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**IN THE WILDERNESS:**  
**A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THOREAU'S**  
***WALDEN AND WORDSWORTH'S PRELUDE***

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## **Abstract**

This paper deals with the study of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. Our aim is to compare both works looking for the similarities and differences between them. Although they are about the relationship between nature and human being, their points of view show diverse nuances that make them unique in style. As we go forward, we will realize that their visionary approaches are still very relevant for our contemporaries and of great interest to understand the changeable world we live in.

**Keywords:** Thoreau, Wordsworth, nature, human being, wilderness.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. General Objectives and Hypotheses .....	1
1.2. State of the Art .....	3
1.3. Methodology .....	8
<b>2. The Relationship between Nature and Human Being .....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1. English Romanticism: William Wordsworth .....	9
2.2. Transcendentalism: Henry D. Thoreau.....	13
<b>3. <i>Walden and The Prelude</i>.....</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1. The Self in Nature .....	18
3.1.1. Life in the Woods.....	18
3.1.2. The Poet in the Country .....	23
3.2. Walking through the Wilderness.....	27
3.2.1. The Art of Walking .....	27
3.2.2. Delightful Pathways to Wander .....	31
<b>4. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>5. Works Cited .....</b>	<b>37</b>

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. General Objectives and Hypotheses

The main objective of this paper is to discuss the divergences and convergences of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. Although both works portray the relationship between the nature and the human being, their approaches are different and this project aims at proving that there were some traces of English Romanticism in Thoreau's writing. The important issue here is to see how he breaks with this tradition, which seems almost like a burden to the American writers who try to create their own literature.

Reading closely *Walden* and *The Prelude*, some of the main dissimilarities can be easily noted. For instance, although they were drawn from the experiences of these authors, they refer to very specific periods of their lives. In the case of *Walden*, it was written after the experience of living in a cabin for two years and two months, while *The Prelude* is considered an autobiography of Wordsworth which spans over many decades of his existence. That would explain why there are many references to the city in Wordsworth's *Prelude* that are not so present in *Walden*.

Another factor that should be taken into account is the conditions under which these authors are in touch with nature. Thoreau is alone in the place that he has built by himself and where there are no luxuries since he has only what he needs. Wordsworth does not really stay in the country; he travels and makes some journeys that end up having a deep impact on him such as the one to the Alps which, incidentally, he does not visit all by himself.

These are just a few details that will be expanded throughout this piece of research. Nevertheless, some initial questions may arise at this point: To what extent is the outlook of an insider (Thoreau) unlike the one of an observer (Wordsworth)? Is there any kind of difference in their description of the landscapes? Are they looking for a connection to nature or is it some form of escape from the crowded cities? Or is it a quest for literary inspiration what motivates them to seek a shelter in the nature? To what extent Wordsworth

influences Thoreau? Which are their similarities and how are they reflected in their writings?

With these points in mind, some hypotheses can be pinned down:

- Thoreau was a reader of the English Romantics, among whom was Wordsworth. Both of them focused on individuals and their connection to nature, where the purity of the inner self could be freely expressed.
- Thoreau thought that in English Romantic poetry there was a lack of wildness. It was not truly portrayed in their poems. And that is what he tries to represent in *Walden*. His decision to live in the woods and his telling of this experiment is a step to the creation of a new concept of nature in literature.
- Wordsworth and Thoreau used a literary language easy to understand in which the poetic “I” is the voice of their works. The resource of the first person narrator makes more personal and believable the facts and life lessons they shared with the reader.

In order to support these hypotheses and prove them right, the content of this project is divided in two main sections. The first is about the cultural movements to which they belonged and the second one is dedicated to the comparative analysis of *Walden* and *The Prelude*.

This structure aims at meeting the objectives of this paper. They cannot be achieved if we do not allude first to the importance of Romanticism and Transcendentalism in their conception of literature and nature. Furthermore, the second part centred on the study of the works is divided in two sections. The former, entitled “The Self in Nature”, expounds on the experience of the writer in the woods (Thoreau) and the poet (Wordsworth) who leaves the metropolis, which threatens to stifle his essence, and looks for a communion with nature. In the second part, the goal is to explain the notion of the writer as a wanderer who walks through the rural sceneries and who sometimes follows a kind of routine, because there are paths and places that he enjoys visiting. Nevertheless, their points of view will change according to the season they

contemplate these landscapes, as it will be seen. Their perspectives will not be the same because Wordsworth's vision is different from Thoreau's and while Thoreau takes a close look at the Walden Pond during his walks, perfecting "the art of Walking" (*Walking* 518), Wordsworth travels to diverse spaces where there are "Delightful Pathways to Wander" (this title is inspired by the Book VI in *The Prelude*).

This paper tries not only to give answers to the questions aforementioned, but also to build a bridge between two cultures, the North American and the English, in a globalized world where the construction of walls makes no sense.

## **1.2. State of the Art**

The corpus of studies that deal with the connection between William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* has been growing throughout the years. Some of them date from the 1980s while others are very recent. For this research, I will take into account all of them in order to have an overview as complete and rigorous as possible.

The article written by Lorrie Smith (1985) contains some allusions to the influence of Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley on Thoreau. Smith, quoting other scholars such as Harold Bloom, says that in Thoreau's works there are some echoes of Wordsworth. Nonetheless, Thoreau is critical about this English tradition as it can be seen in his essay "Walking" (1862). This text, to which Smith refers throughout her article, will be analyzed in order to have a deeper knowledge about Thoreau's concept of "wildness". This term as well as "nature" and "individual" is one of the most significant keywords of this paper.

In Weisbuch's book *Atlantic Double-Cross* (1989) there is a chapter entitled "Thoreau's Dawn and the Lake School's Night" (133-150) that is relevant to understand the similarities between these poets. It is worth noting that Thoreau always tried to find his own voice, one that was not a mirror of the English literary tradition. Nevertheless this author points out that in *Walden* (1854) we can find some traces of Wordsworth's thinking. For instance, Thoreau and Wordsworth shared the idea that we lose the clarity and purity of perception

when we grow up and Weisbuch quotes a passage of *Walden* to illustrate this thought: “I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born” (98). The influence of childhood on Wordsworth and Thoreau’s conception of nature is a topic of real interest because, in fact, the decision of Thoreau to go to the Walden Pond has its roots in his memories of this place when he was a child.

Cavell (1992) made a remarkable contribution to the interpretation of *Walden*, supporting his views on the sense of this work in philosophic theories whose traces can be found in Thoreau’s writing. In addition, Oelschlaeger (1993) has in his book *The Idea of Wilderness. From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology*, a chapter dedicated to Thoreau to whom he refers as “philosopher of the wilderness” (133). There are many parts of interest in this text since it summarizes the literary evolution of the American writer and how his vision of nature and the human being develops as the years go by. Oelschlaeger talks about another concept of vital importance for this research which is “freedom” and he analyses what it meant to Thoreau. In the overcrowded cities individuals are not really free due to the fact that they have to adhere to the social rules and lifestyle in which monetary values hold great sway over people. The notion of freedom needs to be discussed in this paper because it is present in Wordsworth and Thoreau’s writings, where nature and freedom are interlaced because in his communion with the nature, the human being is finally free.

Liu’s article (1994) explores the description of quietness and sound in *The Prelude* (1850). Some of the scenes in which the solitary poet beholds the vastness and greatness of a landscape are alluded in Liu’s work. Wordsworth not only sees nature, but also hears and feels it intensely as Thoreau does in a different way. The author of *Walden* also portrays the sounds of the wilderness, that complement the silence of the solitude.

Cronon’s essay (1995) delimits the concept of “wilderness” and examines how it is expressed in the works of different authors such as Thoreau and Wordsworth among them. A part of this article holds a special interest for us because in it Cronon compares Wordsworth’s contemplation of the Alps as an

experience almost religious and Thoreau's climb to Mount Katahdin is described as highly spiritual too.

Buell's book *The Environmental Imagination* (1996) can be considered one of the main sources of this research because of the amount of information about Thoreau that it provides. It also establishes some comparisons between Thoreau and Wordsworth's points of view. For example, while Wordsworth can be seen as an observer (as in some passages of *The Prelude*), Thoreau lives in the nature, experiences it directly. One of the texts written by Buell can be found in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau* (1995) whose editor was Myerson. This collection of essays comprises the investigations of authors such as Schneider and Hoag, whose contributions are fundamental to this study.

Garrard (2000) is a scholar whose field of research is mainly ecocriticism. Most of the ecocritic theories take into account Thoreau's and Wordsworth's works. Although the objective of this project is not to approach their writings from an ecocritic perspective, it is important to point out that these works have attracted the attention of many experts on ecocriticism. This article of Garrard points out some crossings between Wordsworth and Thoreau, for instance, their ambivalence about the railways that threaten nature but that are also a sign of technic progress. The opposition between the sounds of the animals and the noise produced by the passing of the train needs to be highlighted since it appears several times throughout *Walden*.

In the 2000s there are more sources about the parallelisms and differences between these authors. Newman has two essays that are about this topic such as a chapter of *Our Common Dwelling* (2005) "William Wordsworth, Henry David Thoreau, and the Poetry of Nature" (83-96) and "'Patron of the World': Henry David Thoreau as a Wordsworthian Poet" (2007). In these texts, especially the last one, Newman explains when Thoreau started to read Wordsworth's poetry and he adds that Thoreau was also interested in the poet's life as well as in his idea that poems should be written in a language less complex and more adapted to social circumstances.



In 2000, Schneider also published *Thoreau's Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing* from which the article written by Dassow Walls is the most significant to distinguish the concepts of "wilderness" and "wildness" and how they are reflected in Thoreau's work. In order to define these terms, the PhD Dissertation of Dunn (2009) will be a cornerstone too.

In Langan (2006) and Gaillet de Chezelles (2007) the focus is on Wordsworth's walking. In other words, how he wanders and visits many spaces both urban and rural, and how he gives expression to these experiences in his work. So as to better understand the poetry of the English author, some books of reference about English Romanticism will be consulted such as Frye's (1983) and Gaul's (1988). Apart from other studies more recent carried out by Izenberg (1992), Nichols (1998), Berlin (1999), Fulford (2002), Day (2004) and Gravil and Robinson (2015).

Until now there have been references about Wordsworth and Thoreau but since Emerson had a great influence on the American author, an article written by Meehan (2013) about Emerson and Thoreau is needed to better understand his literary background and how he end up questioning Emersonian Transcendentalism. In addition, there will be some comments on the friendship between Thoreau and Emerson and this information will be taken from an essay written by Harmon Smith (1999).

With respect to this relation between Thoreau and Transcendentalism, Wilson (2000) gives some basic notions about Thoreau's literary and historical background. What interests us most of this book is the section dedicated to the expansion of Romanticism to America that will help to trace some similar patterns existent in both cultural movements. Whereas Von Frank's article (2009) focuses on the different approaches to the study of Transcendentalism, this critical view is taken into account to elaborate a personal approach to the analysis of *The Prelude* and *Walden*. Moreover, Goodman (1990) analyzes the cultural framework of American Philosophy and the impact of Romanticism on it.

One article written by Pace (2003) reflects about the reception of Wordsworth's works in America. It also related the meeting between the English

poet and Emerson, who went on a visit to England. Emerson encouraged the reading of this author in part due to his commitment to social reform (although he became more conservative in his last years), his vision of nature and the use of a language liberated from the yoke of the rigid assumption that poetry should be read by very few and, therefore, it has to be difficult to understand.

Jalalpourroodsari (2013) depicts the confrontations between Wordsworth and Thoreau's notions of nature, solitude and imagination. According to the article, the imagination in *Walden* would be like an intermediary between the individual and the nature.

Although the conception of the city is not the main theme of this project, it should not be totally ignored because both writers lived in an urban space. In the case of Wordsworth, he spent long periods of time in London and Paris and in fact these European capitals are portrayed in *The Prelude*. Thoreau also knew how the life in the city was and Haddin (2015) dedicates an article to this dichotomy between the rural and the urban space.

There are theses that compare the work of Thoreau and Wordsworth, as in the case of Moellering (2010) and Eidson (2014). The first one will be especially relevant in the last part of this paper that deals with the presence of "walking" in *Walden* and *The Prelude*.

Apart from that, recent studies about Thoreau such as Finley's edition of *Henry David Thoreau in Context* (2017) and Furui's article (2016) about the theme of loneliness and communication in *Walden* will provide updated information about Thoreau's life and work.

Nevertheless, there is still a lot of research to do. For instance, it is easier to find works on Thoreau because nowadays he seems to be an author gaining more popularity because of his ideas about nature and politics. However, there are not so many works and articles about the influence of Wordsworth's poetry on his work and that is why this paper aims at creating a dialogue about both authors. Getting lost in their words it is like walking into the woods, there is always something extraordinary and unexpected to find out.

### 1.3. Methodology

A bibliographic revision was carried out at electronic data bases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, LION, Linceo+ and ProQuest. Most of the articles were taken from these sources while some of the titles were found at the libraries of the National Distance Education University (UNED) and the University of Oviedo. The works were published between 1983 and 2017. Only three of them appeared in the 1980s and they were selected because of their importance to compare William Wordsworth and Henry David Thoreau's different views on nature and because of the influence of the contributions made by Frye (1983) and Gaull (1988) in later studies about English Romanticism. Their visions about this topic are basic not only to examine *The Prelude* but also to have a more completed cultural framework of *Walden*.

The keywords to search the articles were basically the names of the authors related to "Transcendentalism", "Romanticism", "wilderness" and the titles of *Walden* and *The Prelude*. However, there were not many coincidences when the terms "Thoreau" and "Wordsworth" were put together. However, it should be pointed out that there have been an increasing number of publications of these writers in the last years as it could be seen when the state of the art was discussed.

Apart from that, some websites dedicated to these poets were consulted such as [walden.org](http://walden.org) and [bartleby.com](http://bartleby.com). The last one contains *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in Eighteen Volumes*, which was helpful to discover more about the personal life and cultural background of these poets.

In addition, the edition of *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* made by Shaver and De Selincourt (1967) and the essays of authors such as Fichte (1848), Coleridge (2005) and Emerson (2008) were read in order to get deeper knowledge of the literary and philosophic background of Wordsworth and Thoreau.

Finally, the original texts were read carefully in order to make a critical and personal approach with the utmost accuracy possible.

## 2. The Relationship between Nature and Human Being

### 2.1. English Romanticism: William Wordsworth

The word “romantic” appears in English for the first time during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As Day explains, it was a French borrowing (*romaunt*) which meant “romance” and it was coined in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (79). This term alluded to the stories and tales from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. But it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when this concept acquired a new dimension thanks to the ideas spread by A. W. Schlegel that arrived to England throughout *De L'Allemagne* by Madame de Staël, whose work was published in London in 1813. Schlegel outlined the tenets of the Romanticism and put forward that its roots could be found in the medieval mythology and in the Italian poetry of Petrarca, Dante and Boccaccio.

Notwithstanding that Staël’s book was well received, it did not have a great impact on English writers. Although that does not mean that some authors such as Coleridge or Byron ignored the cultural movement that was taking place in Germany, the cradle of Romanticism. In fact, at the beginning the first English Romantics that is, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey did not deem themselves as such. However, their way of thinking and writing broke with the established canons, which is characteristic of all Romantic authors. That is why they were so criticized by some literary scholars like Jeffrey who named them contemptuously “the Lake Poets” because they lived in Lake District.

Wordsworth, as well as other Romantics, had to face criticism throughout all his life. However, what he really feared was not so much the opinions of his literary audience but the loss of inspiration to compose new poems. With regards to the process of creation and the role of the poet in society, he wrote in 1800 the Preface to second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) that is considered by Abrams as a “manifesto” in which Wordsworth defended this work that he wrote along with Samuel Coleridge and proposed a new concept of poetry (127). *Lyrical Ballads*, according to Wordsworth’s Preface, was an “experiment” (287) that consisted on using the language of common men as a means to express the feelings and experiences of the poet. In his words: “I propose to myself to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men” (295). This way Wordsworth brought poetry closer to people who did not belong

strictly to the most cultivated elite that, until this moment, was the one who could understand the complex and intricate meaning of verses.

This perspective on poetic language is related to the kind of scenes and situations that Wordsworth and most English Romantic poets portrayed. Wordsworth thought that if he was describing a moment taken from everyday life, the language chosen to depict it had to be the one that was common to everyone.

Actually, language is a code that every human being learns to be part of a society. It involves not only a universe of words but it also comprises a culture that teaches us the rules to follow in order to be an individual fully integrated in a social group. Herder, a philosopher who along with Kant and Fichte had influenced Romantics, thought that expression was essential to the man because he needed to convey his feelings and reflections. Herder also claimed the power of language and said that the man was made by other man; this means that even though he is an independent being, language is a product of the conventions made by people that lived before us and who left their traces in the words that we use.

Isaiah Berlin in his essay *The Roots of Romanticism* (1999) not only points out the importance of Herder in the development of Romantic principles but also he emphasizes the relevance of Kant and Fichte. From the first one, he draws the attention to the distinction that Kant established between human beings and animals. The German philosopher said that the will was what made them different because the man, unlike an animal, can control his instincts and he is not at the expense of them. He can decide what he wants; although that entails that he becomes responsible for his choices. So as to exert this will freely, any individual should not be over another. Therefore, Kant was against any kind of domination or oppression that would threaten the liberties of people. This way of thinking was very similar to many Romantics' beliefs, who supported the French Revolution that promised equality between men and that meant the end of an absolutist monarchy. Wordsworth was one of these advocates as we can see in Book IX of *The Prelude* where he could sense the excitement that French society experiences at the change. In his travel to France in 1790 he visited the

Alps, a fact that would be included in *The Prelude*, but he also went to Paris and “this first visit to France coincided with the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille” (Gaul 311). That is why there was still an atmosphere of elation and agitation in the capital that Wordsworth reflected in his poems: “I stared and listened, with a stranger’s ears, / To Hawkers and Haranguers, hubbub wild!” (57-58). He even confessed that “France lured me forth; the realm that I had crossed/ So lately, journeying toward the snow-clad Alps” (34-35). However, Wordsworth’s initial enthusiasm faded away when he discovered the cruel politics of Robespierre that completely betrayed the spirit of the Revolution.

Fichte was another philosopher whose theories inspired the Romantics. His point of view on how knowledge is not a passive process but an active one is fundamental to understand Wordsworth’s poetry. Fichte defended that “Our lives do not depend upon contemplative knowledge. Life does not begin with disinterested contemplation of nature or of objects. Life begins with action” (Berlin 88). This prominence given to the active role of the subject is parallel to Coleridge and Wordsworth’s way of thinking about this matter. Both of them believed that although the individual was affected by the external world, his mind was active and passive, that is, he received stimuli but he interpreted them and produced his own ideas. This reasoning meant a break with the mechanist theory so present in English philosophy that conceived the mind as a *tabula rasa* to be filled by the images taken from the exterior, as Day says: “A number of Romantic writers suggest that the mind possesses a faculty which enables it to see through the forms of the material world to greater, spiritual reality behind it” (57).

Another aspect of Fichte’s thought that should be taken into account because of its significance to comprehend both Wordsworth and Thoreau’s work is that he conceived nature as a cyclical process. According to him, there is not really destruction because all that withers away will re-emerge. We can see more clearly this notion in *The Vocation of Man* (1799) by Fichte: “All Death in nature is Birth (...). There is no destructive principle in Nature, for Nature throughout is pure, unclouded life (...). Precisely because she destroys me, must she animate me anew” (552).

In the poem "The Simplon Pass" written by Wordsworth there is a verse that alludes to this cycle "woods decaying, never to be decayed" (5). There is always a beginning but never an end. An attentive observer, like Wordsworth was, perceives the changes in nature as time goes. However, the English poet also realized that there was an order that ruled these transformations and which a keen mind could sense. He concluded that there must be something divine in nature and that would explain the perfection that lies beneath the chaos.

Gaull relates these ideas of Wordsworth to theories of the Scottish geologist James Hutton, who investigated the origin of the earth (310). In *Theory of the Earth* (1795) Hutton said that "We find no vestige of a beginning, - no prospect of an end". He was opposed to the extended notion of the formation of the earth due to divine forces and he even foresaw the evolutionism that would be developed by Charles Darwin. His principles influenced not only other geologists like Charles Lyell but also some poets as such as Wordsworth and Shelley, who knew Hutton's discoveries (Fulford 13).

Most of Romantic writers were aware of the scientific advances that were taking place as in the case of Shelley and Wordsworth. Some scholars have established a parallelism between the task of observation undertaken by scientists and that of Romantics: "Like traditional empirists, the Romantics seek to know the world on the basis of human experience" (Goodman 22). Wordsworth's approach to reality is full of curiosity and awe at the little wonders that usually go unnoticed. In fact, this way of looking at the world is similar to that of a child who still keeps that innocence and purity of which an adult lacks and it makes him more receptive to events that an older person would overlook. We will return later to the subject of childhood in Wordsworth's work as well as in Thoreau's since it is an issue of importance for both authors. Coming back to the matter of Wordsworth's view on reality and how he tries to show common situations or things in a new and unexpected light, his friend Samuel T. Coleridge alluded to this process of rediscovery in a part of *Biographia Literaria* (1817) that deals with the creation of *Lyrical Ballads*:

Mr. Wordsworth on the other hand was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us. (145)

Therefore, the poetry of Wordsworth aims at uncovering all those extraordinary elements that are part of our lives but that are often ignored. In a letter to James Tobin in 6 March 1798, Wordsworth said: "My object is to give pictures of Nature, Man and Society. Indeed, I know not any thing which will not come within the scope of my plan" (*LWDW* 212). This purpose is present throughout his poetic career because human being cannot be understood without taken into account his social background and the nature that, according to Wordsworth, was the one that gave him the lessons essential to comprehend a changing and unpredictable world whose secrets await to be discovered.

## **2.2. Transcendentalism: Henry D. Thoreau**

The origins of Transcendentalism are closely related to Unitarianism and English and German Romanticism. This philosophical and literary movement began, according to Buell (1984), in the late 1820s and it reached its highest point in the following two decades ("The Transcendentalist Movement" 1). Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) specifies in his lecture *The Transcendentalist* (1842) that "What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism; Idealism as it appears in 1842" (193). Therefore, Transcendentalists are opposed to materialists whose mode of thinking is based on facts but they do not envisage senses as representations of things and that sometimes they can be misleading. Emerson explains that the idealist believes in inspiration, in the power of the individual. He looks beyond of what he sees, transcending any limits. In Emerson's words, "The Transcendentalist adopts the whole connection of spiritual doctrine" (196).

Emerson points out that the term "transcendental" has its roots in Kant's theories. The aforementioned philosopher was against Locke's Empiricism, which postulated that the ideas came exclusively from experience, and he defended that there must be *a priori* truths to which we can access through our minds. Kant emphasized that our perception of the world is not restricted to the information that our senses provide us. Hence it is a process that depends on the mind. As the Romantics thought, who were also deeply influenced by Kant, the senses are not the only source of knowledge and this fact implies that the



individual takes on a renewed importance as a creator of ideas because he is not just a spectator of the phenomena.

Nevertheless, although Transcendentalists echoed and interpreted Kant's philosophy, it should be explained that "transcendentalism" was not a name chosen by the writers and intellectuals who were part of this movement. The critics of Transcendentalism were the ones who used this term in order to mock them. The named Transcendentalists were not very fond of this label that discredited the intricacy of their ideas and the complexity of their spiritual approach to reality. That is why *The Transcendentalist* is an essay in which Emerson expresses the universe of beliefs that is ignored by those who criticized them. Furthermore, the Transcendentalists were not advocates of labels; they did not like the notion of emphasizing one specific dogma that would stifle the independence and free-thinking of each person. This assertion of the individuality could be claim as a one of the pillars of this movement that was not only philosophical but also religious.

As it has been said at the beginning of this section, Unitarianism is associated to Transcendentalism. This religious doctrine rejected the trinity (Holy Spirit, Father and Son) that had been defended by puritans. Unitarianism was very present at Harvard University, where authors such as Emerson and Thoreau studied. However, Transcendentalists took from this theology some aspects like the importance bestowed to free conscience. Myerson (2000) remarks that they "replaced this anthropomorphic God with a nonanthropomorphic force or spirit, one that was present in all things" (*Transcendentalism: A Reader* XXVIII). This way they perceived human being and nature as manifestations of something divine. This point of view is similar to Wordsworth's, who also thought that the forms in nature were a proclamation of a spiritual energy which could be sensed but not be seen.

*Nature* (1836) is precisely the title of another essay written by Emerson that is a manifesto of the Transcendental Club which was founded on September 8, 1836 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In this text the author put forth some of the tenets that would define the general principles of the movement. These ideas would be shared by other members of this group, including Thoreau.

Emerson said in this work that people did not really see nature or the sun “but shines into the eye and the heart of the child” (10). This allusion to the capacity of the children to perceive the world in awe reminds us of Wordsworth’s references to infancy as a period of time in which the human being still keeps a close contact to nature. While adults remain blind to these wonders that cannot be appreciated in the cities, so the man has to be in the wilderness in order to discover them.

In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant lines of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature. (10)

In this fragment of *Nature*, Emerson praised the interest that the contemplation of a landscape had for the human being because through this observation he can find out more about himself. Then again, this vision is similar to that of Wordsworth’s that vindicated the need to get closer to nature, slipping away from the crowded cities. Emerson remarked that most of people who lived in an urban place, they considered that nature was more stunning and breathtaking in some seasons than in others whereas “to the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty, and in the same field, it beholds, every hour, a picture which was never seen before” (15).

Henry David Thoreau had this “attentive eye” that Emerson mentioned. During the two years and two months he spent in a self-crafted cabin on the shore of Walden Pond, he could discern the changes in the wilderness of which he was witness. He put into practice the theories supported by Emerson. Thoreau met Emerson in 1837 when he was a scholarship student at Harvard. Emerson, older than Thoreau, had published *Nature* the year before and his words still resonated amongst the literary circles of that time. After their first meeting, Emerson was impressed by Thoreau’s knowledge in a wide variety of themes such as literature, religion and society as Harmon Smith says in his book *My Friend, My Friend* (1999) dedicated to the analysis of the friendship between these authors. From that day, Emerson assumed the role of mentor to Thoreau. They used to meet in Emerson’s study where he had a great library in which he had volumes of authors such as Goethe, whom he described in *The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (1852) as one of the most influential minds in

literature. In these visits to Emerson's home, the young Thoreau borrowed books from Emerson's library and he was encouraged by his mentor to write a journal about his everyday life. This was a routine that Emerson himself followed faithfully. The advice would have a considerable effect on Thoreau's writing since his most famous works have the structure of a journal, as is the case of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), whose first draft was elaborated while he lived in Walden Pond. His stay in this place is also related to Emerson because the latter was the owner of this land that he purchased in 1844. It was a site where Emerson usually took a stroll and of which Thoreau had some childhood memories as he explained in *Walden*.

According to Harmon Smith, the transcendentalist poet William Ellery Channing, who was friends with Emerson and Thoreau, had suggested that Thoreau could settle in this land recently acquired by Emerson (H. Smith 100). So, Thoreau with the consent of Emerson started to build his cabin in March of the following year. In May Emerson, as well as other neighbors, helped him with to set this project and to some extent he supported economically Thoreau when it was needed.

Between 1845 and 1847, Thoreau received the visits of some friends and people who were curious about his lifestyle in Walden. Although the next part of this paper will deal with this period, it should be noted that Channing went sometimes to his cabin and it is said that the character "the Poet" in *Walden* refers to him. Furthermore, Thoreau kept in touch with the Emersons (he valued Emerson's wife, Lidian, very highly) and he paid some visits to them.

When Emerson travelled to England between 1847 y 1848, Thoreau looked after his family while he was abroad. In this second travel to Europe, Emerson met Wordsworth, Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle among others. These experiences would be collected in his work *English Traits* (1885). William Wordsworth was a figure of English poetry that had always drawn Emerson's attention and it is highly likely that he transmitted this admiration to Thoreau who was also a reader of Wordsworth's poems.

Their friendship bounded them together and Emerson even commissioned Thoreau some projects such as the creation of a report about the wildlife in Massachusetts, "Natural History of Massachusetts" (1842), for *The Dial* (the journal of the Transcendentalist Club). However, in 1849 the strongest discrepancies between them started. Notwithstanding, some disagreements had already arisen in 1842 when Emerson confessed to Margaret Fuller, his predecessor as director of *The Dial*, that this essay about the flora and fauna in Massachusetts did not achieve the expectations that he originally had. In addition, he criticized *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) and he adopted a patronizing approach that made Thoreau feel as if he did not follow the path that Emerson had charted for him. Myerson (1995) makes an allusion to Emerson's disappointment in the following terms: "Emerson, in turn, continued to think that Thoreau's intense, solitary nature study was a tragic waste of his talents" (*TCCHDT* 35).

Even though Emerson tried to repair the damage done to their friendship, their relationship was not as close as it was before and the veneration that Thoreau had always felt towards him was broken. However, it is quite ironic that Emerson disapproved Thoreau's point of view of nature when in *The Transcendentalist* he manifested that solitude was needed in order to develop one's capacities. Moreover, in *Nature* he claimed the necessity to be alone from time to time: "To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me" (9).

Thoreau spent amounts of time all by himself when he was living at Walden Pond but this did not mean that he was isolated from the world. He was just discovering a reality about which others were in the dark. Thoreau looked at nature in completely new way, a way that not even Emerson understood at that moment. He chose an unexpected direction and followed an unexplored path that would lead him to a profound knowledge of nature and, most importantly, of his own essence as a free and independent human being.

### 3. *Walden and The Prelude*

#### 3.1. The Self in Nature

In this part we will focus on the kind of connection that Henry D. Thoreau and William Wordsworth had with nature and how their involvement with this environment entailed a change in their comprehension of the world.

First of all, there will be an analysis of Thoreau's *Walden* regarding this theme and it will be compared to *The Prelude* by Wordsworth, to whom the section "The Poet in the country" will be dedicated.

##### 3.1.1. Life in the Woods

*Walden; or Life in the Woods*, as it was originally entitled, was first published in 1854. As aforesaid, it narrates the experience of Thoreau living in a cabin which he built himself on the shore of Walden Pond for two years and two months (1845-1847). His stay started the Fourth of July of 1845, the day of the American Independence. Thoreau said that the choice of this memorable date was accidental (241). Nevertheless, some scholars such as Cavell (8) wonder if behind this determination there was a declaration of independence of Thoreau, who questioned society's practices and what is considered as indispensable as it can be seen more clearly in the chapter "Economy" and makes the decision of liberating himself from the ties imposed by his society. Thoreau justified his resolve in this way:

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 (...) I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life. (246-247)

This inner need to experiment life in all its intensity is what motivates him to settle down near Walden Pond. Cavell relates this resolution to Romantics: "closely Thoreau's own "literary withdrawal" resembles those of the Romantics, in its need for solitude and for nature" (11). This is one of the points that Wordsworth and Thoreau have in common, although the first never did such a drastic "withdrawal" and the conditions in which he lived were not as austere as Thoreau's.

Nonetheless, despite their differences, it should be affirmed that Thoreau shared some of the matters that Romantics also discussed. According to Goodman, some of these Romantic themes were “lost intimacy with nature, the importance of feeling, and humanity’s great but wasted powers” (119). These are topics that have their space in *Walden*, in which nature and the individual take a prominent role.

Regarding the concept of the self in this work, Thoreau’s words at the beginning of *Walden* should be noted: “In most books, the *I*, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained” (167). As well as in Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, the first person narrator voiced the poet’s memories. This use of the “I” was characteristic of the Romantics whose individualism was one of their most important features and the Transcendentalists adopted it as part of their own cultural framework.

It should be also noted that *Walden* and *The Prelude* tell the journeys of self-discovery that Thoreau and Wordsworth went through and that was displayed in these works. Frye defined *The Prelude* in the following terms: “Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, certainly the great Romantic epic of English literature, deals with the growth of the individual poet’s mind” (38). *Walden* also reflects an evolution of the author whose perspective of the world and, more specifically, of nature changed when he was at Walden. In fact, as he rediscovered nature, he found out more things about himself. As Cavell observed, “The quest of this book [*Walden*] is for the recovery of the self” (80). This is what can be sensed as we read *Walden*. Thoreau looked for another way of living that was not tainted by the economical obligations and social expectations that gradually curb freedom. He wanted to live another kind of life and he began to build by himself the cabin in which he would move in. Thoreau got used to this frugality and he did not seem to miss what he left behind. In the chapter “Economy” of *Walden*, he pointed out that he did not need curtains to cover the windows of his new home because there was nobody who could invade his privacy. This lack of barriers was liberating to Thoreau because if he had had neighbors, he would have felt more self-conscious and his peaceful solitude would have been disrupted.

The concept of solitude in Thoreau's and Wordsworth's work has been studied by Jalalpourroodsari (2013). According to this scholar, Wordsworth defended that the solitary contemplation of nature leads him to have deeper knowledge of the world. Albeit he and Thoreau considered nature as a teacher to the human being, Thoreau had the impression that although he could see a part of nature, the physical, there was a part which remained in the dark due to its "multilayered essence" (Jalalpourroodsari 7). This mystery that never unravels is summarized by Thoreau in *Walden*: "Nature puts no question and answers none which we mortals ask" (423). Not even a close spectator like Thoreau could find these answers but what is fundamental is asking these questions even though they would not be resolved. Meditating on these matters would mean that the human being is becoming aware of the importance of nature, a problem that already existed in Thoreau's time as he expresses in *Walden*: "Nature has no human inhabitant who appreciates her" (349). In the chapter "Solitude", he claims that "we are not wholly involved in Nature" (288). There was an obvious lack of connection to the environment that both Thoreau and Wordsworth denounced and through their words they tried to make visible this reality that the man tended to ignore when, in fact, nature "is the mother of humanity" (446) that was the conclusion to which Thoreau came during his stay at Walden Pond.

This period in Thoreau's life was marked by the loneliness and some of his occasional visitors were curious about how he could bear his solitude in the woods. Thoreau revealed that he liked to be alone and he reinforced this idea when he wrote in *Walden* that "I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude" (289). He asserts that feeling alone is not determined by the distance between the individual and the rest of people. In his words, "Solitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows" (289). He argues that when people are deeply involved in a task, they do not feel lonely. Furthermore, he declared that the moments we share together are sometimes few, just the meetings at meals that depend on our timetable. Such little instants are not enough to give sufficient value to these interactions.

The theme of solitude is also remarkable in *The Prelude*, in Book IX, where the poet says that in London he lives in “the crowded solitude” (29). This verse seems to anticipate what Thoreau would express years later when he stated that solitude exists in a city or in the country because it is not conditioned by amount of people that surrounds us but by the quality of the contacts made. We can be part of a crowd as Wordsworth and still be lonesome.

However, Furui considers that this solitude was “porous” (3) because Thoreau could not avoid people that he met throughout his experience in Walden and he did not even try to. These encounters gave him a touch of novelty to his routine. In addition, this author comments that Thoreau in one of his journals said that being alone was like an escape from present. But not even in an isolated cabin he could ignore that his time was not the same that the one that others were living as he could realize when he could hear the distant sound of the train. The train was a sign of the innovations of this epoch while Thoreau leaded a life in which modern techniques were not used.

Thoreau’s perception of time was altered during his stay at Walden and the only things that oriented him were the position of the sun and the sounds that came from the highway. As he expressed in the chapter “Where I Lived, and What I Lived for”, “Both place and time were changed” (244). This lack of awareness of the passing of time made him think of Oriental philosophy: “I realized what the Orientals mean by contemplation and the forsaking of works. For the most part, I minded not how the hours went” (267). Oriental culture attracted the Transcendentalists’ attention such as Emerson’s and Thoreau’s, who were familiar with classical Hindu and Chinese texts as had been the German Romantics. This interest was in part motivated by their need to have a wider knowledge of philosophical and religious doctrines from other countries so as to better understand the world and to not be so biased because of their cultural background. In *Walden*, we can find references to Hinduism, more exactly from *Bhagavad Gita* and *The Laws of Manu*, and there are also some quotes from the Chinese philosopher Confucius. Thoreau found these texts really inspiring because of Hinduism’s idea that the divine was in the physical world and that nature was, therefore, a manifestation of God.



Though Wordsworth did not read the aforementioned works, his vision of nature seems to fit with some of the precepts of Hinduism. Prata and Prasad contend that his devotion and awe towards nature is very similar to that of Indian Hindu feelings. Hindus venerate rivers, mountains and trees because “God is present in every particle of Nature” (84). They also stress the importance of man and nature’s relationship, which can be seen in both Wordsworth’s poetry and Thoreau’s essays. For instance, in *Walden* the lake acquires such a presence that Thoreau described it as if it had a life of its own as he declared in the chapter “The Ponds”: “of all the characters I have known, perhaps Walden wears best, and best preserves its purity” (343). A bond was created between them throughout these years and in a reflection about the Walden Pond, Thoreau expressed what it meant to him: “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” (337). Thoreau also used metaphors that represented Walden as a “perfect forest mirror” (339), as if it was a barrier between two dimensions. As Schneider (1995) explains, “the pond symbolically mediates between the material and spiritual worlds represented by the earth and the sky” (“Walden” 97).

In short, looking at nature is the way to understand one’s self, resulting in a profounder consciousness of the essence of the human being. This bottomless pond is a clear symbol of the unending process of searching for answers about the universe we live in.

Confucius was cited in the first chapter of *Walden* when Thoreau alluded to the fact that knowledge consists of knowing what we know and what we not. It seems that Thoreau through this journey of self-discovery and rediscovering of nature followed one of the teachings that Confucius gave to his disciples “to think deeply for themselves and relentlessly study the outside world” (qtd. in Ozdemir 43) and Thoreau put this lesson into practice when he was living in the woods.

### 3.1.2. The Poet in the Country

In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth stated: “He [the Poet] considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature” (300). This asseveration is similar to the one made by Thoreau when he said that nature was “the mother of humanity.” Being close to nature leads to a reconnection with one’s essence as has already been said above.

Even though Wordsworth thought that all men are equals, also in this Preface he set forth that the poet was “endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul” (301). His ability to see beyond is what distinguishes him from the rest. In Book XIII of *The Prelude* there is another definition of the function of the poet that is relevant to analyze:

That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each  
Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,  
Have each his own peculiar faculty,  
Heaven’s gift, a sense that fits him to perceive  
Objects unseen before     (*The Prelude* XII. 301-305)

The correspondence of the poet with the figure of the prophet reminds us of the definition of Emerson in his essay *The Poet*, in which he said: “The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty” (449). In this sense, a parallelism exists in between both cultural movements of which Wordsworth and Emerson, along with Thoreau, are key exponents. This fact has been highlighted by some authors such as Buell: “Transcendentalism was a form of Romanticism that emphasized the analogy between the artist and God, glorifying the artist’s creative and symbol-making powers” (“The Transcendentalist Movement” 2).

*The Prelude* portrays the evolution of a poet, from his childhood to his adulthood as if it was a *bildungsroman*. The title of what would be considered one of his masterpieces remained unclear for Wordsworth. He called it “Poem (title not yet fixed upon) to Coleridge” and in his letters to his sister Dorothy he named it “the poem on the growth of my own mind” (qtd. in Gravil and

Robinson, 379). It was his wife Mary who entitled this work when it was published after the death of the poet.

The origins of this project that would accompany him throughout his life emerged in 1798, “as an exercise in self-maintenance, self-support” (Langan 147) during his residence in Goslar, Germany, where he felt isolated in a foreign land in which he had trouble with the language and the winter was extremely harsh. The conditions in which he began to write *The Prelude* were not ideal and it meant an escape from his current situation. Here we can trace a comparison between the hardship of winter that both Thoreau and Wordsworth had to go through during the making of their works, albeit their contexts were obviously different. Wordsworth chose to look back at his past while Thoreau was like a reporter of his days in Walden.

The remembrance of the past is an essential core of *The Prelude*. Over the span of years reflected in the books that compose it, Wordsworth attached a great importance to childhood. A question to which Izenberg refers: “he felt he has been prepared by his special relationship with nature in childhood for his great poetic task” (226). Wordsworth emphasized the clairvoyance of children in many of his poems such as “Immortality Ode” (“best Philosopher... On whom truths do rest, /Which we are toiling all our lives to find”) and “My heart leaps up” (“The Child is father of the Man”). In *The Prelude*, there are many allusions to this matter as, for instance, in Book XI “France”:

The heart that first had roused him. Youth maintains,  
In all conditions of society,  
Communion more direct and intimate  
With Nature, — hence, oftentimes, with reason too —  
Than age or manhood, even.            (*The Prelude* XI. 27-31)

However, although having lost this close relationship with nature, the man can restore it even if he has not that innocence and initial curiosity of his first years. This idea, as it been said before, was shared by Emerson and Thoreau. The last one had a vision alike to Wordsworth in this respect. In *Walden*, “I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born” (254). His connection to Walden Pond started when he was four years old and he visited this place with his family. There are some memories of his childhood associated

to the site that would become his home when he was an adult. Therefore, both authors' relationship with nature was correlated to their evocations of their infancy. Nonetheless, Lorrie Smith explains that, unlike Wordsworth, "Thoreau is not recalling intimations from childhood but is steeped in the present moment" (240). In fact, his allusion to this period of his life appears in the chapter "The Bean-Field" (307-8) and is very brief.

This identification with nature that started at a very early age could be in part the reason why Wordsworth and Thoreau envisioned it as a shelter that gave them a sense of security.

Buell (1995) studies the influence of Wordsworth on Thoreau's *Walden* as well as the effect that German Romanticism had on his way of thinking, as it happened to other Transcendentalists:

Walden, both the experience and the book, was a pastoral return in two symbolic senses as well as in the literal: a "psychocultural" return, in the spirit of romantic sentimentalism defined by Schiller, to the Homeric world; and a "psychobiographical" return driven by Wordsworthian reminiscences of former times spent more fully within nature, glimpses of which Thoreau allows us in the boyhood boating memories. ("Thoreau and the Natural Environment" 175)

The references to his boyhood are few but meaningful, giving us an insight into his past prior to his period at Walden Pond. This information is significant to the study of *Walden* because it makes us understand better the strong connection between Thoreau and this landscape in which images from the past and present are intertwined.

According to Jalalpourroodsari, "to Wordsworth, nature has the aura of present and past" (6). This overlapping is evident in *The Prelude* and it takes the form of the concept "spots of time". There have been several definitions of it, Nichols states that "spots of time- only claims that feelings from the past come 'in aid' of feelings in the present if we allow memory to extend beyond the sensory to include the emotional" (67) while Gaillet de Chezelles believes that "les *spots of time* peuvent se lire comme des formes d'irruption de l'éternité dans le temporel" (368). Taking these perspectives into account, we can conclude that the called "spots of time" are moments that have passed and that re-emerge to the surface. Wordsworth, in the Book XII entitled "Imagination and Taste", wrote some verses that shed light on this notion: "There are in our

existence spots of time,/ that with distinct pre-eminence retain/ A renovating virtue” (208-210). This virtue is the one that allows us to keep the most crucial instants of our lives that were lost in the maze of our memory and that date from our childhood onwards. It is no coincidence that the title of this particular part of *The Prelude* is “Imagination and Taste” because imagination is nourished by the “spots of time” and he considered it as the basis of the creative process. This term was essential to Coleridge, who discussed it in his *Biographia Literaria*. In order to comprehend what the sense of this concept to Wordsworth, we quote a fragment from *The Prelude* in which he clarified its meaning:

Imagination, which, in truth,  
Is but another name for absolute power  
And the clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
And Reason in her most exalted mood.  
This faculty hath been the feeding source  
Of our long labour                    (*The Prelude* XIV. 189-194)

Imagination, from the point of view of Wordsworth and Coleridge, is the capacity to see not with our eyes, but with our mind. It is a state that brings great joy to the poet who can perceive beyond of what our limited senses allow us. The contemplation of nature is mediated by the imagination, an active force that guides the writer and makes him admire in awe the beauty of nature. This observation entails a meditative attitude which is the genesis of poetry that “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility” (“Preface” 305).

Transcendentalists found out this theory of imagination when they read the English Romantics and, in fact, Emerson was very influenced by this notion along with the one about “spots of time” that he did not see as necessarily linked to the past. Goodman states that “for Emerson reality comes in flashes and gleams, and it is these “few real hours” of our lives for which he searches. These gleaming moments may not be only in the past, as in Wordsworth’s poetry, but they are equally rare” (42). On the other hand, the concept of imagination had a great impact on Thoreau’s way of thinking. So much so that it is mentioned in *Walden*: “My imagination carried me so far” (239). It led him to grasp an insight into the material world. He established a duality between the body and the imagination and he said that both needed to be in balance. This active and, at the same time, receptive imagination makes possible a grasp of reality. It entails an introspection that, as Wordsworth advocated, can only be

achieved when the individual plunges into a peaceful and reflexive state of mind.

The quest of identity was a theme common to Romantics and Transcendentalists and it was linked to the relationship between the human being and nature. When the poet gets closer to it, he discovers more about his own essence. It is like a rebirth, “donne l’impression de renaître” (Gaillet de Chezelles 305). When Thoreau went to Walden Pond, he experienced a feeling quite similar, a situation that seemed to be reinforced by his bathing in Walden. The water has always been related to this process of renewal. Furthermore, this act favors a deeper connection between human and nature as Eidson remarks: “by recounting his own bathing rituals, Thoreau encourages readers to likewise seek bodily contact with waterways and thereby develop a stronger affinity with nature” (24). This integration of the self in nature shows us its relevance to our full development as individuals.

### **3.2. Walking through the Wilderness**

In this section, we will deal with the definition of “wilderness” distinguishing it from that of “wildness”. Furthermore, the act of walking so important in the analysis of Thoreau’s and Wordsworth’s works will be carried out. First, Thoreau’s perspective about this matter will be studied and, lastly, how Wordsworth addressed this issue in *The Prelude*.

#### **3.2.1. The Art of Walking**

The reading of the essay *Walking* (1862) by Thoreau is essential if we want to have a wider outlook on his idea of wilderness. This lecture was delivered at the Concord Lyceum on April 23, 1851 and posthumously published in 1862 in the magazine *Atlantic Monthly*.

This text comprises Thoreau’s thoughts about what he called “the art of Walking” (518) that only a few ones really master. He himself and Wordsworth are included in this group of people who have the “leisure, freedom and independence” (519) to stroll. Thoreau narrated an anecdote about Wordsworth’s routine: “When a traveler asked Wordsworth’s servant to show

him her master's study, she answered, 'Here is his library, but his study is out of doors'" (522).

Thoreau spoke of the benefits of walking in the woods, in the nature that has not been tamed yet. He said that "Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest" (536), but the man undervalues this "wildness". It is indeed ironic that he underestimates and feels little interest towards nature when he is part of it. Given this reasoning, the famous quote "in wildness is the preservation of the world" (534) acquires a new dimension because this protection has an effect not only on what we understand for environment but also on our own well-being.

At this point, it shall be explained which is exactly the difference between "wildness" and "wilderness" because they are often used as interchangeable terms and that causes confusion. Dunn asserts that wildness "is thus at the heart of any living self or society" (18) whereas other authors specify that it is a "quality" (Dassow Walls 15). This difficult-to-grasp quality is characterized by its unvarnished pureness that is in the core of each experience. It does not imply that it has to take place necessarily in the "wilderness". Whereas "wilderness" is the place that is not inhabited, that remains completely untouched by the hand of the man. Cronon has been one of the most critical with this concept, when denounced "its unnaturalness" (7). Before Wordsworth and Thoreau "wilderness" was a synonym of "desolation" and they gave it a connotation more positive, relating it to a vision paradisiacal and almost divine. According to Cronon:

Wilderness is the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilization that has lost its soul. (...) But the trouble with wilderness is that it quietly expresses and reproduces the very values its devotees seek to reject. (16)

Cronon's point of view is based on the theory that "wilderness" is a cultural construct created by the Western mindset that sees nature as the antonym of civilization. This term does not call to reconciliation between man and environment, because the last one needs to be free from the influence of the human being so as to keep its pristine essence. However, this conception is far from what Thoreau or Wordsworth expected to convey with their works. What they saw it was that a gradual separation was taking place in part due to the

growth of the cities and the development of the industry that threatened to pollute and destroy nature with its unstoppable advance. Both authors knew that the world was changing very quickly. In *Walking*, Thoreau expressed his fear that perhaps these paths, where he used to stroll, could disappear in the following years.

His words were a way to make people aware of “this vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature” (545). He found English literature quite lacking in communicating the untamed side of nature.

English literature, from the days of the minstrels to the Lake Poets (...) breathes no quite fresh and, in this sense, wild strain. It is an essentially tame and civilized literature (...) There is plenty of genial love of Nature, but not so much of Nature herself. (540)

In this part of *Walking*, Thoreau made a critic to the poetry of Wordsworth, who was one of the Lake Poets. The influence of the English poet is evident in Thoreau’s work as we have been analyzing throughout this paper and as some authors such as Lorrie Smith have claimed: “Wordsworth, of course, is the English romantic to whom Thoreau seems more akin” (225). But it is also true that he could notice the defaults of the Romantic poets he had read like Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth. Thoreau thought that American writers had to create their own style, freed from the burden of the English literary canon, which he considered was a bit chauvinist and too anchored in their past. Moreover, Weisbuch explains that in *Walden* “England stands for what which is decadent” (136) and that Thoreau tried to stir away from that tradition and encourage the writing of Americans who would reflect the wilderness of their land.

Thoreau believed that the wild draws our attention and this attraction is what makes that stories like *Hamlet* and *The Iliad* are always contemporary. “Wildness” is, consequently, a quality that is associated to adventure while “dullness is but another name for tameness” (539). Suppressing the wildness in a work means stealing its raw intensity and “all good things are wild and free” (542). Freedom and wildness are without any doubt, some of the concepts central in *Walking* and *Walden*.



His walks in the woods are imbued by these values that are not tainted by the fear of getting lost because as he explains in *Walden*, sometimes we have to lose our way to finally find ourselves:

It is a surprising and memorable, as well as valuable experience, to be lost in the woods any time. (...) Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinitive extent of our relations. (322-323)

This is not a static contemplation of nature, it entails movement and involvement. There is a search for the genuine that seemed to be lacking in the city. Schneider alludes to the exploratory character of the author in *Walden*: “a closer reading of *Walden* reveals a Thoreau who is often less interested in stasis than in change, less interested in meditation than in a journey of exploration” (“*Walden*” 92). This research is at times very similar to that of a scientist because of the details he offered in chapters such as “*Sounds*” or “*The Ponds*” and in *Walking*, Thoreau highlighted the impact of science on the writers (540) in their way of perceiving the world. After 1850, four years before the publication *Walden*, it was when Thoreau’s approach to nature turned more empirical as Buell explained (“*Thoreau and the Natural Environment*” 172). What he had in common with scientists was the curiosity and the eagerness to learn more about the earth and the beings that inhabit it. Both Thoreau and Wordsworth were keen observers of their regions as they showed when they wrote “*Natural History of Massachusetts*” (1842) and *Guide to the Lakes* (1810), respectively. Their intention was to make visible what still remained unknown.

Thoreau and Wordsworth used numerous words to refer to their journeys. On the one hand, Thoreau introduced the term “saunterer” whose origin is closely related to pilgrimage or, more specifically, to people who pretended to go to Holy Land and actually they were vagabonds. Thoreau states in *Walking* that “every walk is a sort of crusade” (519) and that he saunters through *Walden*’s woods as “the old prophets and poets” (525). Sometimes he met people during his walks and others it seemed that he lived in his own world as he said in *Walden* (284). Nothing in this land belonged to him because he was not its owner. A walker and a landlord have not obviously the same concept of nature, “Thoreau describes these different ways of relating to land—that of wanderer or saunterer as opposed to a dweller—as a contrast between one

who walks and one who owns” (Moellering 120). The saunterer has another viewpoint on the territory that contrasts with the dweller’s, who sees it as a means to obtain benefits. Therefore, his function consists of exploiting the land in order to be wealthier and more prosperous. This reality is far from the notion that the walker has of it. Moellering adds that “Thoreau goes further than Wordsworth: not only does the land signify different things to different individuals, but for Thoreau, it also changes so dramatically that he is affected at the level of language itself” (121). That is, the name of the region where he lives in (Concord) does not reflect the diverse perspectives of it. The simplicity of language betrays the complex and plural reality that exists behind this word.

There is not a universal view on a certain place, but by “creating his own myth of the saunterer whose inspired walking takes him ever nearer to the essence of the nature through which he travels” (Hoag 153). This vision of nature remains indeed unchanged, despite of all the transformations that the walker witnesses because the spirit of nature is eternal and immutable.

### **3.2.2. Delightful Pathways to Wander**

Since his boyhood, Wordsworth wandered in the Lake District, as he recalled in *The Prelude* in the part entitled “School-Time”:

My morning walks  
Were early; —oft before the hours of school  
I travelled round our little lake, five miles  
Of pleasant wandering. Happy time! (*The Prelude* II. 329-332)

One curious point is that both Thoreau’s and Wordsworth’s childhood was linked to the observation of a lake, an image that would leave this mark on these authors and their future work.

It is clear, as we have seen in the fragment of the poem above, that the young Wordsworth felt a special connection to nature and that these walks brought him great joy as it stressed by the exclamation “Happy time!” His life was a succession of journeys and that is why walking is so present in *The Prelude*. In addition, Wordsworth composed another long poem *The Excursion* (1814), in which appears four characters: the Poet, the Wanderer, the Solitary and the Pastor. The Poet is, as it can be expected, the narrator of the poem and

the Wanderer, according to Moellering, bears some resemblance to the saunterer of Thoreau. Some of these similarities are the “religious fervor” (the aforesaid origin of the word “saunterer” was related to religion) and the fact that the Wanderer has a “small need of books” (Moellering 100). Though the verb “wander” is not mentioned as many times in *Walden* as in Wordsworth’s poems and that there is instead a preference for “walk” or “stroll”; it is evident the parallelism between the character of Wordsworth and Thoreau himself. However, it shall be noted that the English poet shared also these features put forth by Moellering. For instance, the passion of Wordsworth for books as he expressed in the section of *The Prelude* entitled “Books”:

The holidays returned to me, there to find  
That golden store of books which I had left,  
What a joy was mine! How often in the course  
Of those glad respites, though a soft west wind  
Ruffled the waters to the angler’s wish,  
For a whole day together, have I lain  
Down by thy side, O Derwent! Murmuring stream,  
(*The Prelude* V. 478-484)

In *The Prelude*, there is a stark contrast between moments in which there is movement and others which are characterized by their stillness. Walking is an exercise almost as frequent as reading in *Walden* and *The Prelude*. So much as to dedicate a section relating to books, chapter III of *Walden* is entitled “Reading” and Book V of *The Prelude* “Books.” From Thoreau’s work, we highlight the following part: “my residence was more favorable, not only to thought, but to serious reading” (255). The figure of the writer reading out of doors is prominent in this chapter as well as in the extract of Wordsworth’s poem. In those pauses that interrupted temporally their wandering, there was a fusion of the knowledge taken both from the books and the never-ending wisdom of nature. Thoreau said that these moments were even more productive to him than his years at the university. Experiences are sometimes more powerful than the educative formation, they are lessons of life that no book can teach. This is reason why Wordsworth and Thoreau took a close look to nature, the teacher of the man. All this does not play down the huge influence that master pieces of literature and, in the case of Thoreau, the reading of Indian and Chinese classics had on them.

This sort of pilgrimage that Wordsworth and Thoreau made through the wilderness nourished their imagination and helped them to discover new places and, most importantly, to perceive familiar spots in another way. In this sense, a landscape is like a book, every time we study them we notice details that we have not seen before. Gaillet de Chezelles reflects about the discovery of unknown sites and the sensation of familiarity that a space can arise in us:

Excursions et courtes promenades paraissent donc mettre en jeu deux rapports différents à l'espace: l'un axé sur la découverte, l'autre sur la familiarité. Cette divergence n'entraîne toutefois pas une opposition radicale car, comme l'a souligné Thoreau avec justesse, on n'épuise jamais totalement les potentialités d'un paysage. (135)

Although her essay is about Wordsworth, she draws momentarily the attention to Thoreau, who affirmed that there are unending interpretations of the same landscape and that is why we can never grow tired of it.

Wordsworth always remained close to the Lake District but he also travelled abroad and went to France and Germany. Nonetheless, probably the visit that would have the huger impact on his poetry and perception of nature would be his journey to the Alps in the summer of 1790 where he was accompanied by his Cambridge friend Robert Jones. In Book VI of *The Prelude* he related that “with those delightful pathways we advanced” (688) and that “soon/ Were lost, bewildered among woods immense” (700-701). This part of his adventure reminds us of Thoreau’s asseveration that sometimes we have to get lost in the woods to find our way. Wordsworth did not water down this moment of uncertainty and fear that he and his friend had to go through. They had to spent the night there “but *could not* sleep, tormented by the stings/ Of insects, which, with the noise like that of noon,/ Filled all the woods;” (711-713). It is interesting to take this narration of Wordsworth into account because nature is not always a synonym of paradise; it can be harsh and it can test the human being’s resilience.

Thoreau was an example of full adaptation to the cold winters at the Walden Pond but still he was always looking forward for the first signs of spring (441). These encounters between the man and the wilderness are never easy but when he overcomes the difficulties he will be more in harmony with his

environmental and most of all he will feel more self-reliant and ready to face new challenges in his life.

Wordsworth did not have such an involvement with nature as Thoreau did, in other words, his absences out of doors were temporary because later he would come back to be with family and friends. He did not cope with such loneliness and isolation as Thoreau at Walden Pond. However, his walks led him to other countries where different languages were spoken and they helped Wordsworth to have a deeper understanding of the political and social situation in other nations such as France, where the effects of the French Revolution were still obvious. Of all of his journeys, it does not matter where they took him, he tried to keep these pleasant memories and when he talked about them he declared in Book XIV: “may they ne’er/ Fade from remembrance!” (1-2).

So as to do this evocation of the past, the blank verse was the option chosen to write *The Prelude* because it allowed him to be more fluent in his discourse. This type of verse is more suitable if the author wants to use a less flowery language that makes it easier to grasp its meaning. We have to remember that Wordsworth’s main aim was to use the common language as the vehicle of expression in order to make poetry more accessible to people, as he said in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*: “Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men” (303). This intention regarding language was praised by Thoreau, as Newman (2005) explains:

Thoreau valued Wordsworth on the poet’s own terms, as expressed in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*: he appreciated the democratic implications of the decision to write in “a selection of language really used by men,” a decision that reflected a poet’s “rational sympathy” for “the great and universal passions of men. (*Our Common Dwelling* 85-86)

The American writer agrees with Wordsworth that there should be a democratization of culture and, in particular, of poetry that has always been a genre intended to an intellectual minority. In the first chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau addressed to “poor students” (168) and to an audience with few resources, that almost has no money to buy a meal, much less to purchase a book: “some of you, we all know are poor (...) I have no doubt that some of you who read this book are unable to pay for all dinners which you have eaten” (170). Thereby Wordsworth and Thoreau create a literature within the reach of

all, conveying their love for nature to the rest of citizens and making them aware of its importance to the human being. Nonetheless, it is debatable to what extent *Walden* can be read by anyone because it does not lack of complexity and it contains a considerable number of intertexts that only a cultured reader can fully understand.

Lastly, it has to be pointed out that the rhythm of the narration is agile due to the fluency in the language. In *The Prelude* and *Walden*, the “I” of the author is the voice that guides the reader, taking him to his memories. The writer becomes a story-teller of his experiences and he shares what he has learnt from them.

In the “Conclusion” of *Walden*, Thoreau encourages the individual to be himself and to not be conditioned by what is expected from him because “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer” (462-463). The walking of each person is as different and unique as his way of seeing the world.

Wandering is also a main feature in Book XIV. It ends with an allusion to an excursion made to Northern Cambria and in the last stanzas of this poem, Wordsworth advises: “O Friend! The termination of my course/ Is nearer now, much nearer;” (374-375). The use of the adverb “nearer” refers to a distance and in this case the reader is like a walker who is getting closer to his destination which is the ending of *The Prelude*.

Throughout his stay at Walden Pond, Thoreau experienced life in all its intensity and he said that “I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours” (460). Therefore, walking is what leads us to our destiny. In every path there are some obstacles but if we overcome them and keep moving forward, we will realize that what we want is not so far away. The voyage of a real walker never ends just as the words of Thoreau and Wordsworth never cease to take us on a journey towards the very essence of the human being that is finally rediscovered in the wilderness.

## 4. Conclusion

Throughout this research we have analyzed diverse aspects of *Walden* and *The Prelude*. Their origins and the ideas of the thinkers who influenced in their creation have been studied because an author and his work cannot be understood if we do not take into consideration his background. We are made of the stories that we have been told to, the ones that we have lived and those that will come in the future.

Thoreau explained that he left the woods because he “had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one” (460). Our existence is riddled with unexpected adventures, “life is a series of surprises” (413) as Emerson said. We never know what will happen but in this universe that the uncertainty rules, we should never forget where we come from. Wordsworth and Thoreau tried to make people aware of the importance of nature to the spiritual growth of the human being. What they did was not an escape from reality or from the present, it was a reflection about the man that transcended time and space. They sensed the alienation of society and fought against those values that threatened to stifle the freedom of the individual.

Actually, freedom and imagination are concepts that have been mentioned in this paper due to their prominence in Wordsworth’s and Thoreau’s way of thinking. These terms are equally related to the wilderness in which the authors had to get lost in order to reappear again as men wiser and more conscious of their own limits. This is precisely one of the mistakes that we usually make; we think we know more than we do. Nature continues to be a mystery to us, whose essence we do not get to grasp. This duality between the physical and visible world and immaterial and invisible world are reflected in *Walden* and *The Prelude*. The imagination acts as a link of union between both spheres and it is the means through which Thoreau and Wordsworth find their way to translate their feelings and experiences into words whose communicative power have not declined with the years. In fact, they have become increasingly important.

It has taken time to finally realize how relevant is nature in our lives, but currently there is more concern about our environment. Perhaps that is why the

work of Thoreau has awakened interest nowadays and why there are a rising number of studies about *Walden*. The personal involvement of Thoreau in his contemplation of nature is what distinguishes him from other authors and one of the main reasons why he keeps drawing our attention. For his part, Wordsworth showed new ways of experiencing nature and how it is constant presence in our memories from our childhood to our adulthood. Paraphrasing a verse of Book XIV of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth and Thoreau can be considered as “Prophets of Nature” (444) whose mission was to encourage a greater connection to nature and, in the light of events, they certainly accomplished it.

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