

**Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina**

**A READING OF THOREAU'S "WALKING" AS A  
TRAVEL NARRATIVE**

**Camila Alvares Pasquetti**

**2005**

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/INGLÊS E LITERATURA  
CORRESPONDENTE

**A READING OF THOREAU'S "WALKING" AS A TRAVEL  
NARRATIVE**

Por  
Camila Alvares Pasquetti

Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em cumprimento  
parcial dos requisitos para obtenção de grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

FLORIANÓPOLIS

Junho, 2005  
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/INGLÊS E LITERATURA  
CORRESPONDENTE

**A READING OF THOREAU'S "WALKING" AS A TRAVEL  
NARRATIVE**

Por  
Camila Alvares Pasquetti

Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em cumprimento  
parcial dos requisitos para obtenção de grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

FLORIANÓPOLIS

Junho, 2005

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank everybody with whom I have exchanged stories during the period I was researching and writing this thesis. Special thanks to Eliza, Joe, Béco, Vincent, Eli, Aline, Telma and Juliana. Thanks to Gabe Rodrigues for our dialogues on history, to Alberto Siedler for the great dictionary, and to Daniel Moore, my careful reader. Thanks to all my professors, especially to José Roberto O’Shea, who opened the doors of his library to me, to Anelise Corseuil, who guided me at the beginning of this work, to Eliana Avila for the great course on “War and Poetry,” and for participating in my committee together with Glaucia Gonçalves – your comments really shook my mind! Thanks to Marta Oliveira, for introducing me to American Literature. Thanks to my professor and adviser Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins who encouraged me in this research and who enriched my text with her poetic view. Thanks to Cleber Teixeira, whose love for books is contagious. To my parents Mara and Carlos, for everything. I also thank the support of Arlene, Nelson and Muriel, my “relatives” in Florianópolis. Finally, I feel glad for having had the opportunity to do this research at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina.

June 7, 2005

## ABSTRACT

A READING OF THOREAU’S “WALKING” AS A TRAVEL NARRATIVE

CAMILA ALVARES PASQUETTI

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA  
2005

Supervising Professor: Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins

This thesis analyzes Henry David Thoreau's essay "Walking," first published after his death in 1862, with respect to the history of the United States and European travel accounts in Imperial times. Attentive reader of European nature writers and explorers, Thoreau was recalled by poets and literature writers, and also became celebrated by the field of environmental studies, being referred as founder of ecology. Thoreau's walks in wilderness, accounted in "Walking," contradict and at the same time endorse the means through which the United States people were running west at the time: he frequently goes in the same direction, but shows no hurry to get at any place, and calmly searches for what is "holy" along the path. Thoreau's emphatic discourse against private property confronts the main United State's principles, while the author creates his figure as a hero of the individual rebelliousness, a defendant of his own way to walk. Like in other travel accounts where the narrator finds himself in an uncivilized space, the "I," who is the hero of the narrative, sees his western horizon as empty of culture, a place to be founded, this time, upon a new mythology grounded on nature. "Walking" is read here as a transcendental manifesto about movement and perception that is much related to the history of its composition and to its readings since then.

No. de páginas: 107

No. de palavras: 31.162

## RESUMO

### UMA LEITURADE “WALKING”, DE THOREAU, COMO NARRATIVA DE VIAGEM

CAMILA ALVARES PASQUETTI

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

Professora Orientadora: Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins

Esta dissertação analisa o ensaio “Walking”, de Henry David Thoreau, publicado após sua morte em 1862, sob a ótica dos relatos de viagens europeus de tempos imperiais e da história dos Estados. Leitor atento de narrativas de viagens e textos naturalistas Europeus, Thoreau foi retomado por poetas e também celebrado no campo dos estudos ambientais, sendo considerado por estudiosos da área como fundador da ecologia. Suas caminhadas na natureza selvagem relatadas em “Walking” contradizem e ao mesmo tempo reiteram os meios pelos quais os Estados Unidos avançavam à oeste naquele tempo: apesar de Thoreau frequentemente caminhar na mesma direção, ele não demonstra ansiedade em chegar à algum destino específico, mas busca calmamente aquilo que aos seus olhos pode ser sagrado ao longo do caminho. O discurso enfático de Thoreau contra a propriedade privada confronta os princípios morais de seu país, ao passo que Thoreau se promove como o herói símbolo da rebeldia individualista, um defensor da sua própria maneira de caminhar. Como em outras narrativas de viagem onde o narrador se vê em território não-civilizado, o “eu”, herói da narrativa, enxerga seu horizonte à oeste como um espaço vazio de cultura onde uma nova mitologia, desta vez baseada na natureza, está para ser fundada. “Walking” é lido aqui como um manifesto transcendental sobre movimento e percepção que está intrinsecamente ligado à história de sua composição e à suas leituras desde então.

## INTRODUCTION

The writings of Henry David Thoreau are widely known in the United States and abroad. Critics such as Lawrence Buell recognize Thoreau's high popularity and, moreover, take as a premise in their critical work the readers' reverence for Thoreau as a United States folk hero (Buell 175). Fernando Gabeira, Brazilian writer, journalist and political activist, recognizes Thoreau as the ascendant of several modern rebels (Drummond 8). These testimonies are examples of how Thoreau has been read around the globe throughout the years, leading his writings to be broadly considered canonical. Buell says "Thoreau has become the closest approximation to a folk hero that American literary history has ever seen and (...) Concord is still America's most sacred literary spot (...)." The word *canon*, as used here, and according to Buell, refers mainly to the cultism that a literary piece provokes, and the study of its "canonical investment," that is, "the rituals of remembrance through which those regarded for whatever reason as literary heroes become enshrined" can not be denied or left aside (175).

Thoreau's works reveal an intense preoccupation with the nature of perception (and the perception of nature), presenting a concern with his time and society, but also a preoccupation with the future, which his eyes cannot capture but his mind can visualize. In order to talk about Thoreau's ideas on perception, I recur to Sergio Cardoso's article "O Olhar Viajante (do Etnólogo)." In it, the author discusses the difference between the acts of *seeing* ("ver") and *looking* ("olhar") in relation to the concept of travel ("viagem"). He points out that the act of *seeing* the world is our most primitive certitude: things are what the eyes assimilate. For the one who sees, nothing is strange, the world is plain and each part of it composes the whole. The act of *looking*, however, carries an intentional connotation: the subject

who looks has the power and responsibility of interfering with the object that is being regarded. The look, therefore, is not passive; one moves forward instigated by the curiosity to “see again,” or to “see the new” (348). “The look thinks, it is vision made of questionings” (349 my translation<sup>1</sup>), and the one who looks transforms the object that is regarded by interpreting the gaps in its significance. Cardoso connects this differentiation between *seeing* and *looking* with the idea of traveling: one who preserves a stable life close to things that can be reached or seen, is put in opposition to one who looks for the unknown, thus, who travels. The eye of the traveler is the eye which moves in space and time in search for the strange, for what is unfamiliar, that is, for what is not stable or ordered – it is the eye which looks for the “other” and for the “new.” In this sense, traveling is primarily an activity related to the look, instead of to physical displacement, and this is one of my arguments to read Thoreau’s “Walking” as a travel account.

Thoreau is broadly known as an author who privileged a life close to nature and who strongly criticized the established social orders. These assumptions are well represented in Thoreau’s most popular books, *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience*. It could be said, though, that these two works have nothing to do with literature of travel since this subject rarely takes place in the texts— while *Walden* recounts a period of life in the woods of Walden Pond, *Civil Disobedience* emerged from the reflections Thoreau made when spending a night in jail. According to biographies, Thoreau has never traveled far from his home-state Massachusetts (Sayre 1043), but still his first publication, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* is itself a travel account along the rivers Concord and Merrimack—mentioning travel writers and practical advices for travelers about what to take on a journey (Adams 145). But even if *Walden* is seen by critics like Stephen Adams as an account of a journey

---

<sup>1</sup> Cardoso’s discussion relies upon word concepts – the translation of those terms in quotes may no fit well into English: “O olhar pensa; é a visão feita de interrogação” (349).

where Thoreau sojourns Walden Pond “after traveling a good deal in Concord” (145), still to read him as a travel writer means to face the contradictions present in the kind of travel he proposes. Reading Thoreau as a travel writer today demands a certain awareness of the gap between the notions of traveling at his time and today.

It is not difficult to assert, however, that Thoreau’s account of the time he lived by Walden Pond represents the practice of a life outside society, as well as we could think of his experience in the jail as another practice of going beyond social frontiers. As a Transcendental writer, Thoreau is already committed to the idea of going beyond limits, and this very fact demonstrates his characteristic as a traveler, one whose *look* is made of questioning. If trips are experiences with the strange (Cardoso 359) it is not distance which will characterize a journey to Thoreau, but the curiosity about the world where he can wander. By writing about his experiences, Thoreau made his walks become a retelling of his life and the moment he lived. His friend and “teacher” Ralf Waldo Emerson commented that walking, to Thoreau, was more important than anything (“Thoreau”, 30). Thoreau’s essay “Walking”, then, may be the most representative writing of Thoreau in what concerns the perception of the outdoors together with physical displacement.

My purpose in this work, then, is to present a reading of “Walking” as a travel piece by exploring Thoreau’s look upon his space and time towards a personal, but also collective travel theory. My specific research questions are: How is Thoreau related to the European explorers and to natural history—that is, what kind of travel writing does he produce? What is Thoreau’s view of America and what is his interpretation of it? Based on a historical perspective, is Thoreau’s proposal of walking westwards a dissonant or confirming practice in relation to European imperialism and United States expansionism? What are the implications of “Walking” at a time when travel writing was a fashion in Europe and mass

tourism was beginning in England, and how can we read his travel theory with today's eyes?

Through his autobiographic practice, Thoreau constructs himself as the hero of his own narration, this way representing history and being wrapped by it at the same time, as Balsing defends by stating that "autobiography thus bridges public and private life, the hero of autobiography is the paradoxical private-person-as-public-hero" (xv). Because Thoreau uses several times the pronoun "we" my argument is that this pronoun represents the readers who, when identified with Thoreau's "I," are included as walkers and invited to join him. But the narrator alerts that the Walker should perceive his own environment and awake for his belonging in his/her own space and time. Thoreau's history serves as mirror for the readers, who are compelled to compare their walking to that of the narrator, but also calls attention that every history is personal and each one has to trace their own steps.

I will constantly be employing a historical perspective in order to enlighten in which ways Thoreau is representing and being represented by history, and by doing that I will try to answer the above questions. In order to do so, I have selected here two works that will help to enlighten the proposed discussion: *The Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*, first published in 1952, and *Imperial Eyes - Travel Writing and Transculturation*, by Mary Louise Pratt (1992). The former reference will help me to draw a panorama of the history of the United States in its ideological and materialist background, while the latter will help me to imprint criticism and the political position necessary for analyzing literature of travel today. I will also be reviewing, through Pratt, some names that illustrate the literature of travel that becomes popular in Europe before and at the time Thoreau lived, to contrast their purposes of writing and traveling.

The peculiar manifestation of Romanticism, drawn by Emerson under the term Transcendentalism (of which Thoreau also a major representative) in the Independent United States, is a prolific moment for historical, cultural and literary studies since it characterizes the time of formation of identity in the new independent colonies. Transcendentalism proposed to look for nature as a spiritual “teacher” of the American people. It is important to notice that the United States were the pioneers in the struggle for independence and elaboration of a new proper intellectual and economic characteristic. This means that a dense body of American literature from after the mid nineteenth century has a ground in the transcendental philosophy.

The first chapter of this thesis is dedicated to foreground the events that were taking place in European imperialist politics towards its colonies: the endeavor to seize and calculate the world through several expeditions inland the American and African territories. These travel accounts illustrated some of the readings that Thoreau incorporates to “Walking” and they will be contrasted to Thoreau’s work in Chapters 2 and 3. Then, in the next sections, I review some aspects of the History of the United States that I found meaningful to better understand the ideological and economical background of Thoreau’s time, to later suggest how “Walking” contradicts or endorses these “American principles.”

Through a close reading of “Walking,” in the second chapter, we will see how the author’s creation becomes a public example to be followed. There I will be exposing some of the problems in understanding subject, form, and style in “Walking.” At the same time I will be comparing his words with his cultural and political background, sketched in chapter one, in order to understand what kind of poetics he emphasizes. We will see that, for Thoreau, the Walker, with a capital “W,” is not the mere idler or vagabond, but the one who goes to a “Holy Land” in

his walks (“Walking” 71). In accordance with the mood of self-reliance promoted by Enlightenment, his ideal is not to have any home, but to be at home everywhere (72). At his time, Thoreau recognizes people around him as mere “faint-hearted crusaders”, and rare Walkers. Walking for him is an artistic event, not given to everyone but to the ones that were born with the genius for sauntering (71).

But “Walking” has undertaken a long journey from its first drafts, its delivery as speech in the Concord Lyceum, and today’s possibility of downloading it from the Internet. In chapter 3, I will be dealing with some of the resonances that Thoreau’s works in general, and “Walking” specifically have generated in literature and environmental studies. I will also investigate the author’s ideas as a confirming but also contradictory practice of that of expansionism westwards, suggesting that, however representing the figure of an individual white male, his look upon history and his theory of movement is rather an original and peculiar one.

CHAPTER 1  
BEFORE THE TEXT: MOVEMENTS IN EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN  
HISTORIES

1.1 Moving Outward: the look that searches for “the new”

In *The Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*, Herbert W. Edwards and Rod W. Horton select two main interpretations of the so-called American history given by Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles A. Beard. Turner points out the strong *idealism* that pushed settlers to the West of the Northern American territory and the “democratizing effect of a continually expanding frontier,” while Beard stresses the economic *opportunism* that, instead of religious or moral convictions, had determined colonists and political leaders to colonize North American territories. For some time, these two interpretations were seen as mutually exclusive, but Horton and Edwards propose to see them as complementary viewpoints for the study of the United States’ literature and the dynamics of its civilization. Materialism and moral conviction are, according to them, the impulse of the people in the States towards “the formation of political parties, the opening of the West, the development of industries, the slavery question, the civil war, the emergence of that nation as a world Power”(5); that is, the basis of their national identity.

It is unthinkable that our colonists could have survived the long trip from Europe, the hostility of the wilderness, or the hardships of a pioneer existence without the bulwark of some deeply laid idealism, but it is equally unconceivable that they would have persisted in their struggle to found a new nation without the powerful and ever-present conviction that their efforts were going to pay large dividends in hard cash. Just as the Spanish explorers of the sixteenth century took as their motto Fé y Oro (Faith and Gold), so did the builders of the United States implicitly consecrate their efforts on the divergent altars of God and Mammon (5).

To better understand U.S. expansionism in contrast with the European imperialism, I will review the history of European naturalists and their relation to the wild as well as their travel accounts. I will also be contrasting transcendentalist idealism of living in “the perpetual presence of the sublime” (as Emerson, father of Transcendentalism, suggests in “Nature”), with the intellectual convictions that some naturalists helped to create in order to support what Pratt calls “European Planetary Consciousness.”

In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt elucidates the question of through whose eyes the meeting of different cultures is narrated and examines how Romanticism has been constructed upon this relation between Europeans and people from the colonies. Based on travel writings since the 1730’s, Pratt illustrates how travel writing has produced the “other parts of the world” for European readership, that is, how these writings about the “New World” and Africa produced in Europe have betrayed or legitimized the empire (5). Under the concept of *transculturation* the author focuses on how the subordinated (located in the periphery) receive and appropriate the metropolitan modes of representation and how this periphery also helps to draw the metropolis within asymmetrical power relations (6). The majority of sources for this study are texts written by Europeans for Europeans, describing land and interpersonal relations in the colonies. Some of these readings became extraordinarily popular and turned travel literature into a profitable business.

Another key expression created by Pratt to designate a prolific moment in travel accounts is that of the *contact zone*, where both colonizers and colonized interact, and where *transculturation happens*:

A “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and

colonized, or travelers and “travelées”, not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of co presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radical and asymmetrical relations of power (7).

The chief question when trying to identify the moments of *transculturation* in “Walking,” is that of identifying the “subjects” (especially travelées) of the text, and their “relations to each other,” since the essay strongly emphasizes solitude and individualism. So one of my tasks in this study is to analyze how contacts are characterized in the essay, and thus, to question the relation of power implicit when the author, the narrator, the hero and the “other”—namely the natural elements and the people the author refers to along the narrative—meet. Specifically, I will be reviewing the position of Henry David Thoreau as an author that much influenced literature, social and ecological movements in particular periods in the late nineteenth and in the twentieth centuries. What are some events and ideas that were taking place at his time and what are his ideological backgrounds? At the same time that Thoreau is not a European born “imperialist,” he is the descendent of French and English families, therefore a white male, not a Native American subordinated to the whites’ rules. From another perspective, the fact of being a white man does not mean he shares the anxieties and beliefs of a collectivity.

According to Pratt, studies in Romanticism and Imperialism not often consider travel accounts as sources for understanding this period (i). Today, however, travel writing has become a fundamental tool for the rereading of romantic texts: they relate moments of contact between cultures, as the activity of traveling means also the mirroring of oneself into the different “other”. Travel writing helped to construct the Europeans’ image of the American and African continents, demonstrating how the relations between people form different continents were and still are built.

## 1.2 The European view: describing and organizing the world

Before entering the subject of Transcendentalism and, specifically, of Thoreau in the context of “American” expansionism, I will review what I consider to be some of Thoreau’s ancestors: the early naturalists. Some of them are mentioned in “Walking”, thus, explicitly demonstrating Thoreau’s knowledge and critical view about natural history. The book *Imperial Eyes* will be helpful not only for eliciting the role that Pratt’s method and principles play in today’s literary analyses, but also for its review of the writings of naturalist explorers that were sent into the American and African continents from the 1730’s to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Back in the mid 1700’s, Europe inaugurated a new era of capitalism. After the era of maritime exploration, marked by the introduction of slavery and the violent possession of land, European nations intensified the territorial exploration in search for raw material and commercial trade inland. The “European Planetary Consciousness” was being consolidated (9) and, among other things, it aimed at preventing other powers from taking the domain of the American “discovered” territory, and to spread to the colonies the logic of trade, searching for cheaper workers and new consumers. Scientific competition in Europe was taking place between countries, with “science” as the motto—and the excuse—for the construction of this global notion. The whole scientific apparatus created by European nations received strong investments in order to develop this phase of colonization, which built its basis on natural history.

Also in Europe the scientific race would determine which nation would be on top, with France and England leading the argument about the shape of the world—a sphere, according to the French Cartesian theory, or a spheroid, flat at the

poles, as claimed Newton. European governors, perceiving their lands to be exhausted and needing to expand commerce at times of industrial revolution, sent naturalists and botanists abroad to describe what the Imperial territorial domains were like. Their mission was to seize the territories and their natural resources in order to facilitate control over them, to start a new form of domination through trade and thus, to guarantee their possessions.

Intellectually, the eighteenth century is marked by the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement that praised science instead of mysticism, rationalism instead of metaphysics. Not that scientists denied the existence of God. Newton himself believed in a supreme force or “Supreme Architect” of the “Great Machine” that operates through natural laws (Edwards and Horton 55), but from these times on, the discourse in science will increasingly dispense with religious interpretations.

Several were the men sent abroad as a mean to explore the inner lands of the new worlds. One of the few survivals of the expeditions led by France, with the cooperation of Spain, was La Condamine, who became famous due to the success of his trip. It was considered a “diplomatic triumph for the scientific European community” (Pratt 16) despite (and also because of) the several difficulties that were faced on the journey towards the interior of South America. Claiming himself the spokesman of the expedition around the year 1745, his words praised scientific improvement as a benefit for all nations. Science was assumed to be the reason for conquering other lands, though this argument could not hide material interests: “on the one hand, dominant ideologies made a clear distinction between the (interested) pursuit of wealth and the (disinterested) pursuit of knowledge; on the other hand, competitions among nations continued to be the fuel for European expansion abroad” (Pratt, 18).

The search for gold and raw materials was explicit in the survivor's texts and the kingdoms' expeditions—which sent massive amounts of men and goods they were to exchange with the natives inland. Also, the idealism engendered in the European readership's mind about the wonders of the New World created both an economic and an ideological expectation towards America and Africa that ended up stimulating the dispute among nations and a great consumption of travel literature books. “The jungle,” according to La Condamine's writings and as concluded by Pratt (20), “remains a world of fascination and danger”: this is how America was seen through Europeans eyes.

The “(disinterested) pursuit of knowledge” as Pratt argues, was an excuse and a tool in the European search of wealth since, in the name of science, and due to it, new territories were being acquired by the Imperial Europe. So, just as Horton and Edwards suggest, the ideological motivation<sup>2</sup> was as important as the need for power in the dislocation to the west and south of the planet. In addition to all the physical displacement, ideology also takes part in the image Europeans had of themselves and their land through the figure of the others, the inhabitants of the “other parts of the world.”

A major personality in naturalist studies, according to Pratt and also mentioned by Thoreau in “Walking,” is Carl Linné (who changed his last name to the Latin correspondent Linnaeus), the botanist who in *The System of Nature* creates the botanical nomenclature that is still used today for the scientific names of plants and animals. The aim of Linné's work was to classify all the plants existing in nature, and later on, following critical appointments, to describe the human types

---

<sup>2</sup> Though a complex term that could be exhaustively discussed, through “ideology” I restrict my understanding as “a system of ideas and ideals, especially one that forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy” (Oxford American Dictionary). “Ideology” is seen here as opposed to “materialism”, but they were both intrinsic and complementary to the process of the western colonization, as Horton and Edwards argue.

existing in the “New Worlds” by distinguishing their physical and behaviorist peculiarities. The main importance of his research, as Pratt points out, is that it served as a model for several other researchers, students and disciples, to spread themselves around the globe in order to collect plants and insects. Naturalist studies gave continuity to the global categorization of the specimens:

Specimen gathering, the building up of collections, the naming of new species, the recognition of known ones, became standard themes in travel and travel books. Alongside the frontier figures of the seafarer, the conqueror, the captive, the diplomat, there began to appear everywhere the benign, decidedly literate figure of the “herborizer,” armed with nothing more than a collector’s bag, a notebook, and some specimen bottles, deserving nothing more than a few peaceful hours alone with the bugs and the flowers (27).

As a son of the naturalists, though in a different time and space from those mentioned above, Thoreau also sees the wilderness as a synonym of freedom, in contrast with the mere civil and cultural freedom inherited from European culture. More radical than the early botanists, however, he proposes “to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society” (“Walking” 71). So, instead of “a few peaceful hours alone with bugs and flowers,” we will see in chapter 2 that Thoreau proposes to live his life *intensely* among bugs and flowers, struggling, in his individualistic proposal, to detach himself from other travel writers.

Probably the most important of the botanists was Linné, because of the popularity of his public presentations and the publication of his book *The System of Nature*. Worth noticing is the fact that natural descriptions were a recurrent subject in literature and journalistic texts, but for the first time, after Linné, these descriptions were placed not as footnotes or digressions in the narrative, but as parts of the narratives themselves, constituting plots of travelers’ stories (Pratt 28). Also, at the same time, natural history pushed the activity of collecting plants to the level

of a popular hobby. A short time later, botanical gardens became a fashion all over Europe.

The creation of the botanical gardens in Europe was an important outcome of the popular fever of love for nature, especially meaningful if contrasted to what Thoreau considers a “meager assemblage of curiosities” when talking about his house’s front garden (99). The mockery Thoreau makes of gardens also points to his strong criticism of the cultivation of land in opposition to his praise for the wilderness of the West where, as he believes, real freedom is to be experienced. Other consequences of the emphasis given to natural history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the creation of jobs for botanists and scientists, the foundation of several amateur and professional societies linked to nature and the development of such technologies as printing presses, instruments for collecting specimens and the fast increase of the means of transportation. With all these technological advances, two centuries after the first world circumnavigation<sup>3</sup>, and the several ones that followed it, the second part of the “planetary project” according to Pratt, was that of mapping the coastlines. The routes to the new worlds having been found, the following step, the systematizing of nature, took place as a way to represent the European domain. This period or phase of European capitalism goes along with the intensification of map printing and all the social modifications mentioned above. Ideologically, through the practices of describing and naming every square of the earth, the Europeans could get closer to what once belonged exclusively to the field of the imagination. The scientific spirit imposes an order on what once was unknown and considered chaotic. Scientists’ mission was to infinitely organize the world in categories and make all this “knowledge” available to commercial and political demands.

---

<sup>3</sup> 1519-22, led by Portuguese Ferdinand Magellan, with the support of King Charles I of Spain.

One by one the planet's life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European based patterns of global unity and order. The (lettered, male European) eye that held the system could familiarize ("naturalize") new sites/sights immediately upon contact, by incorporating them into the language of the system. (Pratt 31)

By the act of naming the strange world and reproducing natural environments through botanical gardens and collections of specimens organized in museums, people in Europe could now feel familiarized with the New World without necessarily moving westwards or southwards in voyages. Literature about travel, at the same time, raised a great interest in the noble and upper middle class in Europe (lettered and male, as Pratt reminds us). They wanted to join expeditions "in the name of science" as Linné's pupils. This extreme organization of the world influenced different aspects of life in Europe: statistics procedures started to be developed in order to estimate the number of dead, born, sick, married, etc. among populations (as the example of Sweden, which developed a whole systematization of knowledge of its population); bureaucracy and militarization, which are considered by Pratt as the "central instruments of empire" (35), now followed standard patterns of operation. The production and control of firearms also contributed to the contrast that could be found between the rural and the urban, between the primitive and the developed parts of the globe.

"The systems of nature were projected within European borders as well as beyond them. The herborizers were as happy in the countryside of Scotland or southern France as they were in the Amazon or southern Africa" (35). Besides this impression that every place was likely to be counted and fitted into categories, a gap existed in the discourses about the urban and non-urban worlds. The systematization of the world made people and places be seen merely as countable aspects of landscape and society, and thus, easily controlled. The towns were receiving more and more people from the countryside, who were looking for work

and soon formed an enormous working class. The upper classes in Britain began investing their money in trading companies that went to the East and West Indies, which were the "new developing areas" (Mc Dowell 108). A great excitement was growing among Europeans in view of the new possibility of profiting from international trade.

This general European view at the time of the colonies and their people corresponds to the apex of racism, something that travel writing well confirms. La Condamine's words describe the American lands as a mixture of "fascination and fear." Linné himself and his disciples around the globe began to categorize and differentiate human races, separating the Wild, the Asian, the African American, the monsters (eunuchs, dwarfs and giants) from the European. But humans were no plants and, therefore, such characteristics as *behavior* had to be discerned: Americans (as if they were the same people throughout the continent) were characterized as "obstinate, content, free, and regulated by customs" in comparison to Europeans, as "gentle, acute, inventive, governed by laws" (32). The European also saw himself in superior terms as being a "man of science," in opposition to the "man of fortune" (34). These men of science, however, all had a commercial mission of contributing to the mercantile expansion. It was not by chance that expeditions like James Cook's to the South Seas were all financed in search of commercial opportunities. The appropriation of the world and man, through scientific systematization and enslavement, is one of the most explicit characteristics of this era as the opening and controlling of new routes characterized the time of maritime expansion.

The mid-eighteenth century was not an easy time for European imperialism, since a number of diseases defeated white men in the interiors of Africa and indigenous rebellions were taking place in America and the Caribbean Islands.

Cook, the great navigator, was murdered in Polynesia; Britain lost its main colony; and France was supporting several other independence movements in Spanish America. All these happenings made the discourses which defended expansionism as a possible humanitarian act fall into discredit. A new legitimizing ideology was then necessary to subvert the idea that capital was the main reason for Europe to expand abroad. Sentimentalism begins to appear more often in travel narratives. Such writers as Peter Kolb at Cape of the Good Hope, in South Africa, tried to free the natives from negative stereotypes, adopting a humanist discourse as a solution to disguise European guilt. He also praised the value of non-European life ways (Pratt 45) such as the lack of government, professions, laws and institutions. However, the indigenous voice is rarely quoted in the texts produced at the end of 18th century. Sentimentalism and eroticism were other ways of guaranteeing the innocence of the European in the contact zones. The feeling of guilt for the conquest is also suggested by texts written at Cape Cod and may explain the shift in the ways of demonstrating innocence. Both Cape Cod and Cape of Good Hope are described by Pratt as the contact zones, where Africans and Europeans interact. Africans were seen not as a commodity as in colonial times, but as people who could become producers and consumers. Questions on abolitionism began to be raised by the end of the 18th century.

A writer who is an example of this shift in ideology is Mungo Park (1771-1806?). His personal adventures inaugurate the insertion of the narrator, himself, as the protagonist and central hero of his writing. In a sense, he establishes a popular literature and marks a kind of writing that places the individual in the center of the narrative, representing and reinforcing the notion of individualism. Nature is not described exhaustively, but is part of the unpredictable that the narrator will face. Social relations are now the focus, and they appear dramatized in his texts.

According to Pratt, here authority lies in the authenticity of the experience. Park's perspective about trade is not that of wanting to profit in any sense, as at the end of these adventures the only thing left is himself—indicating how great the hero is. Also, traveling for curiosity is noted in Park as in no other writer of the contact zones before, calling attention for the pretense interest of the writer/explorer while entering inland (87).

Another figure that gave a huge contribution to natural studies and travel writing is that of Alexander Von Humboldt. Humboldt was contemporary to Thoreau and read by him, as well as by a great number of readers at the time. He was a highborn German man raised among French aristocracy who aimed to join the expeditions overseas. According to Pratt, Humboldt's main goal was to believe in both man and nature as inseparable (115). With Spanish authorization and at Humboldt's total expense, the voyager and his partner Aimé Bonpland arrived in Venezuela in 1799 at a time when several revolutions were taking place in America, as mentioned above. Interestingly, one of their aims was to climb the Andean peak of Chiborazo, believed then to be the highest mountain in the world. They failed. Besides that frustration, several political contacts were made, as both explorers met a good number of naturalists and political figures such as Thomas Jefferson, in a brief visit to the U.S., in 1802.

(...) Humboldt became a continental celebrity. The hunger for firsthand information on South America was widespread and intense, and Humboldt had made himself a walking encyclopedia. He gave lectures, organized meetings, wrote letters by the hundred, visited dignitaries, held forth tirelessly (and, for some, tiresomely) in salons. Meanwhile, he set teams of annotators and illustrators to work converting his collections and his notes into books. (Pratt 117)

Humboldt's books *Views of Nature* and *Views of Cordilleras* were then popular as no other travel account in Europe. At each return of his voyages, people

waited for his stories with great expectation. Specifically in these writings, the ones selected by Pratt, Humboldt constructs images based on his travel experiences between the years 1810 and 1850, together with Bonpland. These images, transcribed by him, transform what was barely imagined by the European into more realistic and intense images of America. Surely one should look for the original text to have a better idea of what Humboldt's descriptions are like, but for now, the following simplification is sufficient: the Amazon Forest is described as superabundant and tropical; the Andes and the Mexican volcanoes as snow-capped mountains; and the Venezuelan llanos and Argentinean pampas as vast interior plains (Pratt, 125). In a general view, Humboldt's reader could imagine that the American Continent was composed of mountains, plains and jungles. While Linné was a humble herborizer describing the visible world, Humboldt was an omniscient presence over the planet and over his reader, gathering what was visible and mixing it with invisible forces (124). Here we are not talking about the scientific writing alone, but about a whole project that surpasses the text and builds the popular image of its author.

The spiritual element now takes part in the European imagination of the American wilderness, and becomes also a main characteristic of Romantic estheticism. Pratt points out Humboldt's emphasis on harmony and the absorption of occult forces, aligned with industrialism and the machine age. Humboldt was not producing ego-centered sentimental narratives, as Park did before, but fusing science with narcissism, creating a new esthetics of the sublime (121). Like Columbus, he continued to create the image of the American continent as being empty of culture and society, a place where history was about to start. He believes himself to represent a new beginning for South America. According to Pratt, "The formulation is a peace-loving utopian one: none of the obstacles to occidentals'

progress appear in the landscape" (127). While Humboldt naturalized hierarchical racial relations between Europeans and non-European groups, he also sought to defend the revolutions in the United States and in France, as well as to condemn slavery. We will see in segment 1.4 that Transcendentalism in the United States also is marked by optimism through a spiritual look upon the world, which turns also to be a denouncement of slavery, political and social oppression and a aesthetics that reinforced self-reliance at the time of expansionism.

It is interesting to notice that Humboldt and Bonpland never surpassed the boundaries of the European infrastructure. This was probably due to a certain belief in the danger or difficulties that could be faced in lands which he described as "impenetrable" and "inundated." But they were curious enough to try to scale mountain peaks and to go as far as they could, as long as there was a European base nearby.

### 1.3 Into the North American Continent: opportunism

Along with European imperialism, American expansionism revealed similar ways of conquering the "unknown" world. A widespread interpretation of the colonization process in the American Continent would point out that while France, Portugal and Spain had maintained exploitative activities overseas, British people had given priority to settlement and the creation of a new society in their colonies. This is also what Horton and Edwards argue in *The Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*, pointing out the differences between these two types of colonization: those of exploitation and settlement. Based on this assumption, the authors aim at explaining the particular growth of the United States in comparison to other French and Spanish colonies. They recognize, however, the contradictions

present in the belief that colonization in the United States was, since its beginning, a pacific or non-exploitative process:

There is a darker side to the picture, for it was literally a conquest, as the Indians were soon to discover, and the very land itself was often treated as though it were a personalized enemy, to be attacked and conquered by fair means or foul. The present depleted state of some of our most important natural resources is mute evidence of the ruthlessness of this warfare with nature. (Horton and Edwards 123)

From a materialist point of view, the early moments of colonization in the United States can be explained by historical material evidence. Gold, the most precious richness that could be found in the New World, was not found in the immediate east coast of the States. Early on, then, the North American territory did not wake England's interest, except to be used as a colony of settlement, where the rebel group of Protestants could there make their living and be kept away from the monarchical territories. In this sense, European "priorities" in the colonization process were defined according exclusively to the material opportunism that could bring immediate richness to the metropolis<sup>4</sup>.

We can notice, however, at the moment Horton and Edwards discuss the origins of expansionism in the United States, that the ideological aspects of the founding of the English colonies are put in a superior stance when compared to material justifications. According to them, "in contrast with the more exploitative nature of her two greatest rivals, France and Spain, England had thought from the start in terms of permanent settlements, and her colonists were intent on laying in the wilderness the foundations of a new way of life" (122)<sup>5</sup>.

More than mere opportunity, the difference in the mode of colonization in

---

<sup>4</sup> For this interpretation of the colonization process in North America I thank my friend and history teacher Gabe Rodrigues. Different from common sense interpretations found in history books, this view eliminates the innocent but generally spread understanding of the colonization in North America: a utopian settlement based exclusively on ideology, through religion.

<sup>5</sup> Britain, however, also had exploitation colonies in the Caribbean Islands and Africa, fact which contradicts the common sense in which British colonialism is seen as based on settlement.

the United States is explained here by the strong ideology that led English people to face the wilderness of America, as if the aim of their lives was to face the new wild world. It can be argued that England, wanting to get rid of the dissenters, facilitated their exile in America, so that two problems would be solved at the same time: England would be free of people who were disturbing the monarchy, and the New World would be settled, guaranteeing the English possessions in North America<sup>6</sup>. What we see after the first settlements, anyway, as Horton and Edwards well state, is that territory devastation, in the colonial United States happened by foul means and is justified by the belief in the practice of commercialization as a fair way to possess strange lands. Europeans in America applied their market rules of buying and selling goods to local natives, for whom this logic did not exist. Soon the Indians were driven away throughout the continent, many pushed to the northeast, pursued by whites to “negotiate” their lands or suffering the extermination of their tribes. Land and environment, as we have seen, were often “treated as a personalized enemy.” This very statement already contradicts the notion mentioned that “colonists were intent on laying in the wilderness the foundations of a new way of life.” At least, interest in the wilderness was certainly not the guiding force of colonization in America.

A key word in the history of North American colonization, which will be further considered in Thoreau’s *Walking*, is “pilgrim.” The Pilgrims, as they are known, were the group of English Puritans who, fleeing from religious persecution, first came to occupy the North American continent and founded the colony of Plymouth. They first went to Holland, where different religions were permitted, but soon crossed the Atlantic Ocean to live in the New World. The Pilgrims arrived in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, in 1620, a place which Thoreau

---

<sup>6</sup> Same as note #4.

visited in 1839 and about which he wrote the accounts of this trip under the title *A Week on the Cape Cod and Merrimack Rivers*.

The place Thoreau was born, the politically agitated state of Massachusetts, is also significant if we think about the influences in his political ideas that derived from the first English settlers. The image of the pilgrim that is praised in Thoreau's "Walking" has a similar root to that of the first settlers who, under the religious conviction that they would there found their sacred land, began to build their society. It is true, as we have seen, that opportunism was also in the mind of these first settlers. In the pages that follow, I shall argue that it also somehow permeated Thoreau's "walks".

#### 1.4 European Intellectual Backgrounds in The United States: idealism

It seems necessary to briefly comment on the several political influences that the state of Massachusetts was passing through in terms of receiving ideas from Europe and abroad. Boston, the State's capital, had received through its port several Eastern products including printed information, as well as voyagers. It was by the time Emerson began preaching in the Unitarian Church that sacred books from the Eastern religions (like the Vedic writings of Bhagavadgita) started to arrive in the United States, being rapidly incorporated in the ways of thinking among some people. Since the first Pilgrims, Massachusetts had been the home of political discussion and controversy. By the time of the fight for independence, several battles and rebellious actions had taken place in Massachusetts, like the famous "Boston tea party."

In its intellectual life, the United States had also received and adapted much

of the scientific rationalism that was taking place in European minds. In the colonies, scientific rationalism was absorbed and transformed by intellectuals into a tool for confronting orthodox Puritan thinking. As Horton and Edwards remind us, the main part of the population by the end of the eighteenth century did not have high levels of formal education, and an intellectual philosophy, such as the Enlightenment, circulated mainly among intellectuals. However, the intellectual debate somehow reached and influenced the practices of the general population<sup>3</sup>. The Enlightenment dominated British minds from the end of the seventeenth century until the beginning of the eighteenth century (Horton and Edwards 50) and had a powerful impact on the United States by the end of the eighteenth century.

This attitude of mind (...) did much to destroy the Calvinistic conception of the Earth as a vale of tears and suffering and to convince man that, far from being infinitesimal plaything of an inscrutable God, he was rather the master of his fate and the hope of the universe. With its emphasis upon reason rather than authority, its encouragement of scientific inquiry, and its almost childlike belief in the perfectibility of man and his world, the Enlightenment marked a happy departure from Puritan authoritarianism and engendered a spirit of optimism especially fitting to the emergent Colonial culture. (50)

The global anxiety generated by scientific discoveries, the “passion” for exploration and the expansion of trade took over the place that mysticism and superstitions once held before. Man no longer believed in building his future for an after-death period, but focused his happiness on earth, and looked for more material values in life. The authority of the Church was at stake, since acceptance and faith could no longer correspond to the material and scientific climate that was taking place at the time. This atmosphere perfectly fit the “American” desire for wealth within the pre-independent U.S., helping to create a positive ideology which defended the achievement of success through happiness and self-reliance, beliefs that were taken as premises in the Declaration of Independence and which have been associated with the characteristics of the people of United States until

the beginning of the Civil War.

The major philosophers who inspired the ideals printed in the Declaration of Independence (and who since then have settled the chief values in United States society), according to Horton and Edwards, are Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. It is not my objective to deeply revise each of their philosophical trends, but some words have to be said about them in order to clarify the religious, material and ideological effervescence of the time that led up to Thoreau's life. The work of these thinkers echoes (in one way or another) in several texts produced in the United States since then, as they form the basis of American thought. The Declaration of Independence was the means through which "natural rights" were officially established as aims to be reached by all the individuals within the independent nation. From this moment on, government was constituted to serve as an agent for the people and to guarantee these natural rights of life, liberty and property.

Hobbes' (1588-1679) thinking had a strong Calvinist influence: he believed that man has a predatory and perverse tendency; government, though, is necessary to protect society from anarchy. According to him, man instinctively acts towards self-preservation, and the desire for power and selfishness would then be explicable. "(...) yet man is not a beast in the jungle, and realizes full well that the state of nature is equivalent only to anarchy, where brute force alone prevailed" (79). As a friend of King Charles II, he defended absolute monarchy as the only possible way to maintain order and suppress man's instincts, also avoiding rules' confusion and inefficiency. It is evident that the United States' philosophers of independence would not endorse such a proposal as the defense of monarchy, yet Hobbes's beliefs in the nature of man had wide acceptance among puritans, and among politicians (from puritan origins as well) as a confirmation of the desire to

acquire goods and properties—of “getting-on” in society. Hobbes’s ideas strongly echoed in Federalist politics of the early republic, especially under the name of Alexander Hamilton.

Locke (1632-1704) was the man who designed the “natural laws,” which I’ve mentioned before as related to humanitarianism, and these principles were almost entirely quoted by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence<sup>7</sup>. These laws were designed for the benefit and happiness of mankind, since Locke believed that man in the state of nature is not happy. Following Hobbes’ idea that man has an anarchical inclination that should be properly governed, Locke believed that “[man’s] predatory tendencies corrupt what should be an idyllic society into one that is anarchical and ruled only by the laws of the jungle” (Horton and Edwards 80), and that all men have a natural instinct for *life, liberty* and *property*. But government, according to Locke, should be limited in its powers, and seen as an agent that is responsible for people, under a contract and under justice. Property, for him, is inviolable, it is what distinguishes man from beasts, and he finds its justification in the Bible (“God has given earth to the children of men”). Moreover, property can only be ensured under government, which can never remove possessions. The basic principles of capitalism then, as designed here, have “justice” as the basis for authority: a limited constitutional state established with the legislative, executive and judicial powers.

Contrary to all the ideas that defended the evil nature of man, the French philosopher Rousseau (1712-1778) spoke out on against intellectualism, against property and in favor of equality. His principles have helped to provoke and consolidate the French revolution and they would go on to inspire Thomas

---

<sup>7</sup> Jefferson, however, changes “property” for “the pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration. Individual independence, creativity and choice were, for him, essential elements to establish freedom.

Jefferson to develop the new country's concept of democracy. Instead of having a negative impression of man's instincts, Rousseau believed in the natural goodness of man, saying that scientific study and learning leads him to corruption. Also art leads to consciousness about luxury, and thereby, to selfishness and inequality, the latter, understood by him as the cause of human unhappiness. In the work "Discourse on Inequality," Rousseau glorifies the "state of nature," where the fruits of the earth are available to all and man, a 'noble savage,' is ignorant, satisfied and perfectly free" (H & E 83). He believed that private property enslaved man and made him lose his natural goodness.

In "Discourse on Inequality," the government is attacked as an institution invented to protect private property, helping, thus, to promote inequality. "It is only when government is destroyed and man returns to a state of nature that equality can be restored" (Horton and Edwards 83). According to Horton and Edwards, the problem with all these arguments is that the "state of nature" only exists as a philosophical abstraction, and a return to it could only be done in a relative sense. *The Social Contract* is Rousseau's work that has probably best echoed in the United States, since the blaming of private property defended in previous writings was not at all desired in a society that was grounded in material advancement aimed to be spread over the continent. In this work, Rousseau advocates a democratic form of government, where governors would only act with the consent of the governed, thus serving thus, to the people. This contract he defends should occur through popular elections. Rousseau was suspicious about industry, which enslaved man and provoked inequality; therefore, he praised agrarian life.

## 1.5 Moving Westward: Science and Enlightenment in New England

By the mid and late eighteenth century, two other scientific studies in Europe provoked a shift in science and world exploration. They were Linnaeus' classification of plants and Buffon's studies in animal species. These studies had a great impact and served as the basis for the evolutionary theory designed by Darwin, which Thoreau later read and defended to Emerson in the last years of his life. It is true that natural science had become a popular hobby in the British colony, despite the fact that only a small percentage of the population had had formal instruction. Natural history (zoology, botany, geology) and natural philosophy (physics, chemistry, and mathematics) became fields of study at Universities at the same time that they became popular hobbies among the people also in the United States.

Benjamin Franklin is the figure that probably best represents this informal scientific spirit in the independent States. Although of Puritan (Presbyterian) origin, he struggled to contradict the negative Calvinist view of life on earth (Horton and Edwards 58). His booming ideas had a practical intention, that of serving as principles to be followed by every man in the United States; his great number of discoveries was presented as examples of how man should help to improve his fellows' lives. Franklin asserts in his *Autobiography* that there is a supreme deity that created the world and is responsible for its government, but that "the most acceptable Service of God was doing Good to man" (803). He states that it is more important to be a good citizen than a religious person, and criticizes the disrespect for different religions as an act that promotes disagreement and

conflict among fellows. “Vanity,” “happiness,” and “success” are elements of Franklin’s principles. His writings and his personality constitute an icon of national pride as he becomes the archetype of the “self-made American man” of the Enlightenment period, believed by traditional critics to be the times of the “American Renaissance”<sup>8</sup>.

The end of the eighteenth century in the United States, then, reveals a particular moment when the experiences taught by practical life are defended along with spiritual concerns, the latter referring to the search for happiness on earth through hard work and “doing good.” Self reliance and confidence in success were also fundamental to achieving prosperity and economic growth (Horton and Edwards 63). Society then, is based on individual opportunity, and the idea of the necessity of personal initiative was widespread and practiced. The scientific discoveries in mathematics, astronomy and botany in the United States of the Enlightenment, besides being rudimental, would soon put the country in a leadership position earned by amateur scientists like Franklin. Thomas Jefferson himself had published a complete work on the topography and natural history of the state of Virginia. By linking initiative and self reliance, labor becomes the means of achieving personal “betterment,” that is, happiness through material advancement. This “betterment” is also pointed out by Horton and Edwards as the desire to “get on” in society – still today a value in the United States, under the slogan of “success.”

The values of the Enlightenment did not contradict Calvinism completely,

---

<sup>8</sup> Horton and Edwards argue that the class lines of poverty and richness were attenuated by the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the major part of the population was constituted of shopkeepers and small farmers. Whether this is a true value for the Northern part of the United States or not, that was also the case of Thoreau’s family, who kept a store and a small production of pencils. Only some of Thoreau’s family kids could afford to go to college (Sayre, 1042).

but rather, was born from it, from the Puritan concept of hard work, sobriety and the glory of God (Horton and Edwards 74), where the growth of cities was seen in the same terms as the growth of crops; material growth is religiously justified and aimed for. Therefore, as a heritage of the Enlightenment period in the States comes the belief in *progress* as an inevitable tendency towards spiritual and material improvement. The world is not understood as untouchable or fixed, as it was believed before. Rather, man plays an active role in changing and improving his own society. Moral and material struggle were the arguments to run for the betterment of the world, and a continuation of this struggle through the ages would, at some millennial time, result in the establishment of a “Kingdom of Heaven on earth” (Horton and Edwards 70). Humanitarianism is another characteristic of the period according to Horton and Edwards. As a product of their environment and following natural laws, men were understood to be different mostly due to the conditions in which each of them was born, but equally capable of “getting-on” in society through their dedication to work and improvement.

All these new parameters of thought that grounded philosophy and practical life in the United States at the time of their independence were inspired by British political thought, puritan congregationalism<sup>9</sup>, and French democracy, and somehow influenced the thoughts of the so-called Transcendentalists—and specifically, those of Henry David Thoreau. According to Horton and Edwards, with the ascendance of the middle class at the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was a consistent agreement upon fundamental precepts, such as that of the “sancticity” of private property (77), with possessions indicating security instead of the owning of noble titles. The new independent government justified the

---

<sup>9</sup> a system of organization among Christian churches whereby individual local churches are largely self-governing. (OAD, and Horton and Edwards, 78)

<sup>8</sup> Adam Smith (1723-90) Scottish philosopher and economist who advocated in his book *Enquiry into the Wealth of Nations* that government should not interfere in trade and industry.

protection of private properties as a way to avoid British exploitation in the United States territories, setting in it the basic principle of their new nation.

Until the 1730's, most people in North America lived less than 50 miles from the coast (O'Callaghan 5). It was the so-called "tidewater period of settlement" in the United States. In order to have their farms, people started moving inwards, to the west of Pennsylvania, to the valleys of Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia, and north along the Mohawk River. They began cutting down the forest to build their houses and barns, but the poor soil of some areas made them move even farther to the west, where the Amerindian frontier was situated. Only after this period did settlers start entering inland massively, beyond the Appalachian Mountains. By the end of the eighteenth century, the East Coast remained completely dependent on England, since there was no development of manufacturing in the United States before their independence. Also, huge amounts of immigrants were arriving in search for opportunities.

Liberty, both in the national and individual senses, was highly emphasized under Jefferson's government (1800-1808). The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 was an important fact in the history of the States with regard to the encouragement of western expansionism. At the same time, government began to strongly promote transportation development and the sending of expeditions towards the West as an impulse to settlement and land exploitation. At the beginning of the 1800's, the United States governors had already sent several expeditions inwards to "negotiate" with the Indians and, in several cases, to evict them from their lands and put these lands up for sale. "Jefferson (Thomas) had been planning to send an expedition to explore Louisiana. He was a keen amateur scientist and wanted to know more about the geography, the people, the animals and the plants of the land to the West of the United States" (O'Callaghan 40).

It was not due to mere curiosity for the unknown land or to a “scientific spirit”, however, that the move to the West was taking place in the United States, as the quote above from *An Illustrated History of the USA* suggests. Science and commerce, as already seen in the relation of Europe to Africa, were justifications for exploitation, especially the one of property, seen as a necessity for achieving the betterment of man. However, exploitation in the United States took on a different configuration. Unlike the European explorers, thousands of people have moved west in the United States in search of better opportunities. These settlers became themselves the explorers. But before them, other explorers were sent westwards to “examine” the new lands.

The famous Lewis and Clark expedition took place between the years of 1804 and 1806 with the help of a French-Canadian trader and his wife, a native Shoshone, who served as interpreter. Their aim was to reach the Pacific Ocean via the Missouri and Columbia rivers. They carried with them objects like knives and fishing hooks to trade with the natives, adopting about the same procedure as the Europeans when exploring the African and the American territories of the same period. This expedition happened at the same time as Humboldt’s one. Entering inwards, at that time, did not signify to conquer territory by means of force and enslaving natives, but to “exchange” goods.

Lieutenant Zebulon Pike (1779 – 1813) was another explorer sent to look for the source of the Mississippi river, hoping that it would lead to the western coast. He reached the Rocky Mountains (one of which was given his name, although he never reached its peak), was captured by the Spanish and kept captive for some months in Santa Fe. Pike wrote an account of his experiences that “set commercial minds spinning” (Norton, 242), by describing a potential commercial market in Southwestern Spanish cities. Over the next few decades Americans avidly read

published accounts of western exploration. Expansion and the West had caught their imagination” tells the history book *A People and a Nation* (Norton 215). All these movements seemed to go along with the European practices of exploitation through trade, as confirmed by literature from the *contact zones* where the explorers and writers were sponsored by governments to speculate about material opportunities inland. We could think of this phase of expanding capitalism in the United States as an “*American Continental Consciousness*,” having the United States following some of the strategies of Imperialism, entering inland of the North American Continent in search for wealth and establishing economic dominance under subjective justifications as scientific development and curiosity about the different natural landscapes to be found.

Lewis and Clark first represented the federal impulse and interest in geographical and geological surveying, the main initial concerns of the colonization process at that time. Other explorers followed them and helped to report about the western lands. Between 1817 and 1818, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft explored the Missouri and Arkansas region, and during the years of 1819 and 1820, Major Stephen Long explored the Great Plains, mapping the area between the Plate and Canadian Rivers. Later on, in 1843, John C. Frémont’s expedition followed the Oregon Trail to the Pacific, then traveled south to California and returned east by the Great Salt Lake. He erased a supposed myth that the center of the continent was a desert (Norton 242).

Still, the chief obstacle to the conquest of western territories was the land’s non accessibility. Almost all rivers in the states run north and south, and by the beginning of the 1800s there were still no adequate means of transportation: oxen or horse-drawn wagons could not carry a great amount of things. By 1825 several canals were beginning to be built between rivers, and the face of such cities as New

York changed radically. The first and most famous canal in the United States, the Erie Canal, helped to reinforce the popular trust in reaching the west coast. But canal building depended highly on the state's finances.

The construction of railroads became, by the 1830's, the greatest solution for the occupation of the territory. They were cheaper than the building of canals, they could link other towns that could not be connected by water and they were extremely fast, in comparison to ships and, of course, to animal-drawn wagons. Railroads, although costing a large amount of capital and labor, would soon reach the middle and far West. Louisiana, Texas, and the southwest lands (won in the war against Mexico in 1836), New Mexico, Arizona, and California now belonged to the United States, and would soon be included in the railroad skeleton. By 1832, settlers reached Oregon, in the very northeast of the States, by land. The practice of going west became a fever after 1843, three years before Thoreau began to write *Walden*, with people leaving their homelands in the East and setting off for the West. The discovery of gold in California, by 1849, gave another impulse for the settlement and construction of railroads, making it worthwhile, bringing a great number of settlers from all over the United States. Soon its population could claim for an independent state, which happened in 1850. The significance of the west, direction chosen by Thoreau in his sauntering, is a fundamental key in "Walking" as I am going to develop in chapter two.

The War of 1812, between the United States and Britain, was significant for the context in which Thoreau was raised and after, to the development of industry in the United States. Since Britain ceased commerce with the States due to their refusal in participating in the war against France, the new country had to invest strongly in agriculture and especially in industries, something they were not allowed to develop when the country was a British colony (O'Callaghan 39).

During the war years, trade and production decreased significantly, and by the end of the war, the weakness of defense and transportation was evident. These two causes soon became, thus, the two main fields of the states' investment. Winning the war (besides the great losses of men) also helped to give rise to the feeling of nationalism and self-confidence among the population. In a sense, The United States in this postwar period tried to keep away from European business and were engaged with their own development and identity.

The period of history that coincides with Thoreau's life (1817-62) is one of great change in political geography, economy and population growth. While the North of the United States was improving its industries and its cities were growing fast, the South maintained its mode of production based on farming and slavery. These complex changes that took place in the north happened in a climate of self-confidence, permeated by a belief that the people of the United States had the whole continent in their hands. Urban growth brought a radical change in trade and commerce, with shops becoming specialized, doctors and lawyers offices occupying commercial districts of towns and the separation of residential and business districts. Entertainment also became a part of specialized commerce, with cities offering theater, circus, museums, racetracks and baseball parks (Horton and Edwards 132).

Immigrants were arriving by the millions, the greater part of them coming from Ireland and Germany. As they did not know how to plant, these people stayed mostly in towns and cities, where crimes and violence were also increasing. According to Norton (274), three main "classes" composed the urban society: the miserable (beggars, indigents, prostitutes, thieves) who lived by earning money in the streets, an expanding middle class composed of businessmen, professionals and house working women, and an upper class elite who basically inherited money,

were investors in trade and transportation, “men who devoted energy to increasing their fortunes and power” (276).

It was right before the Civil War (1861-65) that silver was discovered in Colorado, Arizona and Nevada, and besides the dubious possibility of finding precious metals, the fever of getting-rich-quick (Horton and Edwards 137) turned inexperienced miners into the new local population. The *Manifest Destiny* was, by then believed to be a reality. The term was first used in 1845 and designated the belief that people in the United States had a divine right to seize all the land they could. So, from coast to coast the continent was conquered by the white “Americans” with their belief that expansion was both justified and inevitable (Oxford American Dictionary). The continental railroad was also becoming a reality: two companies were created in 1862 to begin building it, although they did not advance much during the Civil War.

Let’s not forget that Thoreau’s lifetime was marked by wars: he was born two years after the War of 1812, died two years after the beginning of the Civil War and lived during the war against Mexico for the conquest of western territories was happening, from 1846 to 1848. His writing *Civil Disobedience*, as it was said before, demonstrates Thoreau’s rejection of the Mexican-American War, and the State’s laws such as slavery. “Walking” is another manifestation of these precepts against war and against the State’s laws defended in *Civil Disobedience*, as we will see in chapter 2.

## 1.6 Movements beyond: Transcendentalism

As a consequence of the Enlightenment temper, readings of the Bible also tended to question orthodox and authoritarian interpretations. One of these new

visions of the biblical stories, according to Horton and Edwards, was the one that did not consider Adam's fall as involving the whole of humanity. Each man, although led to sin, was only responsible for working out his own spiritual salvation.

In 1785, the Episcopal Church of Boston adopted Unitarian principles. Unitarianism rejected the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost as representing God. It approximated scientific inquiry to the reading of the Bible, holding that Jesus was a man, and therefore not divine, and Christianity a way of life, instead of a series of creeds (109). By 1829, Emerson was the "Unitarian minister to the second Church at Boston, free to discourse openly upon doctrines that had been considered rank heresies in the time of Calvin" (113).

Inspired by the German idealist philosophy (which stressed feeling and intuition over reason and the individual over society), by the English writings of Wordsworth and Carlyle (who opposed intellect to intuition), and by the Eastern Mystical writings, which were introduced in Boston in the early nineteenth century, Emerson resigns from the Church and proposes a new approach to spiritual life in New England. "Transcendentalism" as Emerson defined it, comes as a complete break with tradition and custom, emphasizing, in accordance to the Enlightenment spirit and the Puritan beliefs, individualism, self-reliance and a strenuous life. Emerson's writings, however, represent a call to action, a rejection of excessively intellectualized approaches to life, and the appraisal of Nature as "the great object lesson providing God's presence everywhere in his creation" (Horton and Edwards 115). This pervading presence of God in Nature is what is called by Emerson the "Oversoul." Optimism, as I have indicated before, is another strong characteristic of Transcendentalism. The Oversoul is, by its definition, good, and Nature, the new

Bible where man can renew his spirit<sup>10</sup>. Evil, if it exists, operates to serve the good side, that is, it is always compensated by the good. Transcendentalism is described by Horton and Edwards as a school of mind (124), of consciousness rather than experience—a concept that does not comprise the physical experience of walking, nor any activism defended by Thoreau.

In “The Transcendentalist,” a lecture read at the Masonic Temple in Boston, in 1842, Emerson develops a notion which defines the concept of Transcendentalism in the regard I am analyzing here. This lecture, later on transformed into an essay, was published before Thoreau’s foray into the wilderness. In “The Transcendentalist,” Emerson defends that the look of the transcendentalist is “the look that thinks,” in opposition to the materialist view that merely notices, counts and apprehends the universe. A similar dichotomy as that presented by Sergio Cardoso in the introduction of this thesis (that between “looking” and “seeing”), is defended by Emerson, who differentiates the “Materialist” from the “Idealist” or Transcendentalist man:

As thinkers, mankind have ever divided into two sects, Materialists and Idealists; the first class founding on experience, the second on consciousness; the first class beginning to think from the data of the senses, the second class perceives that the senses are not final, and say, the senses give us representations of things, but what are the things themselves, they cannot tell. The Materialist insists on facts, on history, on the force of circumstances, and the animal wants of man; the Idealist on the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture ... The Idealist, in speaking of events, sees them as spirits ... This manner of looking at things, transfers every object in nature from an independent and anomalous position without there, into consciousness. (Emerson, “The Transcendentalist” par 1).

To the “Idealistist”/Transcendentalist, or to the one who “looks,” *consciousness* means having no *ready-made answers*, thinking openly about the things that the eye intuitively captures. In addition, this action can never escape

---

<sup>10</sup> for a deeper understanding of the concept of Oversoul, see Emerson’s *Compensation* and, for an overview of its backgrounds, Horton and Edwards’ *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*, 118-19

one's self, meaning that the act of looking always happens in accordance with one's private history. "The Materialist," continues Emerson, is

secure in the certainty of sensation, mocks at fine-spun theories, at star-gazers and dreamers, and believes that his life is solid, that he at least takes nothing for granted, but knows where he stands, and what he does. Yet how easy it is to show him, that he also is a phantom walking and working amid phantoms, and that he need only ask a question or two beyond his daily questions, to find his solid universe growing dim and impalpable before his senses. (par 3)

Every "Materialist," believes Emerson, can become an "Idealist," but the "Idealist" can never become a "Materialist." At the same time that it seems to be easy to destroy any materialist belief or characteristic, "Materialism" is not denied by Emerson, but rather, it is seen as a step to reach "Idealism," and thus "spirit," in a progressive conception of life. This progression, however, does not always happen: a man can continue in his state of "phantom" and not learn how to look spiritually through the "perpetual openness of the human mind" (par 6). Moreover, according to Horton and Edwards, Emerson's lectures and texts were largely seen as an "ethical guide to life for a young nation" (119), and its emphasis on the individual as a powerful force was especially fit to the emergent and expanding economy of the United States.

Emerson helped ideologically to shape the identity of a new culture that was being formed in the United States, that of a people filled with the desire to get ahead in society. In this sense, expansionism was ideologically justified. But for the transcendentalists, it should be done not by means of destruction of the wild and the building of industries, neither by the control of society through laws, but through a spiritual relation to nature and through the disrespect of labor, of the products of labor, propriety or government.

Contrary to the high-speed industrialization process that was taking place in the United States, what Emerson proposed in theory and what Thoreau experienced

in practice was a call to an individual rebellion, that is, the non-recognition of authority—everything that Hobbes and Locke were afraid of. Property was part of the natural laws defended by Locke, but not for Jefferson, as printed in the Declaration of Independence. But for the Federalists that ruled the country during several years, property was an essential element to guarantee individual freedom. To Emerson, there is an “essential reality of the spiritual universe” perceived by the Transcendentalist that cannot be noticed by the ones who follow the rules of the market and politics. Emerson’s ideas echoed not only in Thoreau’s philosophy, but throughout much of the literature produced in the United States and abroad, even influencing social movements of the twentieth century.

Interestingly, Horton and Edwards point out that Transcendentalism can not be characterized as a movement due to the fact that its mentors defended their individualities to such an extent that they did not open a space for any collective action. On the other hand, an author, as a master of cultural exchange, also helps to form a collective ideal, meaning that no matter how they try to search exclusively for individual answers, the very fact of writing and having readers already implies a collective action (Greenblatt, “Culture” 228). I believe that Thoreau and Emerson had a collective project, similar to that of other romantic writers in the independent countries: that of questioning the “old” European cultural background and helping to create the “new” that was going to shape the identity of their independent nation. We will see in the next chapter how form and content in “Walking” can reveal Thoreau’s discursive strategy of entering west and how he builds the discourse of himself being a genius, or a moss-trooper, who spoke for an “ill-cultured” collectivity.

## CHAPTER 2

### THOREAU'S "WALKING"

#### 2.1 The Mirror of the Traveler

I have so far reviewed some historical features of Thoreau's context in order to seek correspondences between "Walking," naturalism, transcendentalism and travel writing. I have also distinguished two modes of perception through the concepts of *looking* and *seeing*, which were said by Sergio Cardoso to be related to the concept of travel. In accordance with that, I have shown that Transcendentalism, as conceived by Emerson, was a response to materialism, becoming a claim to go beyond what the eyes can capture and look for the spirituality of things. In times of strong material advancements and the spread of scientific thought in the United States, Transcendentalism proposed to engage the consciousness of the self, differently from the fields of natural history and ethnology, which, under the totalizing European project, aimed to systematize knowledge.

"Walking" was written at a time when traveling and travel writing were in fashion among a growing bourgeois class, with the former taking its first steps in the direction of becoming a massive movement and the latter becoming a very popular literary genre in terms of both production and consumption. Romantic aesthetics in Europe and in the colonies are said by Pratt to have emerged basically from the relationship of the European Imperial powers with their colonies, and mostly in one direction: from these contact zones back into Europe. This means that the power of creating aesthetics comes from who attains economic power, and therefore, it is wealth that determines how the "other", the "seen" looks like. That is

how travel literature played the role of describing “the rest of the world” for European readership (Pratt 138), as it still plays through different medias today.

Traveling and travel literature at imperial times functioned as an intellectual bridge between the new independent countries and Europe in their formation of national as well as individual characteristics, as a great number of people could afford consuming information from abroad. Among the English nobility, firstly, traveling became a complement to the educational process: young men traveled to live what they have read in books (Camargo 51). The destiny chosen by these sons of European aristocratic families to “experience culture” was mainly the vestiges of the Roman Empire. They took six-month to two-year trips in order to become more cosmopolitan, to describe by themselves the unknown world, to mirror themselves in the others. John Locke, one of the idealists of liberalism who, as we have seen, much influenced the politics and behavior of the independent United States, argued that traveling is a way of enriching the spirit and “fixing” the problems of traditional education (52). Still, this was a practice only affordable to a few, as travelers generally took their servants, illustrators and friends on their trips—something that happened at least until the time when the practice of traveling took its first steps towards becoming a massive movement, by the 1840s.

In the mid-nineteenth century, excursions or “grand tours” of British groups to continental Europe were being organized and promoted. Also, the great Universal Expositions that first happened in London to show the advances and discoveries of science and industry started gathering people from different nations in massive encounters, or “parties of people” (Camargo, 50, my translation). Emerson himself had taken long tours of Europe, where he befriended the poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth and Thomas Carlyle, fathers of Anglo-American Romantic aesthetics. Thoreau, broadly recognized by critics as the man who

practiced Emerson's theory, never traveled far from his hometown<sup>11</sup>. Throughout his writings, Thoreau does not demonstrate much enthusiasm for meeting different people, but instead, his concern seems to be that of knowing wild and extraordinary landscapes.

We will see, however, that Thoreau's idea of travel as expressed in his concept of walking goes much beyond the practice of tours, or massive gatherings to view technological novelties. As every journey opens the opportunity of reflecting upon one's self's face to the different, Thoreau goes to the wilderness, to the outdoors in order to go deeper into his innerness and reflect upon society. He never searches for people during his walks. The idea of "mirroring" in his writings, then, could hardly be said to arise from the relation of himself to another specific character. Though the "other" in the mirror appears several times as being society (culture), this image does not reflect what Thoreau aims to be: Nature is what corresponds to the "other" idealized image of himself.

## 2.2 Subject, Form and Style: the multifaceted walker

"Walking" was a lecture that was delivered several times in the Concord Lyceum, the first of them occurring in 1851. Its previous title was "The Wild," and afterwards it was developed as an essay but only published after Thoreau's death, in 1862 (Stabb, par. 2). The interval between the first sketches of "Walking" and the experience in the woods that received the name *Walden* was about five years. Biographical data (Sayre, 1046) says that while Thoreau lived next to Walden Pond, he rewrote his first masterpiece *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, and

---

<sup>11</sup> Thoreau did not go farther than the distance between Concord and Maine State—that of about 500 kilometers—when he spent two weeks in the State's Woods, hiking up Mount Katahdin (Woodlief par 1)

also began the first drafts of *Walden*. Around the time which involves the delivery of the lectures and the rewriting of “Walking” Thoreau had already written the account of his daily thoughts in the small pieces that compose his *Journal*<sup>12</sup>, and had developed a longer narrative, namely such as “Civil Disobedience,” which was likely a lecture delivered in the same Lyceum. The lyceums were established in the United States in 1826, and had the aim, under Enlightenment ideals, to promote education and culture. Mostly patronized by the middle class, they were evidences of how intense the debate on literature, science and politics was. Most of all, the lyceums were places where the population in the United States could listen to lectures by teachers and traveling lecturers (Fithiam, par. 3).

It has always been confusing for theorists who aim at seeing literary texts as objects of categorization to approach the transcendentalist’s writings, especially those of Emerson and Thoreau. This polemic already involves *Walden*, a work which is classified from different perspectives and that encompasses research in a bunch of different fields of knowledge<sup>13</sup>. Today, not much critical material can be found about “Walking,” and probably the same dilemma of classification can be applied to it: if we aimed at categorizing “Walking,” it would not be easy to determine whether it is an essay, a work of fiction or an autobiography, a naturalist text, a travel text or even a manifesto, a pamphlet calling to the “good walk”. We cannot deny, however, that the desire to distinguish and describe it in linguistic terms—as natural history does with plants and animals, and ethnology with people and their customs—raises questions and helps the researcher to focus on specific

---

<sup>12</sup> In the *Journal*, which was a kind of diary, Thoreau wrote at least five small texts about walking. In “Walking in the Mist,” he interestingly approximates voyages to walks: “I find it good to be out in the still, dark, mizzling afternoon; my walk or voyage is more suggestive and profitable than in bright weather. (...) I am *compelled* to look at near objects.” (*Thoreau’s World* 159)

<sup>13</sup> this conclusion is based on a brief research I have done on published works about Thoreau in the MLA files, and to which I have referred in the introduction of this thesis.

characteristics of the text, differentiating it from other writings. My aim here is not to provide any wholeness or strict interpretation, but to examine some possible approaches to reading what I have opted to call an essay. In order to do so, I depend on a close reading of the text, as well as on other critical studies, to analyze and propose my own interpretation of “Walking.”

“Walking” is divided into smaller parts announced, in the 1863 edition, by double-space paragraph separations<sup>14</sup>. The author inserts a poem of his own and some quotations along the narrative, such as verses from Geoffrey Chaucer and Ben Johnson—which have no authorial reference in the text but are rather inserted as a complement to the narrator’s arguments. Thoreau refers to Chaucer several times, as both writers demonstrate interest in pilgrimage through walking and traveling. The *Canterbury Tales*, as it is known, is a collection of stories narrated with the voice of different characters from the middle ages who are walking together towards a sacred place, the Canterbury Cathedral. But unlike Chaucer, the sort of Pilgrimage that is referred to in “Walking” presents a single voice, the voice of the self, the “I” who most of the times endures in solitude the depth of his particular search for the Holy.

In trying to point out the characteristics of Thoreau’s autobiographical book *Walden*, Mutlu Konuk Blasing argues in “The economies of Walden” that the genre *autobiography* does not imply being “faithful to the facts of experience,” but rather, it implies “the fictionalization of a life lived” (3). The principle that there is a distance between a fact and the narration of this fact through recollections in memory may seem unquestionable, but this very statement is necessary to emphasize the idea that the author is the creator and main character of the narration.

---

<sup>14</sup> This edition is available in the form of photocopies at The Library of Congress: <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi>.

Here lies Thoreau's economy in *Walden*, according to Blasing:

(...) perhaps we should use the term "autobiographical" not to describe how factual the contents of a book are, but to designate a form. In this sense *Walden* is autobiographical: it presents a multifaceted self. Thoreau is split into author, narrator, and hero, who in turn have many faces, ranging from Yankee Philosopher to Poet-Prophet. And the author, narrator, and hero—different entities that share the same name and identity—are mirror images of each other; they reflect and thereby realize each other. (4)

The autobiographical quality of Thoreau's text lies in the presentation of a multifaceted self which has its three "entities" interacting with each other. As a consequence, the multifaceted self does not count on another person to mirror himself in, but claims for the environment, instead, as being the reflected image of the mirror. Economical (for there are no other figures besides "I") and overall, humble, Thoreau has in *Walden* no ambitions to measure the distance of the stars (Blasing 6), but to investigate his own mind. In "Walking" however, Thoreau seems to have a greater ambition:

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 an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school-committee and every one of you will take care of that. (71)

The author, or the author-narrator-hero, proposes to assume the role of Nature's advocate. He prepares the reader for what is to come, something "extreme" and "emphatic," creating, from the beginning, a great expectation in the reader's mind. The reader, included in the narrative under the pronoun "you" is associated with *culture*, in opposition to the author, who advocates *wildness*. The contrast between nature and civilization reinforces the narrator's opposition to the majority of people of his time. At the beginning of the essay, right after the above quotation, the narrator introduces the figures of his acquaintances, comparing

himself to those “others”—evidencing that people are also reflected in the mirror, but a reflection which he discards: “I have met with but one or two persons in my life who understood the art of walking (...) (71).” This fragment evidences Thoreau’s belief in his exclusivity of having the genius for sauntering, though there are “one or two” other real walkers that exempt his supposed position as the God of Walks, a strategy that supposes that the author-narrator-hero, though uncommonly genial, is also a bit humble.

The multifaceted “I,” in being exclusive, gains its power when in opposition to the majority. Thoreau ironically calls the others “champions of civilization” (71), as if he, the narrator, were a “champion of wilderness.” According to Blasing, Henry David Thoreau is an “I” that joins the figure of the hero and the narrator, and the narrative is simultaneously autobiographical and fictional (4). It follows that whatever the narrator says his hero did, that does not mean that the author did it himself. Coincidence or not, we know from Emerson—who, in addition to being an intellectual reference for Thoreau, was also a close friend—that Thoreau used to take long walks throughout his life (Emerson “Thoreau” 25) just like the narrator asserts his hero does.

We will see, as “the ‘I’ is the most particular yet most universal of heroes” (Blasing 7), how Thoreau’s “Walking” can be seen “as form informing history or as history transforming form” (xvi), that is, how the dialogue between text and context in “Walking” is established. As the “author”, “narrator” and “hero” become contemplating mirrors endlessly repeating each other, also “subject, “form”, and “style” are reflections of each other and can be seen as a whole in its inception (xiii). Blasing states that “the ‘I’ in its self-consciousness constitutes at the same time the historical subject, the shaping form, and the personalizing style of the autobiography,” (xiii) suggesting how powerful this genre is and particularly how

Thoreau constructs his image as a powerful American hero.

### 2.3 The author-narrator-hero confronting the difference

The *narrator* (term that here includes the author and hero), when talking about his experience as a walker, affirms: “my companion and I, for I sometimes have a companion, take pleasure in fancying ourselves knights of the new (...)” (73). This companion’s name never appears in the narrative. However, his presence seems necessary to justify that the narrator is not a hermit, as usually the figure of Thoreau is seen; rather, to a certain extent, he is assumed to be a sociable person. This other character, who is his companion, performs the role of a shadow that follows his steps, not complaining or suggesting any idea but reinforcing the narrators’ view. This “sometimes companion” appears briefly again in the next paragraph, in the form of “we,” to confirm the narrator’s idea that they are the only ones in the town who practice “this noble art” (73).

Another moment of the text where a companion shows up is during a walk in the town—although it is not clear whether it is the same person who joined him before or not. The role of this companion is to comment on the villagers’ habit of taking a nap in the afternoon:

When, early in a summer afternoon, we have been shaking the dust of the village from the skirts of our garments, making haste past those houses with purely Doric or Gothic fronts, which have such an air of repose about them, my companion whispers that probably about these times their occupants are all gone to bed. Then it is that I appreciate the beauty and the glory of architecture, which itself never turns in, but forever stands out and erect, keeping watch over the slumberers. (76)

The narrator’s companion “whispers” but does not interfere. He simply suggests a reason for people not being around, as if the narrator were completely

apart from society. I suppose that the significance of the presence of the “other” here is to serve as a bridge between the “I” and the rest of the people in town, to inform Thoreau about the customs of society and to reinforce the distance he wants to keep from cultural goods. Also, the presence of the companion shows that there is someone else besides him who enjoys a different kind of walk, the one practiced in unusual moments of the day. The absence of people in the village opens the possibility for the walker to explore different sensations like the silence and the view of a calm scenery where the whole of social life takes place when people are not sleeping.

The narrator and his phantomlike friend are, therefore, the heroes of the noble walk—as opposed to the rest of the people in the town who are attached to their pre-established ways of life. People from the town are probably the middle class shopkeepers and mechanics that Edwards and Horton suggest (and that I have reviewed in chapter one). They are not good saunterers in the narrator’s eyes for one simple reason: they live indoors, keeping their legs crossed almost the whole day long. This is the case of the village’s women, who are confined to their houses, and who, the narrator supposes, cannot stand that very fact. Worth noticing is the fact that the narrator never runs the risk of assuming someone else’s voice or talking about others with the certainty of someone who is pronouncing a truth. Rather, he uses the words “I have ground to suspect” to carefully reproduce the feelings of the village women (76). To spend much time inside a chamber, for Thoreau, is the same as to acquire rust, an act comparable to suicide.

The “I” who speaks does not assume anyone else’s voice, as he does not look for ordinary company. At the same time, however, he seems to appreciate the presence of a friend—a friend that does not contradict, but rather confirms his opinions. He walks with this shadow-friend seeking to experience the unusual. They

are opposed to the villagers, who respect a general order of time, leisure and labor, and who use the roads for moving. The narrator questions the origins of the word *village*, and finds in its root the Latin ancients *via*, *veho* (to carry) and *villain*, eventually suggesting that the villagers are villains, people who are used to wickedness of society. This evil side of the villagers, in fact, is related to their steadiness: “some [villagers] do not travel at all; others walk in the highways; a few across lots” (81).

It is not only the action of traveling which defines one’s quality to Thoreau. The way one does it also matters. Among these few people who travel, Thoreau establishes differences between “good” and supposedly “bad” travelers. “Bad” travelers or saunterers in “Walking” are the walkers’ who do not search of a Holy Land. With the word *sauntering* the narrator defines what he understands as “the art of walking”: a *saunterer*, in the text, refers both to the pilgrim of the Middle Ages who wanders in search for the “Sainte Terre” asking for charity, and to the one without home or land, the vagrant who, instead, has his home everywhere. The first interpretation is for the narrator the most appropriate (and well fits the ideals of a hero), since “every walk is a sort of crusade” (71). Thoreau complains that at his time people practiced “comfortable tours” instead of “good walks”:

Our expeditions are but tours, and come round again at evening to the old hearth-side from which we set out. Half of the walk is but retracing our steps. We should go forth the shortest walk, perchance, in the spirit of undying adventure, never to return, --prepared to send back our embalmed hearts to our desolate kingdoms. If you are ready to leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again,--if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man, then you are ready for a walk. (73)

The words above offer a direct critique of social habits such as going on tours. The narrator challenges the readers to reflect on their experiences as travelers, walkers, or what today we call *tourists*. The kind of walk and the characteristics of

the ideal walker are designed here: to be a walker means to be as uncommitted as possible to society. Instead of going on a tour, the walker-adventurer should have his spirit prepared to leave and not come back. Differently from most of the adventurers at the time of both European and American expansionism, Thoreau's proposal of walking sustains no obligation to any government or any greater project than that of his own will. On the other hand, the narrator suggests a certain complacency with regard to social rules, since being ready for a walk demands having no debts to pay and being a "free man" (73).

The very idea of having debts paid defended in "Walking" seems to contradict the principle stated in *Civil Disobedience*, in which Thoreau recalls the moments of his imprisonment for disobeying the State and Church by not paying taxes. Maybe it is so because the author experienced moments in jail and did not want to run the risk of going back to it. Being in prison would destroy the preliminary condition necessary for a walk, that of being free. It is possible that "Walking" is another practical answer (the first one being Thoreau's retirement to Walden Pond) for the dilemma of wanting to get free from the State and Church's policies and at the same time, having to be part of it—a permanent conflict in all of Thoreau's writings.

We know from *Civil Disobedience* that Thoreau did not propose an armed rebellion to disobey the civil government, but rather a pacific defense of the self against any generalization of the individual, against laws and rules that do not represent his individual opinion. Writing and not paying taxes was a first alternative he found to disobey authority. What we have in the previously quoted passage of "Walking," narrated in the first-person plural, is rather a suggestion to get away from society through the most legal terms. That is, the least bothered a man can be by others, the better; and this necessarily means to accept some of the official rules

such as paying debts. What we have here is a strong example of the contradiction present in the text, to which Thoreau does not point for a solution besides that of stop subverting society and accept the law.

A close analysis of the linguistic terms of the last quoted passage reveals the fragmentation of the pronoun “we” into individual readers under the pronoun “you”, suggesting a detachment of the narrator and each individual from their connection to their affective ties: father, mother, brother, sister, wife, child and friends. The narrator opens a dialogue with the reader by carefully including himself as part of a practice which he condemns, that of going on a tour and returning to the same lifestyle held before. As if taking his reader by the hand, he suggests them to be prepared to walk away from the collective. What in *Civil Disobedience* was a proposal of disobedience inside society, in “Walking” is a voluntary detachment from collectiveness—not as lasting as the two years spent at the Walden Pond, but in an everyday practice of going for walks.

According to the narrator, these walks should be done in body and spirit, which means that one needs to forget his occupations and obligations to society when walking. Whenever the narrator thinks about work during his walks, he assumes himself to be “out of his senses” (78). The walker must be concentrated on the act of walking, instead of thinking about other activities, so that he can have his eyes and ears wide open to perceive the world around him. This may be the most important pre-disposition of the walk proposed by Thoreau: to be open to the strangeness of the world outdoors, especially to nature. The dichotomy nature versus culture persists as a continuation of that of colonial times, but now it is nature which is idealized and seen as best. By inverting the values which culture and nature have upon society, Thoreau, like other transcendentalists, helps idealizing nature as the one and only way out, but stays trapped in the culture he so

much criticizes. This idealization of nature also has at least the consequence of reinforcing the possibility of total freedom and innocence in the American discourse.

But which direction to go on a walk? Where is Thoreau's Holy Land? These may be the next questions that author and readers are led to. From the opening paragraph of "Walking" we know that it is to nature that Thoreau is going to direct his body and thoughts, but geographically, the path chosen has to be designed in the readers mind. Nature, with a capital "N," is where one can experience "absolute freedom in wildness" ("Walking" 71). Thoreau repeatedly used this unusual term *wildness* to use it as the noun for *wild*, which we know today by the definition of "not domesticated or cultivated" (OAD). John Elder, in his preface to "Walking" states that Thoreau understood "wildness" as "a quality of awareness, openness to the light, to the seasons, and to nature's perpetual renewal" (xvi). From Elder's definition we can infer once more that "outside nature" is reflected in "inside nature"—which in the text would correspond to *instinct*—and that walking instinctively within nature is a way to observe and exercise renewal. If the outside nature is perfect in its wilderness, than the inside is perfect too—a proposition that secures the good and innocent and moral qualities of the author.

#### 2.4 Paths: which trail to follow?

If you go to the political world, follow the great road,— follow that marketman, keep his dust in your eyes, and it will lead you straight to it; for it too, has its place merely, and does not occupy all space. I pass from it as from a bean-field into the forest, and it is forgotten ("Walking" 81).

The roads, for Thoreau have been designed for ordinary travelers. According to him, they constitute the arms and legs of the body that is the village, as rivers that

flow in the direction of a lake (81). These paths, however, lead to known places such as the figurative path of politics and market. To walk through a trivial pre-established road to Thoreau means not to travel at all, but to carry and be carried to the village, to live for it as horses and men of business that have to rapidly get to their commercial spots. Thoreau's path, then, is not "the great road" (81): he has to walk through a different way rather than that of marketmen and politicians. Likewise market and politics, nevertheless, Thoreau sees the west as a synonym of freedom and demonstrates great optimism about it, for at his time there were still enough places where he could escape from being bothered—just as the new economy was "free" from the Eastern regulations. He justifies his common objective with his country's ideological and material expansionism arguing that going in the same direction and in the same mood as that of market and politics is an inevitable progressive tendency of humanity (90).

What is the different track that a "good" walker should trace then? If roads are straight, walking through an unexpected landscape can call the walker's attention to the simple joy of walking in a strange place. A forgotten and useless road is an example of a path that can be amazing and new to the narrator. An example of that is "The Old Marlborough Road", to which Thoreau dedicates a poem: "There is the Old Marlborough Road," he writes "which does not go to Marlborough now, methinks, unless that is Marlborough where it carries me" (82). This path was once believed to lead to wealth and opportunity, but that now has its value in leading to nowhere specifically:

What is it, what is it,  
But a direction out there,  
And the bare possibility  
Of going somewhere? (29-32, 83)

Throughout the poem, it is the path, instead of the destination it takes, which is in evidence. It does not matter where Marlborough is or was located, but rather what

remains of it, its mythology and all the thoughts that it suggests while one is walking along this abandoned road. The pleasure of a walk, as indicated in the poem, is not to know where the path is going to take the walker.

At the time Thoreau wrote “Walking,” a great part of the land to the west was not yet divided into private properties, but was about to be, as he visualized and expressed in the essay. Men, he writes, would soon be confined to the public road, and the walker of the future would have to trespass other people’s private “pleasure-grounds” (85). At this moment, the narrator discourses against private property, arguing that it reflects a limitation not only to the walker, but also to the owner of the land himself: “To enjoy a thing exclusively is commonly to exclude yourself from the true enjoyment of it” (85). Walking, for Thoreau, would be soon limited by the several fences that will divide “God’s earth” (85) and by the roads that would be constructed to serve the town’s commerce. Business, commitments and fences are the greatest ideological and physical obstacles in the way of the walker.

Private property, one of the greatest values defended at the times of Enlightenment in the United States— drawn under the Enlightenment principles of “natural laws” designed by Locke and reviewed in chapter 1—is always criticized by Thoreau. The problem of property as stated in “Walking” is not the one pointed by Rousseau as the fact that promotes inequality among people who have it and who do not. Instead, private property represents an interference in the freedom of the self at the moment this self is forbidden to access the land. On the other hand, a supposed abolition of private property—which would put down the limits of the walk—does not mean the defense of the collective use of the land, but rather it stands for the individual freedom of movement in a land that belongs to God and which is occupied by nature. Private property, to Thoreau, is not compatible with freedom. Moreover, the walker’s aim is not to occupy space; he merely passes by

the land as he passes by the world through his brief existence.

## 2.5 Setting: the outdoor world

When we walk, we naturally go to the fields and woods: what would become of us, if we walked only in a garden or mall? (“Walking” 78)

It is hard for me to believe that I shall find fair landscapes or sufficient wildness and freedom behind the eastern horizon. I am not excited by the prospect of a walk thither, but I believe that the forest which I see in the western horizon stretches uninterruptedly toward the setting sun, and there are no towns or cities in it of enough consequence to disturb me. (86)

It is the world out of doors, most of all, that is being sought by the author-narrator-hero. We have seen, however, that Thoreau’s praise for the wilderness does not exclude his admiration for the village buildings. But the ideal scenery he describes (the village in a summer afternoon, The Old Marlborough Road, the swamp) does not include human presence, except for the “sometimes companion”, who once in a while joins him in his wanderings. Gardens and malls, as opposed to the ideal places mentioned by Thoreau, are representations of human interference in the landscape. They are programmed for the people to visit them; they carry a collective characteristic, being either public or private. Gardens and malls are not apart from civil culture and therefore are no “natural” environments to walk in.

It is to west that the narrator walks free, or to somewhere between the south and southwest, while in the opposite direction, to the East, he assumes to go only by force (86). The East for him represents the “old” world, Europe and ancient culture. In contrast, “the forests of the western horizon stretch uninterruptedly toward the setting sun,” and in them the narrator sees infinitude. This moment suggests that

nothing is bad in the western direction, but rather that there exists an ideal place, a kind of paradise or, in Thoreau's words, the "Holy Land" (71). To the west Thoreau sees no impediments or disturbances, and the towns and cities that did exist at the time to the west are not as great in power as his ideas are fragile to be disturbed.

To regard the West as a direction where no evil can foil one's journey was a common image at times of expansionism. Thoreau in "Walking" reaffirms this idea and endorses the "Manifest Destiny" doctrine, which held the collective feeling that the United States had to extend what they believed to be their "boundaries of freedom" and dominate the continent (Tindall 510). This massive dislocation of white people to the west of the North American Continent, though aggressive towards the land, people and environment, was held by the great feeling of confidence in the self and in success. Likewise filled with the mood of self-confidence, Thoreau assumes his choice of walking west to be a practice shared with his countrymen:

And that way the nation is moving, and I may say that mankind progress from east to west (...) We go eastward to realize history and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race; we go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure. (86-7)

The narrator assumes, by using the pronoun "we," that the population's movement to the West, of which he feels part, has a progressive tendency. The "spirit of enterprise" that he defends while people are going west, is not that of business, but a project that demands mental and physical effort. To walk westwards is to walk to future, to go in the opposite direction of the East, a movement he describes as coincident with birds' migration. But unlike the masses, his personal objective is not that of traveling across the continent trying to reach the coast: his trip is not about going far and, overall, it involves no means of transportation rather than one's own feet.

“Wildness” and “freedom” appear as main characteristics of the ideal place, the Holy Land. Instead of wishing to settle *in* the “far west,” Thoreau in “Walking” is concerned about walking *through* the “wild west.” Moreover, he affirms that his vicinity has a lot to offer, for it is never the same every time he walks through it. But it is in the darkest woods and in the most dismal swamp (to the citizens’ eye) that the narrator finds the place to recreate himself (100). The swamp, according to him, is a sacred place, where he is free from the asphyxia that cities and society provoke. “I enter the swamp as a sacred place,” he affirms, “There is the strength, the marrow of Nature” (100).

While his countrymen would probably refuse to enter a swamp just for fun, the narrator of “Walking” finds his amusement there. He does not need to go farther or to pass by it in order to get to another place: there, at the swamp, where no one besides him wants to be (and perhaps where no man feels comfortable), is where Thoreau claims to feel free and close to “wildness” (100). If we recover the steps of the explorers, we will remember that Humboldt himself had imposed a certain limit for entering the woods and considered some of the new world’s landscapes as “impenetrable” (Pratt 131). We do not know the characteristics of the “impenetrable lands” that were faced by Humboldt, neither do we know details of the wildness adored by Thoreau, but these places (bog, swamp, mud) are usually remembered for their difficult access<sup>15</sup>.

It is odd to imagine Thoreau, the author, trying to walk through a swamp. But, in my opinion, this exaggeration provoked by the author is what imprints on the text the necessary irony to be contrasted with the regular, common lifestyle of

---

<sup>15</sup> Another traveler that had adoration for swamps is studied by Pratt. Mary Kingsley traveled to the West Africa and wrote travel accounts describing how she entered the swamps. “‘Her’ swamps,” states Pratt, “as she calls them, are a landscape that the Africans themselves seen neither to use nor value, a place where they would never contest the European presence.” She recreates the land occupation and interventionist discourse through irony and inversion (213), the same strategy as that of Thoreau.

his country\_fellows. It is a way to manifest disdain for the common sense relationship with the wild, and therefore, to validate his opinion. He calls attention to look to what could be considered an ordinary landscape as a holy land, as if there man could feel purified from the harms of culture.

Again, when developing his ideas on botany and gardening, the narrator states that he would prefer a Dismal Swamp (now with capital letters) instead of the most beautiful garden (99). Such is his opinion about botany: it “cannot go farther than tell me the names of shrubs” that grow at the swamp (98). He states that he would prefer to put his house behind a swamp than behind “that meager assemblage of curiosities, that poor apology for Nature and art” (99) which is a front garden. The swamp, therefore, represents the untouched wilderness, the good and holy land, while the garden loses its value for being nature manipulated by man.

The movement towards the West, as we have seen, is for the narrator a natural and progressive happening. As the sun, the “Great Pioneer” (88) sets in the west everyday, humankind moves accordingly. As the Island of Atlantis and the islands and gardens of Hesperides were the ancient Great West of the Greeks, so the sunset in the United States brings with it a climate of mystery and poetry (88). “The man of the Old World sets out upon his way. Leaving the highlands of Asia, he descends from station to station towards Europe. Each of his steps is marked by a new civilization superior to the preceding, by a greater power of development” (90).

As I have mentioned, the belief in the progress of humanity permeates Thoreau’s idea of going west. Progress, to him, relates to the spirit of enterprise as explained before. We could think of the geometric form he uses to outline his walks, the parabola, as related to the idea of progress. He defends his preference to the parabola in detriment of the circle (86). The circle, we could infer, represents

the tour, the going round and coming back to the same place--“to the old hearth-side from which we set out” (72). A parabola, instead, in the narrator’s imagination, corresponds to “those cometary orbits which have thought to be non-returning curves” with its movement opening westward and his house occupying the place of the sun (86). But Blasing understands Thoreau’s notion of progress in *Walden* as a spiral which represents a repetition that also changes. She states that “Thoreau’s understanding of the progressive nature of repetition enabled him, for example, to celebrate each morning” (II), where the point of arrival is already different in time, permitting, thus, progress, or spiritual renewal.

In a sense, the narrator’s exaggeration at certain points of the text may sound provocative to readers, as we should expect since the very beginning of the text. Another example of a provocative moment is the comparison of the “backwoodsman” of the United States with Adam (93). Thoreau says that, as a real patriot, he should be ashamed to think that “Adam in paradise was more favorably situated on the whole than the backwoodsman in this country” (93). That is, according to him, people in the United States have all the environmental conditions to regard their land as the real paradise and naturally believe themselves to be superior to others.

## 2.6 Finding and Founding the Unknown

At the same time that Thoreau reinforces the discourse of going West, his contradictory position is that of wanting to “get off” society in his walks. Still, he is in accordance with the spirit of confidence, and defended his land as the best of all in the earth for man to live in. In order to prove that the territories of the New

World are greater than those of the Old World, the narrator paraphrases natural science books and travel accounts. Let us not forget that in the first years after college Thoreau was a science and language teacher, and would have been well acquainted with modern scientific literature from a broad range of sources.

To illustrate the “westward tendency” of humankind, the narrator refers to Christopher Columbus as a man who believed it “more strongly than any before” (88). He obeyed his senses, the narrator continues, “and found a New World for Castile and Leon” (88). It seems quite important here to notice that the word “found” in the English language refers either to the past form of the verb “find,” which is the quality of something that was discovered unexpectedly or in the course of a search and to establish or originate an organization, town or colony—and here we could think of the establishment of a society and rules (OAD). So these two conceptions may be implicit in the use of the word “found.” We know, however, that this was not the word used by Columbus in his letters, but rather that of “hallar”, which means to find, to encounter, to discover and to observe (Colón 225).

If we read Stephen Greenblatt’s *Marvelous Possessions*, where the essay with the same title begins “at the most famous of beginnings” that is, with a paragraph from Christopher Columbus’ letter to Luis de Santangel (the Spanish Crown’s writer) telling about his arrival at the islands of Central America, it is possible to detach what kind of “find” was implied in Columbus’ “discovery” and how Thoreau interpreted it. In this paragraph, Columbus claims to have “found” several islands. Despite the great number of people who occupied the islands, he claims to have “taken possession” of them through a proclamation which, amazingly, did not encounter any local resistance. The act of taking possession, then, involved the act of naming the places with the names of Catholic saints and Spanish nobles. What matters at this point here is that the act of “naming” in

Columbus' understanding (and in the European imaginary construction of the American Continent) is not only intrinsically suggested by the word "discovery" but also a consequence of a finding. I believe that the meanings of the word "found" as exposed previously are contained in the European project of "taking possession of the world," according both to what I have reviewed from Pratt and to Columbus' own words, quoted in Greenblatt's book.

Columbus' letter forms a mythic chapter of the history of the American Continent. The act of "taking possession" of the land was exercised by the ceremony of unfolding a flag and elevating a cross on the strange lands, declaring out loud that that place belonged to a higher power. After that, writing accounts of the New World to European crowns, and occupying the place through all violent means necessary were the next formal steps to be followed in the beginning of the colonial period. Not only the act of establishing new rules in the "discovered lands" but overall, the writings that tell of the arrival of the Europeans in the New World helped to legitimize power and show the importance of the written word of travelers and expeditors. Documents deliver authority to the voice that writes them, constructing writers' and readers' outlook upon history (Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 58).

But the "westward tendency" that Thoreau obeys is not that of "founding" in the sense of establishing any kind of organization, taking possession of the landscape around him and naming places, like Columbus did. Rather, his intention is to question the principles of possessions:

You may name it America, but it is not America; neither Americo Vespucius, nor Columbus, nor the rest were the discoverers of it. There is a truer account of it in mythology than in any history of America, so called, that I have seen (82).

There is something in common, however, between Thoreau's and Columbus'

entering westwards. That is: they both describe America as if they were the first and only men to see and document it, and by doing that they become the heroes of their own narratives. The power and authority of the traveler/hero lies in the act of writing about a place that no other white man wrote about before, helping to shape and create an image that becomes mythical, just as it happens with other travel writers.

### 2.7 Nationalism, science and wilderness in “Walking”

What follows Columbus’ quotation, in the third part of “Walking,” are several quotations from travelers and naturalists brought up to endorse Thoreau’s praise of wilderness, westward tendency and the surprises of the New World. These passages show that the writer was aware of what was being published and also very interested in natural history and travel literature.

In the writings of Guyot, the European geographer, the narrator finds confirmation that there is a natural and progressive movement westwards, as there is a natural tendency of the vegetal world to serve for the animal world. Michaux, the traveler, is quoted to endorse the singularities of the vegetation of the United States “so fertile and rich and varied” (89). Humboldt is cited for his praise of the landscapes of South America, seeing the “greatest perfection in the primitive forests of the Amazon” (89-90). Another traveler, the Englishman Sir Francis Head, also confirms the “brightness and more costly colors” of the American Continent in comparison to the Old Continent (90). Head’s words in “Walking” are:

The heavens of America appear infinitely higher, the sky is bluer, the air is fresher, the cold is intenser, the moon looks larger, the stars are brighter, the thunder is louder, the lightening is vividder, the wind is stronger, the rain is heavier, the mountains are higher, the rivers longer, the forests bigger, the plain broader. (90-91)

This exaggeration in the description of the American lands sounds exhausting: one might feel compelled to not contradict such an emphatic, even childish insistence. This argumentation is followed by quoting Linné's description of American plants in Latin, so "joyous and smooth" (91). The advantage of the American continent over the African, Thoreau states, is that of not having wild beasts to carry off travelers and inhabitants whose adventure takes them into the woods. In the wilderness of North America, a traveler could take a nap almost anywhere without fearing that something bad could happen to him. That is, as long as the wilderness does not risk his security, it is the best place to be. After this intersection of voices, the narrator creates the image of a marvelous America, concluding that:

If the moon looks larger here than in Europe, probably the sun looks larger also. If the heavens of America appear infinitely higher, and the stars brighter, I trust that these facts are symbolical of the height to which the philosophy and poetry and religion of her inhabitants may one day soar. (...) Will not man grow to greater perfection intellectually as well as physically under these influences? Or is it unimportant how many foggy days there are in his life? (91)

At this moment of the text we confirm that the narrator really believes in the immensity and greatness of the territory in which he was born. America, as he states, offers such vast natural resources that it seems impossible that one who is born in such a place would not be influenced by its nature. This optimistic idealism of the man and land in the New World, and especially in the United States perfectly fits the optimistic discourse of self-confidence that permeates Transcendentalist idealism, and also goes along with the spirit of Enlightenment in America.

Some other voices are quoted in support of the narrator's argument on the greatness of America. From the chronological biography of Thoreau by Robert F. Sayre, we know that Thoreau had read Darwin's *Origin of Species* and defended it to Emerson in 1860. In "Walking" Darwin is quoted once in his affirmation that the

white man can be compared to the plants that grow in gardens, in contrast to the man who grows openly in the fields and has a darker skin. “A tanned skin is something more than respectable, and perhaps olive is a fitter color than white for a man—a denizen of the woods”<sup>16</sup> (“Walking” 97).

In a sense, according to this, the dark skinned man is superior to the white one, in a vision that suggests an inversion of values in the relation of power between colonizers and colonized in this contact zone of the text. But also these words indicate that Thoreau wanted to revert the ethnological discourse on the African and Native American man. Some of the characteristics attributed by Linné to the African man are those of “indolent” “relaxed” and “negligent” while some of the adjectives that describe the Americans are “obstinate” “content” and “free” (Pratt 32). It is the Indian which is pure and fit to nature, as Romantic aesthetics celebrate the “bon sauvage”.

In Darwin Thoreau finds a theory of evolution which involves all the elements present in natural science’s categorizations; an explanation that orders these elements according to a natural selection. That is, a theory that, in a sense, reinforces his own one when talking about life outdoors. The main difference that I see in Darwin’s and Thoreau’s discourse is that Thoreau is not concerned with any objective response or scientific truth, but that of his own. Differently from Linné, Darwin and the other naturalists, Thoreau assumes a particular position when pointing out what he believes is good or superior, which is everything that is linked to the wild. Because the first person is present in his writings, Thoreau distances himself from scientific understanding of the world. This includes, as has been shown, the naming of people and plants, or any categorization that follows, with the

---

<sup>16</sup> It would be interesting to develop some ideas on the intersections between Thoreau, Rousseau and Darwin, but suffice it is to say, by now that for Thoreau, every reference to the wild is a reference to what is “good.”

narrator avoiding speaking in the name of a general theory, but rather choosing to speak exclusively from his own point of view, that of a poet and prophet (82).

“The science of Humboldt is one thing, poetry is another thing” (104), he says, “The poet to-day, notwithstanding all the discoveries of science, and the accumulated learning of mankind, enjoys no advantage over Homer” (104). In a discourse that suspects of scientific progress and its consequences, the narrator of “Walking” makes it clear that poetry is above all kinds of material improvements. On the other hand, it is important to notice that he is not talking of every kind of poetry, but specifically that of Greek mythology.

Similar to Columbus, Thoreau sees his movement westwards as an encounter with/discovery of a paradise, as both authors describe their astonishment with the wilderness that is being found in the west. The kind of discovery exercised by Columbus, however, is that of naming and taking possession of what he sees, while that of Thoreau is simply to be among nature, observing and writing about its wonders, without any religious or political institution to sponsor his walks. Both travelers, however, rely on the written word to confirm their position. Not only looking is necessary, but also writing for different audiences their accounts of the strange—so marvelous it is that it has to be somehow imprinted with their names on it. The same happens with other travel writers who, like Mungo Park, demonstrate their admiration for the unknown. Writing is what helps to shape the collective conception of a location and the relations of man to it, at the same time that it works as a kind of baptism, as seen with Columbus; that is, a place starts to exist after the first written account of what was “found” in it, through European, and when talking about Thoreau, white American eyes.

As to the second part of the “European Planetary Consciousness,” term coined from Pratt in section 1.2, Thoreau differs radically from European writers in

his criticism of the scientific approach to nature and environment. Besides defending Darwin, no other scientific theory but that of the adaptation of man to his environment seems plausible to him. There is in Thoreau a curiosity to observe and try to understand animal behaviors as well as to express the wonders of nature that several critics call him a nature writer.

## 2.8 “The Cockerel Crow Gospel”

Contrasting against the reflections about science in “Walking” is the religiousness in which the text is strongly steeped. Transcendentalists like Thoreau carry in their discourses the utopian aim of being detached from other philosophies and from tradition—otherwise their ideas would contradict their necessity of creating a an original American literature and a new religious approach. The religious principles of “Walking” are clear: the first is that a walker must be driven by the belief in reaching a Holy Land. The prophet-narrator states, by comparing the walker to “some Peter the Hermit,” that the Holy Land must be reconquered “from the hands of the Infidels” (72). The “infidels” can refer to those people who want to possess the land and rapidly transform its features—such as the people referred to on page 102 of “Walking” as “a type of a class,” against whom the narrator direct his practices. *Nature* and the *Wildness*, with capital letters are the references that appear as religious motivation for the *Walker*—also in initial capital, understood as a pilgrim. It is Nature, intuition and Wilderness which are going to guide the Walker to this sacred place.

Lawrence Buell’s essay “The Thoreauvian Pilgrimage” examines how Thoreau’s words resonated with travel accounts due to their religious aspect. He was even compared to Saint Francis of Assisi for his defense of nature and religious

rituals with the natural elements (192). Buell's review of A.H. Japp brings to light a conception of Thoreau as inspired by an "ecological gospel of reverence for fellow creatures as equals." And Buell had emphasized "Walking" instead of *Walden*, he would probably find more elements to reinforce this theory, since in the essay Thoreau discourses about gospel. But his gospel is not that of the bible or any retelling of Christ's stories.

"Above all" Thoreau says, "we cannot afford not to live in the present" and it is the cock crow who alerts us to the "gospel according to the moment," this gospel being an even newer testament (120). It is the cock, with his cockerel crow, that can truly celebrate the present instant of time, calling the narrator to come "back to his senses," that is, to awake for the consciousness of the present, as if he was asleep when thinking about past events. It is curious to imagine a cock in the place of a sage or priest, calling people's attention to the joy of everyday life, as this passage suggests. The spiritual power of the cockerel crow is the gospel which conducts Thoreau's thoughts immediately to the moment he is living. The walker needs to be "in his senses," then in order to grasp what the "even newer gospel" has to preach.

A reference to Elysium—the place in Greek mythology where the heroes were sent by the gods after death, or the place of pure happiness (OAD)—is made in the last lines of "Walking". In their walks (and here, in the last paragraphs of "Walking" the first person plural appears again) the sun is the guide that calls them to the west, as if the West represented the borders of Elysium, and takes them home by gently touching their backs. So we could think of the sun as another sage or preacher, in the sense that it beckons the walker towards the Holy Land, being announced and celebrated in its first morning rays by the cock, and driving people home each evening, in an ever returning movement.

As for God, there are only two references in the text, and a strict interpretation of the meaning of God to the narrator may lead to the finding of contradictions in his arguments—since it is through Nature that spiritual renewal can be possible, and not by the words from the Bible or any preacher. The first of these references is when, in expounding on the nature of the walker at the beginning of the essay, the narrator states that “No wealth can buy the requisite leisure, freedom, and independence, which are the capital in this profession. It comes only by the grace of God” (73). The second reference to God comes when the narrator condemns the division of land, visualizing the future and saying that “walking over the surface of God’s earth, shall be construed to mean trespassing on some gentleman’s grounds” (85).

One possible interpretation I find for the presence of God in the text is the narrator’s purpose to share a common ground with religious readers and hearers of his speech, that is, to gain their agreement that according to God, the earth is collective, and that people who do not have any natural inclination to be “Walkers” (as he conceives) will not enjoy it truly throughout their lives. Another possibility, which does not contradict the previous one, is to consider Thoreau’s religiousness as not completely detached from traditional religion, being the presence of God in the text an intentional indication that Thoreau’s transcendentalism does not deny its Protestant inheritance. But in comparison to the word “Nature” (with initial capital) that appears at least eighteen times in the text, references to God are almost insignificant, showing that it is Nature which best represents religiousness to him. The sun and the cock, then, are means through which nature expresses its gospel; intuition, instead of any planned movement, is what conducts the walker to the holy place.

## 2.9 Thoreau's poetics of "Walking"

He would be a poet who could impress the winds and streams into his service, to speak for him; who nailed words to their primitive senses, as farmers drive down stakes in the spring, which the frost has heaved; who derived his words as often as he used them, -- transplanted them into his page with earth adhering to their roots; whose words were so true and fresh and natural that they would appear to expand like the buds at the approach of spring, though they lay half smothered between two musty leaves in a library, --aye, to bloom and bear fruit there, after their kind, annually, for the faithful reader, in sympathy with surrounding Nature.

If, for Thoreau, the best things are the wild and free ones, so should be the best poetry. It is not in culture that Thoreau finds the inspiration and basis of what he considers good poetry, but in the outside world, in wilderness. At the beginning of the essay, when the narrator discusses the meaning of the kind of walking he is proposing, he tells a story about Wordsworth. A traveler, when passing by, asked the poet's servant to see Wordsworth's studies; the servant pointed to the library but adverted that his master's study was out of doors (77). As with Wordsworth, we could say that Thoreau's poetics, or theory of poetry is directly linked to the practice of his walks, to the act of observing and being absorbed by the outdoors world, extracting from Nature the words, which, like plants with their roots and earth, are going to be transplanted to the paper.

Also, Greek mythology represents the closest that poetry ever got to nature (for Thoreau "Nature" with capital initial). Greek mythology, he states, has its roots in nature, and is put in opposition to English Literature, which does not breathe the fresh and wild strain. In a single sentence Thoreau quotes the names of Chaucer, Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare, poets whose words were paraphrased in several other parts of the essay (103). The narrator posits that these poets, besides their demonstration of love for nature, do not talk about what is wild in men. They are, for him, too civilized.

One could question, at this point, what is the space for the native and wild poetry by Native Americans in “Walking.” It is true that Thoreau himself did not write much about the Native Americans<sup>17</sup>, but references to them appear in “Walking” in the form of brief stories inserted in the text. The narrator points to the “wildest dreams of wild men” (105) as examples of what he considers good poetry: the poetry of the wild. Worth noticing are the passages that indicate the presence of *contact zones* in “Walking,” such as the text below, a recollection of travelers’ words about the Natives:

Some travelers tell us that an Indian had no name given him at first, but earned it, and his name was his fame; and among some tribes he acquired a new name with every new exploit. It is pitiful when a man bears a name for convenience merely, who has earned neither name nor fame. (109)

This part of the text is for my purpose, very significant, for these words not only show that Thoreau was a reader of travel writing and interested in Native customs, but that he counter poses the “wild” behavior with that of the whites. The whole of scientific practice and discourse is put in check when compared to the method of giving and receiving names used by the Natives. “A familiar name cannot make a man less strange to me” (109) he continues. That is, words’ meanings cannot be used simply to describe a thing that has no connection to its name. In other words, the act of naming the things on earth is an impossible attempt to familiarize things that instead, have their own transcendence. A name, like a label, in European and white American minds, is a tentative taming of man and nature by creating realities that transform the unknown and unexpected into a recognizable code. Behind the act of giving fixed names to things, there is the intention of fixing the world and its elements in separated compartments of a whole, as if everything were “explicable” and “understandable.”

---

<sup>17</sup> Though Thoreau was pretty interested in the subject for he was preparing a history of the Native Americans before he died, as Edwin S. Fussels’ essay “The Red Face of Man” well develop;

Every generalization, or collectivization of people under a label, such as the army, is for Thoreau abominable. He suggests, however, that it would be an advantage to philosophy if men were named “merely in the gross,” according to their genus and variety, so that people would be aware that they are being put in a category. Then, I infer that any annihilation of individual characteristics such as happens with the soldiers of an army, would kill the possibility of transcendence. People who are grouped under a general label should be aware that they are leaving their personalities behind to assume a collective identity.

I consider Thoreau to be a specific and unique travel writer, as each certainly is. His writings point to an understanding of travel that is far distant from other travel writings at the same time that they share a similar ground. I will develop the qualities of his traveling proposal in the next chapter. But by now, I should point at two main aspects of his poetics: that of sympathy and instinct. “The seeds of instinct are preserved under the thick hides of cattle and horses, like the seeds in the bowels of the earth, an indefinite period” (107). It is instinct that lays under the term “wild” and that is present even in the most domesticated races of animals. So it is in the tamed man, in whose routine, name, appearance, and attitudes hide the very seeds of instinct. It is the belief in the instinctive rebelliousness of man, in my opinion, that gives the optimistic tone to Thoreau’s writings, and specifically to “Walking.” This happens, for instance, in the passage of the text when he observes the cattle’s free play in the natural environment (107), an idealized moment when man and animals are away from being governed by a superior voice. To Thoreau, that is when poetry happens.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESONANCES OF “WALKING”

#### 3.1 Thoreau’s writings as resources of resistance

It is common among critical essays on Thoreau not to distinguish between “author” and “hero” in his works. This happens due to the fact that his writings are all autobiographical, written in the first person singular. Thoreau has created his hero to be a glorification of the American individual, somewhat like Benjamin Franklin did half a century before. Thoreau is the narrator and main character of all his writings, and he even assumes the position of a prophet and a genius. “Any man” he says “can stop a hole to keep the wind away, but no other man could serve so rare a use as the author of this illustration did” (108). Thoreau induces his readers to believe that they are reading about a real person who is somehow wiser than other simple men.

The greatest amount of critical material that can be found about Thoreau today is mostly concerned with two of his writings: *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience*. And although the works of Thoreau have been studied through several different perspectives, little attention has been dedicated to “Walking” in comparison to the writings mentioned above. Still, there has been an increase in the number of publications about Thoreau’s works on the fields of literature, ecology and politics. The most quoted passage of “Walking”—“in Wildness is the preservation of the world” (95)—has inspired several writers that are concerned with environmental studies. However, few literary analyses speak of the essay as a whole. *Walden* remains the most popular of his works. His ideas on how to regard nature as a

fundamental key to an individual's and a people's formation rather than a mere commodity seem to be the arguments that call the attention of today's scholars. *Civil Disobedience* is a mark of his political thinking, a text much appreciated in the fields of sociology and law. As for considering Thoreau's works as art pieces, critics from the most traditional like F. O. Matthiessen to post modern ones like Lawrence Buell, when writing about Thoreau, declare that they are dealing with art, rather than with philosophy or politics – a choice that do not exempt them of dealing, one way or another, with these other approaches. Here I review some of the responses that “Walking” has generated among critics.

At the time the American transcendentalists lived, most of them did not cause a great impact in American thinking immediately. As Edwards and Horton state, Transcendentalism “was more of a leavening of the lump than a sudden mass conversion”. In affirming that, however, they open a possibility for understanding Transcendentalism as a collective movement, though “the leaders of the movement were too individualistic to found a school of philosophy” (126). Still, certain impact they surely had, or intended to have among people, as this passage of *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought* exemplifies:

Transcendentalism was an ethical guide to life for a young nation. (...) In its insistence on the essential worth and dignity, it was a powerful force for democracy, and at the same time it preached, and practiced, an idealism that was greatly needed in a rapidly expanding economy, where opportunity too often became mere opportunism, and the desire to “get on” obscured the moral necessity for rising to spiritual heights. (119)

Transcendental writings argued in favor of a spiritual reason found in nature, men's liberty from traditional habits and individuality, principles which were held in agreement with the excited spirit of going West of the time. Transcendentalism, then, turned became another reason to justify expansionism. Specially Emerson is pointed out by Edwards and Horton as being responsible for the idea of the negation of evil and the principle of compensation—the belief that every “evil” deed is offset

by a corresponding “good” one (unity in dualism)—a theory that strongly justifies evil actions and discourages “moral indignation” (120). This assumption may also apply to Thoreau, since his extreme optimism permit him to forget the obstacles (towns, government, fences, property, law) he has to face. A strategy to “jump” these obstacles is Thoreau’s direct speech against them, showing that he is aware about the difficulties and has the mission of telling evil to redeem in nature.

At a certain moment in “Walking,” for instance, Thoreau states that he has heard about a “Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.” He rejects this institution’s purposes saying that there would better be a “Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance” and criticizes its members: “Go to grass” he tells them, “you have eaten hay long enough” (112). Thoreau blames these people for their willingness to give orders to others, treating them like tamed cattle<sup>18</sup>.

For the several rebellious attitudes found in his books, Thoreau has become an American icon after his death from tuberculosis, in 1862. He was not broadly recognized at first, as other transcendentalists like Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne were. But a significant number of intellectuals and “pilgrims” at the end of the nineteenth century, such as the poet John Muir, visited Concord and helped to create and echo the myth of “Concord as an Oasis of pastoral felicity and Walden as a spiritual center,” as well states Lawrence Buell in the article “The Thoreauvian Pilgrimage: The Structure of an American Cult” (182). Buell’s arguments are particularly interesting when he discusses the resonances of Thoreau’s words in traveling movements; he shows how Walden Pond has become a site for pilgrimage, and Thoreau, an American folk hero.

Several are the names of writers and hermits who, inspired by Thoreau’s

---

<sup>18</sup> Interesting intersections of this passage could be developed between Thoreau’s and Rousseau’s words praising ignorance and blaming the excessive value given to knowledge. The very expression “Go to grass!” also reminds Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, as another transcendental appeal to a return of the self to nature.

words, followed his steps and entered the woods of Walden Pond ever since the author lived there. The main consequence of these pilgrimage movements, according to Buell, discovers is that all the travel accounts, starting with Muir's, reveal their authors' struggle to see the place Thoreau lived with "Thoreauvian eyes." That is, they try to grasp Concord and Walden through the words of Thoreau, delighted by the spiritual renewal he talks so much about. Buell brings the concept "pilgrimage" from Victor and Edith Turner to develop his argument: it is a "temporary liberation from profane social structures and spiritual renewal at the journey's end through the exchange of these structures for a sacred realm of significant symbols (...)." Pilgrimage is the religious appeal invoked by Thoreau. Though temporary when walking, it should, rather, be progressive in order to "light up our whole lives with a great awakening light" ("Walking", 122).

Statistic data researched by Buell demonstrate that right before World War I, the number of visitors at Walden Pond was 30 thousand per year, while during the seventies, this number reached half a million per year, indicating that this pilgrimage movement to Thoreau's place began at the time Muir visited the Pond, in 1893, and developed into a mass tourist movement in less than a century. Many writers and hermits studied by Buell followed Thoreau's track and took his book as a guide for an alternative way of life in the United States before and after 1947, when the centenary of Thoreau's retirement to Walden Pond was celebrated. Most of these works are simple mimicry of Thoreau's experience exercised by his followers—or, in Buell's words, Thoreau's *devotees*. Buell explains, however, that Thoreau was not the only motive for these people to "withdraw to a simpler state of existence for the sake of spiritual renewal" (188). Other works such as Cooper's *The Pioneers* have also emphasized the idea that settlement in New England was a synonym of being errant into the wilderness, which meant a distinguished action.

References to the early settlers in “Walking” well confirm this argument:

I was impressed as if some ancient and altogether admirable and shining family had settled there in that part of the land called Concord, unknown to me,—to whom the sun was servant,—who had not gone into society in the village,—who had not been called on. (116-7)

Buell also argues that the very idea of pilgrimage is present in ancient western and eastern cultures, but what Muir started was a “prototype pilgrimage” (188). Muir founded the “Thoreauvian Pilgrimage” cult, which a set of Thoreau’s admirers have followed and worshiped—transforming Thoreau’s figure into a preacher and canonical writer. And yet, as “all shrines also require saints” (189), Buell examines how Thoreau incredibly fits the requirements to be considered a kind of “saint” or a religious leader. “Walking” presents clear examples of the sancticity that can be found in Thoreau’s words, the sacred aura imputed in the act of walking, as it deals with the pilgrimage in search of a spiritual encounter, the saunter towards a Holy Land. Still, Buell differentiates Thoreau’s “admirers”—who have written Concord’s visitation narratives, guidebooks that indicated Concord as a literary spot—from other readers of Thoreau, who “are less likely to be interested in shrine-building than in enacting their own independent pilgrimages.” These last cases were, for instance, those of Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

Gandhi and King openly welcomed Thoreau’s writings as a source of inspiration for their public and collective manifestations. His ideas resonated through the social movements that these two great figures led. Not by chance they lived around the same time, the mid-twentieth century, when anti-colonial and anti-slavery movements were getting stronger around the world. What happened in this period related to the resonance of Thoreau’s writings is enough subject matter for another thesis, but it is sufficient to say now that civil disobedience—boycotts, noncooperation with the state and other pacific reactions against oppression and war—was at its peak. Because of the astonishment with World War II, and further

movements against the Vietnam War, a global counter-cultural wave was being spread, and many of its pushers were inspired in their actions by Thoreau's thoughts and attitudes. Musicians like John Cage, and poets such as Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snider, among several others have Thoreau as a reference to their works.

Ginsberg's poem "Sunflower Sutra" (1956), for instance, can be compared to the writings of Thoreau in their conception of the relation between man and nature:

I walked on the banks of the tincan banana dock and sat down under the  
huge shade of a Southern Pacific locomotive to look at the sunset over the  
box house hills and cry.  
Jack Kerouac sat beside me on a busted rusty iron pole, companion, we  
thought the same thoughts of the soul, bleak and blue and sad-eyed,  
surrounded by the gnarled steel roots of trees of machinery. (1-6)

The poet and his poet-friend sit to watch this dirty, dank and noisy scenery of a San Francisco's dock, when his friend notices a sunflower "sitting dry on top of a pile of ancient sawdust," which the poet grabs and uses as a scepter, and delivers his sermon face to their "bleak and blue and sad-eyed" feelings, stating that "we're all golden sunflowers inside." One century after the spread of self-reliance mood, what we read in Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra" is a desperate will to find something pure (nature) among all the machinery and trash that they perceive in their surroundings. Direct references to Walt Whitman can easily be found in the poem, but not to Thoreau.

Still we can compare the poets' movements and the scenery with that of "Walking," as Ginsberg and Kerouac sit in a place that is far from being the wild and natural. Under a shade of a locomotive, looking at the "box house hills," the poet finds in the sunflower what for Thoreau could be the symbol of search for spiritual renewal, a holy image in an unpleasant place. Ginsberg sees beauty and transcendence in the sunflower, the only thing that can rescue him and his friend

from the trash of their surroundings and their times. By trying to reconquer the holy symbol from the dirt that development had provoked on landscape, Ginsberg and Kerouac became icons of the counter-cultural movement, being rapidly recognized and admired around the globe.

Besides these speculations about Thoreau's broad recognition, I add to it the non-official information that, under Latin American dictatorships, American books were not as hunted as the ones which came from the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and other communist spots, but instead, free to be consumed. Consequently, books such as *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience* were allowed to be sold, bought and of course, read<sup>19</sup>. I am talking here about a good number of intellectuals who had access to foreign literature, and who, like in other countries, helped to organize resistance against oppression. Also, as everything that was happening in America quite fascinated the world, mainly because of cinema and music, we can imagine that, in order to understand a bit of our dominant culture, some people here in South America must have turned to literature as a source of information. Not that Thoreau had to do with the propaganda of the "American way of life" in the fifties and sixties, but quite the opposite: he represented a response for those who wanted to assume a different lifestyle towards both the excess of consumerism and the oppression of authority. Through some conversations I had with people who lived during this period I found out that *Civil Disobedience* was really a handbook for those who, in one way or another, were critics of the dictatorship in Latin America and all the cultural impositions that came along with it.

### 3.2 "Walking": a naturalist text?

---

<sup>19</sup> information brought up in a conversation with poet Cleber Teixeira

“Nature is a personality so vast and unique that we have never seen one of her features.” (“Walking” 115)

The first critical essays dedicated to Thoreau considered his works to be those of a naturalist writer (Matthiessen 76). Despite Thoreau’s frequent warnings about his unscientific perspective, still today he has been seen as a descendent of naturalists, and even called an “ecologist,” though this word did not exist until a little after Thoreau’s death (OAD).

Truth is that Thoreau plays a significant role in environmental studies, a fact easily verified in contemporary English language works in the field, whose authors not only quoted Thoreau but also confer special attention to him. This is the case with Donald Worster’s *Nature’s Economy*, and Edward Wilson’s *O Futuro da Vida*. Worster recognizes in Thoreau a “scientific observation with ethical understanding and responsibility” as his book discourses about the nature of ecology as science and/or a philosophy (Manas, par. 1). Edward Wilson writes the prologue of his book as an imaginary letter to Thoreau, treating him as a friend and informing him of the changes that have taken place around Walden Pond since his retirement there from 1845 to 1847. Because Wilson intends to follow Thoreau’s steps, Wilson is another of Thoreau’s devotees.

Another major author in environmental studies today, Simon Schang names Thoreau and John Muir in his book *Landscape and Memory* (1995), as being the “founders of modern environmentalism”<sup>20</sup>. He begins and ends his almost six hundred pages of stories about landscape descriptions and human interference in it with quotations from Thoreau’s *Walden*, “Walking” and *Journal*. The most famous passage of “Walking” --“in wildness is the preservation of the world”—is quoted at

---

<sup>20</sup> my translation from the Portuguese version – the original word for environmentalism being “ambientalismo” (Schana, *Paisagem e Memória*, 17)

least three times in this book. His reverence for Thoreau, however, is that of an admirer: Schang has looked for signs in Thoreau's place, wondering how only two decades after Thoreau's death Walden Pond became a site for pilgrims, argument that confirms Buell's studies. He also elaborates his opinions on Thoreau's probable feelings and private stories, a reading that may suggest Schang's place as a Thoreau's devotee, like Edward Wilson. But what is the preservation defended by Thoreau in "Walking" that so forcefully called environmental scholars' attention in the United States and Britain?

A lot has been said about this question in relation to *Walden*, for instance, based on the chapters "Economy" or "Where I lived and What I Lived For" to exemplify the utopian possibilities of inhabiting a wild environment without damaging it. In "Walking" Thoreau shows respect for nature as the main teacher of life, for it is not in cultivated nature that man will find renewal, but in wilderness. Therefore, wilderness must exist in men's life, and the only way for renewal to happen is through its preservation. To this permanent dilemma of human interference on nature, Thoreau has his answer:

I would not have every man nor every part of a man cultivated, any more than I would have every acre of earth cultivated: part will be tillage, but the greater part will be meadow and forest, not only serving an immediate use, but preparing a mould against a distant future, by the annual decay of the vegetation which it supports.

A simple comparison between Thoreau and the naturalists who lived in times and spaces different from his own may run the risk of turning out to be a superficial generalization. Still, some aspects that differentiate Thoreau from nature writers, ethnographers and botanists is that Thoreau did not participate in any sponsored scientific exploration except those of his own creation (a boat trip on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers and another trip to the Maine Woods). Though

preserving his solitude, Thoreau is interested in the collective practices of the white man and the moral failures of the life he has chosen. He criticizes the main instrument of European science: that of naming the world's elements and treating nature as a system under control. Moreover, his view was that of a transcendentalist and a romanticist, which preserved the spiritual and poetical value of nature.

Similarly to other naturalists, on the other hand, Thoreau was also a student of the natural elements. He lived among and observed them but had no interest in naming plants or animals. As was said before, Thoreau developed a deep knowledge of the field of nature writing, a fact that is explicit in his quotations on Linné, Guyot, Buffon and Humboldt. In Humboldt and Linné, Thoreau finds a confirmation of his theory on the greatness of the American territory. In Humboldt too he recognizes a great scientist, but not a poet. Although Humboldt expressed sentiment and subjectivism in his writings, he was not considered a poet to Thoreau. What Humboldt produced was not "literature which gives expression to nature" ("Walking," 104). Thoreau's concern, then, is not with scientific descriptions or mere sentimentalism towards nature, but with an awake poetry that can serve as a vehicle of nature, with brilliant writers (like him) at its service.

Perhaps what calls environmental scholars' attention the most in the writings of Thoreau is his view of nature as something sacred, its romantic appeal contrasted with the dry determinism that explains the origins of life forms. Romanticism is, in my view, very much present in ecology, especially the branch of it which defends that nature should remain untouched. Thoreau lived in nature without changing its features, and his texts had a practical appeal that can well be a guide for a conception of an alternative life style: living in the world outdoors instead of being slaves to cars, apartments and malls; living in simplicity, cutting all excessiveness that modern life pushes us to. Ecological catastrophes originating from nuclear

weapons and accidents, and global warming due to the burning of fossil fuels also turn the attention to environmental studies, and provoke a recall of early environmental advocates such as Thoreau—through what Buell named “rituals of remembrance.”

### 3.3 Thoreau’s outlook on America: what expansionism, what imperialism?

How proud Thoreau is of himself and of his land we have already seen. From the perspective of the resonances of his writings, we also know that he has strongly influenced studies and practices in environmentalism in the United States, as well as studies that discuss the formation of American identity, taking Thoreau as one of the main sources to define the American individualism. In this section I dedicate some lines to examine what kind of expansionism and/or imperialism is supported or rejected by Thoreau in “Walking”.

Edwards and Horton, at the end of the chapter “Unitarianism and Transcendentalism,” show the means through which Transcendentalism, mainly based on Emerson’s works, was taken as a stimulus to expansionism and conquest of the West. Individualism, the basis of transcendental thinking, for many people justified their personal eagerness to “get on,” resulting “far more often in rampant individualism than in a democracy of mutual helpfulness and equal opportunity” (120). To two of the main promotion jargons of the time, “hitch your wagon to a star” and “go west, young man” (H & E 120), Thoreau adds in “Walking” another one: “To Americans, I hardly need to say, - ‘Westward the star of empire takes its way.’” This very statement, one may say, reveals Thoreau’s support for imperialism and expansionism, reinforcing that nations should follow the “Great Pioneer” which is the sun (“Walking” 88). But as a distinctive propagandist of individualism,

Thoreau's complex message and vision of America cannot be simplified.

In reading "Walking," it seems from beginning to end that Thoreau assumes the conquest of the West by "nations" (93) or by "a new civilization superior to the preceding, by a greater power of development" (90) as an inevitable outcome. As I have stated before, Thoreau's belief in progress is explicit in his text, but at the same time, the kind of expansionism he defends is not the one practiced by the main European explorers and settlers—that of profiting from the land and its natives, by extracting its material richness. His attitude may get closer, however, to that of Mungo Park (mentioned in chapter 1), who, in response to a nagging sense of guilt for being "imperialist," ends his novels as a hero who does not want to take advantage of natives and their land in any materialistic sense—although in a passage of "Walking" he values the agrarian instruments over the native ones.

One must try not to see—and this is a fundamental precept of exercising perception—the United States of Thoreau as the same United States of today; one should not even try to see through the eyes of Thoreau, as many of his admirers did. Rather, we must remain aware of the distance in time—one hundred and fifty years—that separate the moment "Walking" was exposed in the Concord Lyceum to today's possibility of downloading the original text from the Internet. Moreover, our regard, besides being individual, is a product of different collective histories. The United States of Thoreau's time, as I have tried to show, was passing through moments of rapid change, growth of population, improvement of means of transportation, abolitionist movements, anxiety towards the possibilities of finding gold and occupying an immense and unknown continental area. From that time to the present, the United States has condensed in its history enough facts to bring it to be the strongest economy in the world, and one of the prices they have paid for it was the devastation of their continental natural area.

Edwards and Horton often refer to the US's post Civil War industrial growth as a period of aggressions: commercial aggression (262) and aggressive tactics in foreign territories, with the closing of the American frontiers (264). Mass production, machine technology and finance capitalism turned the American people into promoters and victims of financial manipulations. Darwin's theories also helped to destroy the feeling of self-reliance that was the motto of the Enlightenment (254). The renunciation of religious beliefs due to the view of man as a biochemical phenomenon was supported by philosophers like C.S Pierce (1839-1914) and William James (1842-1910) and their pragmatic thoughts helped the "relatively naive plain citizen" of the 1890s to approve and encourage the expansion of the United States' boundaries abroad (252). These were, of course, historic events that Thoreau did not experience.

The expansionism of Thoreau's time was a previous manifestation of (and used as a pre-text to) the continuing "American" desire to conquer overseas through economic dominance. After the Civil War, its frontiers established, the United States started influencing the world through its industry. The distinction between American expansionism and European imperialism could be explained according to the time they occurred and to the geographical conditions they faced: North American territory is a continuous extension of land, where the relation of metropolis to colony is separated by the sea, being American expansionism a spreading of the center—represented by the main cities of the east coast<sup>21</sup>. I believe, however, that imperialism is to a great extent a consequence of expansionism in the sense that both systems have the objective of searching for raw material, getting cheap labor, and enlarging the number of consumers for their industries.

European imperialism and American expansionism carry on a practice of

---

<sup>21</sup> I owe, once again, this observation to my friend and History teacher Gabe Rodrigues

economic dependence through the establishment of multinational enterprises abroad, and the continuity of a global project of data collection and its manipulation; imperialism, since the beginning of the European project of systematization of the world gets spread through cultural production. Expansionism also follows the same consolidation of bourgeois forms of subjectivity and power, as pointed out by Pratt in relation to Europe (9) having the bourgeois ideology dominating other social classes. Moreover, about a century after Thoreau's times, the United States economic ascendancy starts being discussed by scholars as either "cultural imperialism" or "neocolonialism" (Ianni 127)<sup>22</sup>.

The United States' expansionism of Thoreau's time was spreading the seeds of what was to come: the continual expansion of its economy and political dominance over other countries. By the end of the nineteenth century, then, the United States, through its church and political figures much influenced by Darwin's deterministic theory—that could serve to justify the rights of strong nations over weak ones (H & E 262)—assume their "mission" of spreading around the world the advantages of business enterprise, with the idealistic excuse of promoting democracy abroad (264).

In their chapter about Marxism in American Literature, Edwards and Horton interestingly account for the transcendentalist movement as a form of condemnation of materialism and business opportunism, as was demonstrated in chapter 1 with Emerson's essay "The Transcendentalist." This position against something that was about to come, aggressive capitalism and high accumulation, was already felt by Thoreau, as in *Walden* he associates accumulation with slavery (62). In "Walking" this awareness is also clear, for the main expressions of "wanting more" were

---

<sup>22</sup> The subject of American Imperialism is vast and complex; one of the differences of European and American Imperialisms pointed out by Ianni is that American Imperialism is built in opposition to socialism, while Europe had the internal dispute of different countries.

already perceived by Thoreau in the social manners of his fellows. Thoreau's discourse against precocity, for instance, shows his condemnation for doing things rapidly, disrespecting the natural time of growth and development. He says: "When we should be still growing children, we are already little men" (110). I take this as an attack to any imperialist practice.

Besides blaming his society for hurrying in time, for living indoors and for its people's will to accumulate, Thoreau considers himself a "true patriot." The kind of patriotism he talks about has nothing to do with defending war or militarism by any means. He shows his loyalty and patriotism to the State by assuming the role of a "moss-trooper" with whose spirit he enters the State's territories occasionally (115). It is not society, then, that he aims to "serve" but of course, "Nature," although it is to society that he writes. Once again we have the narrator mocking the army, something he does not respect, and establishing his view of the frontier: the State's territory, and on the other side, wilderness.

In relation to the concept of *contact zones* brought up by Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*, reviewed at the beginning of this thesis—the interaction between colonizers and colonized—we saw that, although the concept is used by her to refer to European imperialism, this relationship is critical to readings of travel literature. We saw that Thoreau does not walk in search of human contact but still, references to "others" and to "travelers" are not rare in "Walking." Travelers are usually referred to as people who inform, who gather an extended knowledge about people and places. He does not need to travel far, it seems, if the words of travelers come to him. We also know that, for a long time, Thoreau was seen as a hermit, even if critics and biographers diverge on that point. The fact is that Thoreau dedicated part of his life to a solitude that was not completely apart from the collectiveness, but at the same time, represented a retirement from society and its laws. Be it hermitage or

not, his practical retirement did not exclude Thoreau from human contact.

Some passages, such as the comparison of Native Americans to American farmers concerning their treatment of the land are rather obscure, as suggests Margaret Brulatour, a Thoreau scholar. We know that Thoreau defends many indigenous practices, but he also praises agrarian instruments as being means of redeeming the “virgin soil” in comparison to the weak Indian’s instrument, the “clam-shell.” At the same time, however, the author denounces the “bad” use of white men’s tools, as in the case of an employer of his who, wanting to put a “girdling ditch” around a swamp, almost paid with his life by sinking in the mud (102).

It is because human contact is not the focus of his writings that contact zones in “Walking” can be better perceived in terms of their absence, a fact that again points at the author’s extreme individualism. This absence is the absence of other specific people, for the individual’s position towards “Society” and “State” is clear. That is, instead of the dichotomy of colonizer versus colonized, Thoreau constructs a dichotomy of individual versus society. Instead of focusing on the different human subjects observed in his walks, Thoreau uses his philosophy to criticize aspects of his entire society, which could be considered a strategy of anti-conquest, that is, according to Pratt, a way to secure innocence within one country’s hegemony. By blaming his own society for its advances in industry and consumerism, and its lack of respect towards the Indians, Thoreau tries to guarantee the sympathy of his readers.

### 3.4 The anti-tourism

It is not only because Thoreau creates dialogues with several texts of

travelers and naturalists that “Walking” is a text about traveling. But one distinct aspect of “Walking” is that, besides the evidence in the text that the author was a reader of travel and nature writers, a whole theory about movement is presented in it—a theory which, despite the distance in time, can be contrasted to the notion of tourism—word that shows up in the mid nineteenth century to represent massive temporary dislocations—and to what is written about traveling today.

“Walking” is a work about displacement and perception, another of Thoreau’s defenses of simplicity against the excessive consumerism of a society dependent on money and a complex infra-structure. From the perspective of travel writing, what is exclusive in Thoreau that differentiates his writings from other travel accounts is its transcendentalist characteristic. As to the matter of *transculturation*, the way the traveler receives and appropriates the metropolitan modes of representation, when Thoreau positions himself close to the first settlers of New England in the woods of Concord, he already considers himself a colonizer. Surely, to the present eyes, he belongs to and represents a dominant culture, the American culture of individualism, one that, in defending the self, supposedly has to respect and accept the different other. The narrator defends several Indian practices in this sense, but these Indians are never described in terms of which tribe they belong or any physical characteristic such as the ones used in ethnology. He does not express much sentimentalism towards them either, as some romantic writers did towards the “exotic” man.

In “Walking,” Thoreau depicts the individual struggle to escape from being represented by someone else, or by any institution where the individual voice is not heard. Categories and generalizations are what destroy the individual freedom, a practice that goes against his will. Still the author cannot avoid representing and being represented. He uses the categories, for example, of farmers, Indians, and

villagers, putting one group in opposition to another and to him. But neither Indians nor farmers have his status, that of a poet. He sees himself, the hero—poet, as the genius who tries to give expression to nature, believing that this act is the only noble one.

A reflection of this transcendental insubordination in relation to the act of traveling in “Walking” is Thoreau’s encouragement to clean up the obstacles faced during a trip, so that truer enjoyment of the outdoors world is possible. But what are these obstacles like? The saunterer, or the one “born into the family of the walkers,” according to Thoreau (73), must have a direct physical contact with nature. That is, he has to use his body for displacement instead of any means of transportation, to open his eyes, be attentive and so, try to be in “in his senses,” concentrating on what he is living at the very moment of the walk. Like the protestant’s direct relation with the writings of the bible, contact with nature should not occur through someone else’s point of view: no other but the individual can perceive the Holy Nature. What could be considered as obstacles for traveling today, the lack of infrastructure or means of transportation, the heat, the cold or excessive wind, for instance, were for Thoreau what made a trip natural and what helped him to perceive the world outside by refining his senses.

The search for the unexpected that the external world can offer in a walk is part of what I suggest to be the theory of travel in “Walking.” This elegy for surprises can be contrasted with a traditional mode of traveling, that of the mass movement known as tourism. Tourism is usually promoted and executed with a previous idea of knowing where to go, when to come back, and what to take on a trip in order to guarantee complete safety and enjoyment. Parks, museums, malls—all that can be considered as tourist attractions—are products of great organizations that join different items in planned open areas or attractive buildings. They present

a variety of new things to buy or to watch (usually both) with the security of having people frequenting them. If on the one hand the mall has the exclusive function of gathering goods to be sold, parks and museums, though not having this end final as a primary objective, are mostly constituted of the dislocated natural and cultural elements in a space that is organized and under control. That is why there is no meaning for Thoreau to search for these places when traveling.

According to Thoreau, it does not matter for the kind of walk he is proposing if the path the walker chooses is always the same path, for what he is going to see is never the same. We know that the narrator comes home, and then departs from the same home for another walk, but each time he passes by a place he is capable of recognizing more richness in it. This is another principle of “Walking,” that is, the look that recognizes the unexpected in one’s known place. When describing the farms and fields on the borders of Concord, Thoreau observes the mutations of the landscape, saying that only a painting can be able to capture a stable image, because “the world with which we are commonly acquainted leaves no trace, and it will have no anniversary” (116). He declares that he walks everyday around his vicinity, and that two or three hours of walking will take him to a “strange country,” for he is always going to find there a different element, “an absolutely new prospect” (79).

The path is the most important external “equipment” of travel, and as we have seen, no road is necessary to trace the way the walker chooses to go. It is the walk in the open air, not the destiny, which interests the saunterer. Moreover, to put the mind where the body is, is an essential principle of going out for a walk according to the narrator. Although the path is generally chosen by instinct, Thoreau turns mostly to the west as his favorite direction, as the whole history of the United States is running the same way. Here the narrator reproduces and

endorses a discourse of expansionism, but we must not forget that while his countrymen are hurrying in time, embedded with the desire to “get on,” Thoreau is rather walking slowly, in order to get out of the village’s commercial borders, showing no interest in, and even no respect for business, market and consumerism. His walks, according to him, have no objective.

If we think about the desires generated by the idea of tourism today we do not need to go far in the discussion to verify that the same desire of “getting on” is what moves most people to travel. Opportunism is, most of the time, underneath the idea of traveling. One does not travel without buying goods, going everywhere he can and taking infinite pictures that he will show everyone when he comes back. Many times, instead of resting and “renewing,” this traveler comes home more tired than when he left. As work inhibits the liberation of instincts, then traveling during vacations appears as a possibility of getting free from burdens and going to a paradise on earth.

### 3.5 A transcultural approach

“Walking” from beginning to end has a provocative tone. Thoreau leads his readers to rethink what kind of walkers they are. In spite of the distance in time, we have seen that the philosophical questions raised in Thoreau’s essay are rather current in contemporary western thought. We can think of “Walking” simply as a metaphor for life, a life’s journey. But one must not forget that the walking we are talking about is the walking of an individual, the walk taken and proposed by Henry

David Thoreau, the author who builds his image as a hero through his narrative voice. The narration of his walking inevitably induces a comparison to the readers' own walks: where we go, what for, with whom and, most of all: are we really "in our senses," that is, are we awake to perceive the wilderness that still remains, and can we differentiate it from what is culturally imposed?

Thoreau's words have shaken the thoughts of anarchists, hermits, poets, politicians, nature advocates and other defenders of individualism from his time to ours. The strongest characteristic of his texts, and specifically "Walking," is, for me, its characteristic of manifesto—that is, it represents a call to action. In *Walden*, for instance, Thoreau admits his words to be a guide for poor students. One of the attributes of "Walking" that confirms my argument is its ideological, together with its practical worth: a celebration of nature, life outdoors, instinct and simplicity. These are certainly romantic ideals and, to a certain extent, they can be compared to the precepts Benjamin Franklin's intended to teach his young nation. But instead of Franklin's conservative position in relation to family, work and collective values, Thoreau's position is that of a disobedient transcendental writer—a rebel that has presented, from his time to ours, conceptual alternatives that question and break with tradition and custom.

## FINAL REMARKS

From all the paths “Walking” may lead to, or may inspire, the one I have chosen to follow is that of reading its author—who is also the narrator and main character who performs the walks in body and spirit—a travel writer. Thoreau’s philosophy of walking contains in it the paradox of being at the same time in accordance with and contradictory to the earth’s (nature) and people’s (culture) movement westwards. Nature and culture, although treated by him as opposite forces, are components of what he believed to be the mythology of the future, a culture found in the wild aspects of a land that was being rapidly explored by the white man, but still reserved its amazements.

Through reviewing some histories of travel writing, we saw that while Europe aimed at controlling every quarter of the globe by sending explorers inwards and naming plants and places, American continental expansionism, though not occurring at the same exact moment, followed, to a great extent, the same imperial strategy. Transcendentalism, however, helped to shape new ideologies and economic values in expansionism, opening possibilities for contradicting and redefining the established patterns. “Transcendentalism,” which had in Thoreau one of its major figures, was a response, a look that aimed at categorizing men and turning them into countable pieces of the greater machinery of State and Church. Thoreau constructed his own transcendentalist philosophy and put it in to practice by living in the woods, drawing on non-violent ways of disobeying the State, and finding in walking a way of protesting against the excessiveness of his society.

Though there is a gap of fifty years between the main sources I have used for this historical review, *The Backgrounds of American Literary Thought* and *Imperial Eyes*, I believe that, put together, they complement each other. The result I

aimed at achieving was to critically outline the process of expansionism in America in which Thoreau found himself without disregarding a global view of how Europe was ruling the world's economy. Special attention was given to European and American explorers' role in illustrating the different peoples and nature they found along their expeditions in America and Africa—several of whom Thoreau refers to in "Walking." Horton and Edwards often approve or give excuses to the excesses committed by expansionism in the United States while Pratt concentrates on the relation of power implicit in the meeting of Europeans and natives. These two points of view were necessary to help me with the task of sketching Thoreau's historical backgrounds.

I also reviewed, in the beginning of chapter 2, how literature of travel and the act of traveling were in fashion among intellectuals in America and Europe. Like Emerson, these thinkers traveled to see what they had learned in books, to instruct themselves and meet with other like-minded people. Collective tours were beginning to be organized in England and would soon become a fever among people who could afford to travel abroad. But, for Thoreau, going on tours does not improve the voyager's thoughts if he/she does not perceive nature by being alert to the present. Also, at the same moment that people in the United States are running west with their ox-driven wagons, building railroads and about to start a civil war in favor of industry and production, Thoreau is *walking* westwards, following his own rhythm.

Traveling, for Thoreau, is not a matter of going far from home: distance does not imply the measure of steps, kilometers or miles. Instead, distance is the displacement of the walker or traveler in the outdoors, in the direction of an uncertain destination. This destination is preferably that of wilderness, which for Thoreau is Holy, for it can offer spiritual renewal and the freedom of instincts. In

opposition to ethnology and natural history, Thoreau's "Walker" is the one which preserves strangeness, instead of categorizing and explaining what is seen. The concept of traveler, seen this way, goes along with what Emerson has called the Idealist: he sees events as spiritual facts, relying on the vast and unknown. The Idealist traveler, then, does not accept everything that is imposed and generalized, such as labor, army, or simply going for a walk in "convenient" and expected places. Thoreau gives a transcendental meaning to voyaging, which, like the voyaging of the pilgrims, is driven to reach a Holy Land.

A transcendentalist trip, such as the one developed in "Walking" does not rely upon the dichotomy between labor and traveling, but promotes traveling in everyday life. It is to the West that nature and wilderness are visualized by Thoreau as preservation area that, in spite of the fact that it would soon be parted into private properties, this land still had enough wilderness to amaze the Walker. The Walker then, passes by without transforming the landscape, he/she is attentive to the peculiarities of nature and has his/her senses acute during a walk. This means that the look developed by Thoreau in "Walking" is the look that is not stable, but that experiments with different perspectives, for instance, from the top of a tree, or from the bottom up. It is the look that perceives the sounds, the breeze, and the heat of the sun. This anxiety to produce redemption, that is, to support that evil is not as great as to overcome one's walk, also reveals Thoreau's fragility, for when there is an obstacle along his path, the way to deal with it is by ignoring evil.

But whenever there are impasses to be solved, it is important remark that in what regards transcendentalism, the one who will deal with trouble is also the self and not any one else. The transcendentalist walk, therefore, claims no mediator, it favors the direct relation of walker and nature; it demands no means of transportation but the body; no buying of souvenirs; no concrete destination but that

of finding one's own Holy Land, where the walker can detach himself from society to better think about the relation of the self in the collective.

The time Thoreau lived, prior to the Civil War, corresponded to a boom in the transportation system and great mass movement to the west, pushed by a collective excitement and will to "get on" in society. As the movement west was at its peak at the time Thoreau lived, he does not struggle to go against it, but rather accepts, endorses and promotes this direction as the Holy one. At this point he helps to endorse the expansionist discourse, but not by the same means as expansionism adopted. By discoursing against precocity, for instance, Thoreau dismantles the whole American capitalist behavior of wanting to get rich quick and to acquire possessions. Possession, in his view, implies a limit for freedom, and this may be the chief polemic raised by him, an aspect that helps to rethink traveling behaviors and the whole relation between environment and people. Thoreau in "Walking" publicly manifests his disrespect for one of the main cultural value in the United States—private property—while guarantees the traveler's success formula of having his home everywhere, and overcoming the journey's evils.

Thoreau states in "Walking": "Unless our philosophy hears the cock crow in every barn-yard within our horizon, it is belated." Even when criticizing English poetry, he recognizes himself, by quoting these poets, as a product of that tradition. He stresses, however, the necessity of being alert to what is going on around us and to pay attention to it, otherwise we will be reproducing the lives and discourses of others, our ways of life will be belated. Evidence that Thoreau was "hearing the cockerel crow" of his present, that his philosophy was a philosophy of the present, are explicit when he mentions authors that were contemporary to him. For instance, one year after the publication of *Origins of the Species*, Thoreau had read and

commented on Darwin's work. He was entering into a dialogue with travel writers of his time like Humboldt, reading most of them in their original languages.

"Walking," like other works by Thoreau, has a practical quality. It is a call to travel on one's own feet and in one's own place as a way to awaken critical sense and confidence in independence. It represents the look that thinks and is curious, but not anxious about what one will see, where one will pass or when to come back home. The Walker avoids resuming routine as a circular movement that makes him/her forget about the trip as soon as he/she returns to a life that, as Thoreau imagines the village women's to be, is unbearable. But although Thoreau avoids referring to men or women specifically in the text, there is a clear naturalization of freedom as found in the masculine references: while women stay home, the cock, symbol of the new gospel to come, is what symbolizes freedom and consciousness.

It was by expanding this masculine white new theory made up to ground American Culture that Thoreau has become a canonical reference in Western literature. This new theory also strongly hit the field of environmental studies and people who work with sustainability, permaculture and other alternatives to the excessive production and consumption process. Thoreau's manifesto, in this sense, is strong: it is a call to people, who today we could think of as "consumers", to not acquire what could be useless for their true enjoyment of life. His travel manifesto works through the same means, as traveling has to be part of everyday life, independently of the distance to be traced, dispensing mediators (guides), transportation, accommodation and money.

But today a Walker does not necessarily need to dispense with all the apparatus made for locomotion and leisure. Reading "Walking" instead, makes the traveler think about the means he uses for traveling, to better choose—if choice is what lasts—what to consume in order to dismantle, through individual initiative,

any generalizations, superficialities, and excesses in possessions and consumerism. The solution, though individual, is collective when it becomes a live discussion, or a practice that pushes to a questioning like the one I am proposing here.

Henry David Thoreau, a symbol of American individualism, guaranteed his “possession” by putting his name under his words. His words attest to his findings. Through them, Thoreau expresses no guilt for the American conquest, but criticizes its means by mocking the army and all apparatus that serve to maintain the State’s oppression over people. If we remember Pratt, what she denounces as “central instruments of empire” (35) is what Thoreau criticizes, the imposition of control on people. Still, the author-narrator-hero reveals a strategy of innocence (redemption) when trying to reverse the aggressions towards the land and the wild men exercised by his predecessors, by vigorously praising wilderness and instinct.

We can consider the Thoreau of “Walking” as a travel writer for his presentation of a philosophy of movement that was quite alert about its time, and also visionary towards the future. This essay also reveals how Thoreau predicted the history of his country for his several posthumous readers, but it is also a symptom of how were the white intellectual males (re)producing expansionist culture. Thoreau suggests, like other travel writers and explorers such as Columbus did, that the “different” territory he was entering was quite empty of culture and people—and where a mythological history was about to be created. The inspiration for the creation of this mythology would not come from tradition, but from the Western horizon. Thoreau believed himself to be a key figure in this historical change—a “peace-loving utopian” formulation (like Humboldt’s in Pratt, 127) where there are no obstacles to western “progress.” Opportunity and Idealism, then, are intrinsic to Thoreau’s project of “Walking.”

Constantly floating in the mood of happiness and self reliance of his time, Thoreau's choice is never to trail someone else's path, but rather to be off the road, "discovering" the world by his own. "Walking", as any master-piece, should not be summed up as a theory of travel, or looked at from a single specific point of view, for most of all, Thoreau is an artist of the words, a "poet and prophet"—as he called himself—who, by experiencing organic contact with nature, tries to escape categorization. At the same time, his art deserves criticism.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, Stephen. "The Genres of *A Week in the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*." *Approaches to teaching Thoreau's Walden and Other Works*. Ed. Richard Schneider. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1996. 143-9.
- Anderson, Charles R. ed., *Thoreau's World: Miniatures from His Journal*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972.
- Buel, Lawrence. "The Thoreauvian Pilgrimage: The Structure of an American Cult." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography*. Ed Luis J. Budd. Vol. 61. n. 2. May, 1989. 175 – 199.
- Brulatour, Margaret M. *Walking: Study Text*. American Transcendentalism Web. December 2004. 1999.  
<<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/thoreau/walking/>>
- Blasing, Mutlu Konuk. *The Art of Life: Studies in American Autobiographical Literature*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977. xi-xxviii, 3-23.
- Camargo, Haroldo L. "Fundamentos Disciplinares do Turismo: História". *Turismo. Como aprender, como ensinar*. Org. Luis Gonzaga Trigo. 2ª ed. São Paulo: SENAC, 2001.
- Cardoso, Sérgio. "O Olhar Viajante (do Etnólogo)." *O Olhar*. Aauto Novaes, et al. – São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1988. 347 – 360.
- Colón, Cristóbal. *Diario de Bordo*. Ed. Vicente Muñoz Puelles. Madrid, Castellana, 1985. 225 – 239.
- Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Pioneers*. New York: The American Library, 1964. Chapters I and XXII.
- Drummond, José Augusto, "Henry David Thoreau, homem de várias épocas." *Desobedecendo: A Desobediência Civil e Outros Escritos*. Trad. José Augusto Drummond. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986. 13 – 34.
- Elder, John. Introduction. "Walking". Henry David Thoreau. Boston, Beacon Press, 1991. vii – xviii.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. Ed. John Elder. Boston, Beacon Press, 1991.

- , "The Transcendentalist". 1842. 12 May 2004.  
<<http://www.emersoncentral.com/transcendentalist.htm>>
- , "Thoreau". *Thoreau: A Century of Criticism*. Ed. Walter Harding. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Dallas: Southern Methodist U P. 1970. 22 – 40.
- Franklin, Benjamin. "Autobiography, parts One and Two." *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Paul Lauter. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vol. 1 Lexington, MA: Heath & Company, 1994. 753 – 765. 801 – 810.
- Fithian, Daiana. "The Lyceum Movement: A Revolution in American Education." Ed. Thomas L. Long. April, 2000. Nineteenth Century Friendship Book Manuscript Project. May 25, 2005.  
<<http://www.tncc.cc.va.us/faculty/longt/FriendshipBook/LyceumMovement.htm>>
- Fussel, Edwin S. "The Red Face of Man." *Thoreau: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Sherman Paul. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962. 142-160.
- Gabeira, Fernando. Apresentação. *Desobedecendo: A Desobediência Civil e Outros Escritos*. Trad. e intr. José Augusto Drummond. 2a. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986. 7 – 11.
- Ginsberg, Allan "Sunflower Sutra." *Post-modern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. Ed. Paul Hoover. New York: Norton, 1994.
- Golemba, Henry. "Unreading Thoreau." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography*. Ed. Luis J. Budd et al. Durham: n. d. 385 – 401.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvelous Possessions*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1991. 53 – 85.
- , "Culture." *Critical Terms for Literary Studies*. Ed. Lentriccia, Frank and Thomas Mc Laughlin. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1995. 225 - 232.
- Horton, W. Rod, and Herbert W. Edwards. *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1952.
- Ianni, Octavio. *Imperialismo e Cultura*. 3a ed. Petrópolis, 1976. 7-21, 125 - 128.
- Jefferson, Thomas. "Notes on the State of Virginia." *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Paul Lauter. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vol. 1 Lexington: Heath & Company, 1994. 894 – 909.

Krippendorf, Jost. *Sociologia do Turismo: Para uma nova compreensão do Lazer e das Viagens*. Trd. Contexto Traduções. 3a ed. Revisada. São Paulo, Aleph, 2001.

Matthiessen, F. O., *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the age of Emerson and Whitman*. New York: Oxford U. P., 1946. (vii-29, 77-99)

Mc Dowell, David. *An Illustrated History of Britain*. Longman, 1989.

Miller, Henry. "Preface to *Three Essays by Henry David Thoreau*." *Thoreau: A Century of Criticism*. Ed. Walter Harding. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Dallas: Southern Methodist U P,

Norton, Mary Beth, et al. *A People and a nation: A History of the United States*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986. 4 - 295.

O'Callaghan, Dennis Brynley. *An Illustrated History of the U.S.A*. Longman, 1990.

Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial eyes: studies in travel writing and transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Robinson, David M. "Thoreau's 'Walking' and the Ecological Imperative." *Approaches to teaching Thoreau's Walden and Other Works*. Ed. Richard Schneider. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1996. 169 – 174.

Sayre, Robert F. "Chronology." *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Walden; or, Life in the Woods, the Maine Woods, Cape Cod*. New York: Viking Press, 1985. 1041 – 1051.

Scheller, Malini. "Carnival Rhetoric and Extra-Vagance in Thoreau's Walden." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography*. Ed. Edwin H. Cady and Luis J. Budd. Vol. 58. n. 1. Durham: March, 1985. 1 – 27.

Schneider, Richard J. "Introduction: Thoreau's Challenge to Teachers." *Approaches to teaching Thoreau's Walden and Other Works*. Ed. Richard Schneider. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1996. 169 – 174.

Stabb, Mark. *Simply Walking*. [The Thoreau Reader: A Project Cooperation with Thoreau's Society](http://eserver.org/thoreau/simply.html). 10 pars. 3 March 2004  
<<http://eserver.org/thoreau/simply.html>>

Thoreau, Henry David. *Excursions*. 1863. The Library of Congress. 10 Jun 2005.  
[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrvbib:@OR\(@field](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrvbib:@OR(@field)

(AUTHOR+@band(Thoreau,+Henry+David,+1817-1862+))+@field(OTHER+@band(Thoreau,+Henry+David,+1817-1862+)))

---, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government: Authoritative Texts, Thoreau's Journal, Reviews and Essays in Criticism*. Ed. William Rossi. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Norton Critical Editions, 1992.

---, "Walking". *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Nature - Henry David Thoreau: Walking*. ed. John Elder. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.

Tichi, Cecilia. "American Literary Studies to the Civil War." *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1992. 209 – 231.

Tindall, George Brown. *America: A Narrative History*. New York: Norton and Company. Vol. 1. 465 – 510.

Woodlief, Ann. 12 March, 2005. American Transcendentalism Web.  
<<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/thoreau/ktaadn/>>