Nature And Transcendentalists Aspects: Henry David Thoreau’s Walden

In this project, we are going to try to analyze the different perspectives about life that Thoreau reflects in Walden. In addition, we are going to compare Thoreau’s thoughts with the perspectives of other authors and we are going to use his work Walden itself as the principal source.

According to Thoreau, we should reject the idea that he is a defender of the urban because of his experiment: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” (Walden 90) He claims that for him, the most important thing was live in harmony with nature. To accomplish this purpose, he is going to change his normal mode of existence and for that reason he affirms, “Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it.” (Walden 317)

Ashton Nichols is going to introduce two concepts, wildness and wilderness that he is going to address. According to these two concepts, which are present in this work, Ashton Nichols compares both aspects. “The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the world.” (Walking 239) From the forest and wilderness come the tonics and barks which brace mankind. Nichols realizes that for Thoreau, the concept of wildness is found in wilderness. For this reason, Thoreau believes that wilderness is the best place to take refuge from the world. Nature could make us see ourselves reflected in it.

Ashton Nichols uses the concept urbanature to describe the connection that there is between urban spaces and natural spaces. In his article Thoreau and Urbanature: from Walden to Ecocriticism, Nichols observes that “animals wild and semi-wild pervade our urban and suburban spaces.” (347) Nichols is going to develop his idea of urbanature through Thoreau’s life and work. Nichols projects his ecological vision recalling Thoreau’s proximity to urban spaces because of Thoreau always returned to the urban and travelled also throughout his Walden experiment. Nichols believes that by merging these two concepts he could get solutions to ecological problems.

In Walden, Thoreau is going to evaluate the lives of his neighbors to report the way of life during his experiment. He criticizes conventional wisdom saying the way we should live life. “When we consider what, to use the words of the catechism, is the chief end of man, and what are the true necessaries and means of life, it appears as if men had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other. Yet they honestly think there is no choice left.” (Walden 8) At Brook Farm, they wanted to reduce the necessities of their lives thus marking the contrast with materialistic communism. At Brook Farm, they were able to “steal enough time away from work to pursue their programs of improvement.” (Newman 528)

Thoreau explains the concept of materialism as something which for him means much more than the acquisition of goods. He says that materialism is a way of slavery.” “Thoreau saved his time, investing it in “spiritual self-culture.” Smith encourages the procurement of freedom

through the “exercise of enlightened self-interest” for financial gain; meanwhile, Thoreau demonstrates that people already have more freedom than they currently know.” (Schneider 99-100) Thoreau speaks about the emptiness of people comparing it to the concept of wildness, “Life consists with wildness […] One who pressed forward incessantly and never rested from his labors, who grew fast and made infinite demands on life, would always find himself in a new country or wilderness, […] Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in impervious and quaking swamps.” (Walking 240-241)

Thoreau’s concept of wildness could also be analyzed from the historical point of view because of history influences the creation of his work. At this time, the industrial revolution took place and we can see how we went from creating artisanal products to mass production. “The economic and political power that had been relatively dispersed among traders, merchants, clerics, and farmers of New England was 10 consolidated into the hands of the owners of commercial and industrial capital.” (Newman 517) During this period, we can see a lot of demonstrations. For example, in the early 1830’s, “New York witnessed its first labor demonstrations as stonecutters protested the use of prison cut stone in the construction of public buildings.” (Newman 518) Newman quotes Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, “The hours redeemed from labor by community, will not be reapplied to the acquisition of wealth, but to the production of intellectual goods. This community aims to be rich, not in the metallic representative of wealth, but in the wealth 12 itself, which money should represent; namely, THE LEISURE TO LIVE IN ALL THE FACULTIES OF THE SOUL.” (Newman 528) Thoreau is surrounded by progress, but nevertheless, he is going to reject materialism and wealth. For this reason, he is going to use his experiment in nature as a method of reaction.

All in all, nature is the place in which human beings could find harmony. Thoreau is going to discover the beauty that nature is going to inspire in him. Through this work, we can understand the importance that has nature for him and which are the true senses of life. In addition, this project shows us the importance of two concepts, wildness and wilderness which are very present in Walden. Wildness is compared with the period in which the work is located. Urbanature could also be compared with this work and it is related with ecological problems. Comparing this work with materialism we came to the conclusion that we should reduce the necessities of our lives and that for him, materialism doesn’t mean the acquisition of goods, but this means the opposite.