical common life could not please him, a man of faith who believed in goodness and immortality, as no other man did. Considered an idealist, a crank, he was able to find joy and happiness in the details of life due to his capacity of pursuing a meaningful spiritual life, not corrupted by "material progress" and materialism. He transcended his own time because he refused to live a fake existence, decided to follow and live according to the needs and desires of his "self," regardless of the costs he would pay for his uncommon choice. His true search for integrity, truth, sincerity and simplicity is evidenced in this passage:

> Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. I sat at a table where rich food and wine in abundance were, and obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board. The hospitality was as cold as the ices. I thought that there was no need of ice to freeze them. They talked to me of the age of the wine and the fame of the vintage; but I thought of an older, a newer, and purer wine, of a more glorious vintage, which they had not got, and could not buy. The style, the house and grounds and "entertainment" pass for nothing with me. I called on the king, but he made me wait in his hall, and conducted like a man incapacitated for hospitality. There was a man in my neighborhood who lived in a hollow tree. His manners were truly regal. I should have done better had I called on him (379).

Thoreau is definitely, once more, highlighting the importance of truth in human relationships and life, showing his contempt for the lack of integrity that he saw in American life. It is not by chance that in the chapter "Conclusion," he addresses his readers in a direct way to remind them of this important moral value. The language, the style, the examples given are simple, and resonate with a Biblical text so as to be understood by everybody, no matter their capacity. After all, I also question the value of truth today as Thoreau did. Is not man totally neglecting the richest inner values?

I totally agree with Emerson when he says in "Self-Reliance" that "If we live truly, we shall see truly," as Thoreau demonstrates clearly. After travelling through cloudy waters, and "to refuse all the accustomed paths and keep his solitary freedom at the cost of disappointing the natural expectations of his family and friends…,"[54] as Emerson admitted in his funeral tribute, Thoreau finds himself, a discovery that most people neglect and which is fundamental to live well. He manages to reconcile himself with God, Nature, and humankind, he seizes each instant and lives it profoundly and deliberately so as not to discover at the moment of his death that he had not lived. His rare choice requires self-discipline, determination and courage, and these qualities Thoreau learns to cultivate, as he realizes that they grow inside one's heart as the beans in the field, if man endeavours truly to plant these seeds and "waters" them regularly. Man is part of Nature and as such the power and beauty of it can be found inside himself, may he wish and have his heart open to the Artist's call. For this reason, Thoreau juxtaposes his rebirth with the chapter "Spring" where there is an explicit reference and understanding of God as the World's Creator, as exemplified by the following quotes: "I stood in the laboratory of the Artist who made the world and me," (354) also considering man "a mass of thawing clay" (355), "clay in the hands of the potter" (357); "Walden was dead as is alive again" (360). The pond's rebirth is also Thoreau's spiritual awakening; he had been lost, blind, slumbering and now he can see truly, he found himself and because he discovered the powerful force of faith his human fears are relieved, therefore he recognizes that "that man who does not believe that each day contains an earlier, more sacred, and auroral hour than he has yet profaned, has despaired of life, and is pursuing a descending and darkening way" (133). How could he awaken his neighbours if he himself was not

awaken? Only a man conscious of the infinite, admirable, higher, spiritual forces is able to raise metaphysical questions as Thoreau did, to which he left open ended answers, giving man total freedom to discover the ones which suit and fulfil him best.

As Michael Meyer refers, "he offered his readers the peace and freedom of a balanced soul rather than the security of balanced books." [55] By highlighting the differences between himself, his life and his Concord townsmen, Thoreau intends to stir, shaken their conscience, convince them that both humankind and Nature / the environment will gain unlimited benefits if they seek to live according to Nature's laws, if they both coexist peacefully.

2.5.1 *Walden*'s Challenges

Unfortunately, more than a hundred and fifty years after *Walden*'s publication, the world has proven that Thoreau was totally right when he tried to admonish humankind for the serious consequences of the unconscious, careless, irresponsible exploitation of the Earth's resources. "Enjoy the land, but own it not" (255), he wisely alerts man that it is totally wrong to think that the earth is at his disposal. On the contrary, he should use, but not misuse and abuse it, love it and be aware that as far as he preserves Nature he also protects and preserves his well being, his own life. The whole world should "be impregnated" with Thoreau's principle, it is more urgent than ever to put Thoreau's "strict economy" into practice and also remember Gandhi's quote: "There is not enough for everyone's greed but there is enough for everyone's need". It is urgent to live a simpler life, to learn and teach to younger generations Thoreau's maxim "a man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone" (126), since self-fulfilment and happiness can be achieved, even though one is poor in material goods. In fact, most times the poor ones are richer in love, humbleness and gratitude, since money distracts people from the essential noble feelings and corrupts the human soul. Basically, Thoreau follows God's commandments, he loves Nature and man as his own "self" and this is what he exemplifies by pursuing the simplest mode of life and doing what he really loves.

While in the chapter “Economy” Thoreau addresses his readers, criticizing their set of values, their ostentatious materialistic existences, after a process of “maturation” he comes to the conclusion that the poor can also enjoy life, live a more rewarding, fulfilled life than his affluent contemporaries. For this reason, he praises it:

> Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poor house. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man’s abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts as in a palace [...] cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage (376- 377).

Whereas he had previously appealed to the need of self-development and culture, paradoxically, now, he seems to contradict himself by saying: “Do not seek so anxiously to be developed, to subject yourself to many influences to be played on; it is all dissipation. Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly lights” (377). Probably these are encouraging words addressed to all those who are not wealthy assuring them that they are also noble humans, have a rewarding life thanks to their virtues. Therefore, they do not need to “develop” the way the capitalistic system expects them to. Yet, with or without contradiction, what is important to highlight is Thoreau’s positive thinking and constant praise of life, no matter how hard and poor in material goods life may be, then “Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly lights” (377) and it is precisely the knowledge that man is not just clay but also has a divine dimension that is important not to forget.

As referred earlier, Thoreau is unable to fit in a society whose citizens lead shallow existences, lives without principle. As a philosopher, he recognizes that New Englanders lead mean lives “because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things” (140) and have unconsciously been entrapped by the capitalist system that equals happiness to material comfort. He has a genial intuition and knowledge that make him believe there is an alternative which he is willing to offer, rather than investing in worldly possessions as most of his contemporaries do. He points out a more elevated and rewarding life, one that cultivates moral virtues: “I said to myself, I will not plant beans and corn with so much industry another summer, but such seeds, if the seed is not lost, as sincerity, truth, simplicity, faith, innocence, and the like, ...” (209). Thoreau regrets the fact that man feels content with outward appearance, pursues a life rich in commodities and material

comfort but poor in inner principles: “while civilization has been improving our houses, it has not equally improved the men who inhabit them. It has created palaces, but it was not so easy to create noblemen and kings” (77). This is precisely what has failed: man’s inability to improve his soul, his own self.

It is simply astounding how Thoreau’s words ring so true today. Humankind seems to be adrift, unable to find out new motives of enjoyment and happiness. As he himself refers:

> Let us consider the way in which we spend our lives. This world is a place of business. What an infinite bustle! I am awaked almost every night by the panting of the locomotive. It interrupts my dreams. There is not Sabbath. It would be glorious to see mankind at leisure for once. It is nothing but work, work, work.[56]

Totally smashed and enslaved by work, man is unable to discern that he should spend his time living truly, instead of getting a living. Because man has neglected his self development, his spiritual growth, and moral values, here we are, facing an unprecedented crisis today. As Thoreau says, unfortunately, “It is the luxurious and dissipated who set the fashions which the herd so diligently follow” (79), but no matter how strong the current flows, there are always sound voices who dare “brag as lustily as chanticleer” to awaken and encourage people to go on a new journey. What Thoreau advocates for humankind is a new lifestyle, where simplicity should replace materialism, where governments would not dictate and impose consumers’ habits. He defends the freedom to follow unique, different lifestyles, since “Nature and human life are as various as our several constitutions” (52) and “there are as many ways as there can be drawn radii from one centre” (53). He reminds us that “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away” (374). In effect, Thoreau himself heard a different drummer, he managed to get free from the impoverished values that chained his contemporaries and embarked on a new expedition, which would be only fully recognized much later. Carrie-Anne Dedeo asserts that:

> With the metaphor of the drummer the nonconformist who marches to the beat of a different drum Thoreau explores and defends his own choices in life from the conformist attitudes of society. In some ways, his defense of the nonconformist, who must be free to explore his own truths, and the "once-and-a-half-wit" whose

> insights society fails to recognize are defenses of his own writing. "Conclusion" was not included in the first draft of *Walden*; when Thoreau included it in the published version, he had already seen the failure of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* and had experienced the decrease in calls for him to lecture. His commentary in "Conclusion," therefore, in part is a challenge issued to those who might dismiss his book to open their minds and recognize his insights.[57]

I, however, claim that rather than being worried about himself, Thoreau intends to widen people's horizons so that they can understand that the best they can do is to find their own way. Actually, what is important to underscore is Thoreau's insistence on the need for man to reform his moral values, his self, his inner feelings and to search for a spiritually meaningful life. He attempts to awaken people to purify their spirit, to care about finding the divinity within themselves, rather than wasting time with superfluities. The inward exploration, the cultivation of the self with virtues and the appeal to each reader to find out and pursue his own way are, of course, central themes in *Walden* as it is brilliantly expressed in the last chapter "Conclusion": "Direct your eye right inward, and you'll find a thousand regions in your mind yet undiscovered. Travel them, and be Expert in home-cosmography" (369); "Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought" (369).

In vain did Thoreau preach his insights and values. Man's disdain for simplicity and worship of materialism have proven to be humankind's biggest mistake. Even today, when ecological disasters are happening at an accelerated pace, the most powerful political and economic powers continue to be blind, unable to recognise that the alienating power of the hyper consumer society means an irreparable harm to the earth, and, eventually, its destruction. Man is by no means innocent as regards Nature's destruction today. Since the invention of the atom bomb during World War II, the "Age of Ecology" emerged, according to Donald Worster, and from then on, many nature writers, environmentalists, and other engaged citizens have constantly sounded the alarm about the destruction of our planet. Also the film industry has produced a wide range of films like *The Day After Tomorrow*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, *2012*, *Home*, *and The11th Hour*, among others, whose main purpose is to alert and draw man's attention to a new reality, that it is high time he pursued a different lifestyle that suits him better and benefits the whole ecosphere.

Although there are so many readers who will never fully recognize the true meaning of Thoreau's experiment and writings, I contend that no other American writer could have gained the reputation as the "Father of environmentalism." In effect, in *Walden* and in some of his most famous essays like "Civil Disobedience,""Walking," and "Life Without Principle," Thoreau offers readers his interpretations of Nature and the conduct of life, giving precious, valuable insights on how people live and how they ought to live. He gives important clues for how to achieve self-realization and happiness without hurry, stress and anxiety, just working the minimum indispensable time and living with a broad margin of leisure. He contrasts the pleasures he got by living as simply as possible with the desperate lives of those who mocked and criticized him. By denying and ridiculing the values of the materialistic society in which he lived, Thoreau hopes to reform one's interior, one's nature, and also Nature itself.

On the whole, I conclude that in *Walden*, Thoreau deals simultaneously with one's self-cultivation and love of nature, and that these are the two major themes of the book. His interest in ameliorating man's deeds and the world was not a pure fantasy, a whim of an idealist, but a true, deliberate effort of someone really engaged in leaving a valuable legacy, a testimony to the world. By demonstrating how man can coexist harmoniously with Nature, be part and parcel of it, Thoreau challenges modern readers to adopt new attitudes, new values, so that they can be able, as he himself was, to discover the divine that exists within themselves, and which pervades and commands the whole universe. The life of simplicity that Thoreau praised and deliberately embraced, his search for the spiritual dimension that he finally found out at Walden Pond, show us, that despite all the industrial and technological progress, the hyper consumer society only brings a paradoxical felicity, as Gilles Lipovetsky's book *A Felicidade Paradoxal: Ensaio Sobre a Sociedade do Hiperconsumo*, brilliantly describes.[58]

Finally, all things considered, I dare say that *Walden* challenges humankind much more in the twenty-first century than at Thoreau's time, but he was the prophet who envisaged that the seeds that were being sown would grow as weeds instead of wheat. His alert to the urgent need for spiritual awakening and spiritual rebirth were not taken seriously. As a consequence, our vulnerable Mother Nature cannot stand all the ill

treatment that is being inflicted on her, like the plunder of natural resources, toxic waste, air, water and sea pollution and is just retaliating, showing that she has been continuously, disrespectfully harmed and deserves to be respected, loved and preserved.

Notes

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[3] Harding, p. 135.

[4] Norman Foerster, "The intellectual Heritage of Thoreau, "*Twentieth Century Interpretations of Walden*, Ed. Richard Ruland (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, 1968), p. 41.

[5] Quoted in the Introduction to *Walden*; Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: J.M. Dent and Sons LTD, 1974), p. vii.

[6] Quoted in Foerster, pp. 41- 42.

[7] Quoted in the Introduction to *Walden*; Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (USA: Penguin Group, 1986), p. 22.

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[12] John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (New York: Oxford UP, 2004), p. 132.

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[24] Gatta, p. 128.

[25] Gatta, p. 129.

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[34] Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, Ed. Sherman Paul (Boston: Riverside Editions, 1960), p. viii.

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[42] Dolan, p. 165.

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CHAPTER THREE

3. The Theme of Nature in *Moby-Dick* and *Walden*

3.1 The Influences of Romanticism and Transcendentalism

In the third chapter of this study I aim at contrasting Melville's and Thoreau's views on nature on display in their masterpieces *Moby-Dick* and *Walden*. Considering man's pernicious effects on our planet and the environmental catastrophes human beings are facing today, I intend to extract useful practical meaning from Melville's and Thoreau's warnings almost two centuries ago.

Before embarking on a comparison and contrast between both authors' views toward Nature and their sincere environmental concerns, I believe it is important to understand how these authors' thoughts were shaped by the cultural and literary movements of Romanticism and Transcendentalism and how these trends and the period they lived in are revealed in *Moby-Dick* and *Walden*.

Without a doubt, German and the British Romantic authors like Schiller, Goethe, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle greatly influenced New England Transcendentalists, namely Emerson and Thoreau, each one in his own way. Transcendentalists, however, wanted to break free from the Old World, that is, they wanted a literature of their own, even if it encompassed many features of British and European Romanticism. Emerson, the father and leader of Transcendentalism, had a crucial role in the formation of Thoreau's character, and, to a certain extent, Melville's.

With the publication of *Nature* (1836), Emerson drew readers' attention to the Romantic / Transcendentalist theme of Nature. He expressed his opinion and reflections on Nature freely, from an unusual, peculiar angle: with affection, love, and emotion. In chapter one of this book, he shows right away man's dependence on nature, the importance and the inevitable link between man and nature, especially in the following passage: "His intercourse with heaven and earth becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows."[1] This quote substantiates the power of ecstasy that nature exerts on humans, its healing powers "in spite of real sorrows." Throughout the essay Emerson offers a new outlook on

Nature, stressing its benefits on the human soul, but mainly asserting that man can reach God or the Over Soul in or through nature. This was, undoubtedly, a provocative challenge to mid-nineteenth-century America, to preach man's direct access to God through nature, without the help of the church or the clergy. He sees nature as being infused with spirit, as a holy teacher of the self-reliant man who will recognize its precious value beyond its mere physicality or the commodities it can provide.

Only a genius like Emerson could present such innovative thoughts and ideas in mid-nineteenth-century America, which would mould other Transcendentalists, Thoreau in particular. Although Transcendentalists such as Emerson (he had been a reverend at Boston's Unitarian Church), had broken with Unitarianism, they felt the need for a new religious philosophy, as Emerson claims:

> The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?[2]

Emerson is here asking for a direct access to God, unmediated by any elements of Scripture and tradition, exactly what he thought America needed. This way, Transcendentalists did not need to worry about a transcendent moral God, since the Spirit or Divine was to be found in Nature and within man's soul, an idea applauded by Walt Whitman and celebrated in his poem "Song of Myself", where he announces to the world: "Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from."[3]

Also, by the time Melville and Thoreau were gaining maturity as writers, the Eastern holy books, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*, had been translated into English, exerting an immediate influence on the formation of the Transcendentalists' conception of Nature, which began to be regarded as divine. In addition, the translations of these Hindu and Buddhist texts also contributed to the cultivation of a positive thinking, a positive mental attitude toward life, as observed in Emerson and Thoreau.

In this respect, it is really interesting to note how the aforementioned Eastern religions and philosophy influenced Thoreau's thoughts and writing. Throughout *Walden*, Thoreau refers to the sacred Hindu book *Baghavad Gita*; the Hindu Scriptures, the Vedas;

an epic Hindu poem, “Harivansa”; a famous Persian poet, Muslih-ud-Din; Hindu poets like Mîr Camar Uddîn Mast or Kabir; among other Hindu cultural references. Conversely, in *Moby-Dick*, Melville only refers to Seeva: Shiva or Siva, member of the Hindu Triad, whereas several characters have biblical names and other biblical references are recurrent. Noteworthy is also the fact that the narrator starts with a biblical invocation: “Call me Ishmael,” and finishes in the epilogue with a quotation by Job: “And I only am escaped alone to tell thee.” Thus, it is easy to conclude that of the two, Thoreau was clearly the one to be shaped mostly by Eastern philosophy and religious values.

However, despite these wide divergences of opinion regarding religious beliefs, *Moby-Dick* and *Walden* mirror Transcendentalism’s current ideas, like the glorification of nature, the emotional description of the natural world: showing contempt for conventions, emphasizing the absolute need and power of self-reliance and self-knowledge, asserting individualism, and showing an ambivalent attitude toward technology and progress. On the whole, both works intend to stir the dormant minds of the authors’ contemporaries, but are also the richest legacy these authors could leave to humankind, since they comprise a large portion of the consciousness of America that remains alive today. In fact, through their economic, political, and social outlooks, Melville and Thoreau reveal the main trends and contradictions of mid-nineteenth-century America.

Although Thoreau was a true follower of Emerson and was much closer to his genuine spirit than any other Transcendentalist, Melville was also perfectly aware of the major ideas of the movement. Both show, each one in his own way, how faithful they were to the mainstream Transcendentalism of the time.

3.2 Authors’ Similarities and Differences

After this brief reflection on the dominant ideas that prevailed in mid-nineteenth-America, we are now in a better position to understand Melville’s and Thoreau’s commitment to nature, their unlimited love for the nonhuman world, their preoccupation with man’s alienation both from nature and himself, and their urge for a harmonious

coexistence between man and nature. Had they not had any contact with the philosophy of Transcendentalism presented in Emerson's book *Nature* they would certainly have developed a different view on nature and the environment. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten, that Thoreau rejected some of Emerson's more transcendentalist anthropocentric beliefs, embracing, in turn, anthropomorphism. This is evident throughout *Walden* where he clearly shows a profound respect for every living being, where he admires the natural world, and sides with nature, which contrasts with Emerson's idea:

> Nature is thoroughly mediate. It is made to serve. It receives the dominion of man as meekly as the ass on which the Saviour rode. It offers all its kingdoms to man as the raw material which he may mould into what is useful.[4]

Whereas Thoreau considers himself as an element like any other in the universe, Emerson still thinks man can submit nature and that nature is at the service of all who need it, and here lies a crucial difference between Emerson and Thoreau.

Rather than being the minister of nature, Thoreau feels he is part and parcel of nature, he recognizes his close relationship to the plant and animal life, and shows a strong consciousness of oneness with all of nature. In the following excerpt it is obvious his sense of communion with nature, his consciousness that everything is linked to everything else:

> The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature, — of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter, — such health, such cheer, they afford forever! . . . Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself? (*Walden*, 183).

This does not mean, however, that Thoreau did not fully embrace Transcendentalism, but simply that he developed the movement's principles in a more consistent way, in the sense that he really lived them through his experiment at Walden Pond.

On the other hand, considering that Transcendentalism was contradictory, impossible to contain within a simple definition, that it also regarded individualism as the supreme value, it is easy to understand Thoreau's divergent opinions and his commitment to pursue his own beliefs. It is undeniable, thus, that Thoreau constructed his set of values and principles differently from his mentor, but, in general terms, he was

faithful to mainstream Transcendentalism. Like Emerson, he showed great faith in the living God / Over Soul within everyone and pervading nature, therefore within easy reach. Having been Emerson's pupil at Harvard, it was only natural that he was highly influenced by his mentor, sharing with him the hope in the limitless possibilities of man, seeing the beauty in every detail of nature and facing life and man's place in the world with optimism.

All things considered, I claim that Thoreau's character, philosophy and conception of nature, life and worldview, reflect the positive, optimistic thinking of Transcendentalism, which cultivated an incredible faith in the progress of man, not the material but the spiritual one. Since God resides in man's soul, there is no dark side of sin in the universe, man is inherently empowered with self-trust and self-reliance to face life with optimism and live in peaceful harmony with nature. God is within man, to trust Him is to trust the voice of the self and this gives man an unlimited power and positive view on everything in the universe. Thoreau did not consider man corrupt, evil or depraved, but he wisely perceived how easy it is for man to be alienated by the illusion of "progress" and materialism, leaving behind the essential of life, i.e. his spiritual, intellectual growth.

Conversely, Melville grew critical of Transcendentalism, as he was very skeptical of some of the movement's thoughts, being therefore considered anti-Transcendentalist or a dark Romantic. Despite embracing some of its ideas, Melville seems to condemn and satirize some of its trends rather than accept them. While Emerson and Thoreau are very much alike, Melville admired Hawthorne as an artist and thinker, sharing with him a similar view on nature, life and the universe. With him he exchanged ideas while writing *Moby-Dick*, dedicating it to him, as appears at the beginning of the novel: "In token of my admiration for his genius, this book is inscribed to Nathaniel Hawthorne." Melville is doubtful about man's innocence and goodness as he shows through the character of Bulkington, who he considers too pure to live in this world, a man who rejects the insignificance of the material world ashore and would enjoy instead "the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God" (*Moby-Dick*, 117). Interesting is also Melville's critique of man's goodness found in one of his books: "The scribbling on the margins of a copy of

Emerson owned by Melville, specifically next to a passage, on the essential goodness of men: ‘God help the poor fellow who squares his life according to this.’[5]

It would not be far from the truth to say that Melville sees humanity through Calvinistic eyes, sharing its austere beliefs, considering that within people coexist evil, cruelty, depravity and goodness, love, and sympathy. For him, mankind is radically imperfect, men are all flawed and do not aspire to perfection. For this reason he presents a darker view of mankind’s existence in the universe and the negative seems to prevail in the universe of *Moby-Dick*.

Despite the differences, though, Melville and Thoreau choose narrators/characters, Ishmael and Thoreau himself, who, dissatisfied with their lives, start an individual journey, move to new surroundings, which in both cases involve water (the romantic journey to the countryside), in search of independence, purity, clarity, and self-realization. One must not forget water’s symbolic meaning, i.e., its potential to cleanse, purify oneself, start a new life as with one’s baptism.

While Thoreau went to the woods “to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life; to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life” (*Walden*, 135), Ishmael goes to sea because of the good he hopes to find there, because he sees the sea as a refuge for his troubled mind:

> Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off-- then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball (*Moby-Dick*, 3).

Also *Moby-Dick*’s protagonist, Ahab, goes to sea on his quest, because he wants to get revenge on that “dumb brute,” the “inscrutable thing” that “unmanned” and “dismasted” him, to destroy the evil that pervades throughout all nature. It is likewise evident that these three characters do not have a satisfactory life; they are psychologically unbalanced, solitary beings who search for truth, knowledge and self-realization in contact with nature, far from civilization.

It is particularly relevant that Melville's and Thoreau's characters choose nature/water, i.e., the ocean and Walden Pond to answer to frustration and desperation. For them, water is fundamental to refresh their spirit and to discover their true self. As Ishmael notes: "meditation and water are wedded for ever" (*Moby-Dick*, 4). Water cleans and restores their bodies and souls, it has divine powers of redemption as Thoreau refers: "I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise" (*Walden*, 132). Water is an archetype for rebirth, renewal, and particularly for life, it answers man's curiosity of life, and is a great source of inspiration. As Melville mentions, from water there is a reflection of the image of the ungraspable phantom of life: "But the same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all" (*Moby-Dick*, 5).

So, for Melville, and for Thoreau as well, the sea/the lake are like a huge mirror of everything, in which the phantom of life can be seen, they are a symbol for the plenitude of the world, reflect it, and above all, help man to know himself as Thoreau notes: "A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature" (*Walden*, 233).

However, it must not be forgotten that Thoreau sought refuge at Walden Pond and in the woods, as it is referred in the subtitle of the book "life in the woods", while Ishmael and Ahab go to sea, which symbolizes nature as well as the White Whale. It may seem a crucial difference, at first sight, but in essence, both authors are eager to share their profound love, respect, awe, and reverence for nature, the humankind and the nonhuman world. Both Melville and Thoreau analyze all aspects of nature, its relevance to human life, how man is affected by it, i.e., they explore the powers and influences of nature over man, but also the opposite, man's incursion and depredation of it. Living in a period when land was still abundant, when it was thought it had inexhaustible resources, and the sea rolled on as it always had, both writers were extraordinary visionaries, who transcended their time, since they interpreted the natural world with a distinctive insight, totally unusual for that time, both advocated that it was totally wrong to conquer, control and dominate it.

As a matter of fact, in my view, Thoreau's unconditional, almost fanatical love for nature sounds still excessive at present, as it is evident in the following quote:

> What exactly did Thoreau mean by that "certain tender relation"? One clue is his sensitivity to violence against nature as if it were violence against people. He upbraids himself for pelting chestnut trees with rocks in order to make the nuts fall: "It is worse than boorish, it is criminal, to inflict an unnecessary injury on the tree that feeds or shadows us" (J7:514). Indignant at a neighbor's felling of his hackberry trees, the only stand of its kind in Concord, Thoreau declares, "if some are prosecuted for abusing children, others deserve to be prosecuted for maltreating the face of nature committed to their care" (J10:51).[6]

Today, in the face of our environmental crisis, the beliefs Melville and Thoreau supported have assumed paramount importance, despite their differences. Whereas Thoreau's conception of nature fits the more positive and optimistic pattern of Transcendentalism, viewing nature as essential to man's equilibrium, survival, and happiness, conversely, Melville's view is more negative. Through the voice of Ishmael, he expresses his longing for beauty and nature, and at the same time highlights nature's contradictory states, showing that it is unpredictable, inscrutable, intriguing, and vulnerable. Man is set apart from nature and is in constant war with it, Ahab is in constant struggle with the ocean, with the White Whale, in a desperate attempt to find its truth, its metaphysical truth. For the author, nature/the sea is a symbol of the deep physical reality, which seems to be stirred from underneath, by a divine power or an absolute spirit, as Ishmael describes:

> There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seems to speak of some hidden soul beneath; like those fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod over the buried Evangelist St. John. And meet it is, that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling watery prairies and Potters' Fields of all four continents, the waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly; for here, millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still; tossing like slumberers in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness (*Moby-Dick*, 525).

Through this incredible brilliant description of the inconstant, turbulent, revolving sea "whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath," Melville depicts the mystery that life is. No one knows the mystery of the sea and life, but it seems

there is “some hidden soul beneath,” he concludes, because nature and life are profound, complex and with an ungraspable meaning. Yet, similarly, Melville also acknowledges nature’s sacredness, its spiritual meaning, identifying nature with God, and seeing in it the nature of God Himself:

> Thus this mysterious, divine Pacific zones the world’s whole bulk about; makes all coasts one bay to it; seems the tide-beating heart of earth. Lifted by those eternal swells, you needs must own the seductive god, bowing your head to Pan (*Moby-Dick*, 525-526).

So, despite being different from Thoreau, Melville also recognizes that nature is sacred, and man’s attitude toward it should be a religious, spiritual one. Through the following description we can easily perceive his deep reverence and respect for nature, for the nonhuman world, how he, like Thoreau, depicts it as a widespread manifestation of the divine, despite there being a huge difference between both:

> Consider the subtleness of the sea; how its most dreaded creatures glide under water, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden beneath the loveliest tints of azure. Consider also the devilish brilliance and beauty of many of its most remorseless tribes, as the dainty embellished shape of many species of sharks. Consider once more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began (*Moby-Dick*, 299).

By using the imperative “consider” three times, Melville draws our attention to the mysterious and beautiful sea with its creatures, he simultaneously shows our insignificance compared to the immensity of the sea.

But, whereas Melville depicts nature as deadly, irrational, and divine, Thoreau, in turn, stresses that nature is divine, God is found in nature and through nature. Ishmael observes that the ocean is a symbol for everything there is, for life itself in its plenitude. The White Whale/the sea have metaphysical connotations, besides being symbols of nature whose meanings overlap. The sea also represents, as it has been referred, man’s life in its richness and profound mystery, a terra incognita from which man has not enough knowledge, it symbolizes the fears that a man must overcome in life in order to gain a fuller understanding of it. The sea is a metaphor that the author uses to describe man’s condition on earth and also man’s doubts. The sea is blue, vast, dark, infinite, as are the uncertainties, fears, and constant troubles of man, represented by Ahab who

cannot accept the inability to fully know the power of the universe. Therefore, he is in a permanent struggle with Moby Dick in a desperate attempt to find its metaphysical secret, its ultimate truth, all in vain, since his human condition does not allow him to reach what is only attainable by God. Ahab failed, as we fail nowadays, because we have not got the capacity to realize we should respect the laws of nature and that it is totally wrong to violate its sphere. Like Ahab, we have not learnt our place in the ecosphere yet; we have not understood the vastness of the universe and continue to struggle with ourselves and nature, blind to the constant warnings that are being given. Unfortunately, almost two hundred years after the publication of "Nature" (1836), it seems, Emerson's chapter "Language," dedicated to the language of nature, where nature is conceived of as God's speech or writing, has been almost completely forgotten or neglected. Nature acquires, then, the most significant and meaningful expression of God, it is a means of communication from God to man, through which God shows His purposes. Through intuition man has access to His language, understands God's meaning, but only the one who lives in harmony with nature can understand it, as Emerson notes: "A life in harmony with Nature, the love of truth and of virtue, will purge the eyes to understand her text."[7]

For Thoreau, only in nature and in solitude does man become fully aware of God's presence, infinite power, and grandeur, and learns that man's goodness grows more within his heart if he searches for Him in nature rather than in civilization. On the other hand, God addresses humans through nature or in nature, so man depends on nature, needs to embrace it in order to discover and experience the divine. For the author, there is an interdependent relationship between man and nature/God, man is one with nature, or at least seeks a perfect harmony with it.

For Melville, there is an irrational force lurking behind the White Whale/nature, the sea is mysterious, dark with its ever-rolling waves, and, yet, they are divine. He recognizes nature's paradoxes, he knows that both man and nature share the same ambiguity and the same inconstancy; both are paradoxically benign and malevolent, beautiful and hideous and destructive. As Elizabeth Hardwick notes:

> The sea, its awful, challenging infinitude, and the soothing, hypnotic balm of a clear day and gentle waves – you sometimes feel as you read *Moby-Dick* that these dichotomies of the ocean almost drove Melville mad.[8]

So, only to a certain extent did Melville maintain the optimistic view of nature that the Emersonian philosophers had adopted, since he seems to reconcile the irreconcilable, i.e., for him nature is divine and destructive, good and evil, terrible and beautiful. But, unlike Thoreau, Melville is aware that nature has a power beyond humans' control, that it is a symbol of what lies beyond it. It is a mask that hides the metaphysical truth:

> All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike though the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond (*Moby-Dick*, 178).

In contrast, Thoreau believes that the individual can have a direct relationship with God, find and experience God directly in nature. In nature man can discover God and truth and live according to His higher principles, so God addresses man through nature, and what is needed is only to be in tune with it. So, while Thoreau reaches his plenitude in nature, in the presence of God and with God, and finds the answers to metaphysical key questions of his existence on earth, Melville, in his turn, recognizes nature's paradoxes, and attempts to show that the powerful forces of opposition that struggle within man's soul are the same dichotomies that are also found in the sea and Moby Dick, symbols of nature.

However, both Melville and Thoreau had the capacity to experience a mystical union with nature, both achieved total ecstasy, contemplated and became one with the natural world. They shared a romantic attitude when they created an original relationship with the universe, escaped from reality and sought refuge in nature, as described in the following passage:

> There you stand, a hundred feet above the silent decks, striding along the deep, as if the masts were gigantic stilts, while beneath you and between your legs, as it were, swim the hugest monsters of the sea, even as ships once sailed between the boots of the famous Colossus at old Rhodes. There you stand, lost in the infinite series of the sea, with nothing ruffled but the waves. The tranced ship indolently rolls; the drowsy trade winds blow; everything resolves you into languor. For the most part, in this tropic whaling life, a sublime uneventfulness invests you (*Moby-Dick*, 169).

Or in the following one, as well:

> Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a revery, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs (*Walden*, 156-157).

In my view, Thoreau establishes a total communion, integration with nature, contemplates its beauty totally overwhelmed by its wonders, considers it fundamental to his spiritual and moral development, whereas Melville is more ambiguous, in the sense that for him nature is beautiful, mysterious, symbolic, and divine.

All things considered, I dare say that Melville and Thoreau preferred to side with nature rather than with man, both showed an uncommon interest in the external nature, for itself, for its beauty, and as a source of strength, spirituality and inspiration for the soul. Moreover, both sustain a non-anthropocentric ethics and teach us that nature and nonhuman beings have their intrinsic value, regardless of their differences, similarities and the use they may have to us.

Through Ahab's anthropocentric beliefs and final death, Melville shows that it is totally wrong to be blind or ignore the power of nature and to assert man's supremacy over it. At the same time, through Ishmael's survival, at the end of the journey, he shows that his pursuit of knowledge, growth and self-realization are reasonable, therefore he does not think that the attainment of such knowledge justifies the use of whatever means. Ishmael, like Thoreau, needed to go on a voyage to experience freedom, free himself, learn from what nature had to teach him, and discover life's meaning for himself. I contend, therefore, that both reveal a great capacity to really listen to, observe and make sense of nature in a balanced way.

Although Melville and Thoreau recognize value, and appreciate nature's intrinsic value, Thoreau is much more assertive and straightforward. He alerts man to the fact that his mental and spiritual health depends on an intimate and moral connection with nature: "We need the tonic of wildness" is one of his best known appeals. He reminds us that we are not essential to nature's health, but the opposite is true, and shows, as well, that it is totally wrong to have a sense of dominion and superiority over nature.

In *Moby-Dick*, Melville shows that it is wrong to kill and exploit other animals, challenges man to rethink his attitude towards nonhuman creatures, appeals to treating

them as brothers and stands up for a balanced quasi-equivalent relation between humans and animals. In *Walden*, Thoreau's commitment to the defense of animals' rights is likewise evident:

> What is a country without rabbits and partridges? They are among the most simple and indigenous animal products; ancient and venerable families known to antiquity as to modern times; of the very hue and substance of Nature, nearest allied to leaves and to the ground- and to one another; it is either winged or it is legged. It is hardly as if you had seen a wild creature when a rabbit or a partridge bursts away, only a natural one, as much to be expected as rustling leaves. The partridge and the rabbit are still sure to thrive, like true natives of the soil, whatever revolutions occur. If the forest is cut off, the sprouts and bushes which spring up afford them concealment, and they become more numerous than ever. That must be a poor country indeed that does not support a hare (Walden, 328-329).

He knows and wants to draw readers' attention to the necessity of preserving the web of life, as all species are fundamental to the balance of the ecosphere.

Overall, I claim that in this aspect, both writers show love, admiration and noble feelings toward other animals. Modern readers definitely feel impressed and marvelled at the touching, wondrous descriptions of the relationship of brotherhood that Ishmael, Queequeg and Starbuck develop with whales. But while Melville raises the endangerment question in an ambivalent way in chapter 105, "Does the Whale's Magnitude Diminish? – Will He Perish?," something unthinkable at his time, which provides evidence of his ecological awareness, Thoreau's standpoint regarding animal suffering and killing is much more obvious. Since animals have the same rights as men, it is ethically wrong to kill and eat them, their killing representing a lack of respect for all nonhuman beings and a subsequent menace to nature and mankind. Despite the differences, though, both writers acknowledge the importance of all nonhuman beings to maintain the balance of the ecosphere, and are, somehow, pioneers when they regard humans' interdependency and interrelationship with other species and nature fundamental to humankind's survival.

Again, we see a common set of beliefs in what concerns Melville's and Thoreau's love and respect for animals and the nonhuman world. Nevertheless, Thoreau's valorization of other species, in my view, surpasses Melville's, because he strives to become in tune with the natural world, as he really endeavors to feel part and parcel of

nature, and while living at the pond he puts himself at the same moral level as animals and plants.

Last but not least, it is also important to stress that Melville's and Thoreau's works reveal the authors' concerns about the destructive force of industrial progress, technological innovation, the new means of communication and the factories upon the life of people and man's desire to tame and control nature. They were preoccupied with the harmful exploitation of Nature, man's submission of it, and, above all, they aimed at awakening their contemporaries' slumbering minds, so that they would not live in a dormant state. The problem is that when these works were published they had few readers and almost no influence, probably less than they have at present. In effect, the Transcendentalists' premise that man was moving toward moral perfection has been proven to be false, because man has turned his back on nature, convinced that he is owner and master of the whole universe.

Melville and Thoreau showed how both were truly skeptical about American progress, which involved more money, more technology, more things instead of intellectual growth, spiritual development, and a harmonious coexistence between man and nature. They knew that man could not continue to extract benefits from nature, exploit and plunder it lavishly, without causing irreparable harm. As nature lovers and possessing a rare intuitive insight, they tried to admonish humankind that man's unlimited greed that leads him to disrespect himself, other human beings, and the laws of nature, would bring much suffering, anguish and death, "punishing" the whole world. As they foreshadowed in the 1850s, the development of industrial capitalism, materialism, and technologies have removed people from their essential relationship with nature, the divine, which have given rise to "lives of quiet desperation."

By focusing his writing on the world's first oil industry that the US dominated in the 1840s, Melville shows his concern about the depredation that this industry was inflicting on the environment, the pillage of natural resources, and man's losses with the industrial development. Basically, he intends to underscore that the essence of capitalism is the pursuit of wealth, which is the cause of so much evil on earth as he notes:

> considering that we so earnestly believe money to be the root of all earthly ills, and that on no account can a monied man enter heaven. Ah! how cheerfully we consign ourselves to perdition! (*Moby-Dick*, 7).

Astonishingly, this is in perfect tune with Thoreau's doctrine of simplicity, which he experiments at Walden Pond. Thus, both Melville and Thoreau condemn man's deification of money/wealth and recommend that we should free ourselves from the slavery of material possessions and live simply. Both consider possessions a hindrance to achieving "the chief purpose of life", but while Thoreau notes that his experiment had its economic side, he wanted to prove that "a man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone", Melville, in turn, criticizes industrial civilization where people earned money and gained honor by exploiting nature's resources till exhaustion, as he points out in the following excerpt:

> There weekly arrive in this town scores of green Vermonters and New Hampshire men, all athirst for gain and glory in the fishery, They are mostly young, of stalwart frames; fellows who have felled forests, and now seek to drop the axe and snatch the whale-lance (*Moby-Dick*, 36).

From these works, we can learn that to pursue a "good life" man has disrespected nature's laws, has neglected a harmonious relationship with nature and has grown in selfishness, overestimating his power over nature, resembling more Ahab and his insatiable gluttony, rather than Ishmael. Man has not understood yet that he cannot live independently without nature; the mutual conquest is really purposeless, because man and nature are not opponents, but must live together in harmony. It seems humankind has evolved, but have we? The anthropocentric view of nature should be replaced by the principles of ecosophy as Arne Naess advocates in his book *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*.

Melville and Thoreau endeavored to awake readers' consciousness; both alerted it was imperative to reconcile ecological environment and development. Thoreau's challenge to invest in self-development and spiritual growth are urgent changes the whole humankind should take into account.

To conclude, I argue that Melville's anti-Transcendentalist view on nature does not clash with Thoreau's transcendentalist perspective; instead, it simply diverges from it in

some aspects, but in essence, their meanings overlap. Of course, Melville's view of nature and mankind's existence in the universe is more negative and darker. This derived from his Calvinistic conception that humankind is imperfect and has two warring forces, good and evil warring within their souls, the same very forces that are in constant struggle with nature, epitomized by Ahab who goes on his quest to sea to destroy the evil, and Ishmael to find the good.

In contrast, Thoreau's idealistic optimistic doctrine reflects a faith in the infinite goodness of man, since there is no place for the dark side of sin within man and in the universe. Thoreau is the philosopher of hope, who believes man is inherently good, kind and flawless because God lives within him. This is the reason why man should not be afraid of developing self-trust and self-reliance, since to trust in the self is actually to trust the voice of God speaking intuitively within one's heart. It must be remembered, though, that Thoreau's stand toward nature is a view shaped by his European and New England Protestant heritage, the European Romantics, Emerson's transcendentalist doctrines, the Eastern religious and philosophical texts, and Christian interpretation of nature. Definitely influenced by all these theories, it is no wonder, then, that his view embraces a multiplicity of expressions as are conveyed throughout *Walden*. For him, nature is the ideal teacher, consequently, his purpose is to cultivate himself as an ideal student. In this aspect Thoreau's view of nature does not match with Melville's, since Ahab does not really listen to Nature, or at least everything nature has to say, while Ishmael only does it to a certain extent. He acknowledges that Nature can comfort, invigorate, inspire and teach him as he states:

> Oh, man! admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among ice. Do thou, too, live in this world without being of it. Be cool at the equator; keep thy blood fluid at the Pole. Like the great dome of St. Peter's, and like the great whale, retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of thine own (*Moby-Dick*, 334-335).

Ishmael addresses readers urging them to preserve their individualities even if surrounded by adverse conditions, i.e., we should endeavor to resist external pressure, mainly when it is against our principles. He reveals, thus, a greater capacity to listen to and make sense of nature, which resonates with Thoreau to whom Nature should be a

model for humanity as he admits that he can learn much from nature, it has much to teach: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (*Walden*, 135).

Notes

[1] *Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems (New York: Bantam Dell, 1990), p. 18.*

[2] *Emerson, p. 15.*

[3] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass,*(New York: Norton, 1965), p. 53.

[4] *Emerson, p. 35.*

[5] Ramón E. Romero, Negotiating Transcendentalism, "Escaping" Paradise: Herman … *ejas.revues.org › Issues › 1*

[6] Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1995), p. 209.

[7] *Emerson, p. 33.*

[8] *Hardwick, p. 86.*

CONCLUSION

Nowadays, confronted with deep environmental and spiritual crises brought about by industrialization and technological development, humankind should learn from Melville's and Thoreau's works, *Moby-Dick* and *Walden*, and take the ecological and life principles that they wisely left as a legacy. It is high time man showed a deeper concern for the deterioration of our environment. As a matter of fact, both masterpieces should not be just prose work. They should contribute to change man's mindset, to help to discover a new mode of living, an ideal life where man is imbued with ecological consciousness.

Both authors were attentive, thoughtful writers, ecological prophets ahead of their time who advocated in the 1850s what would happen to nature and humankind if man did not reverse his attitude toward nature. Reading between the lines of *Moby-Dick* and *Walden* we discover the authors' distinctive concepts of nature, their noble thoughts and feelings regarding the nonhuman world, how they conceived man as part of nature, recognized its intrinsic value, and above all, their condemnation of man's exploitation and encroachment upon it. It is true that Thoreau's *Walden* can be considered the "Green Bible" and the author has influenced the life of many ecological literary writers like John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Edward Abbey or Annie Dillard, who like him, live a relative solitary life close to nature. Nevertheless, *Moby-Dick* is as challenging and enriching as *Walden*, it contains multitudes, as the author himself. By showing Ahab's greedy, unlimited quest for revenge and dominance over Nature, Melville clearly shows that man's ambition to conquest, control and dominate Nature is totally wrong and only brings disaster, and even death to man and causes irreparable harm to nature. The survival of Ishmael, on the contrary, conveys the ecological views of the author. Through him, Melville asserts that man should recognize his right place on the Earth, his correct status in the ecosphere and should learn to live on "friendly terms" with all human and nonhuman beings.

Recognizing that industrialization and economic development were removing people from the natural world, the more material goods and well being man possessed, the more distant and separate he was from nature, Melville and Thoreau could not help condemning and criticizing the wrong path Americans were following, and being

completely disillusioned with the exploration, the conquest and with the life dispossessed of spiritual meaning that characterized the New World in the mid-nineteenth-century. Therefore, they strove to grow a new kind of civilization, one which would pay more attention to the building of a harmonious relationship between man and nature, and man's spiritual growth. Melville's words, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth"(p.85) resonates with so many of Thoreau's appeals: "Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage" (377) or even his motto: "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity" (135) or "a man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone" (126).

Both authors criticize America's slavish materialism, commercialism, capitalism, and the lack of integrity of their fellowmen, which continue to corrupt the human soul. They observed that America's growing material progress was not accompanied by the individual's intellectual development and spiritual growth. Humans treated the environment to suit themselves and gradually separated themselves from the land and forgot that it was their moral obligation to take care of it.

Today, with the development of modern environmentalism, interest in *Moby-Dick* and *Walden* has grown. They contribute to awake modern readers' consciousness, they help people rethink their relationship toward nature and about the kind of relationship they should establish with nature to benefit the whole ecosphere. Rereading and analyzing these works is to rediscover the pleasure of living/feeling close to nature, in a certain way it is to get closer to Thoreau, who took the time to look carefully at nature, the world he lived in, from a different perspective, one which was invisible to his townsmen.

In effect, the more I study *Moby-Dick* and *Walden*, the more I question humans' right to rule over nature, man's almost total blindness toward these perspectives, attitudes and challenges as they were presented by these prophets of wisdom. I claim that our influential leaders do not care or are not interested in paying attention to these warnings, as they are too limited in their outlook on what concerns the environment, or simply, because the greedy, egotistical ambition of careerism and material gain rule higher than pursuing a life with principles.

In my view, I claim that humankind has to face the fact that today's environmental crisis is directly connected to a degradation in the human spirit, that man has turned his back on nature, and nature has become increasingly unfamiliar to him. *Moby-Dick* and *Walden* appeal to modern readers as they urge us to pursue a new lifestyle that suits humans better and benefits the whole ecosphere. They highlight that by searching a harmonious relationship between man and nature, man counteracts the alienating power of this capitalistic society and man can effectively live a true, happy life by adopting a voluntary simplicity. Melville clearly admonishes humankind that man may challenge nature, may misuse, exploit, mismanage the natural resources, but nature in the form of the White Whale responds to man's challenge: "Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled" (622).

Consequently, I claim that to decelerate the speed of degradation of the environment, man has to go back to nature, to pursue a simple life and a life with principles. Man needs to explore the truth in his inner heart, instead of pursuing material satisfaction that leads him to have a shallow existence, bounded by his work, home, material and physical needs.

It is urgent to adopt a new lifestyle if we want to diminish natural calamities, reduce our harmful impact on this planet. It is urgent to direct our attention to matters that concern the whole ecosphere if we want to survive and save the earth. After all, what will benefit man if he is affluent but has no nature left?

Rereading *Moby-Dick* and *Walden* has a realistic significance today. They teach modern readers the best lesson ever imagined, that man must learn to love nature, they teach us how humans, nature and environment can coexist harmoniously.

To conclude, I claim that only by living in harmony with himself and nature can man find an ideal life, a life that does not harm the environment and respects the whole ecosphere. And to achieve such goal, man should lead the kind of life that Thoreau characterized by outward simplicity and inward richness. After all, Thoreau's conclusion

that “We spend more on almost any article of bodily aliment or ailment than on our mental aliment” (154) rings truer today than at his time.

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