

Travel Writing and Environmental Ethics in Henry David Thoreau's

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

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Pro gradu -tutkielmani käsittelee luontokuvausta Henry David Thoreau'n proosateoksessa *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849). Thoreau-tutkimus on perinteisesti keskittynyt Thoreau'n individualismia ajavaan filosofiaan, joka kulminoitui teoksessa *Walden* (suom. *Elämää metsässä*, 1854), mutta myös luontorakkaus esiintyy voimakkaana Thoreau'n teksteissä. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* on ei-fiktiivinen matkakertomus, jossa luonnon jatkuva läsnäolo ja pyrkimys riippumattomaan elämään ennakoivat *Walden* -teoksessa kuvattua luonnon ehdoilla elämistä.

Lähestyn teosta ekokritiikin teorian kautta. Ekokritiikki tutkii kirjallisuutta luonnon ja ihmisen välisen vuorovaikutuksen lähtökohdista. Kyseessä on melko nuori kirjallisuustutkimuksen suuntaus, jonka mukaan ympäristö (ei-ihminen) ja ihminen ovat jatkuvassa vuorovaikutuksessa keskenään. Ekokritiikin hahmottelemat kysymykset eivät rajoitu luontokuvaukseen, vaan tavoitteena on usein murtaa käsitys ihmiskeskeisyydestä suhteessa ympäristöön. Eräs tärkeimmistä lähtökohdista ekokriittisessä tutkimuksessa onkin juuri ympäristön käsite: ekokritiikille ei ole olennaista villi luonto, vaan meitä kaikkia ympäröivä elollinen elämä, rakennettua tai muuten muokattua ympäristöä unohtamatta. Lisäksi ekokritiikki pohtii luontokuvauksen taustalla vaikuttavia ja usein yhteiskunnallisia teemoja, kuten esimerkiksi ympäristökatastrofeja ja ihmisen toimien aikaansaamaa tuhoa.

Avainkysymyksenäni on kysymys ihmisen ja luonnon välisestä suhteesta. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* on proosatekstin, viittausten ja lyriikan keinoin etenevä kertomus, jossa Thoreau käsittelee nuoruutensa jokimatalla kohtaamaansa luontoa, ihmisiä ja eläimiä tietoisena kiihtyvän teollistumisen aiheuttamasta jatkuvasta muutoksesta perinteisessä maalaismaisemassa. Teoksen matka sijoittuu Uuteen-Englantiin, alueelle, joka vielä 1800-luvun puolivälissä oli Pohjois-Amerikan varhaisen teollistumisen keskus. Thoreau'n luontokuvauksessa teollisuus ja kaupungit ovat kuitenkin läsnäolostaan huolimatta toissijaisia verrattuna maalaismaisemaan ja alkuperäiseen luontoon.

Tutkimuksessani olen halunnut keskittyä tapaan, jolla Thoreau pohtii ihmisen paikkaa luonnossa. Pohdin liikkuvuuden ja henkilökohtaisen vapauden tematiikkaa sekä ihmisen vastuuta ympäristöään kohtaan. Ympäristöetiikan näkökulmasta tarkasteltuna Thoreau'n matkan maisema korostaa luontoa, joka omalla tavallaan sekä sietää että vastustaa sitä dominoimaan pyrkivää ihmistä. Luonto esiintyy siis autonomisena. Thoreau, jonka toimintaa ja ilmaisua ohjaa kunnioitus ympäristöä kohtaan, kokee läntisen, teollistuneen maailmankuvan uhaksi ihmisen ja luonnon väliselle tasapainolle. Esikuvana ihmisen ja luonnon välisestä harmoniasta ovat useimmiten alkuperäiskansat, joiden elämäntapaa Thoreau ihailee. Perinteinen käsitys "jalosta villistä" ilmeneekin Thoreau'n tekstissä juuri suhteessa luontoon.

Avainsanat: ekokritiikki, luontokuvaus, luontosuhde, matkakirjallisuus, ympäristöetiikka

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1. Introduction

This pro gradu thesis examines the relationship between nature and culture in a book of travel and nature writing, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), by Henry David Thoreau.

Thoreau (1817-1862) was an essayist, philosopher, poet, land surveyor, public speaker and social critic known for his essays on natural history and advocacy of the anti-slavery movement. A prolific author, his *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854) is considered part of the American literary canon and is one of the founding texts of American nature writing. Similarly, the essay “A Resistance to Civil Government” (1849), a call to civil disobedience, and “A Plea for Captain John Brown” (1859), a speech espousing the abolition of slavery, have been an inspiration to generations of activists and protesters worldwide. Thoreau produced a large number of non-fiction essays and several volumes of journals, but only two of his full-length books saw publication during his lifetime. The first of these was *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, which was self-published in 1849; the second was *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854). To this day, *Walden* remains Thoreau’s best known work; other notable ones include two posthumously published travel narratives, *The Maine Woods* (1863) and *Cape Cod* (1864).

A popular genre in American literature, nature writing offers ways of looking at environmental attitudes and ecological visions that are specific to America. Thoreau's nature writing forms part of an environmental literary canon alongside many other authors of environmental text, from e.g. John Muir and Mary Austin to Edward Abbey and Gary Snyder. Thoreau is often associated with the Transcendentalist movement, mainly by virtue of the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888) early on in his career. Throughout his life Thoreau was dedicated to observation and exploration of his surroundings and was particularly attached to his hometown of Concord, Massachusetts, a (then) rural town north-west of Boston. Although he made a number of voyages, his travels took him no further abroad than Staten Island (1843-1844), Quebec (in

1850) and Minnesota (in 1861). Nevertheless, he travelled fairly extensively around New England, including trips to the Maine woods, to Cape Cod in Massachusetts and the White Mountains in New Hampshire. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* is the (re)telling of one such regional journey, recording a week's boat trip Thoreau made with his older brother John in the autumn of 1839.

1.1 Thoreau, Emerson and environmental representation

Outside of a handful of longer journeys, Thoreau's life was fairly strongly anchored in Concord and its surrounding areas; for him, the town contained everything a lover of nature could want. Concord in the nineteenth century was home not just to Thoreau, but to a number of prominent scholars and writers many of whom were associated with the philosophy of Transcendentalism, such as the philosopher and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson and the journalist and women's rights activist Margaret Fuller (1810-1850). Aside from the association with Transcendentalism, Thoreau's life and work falls in the broader context of the American Renaissance¹, a period characterised by the flourishing of literary culture in mid-nineteenth-century America. His contemporaries include the authors Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) and Herman Melville (1819-1891).

Various groups of social and political activists have drawn their inspiration from the ideas expressed by Thoreau in his work. One of the strongest associations between his writing and contemporary activist orientation is found in the environmental movement, providing the general context for an environmentalist reading of *A Week* that is the topic of this thesis. As stated, my aim is to identify and examine elements of the human relationship with the natural environment in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849). Specifically, I evaluate the text from the perspective of environmental ethics by examining Thoreau's sense of entitlement to the New England landscape and how this shows in the broader context of environmentalism. Through an analysis of Thoreau's mobility,

¹ F. O. Matthiessen codifies the period in his 1941 book, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*.

I aim to place the text as an expression of ethics in relation to the physical environment and its inhabitants. The theoretical framework for this discussion is ecocriticism, especially as it relates to the cultural construction of nature, to natural boundaries, and to human identification with, and manipulation of, the environment. I will consider examples from the narrative that show his own engagement with the surroundings, both in terms of identification with the landscape and regarding the humans in that landscape. The time and location of Thoreau's narrative, nineteenth-century New England, offers an adequate middle ground between biocentric and human-centric emphases. I am specifically talking about the nineteenth century as a period of industrialisation and modernisation in the US, as well as the simultaneous tendency towards primitivism during the same period.

In this thesis, I hope to contribute to the body of research on Thoreau from an environmentalist standpoint. My discussion is motivated by an attempt to negotiate the human-nature relationship by using the concepts of environmental ethics and sense of place in the context of travel. My reading of these concepts in Thoreau's writing is informed by the idea of mobility and the ways in which human culture and physical nature interact. The attachment to place informs Thoreau's vision of the the natural environment as a tangible and knowable entity, something with which he is able to form a connection both practically and spiritually. I am also interested in how human perception of the environment is affected in the context of travel and to what extent personal mobility can be an expression of ecological vision and I anticipate that the fact of Thoreau's own mobility does not diminish his need to maintain a relationship with the specific places described in the narrative. Indeed, much of the narrative is dedicated to just that purpose: to establish a relationship between phenomenological place-sense and awareness of the temporary nature of Thoreau's association with a given place. In my reading, mobility enhances certain elements of the pastoral such as withdrawal from society and the pattern of "retreat and return"². I will be using the concept of change as shorthand for a range of anxieties that Thoreau

2 Gifford 1999: 81

expresses in terms of the future. This culminates in a keen awareness of human impact on the environment through industrialisation, progress and commerce.

Thoreau edited the manuscript of *A Week* into its final form during his stay at Walden Pond and the narrative was finally published in 1849, ten years after the journey took place. Contemporary response to the book was mixed: some, like Alcott, found it “purely American” and “fragrant with the life of New England woods and streams,”³ believing it could not have been written anywhere else than in New England. The book failed commercially, presumably reflecting the more negative critical response which found the book disjointed. The reviewer James Russell Lowell, for instance, comments on the tendency of the book to fall into digressions and snags interrupting the peaceful river journey. He states that the book is enjoyable as long as Thoreau’s style remains confidential and honest, but sometimes he makes his two rivers “run Thoreau or Emerson or indeed anything but their own transparent element”⁴, indicating Thoreau’s habit of becoming too absorbed in his philosophical reflections in favour of the actual journey.

Thoreau worked on his narrative at a time when the influence of Emerson's work played a greater role in his thinking about the natural world and at the time of his journey, Thoreau was determined to fill the role of the American Poet sought after by Emerson. The two had met shortly after Thoreau's graduation in 1837 and cultivated a close working relationship collaborating on shared projects such as the Transcendentalist journal, *The Dial*, and a planned anthology of British poetry that was to be edited by Thoreau⁵. More importantly for my purposes, both writers expressed an interest in the human relationship with the natural world and drew on the surroundings of Concord as a source of

3 From the “Introductory Note” to the 1906 Houghton, Mifflin edition of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, p. xlii. Available at the Walden Woods Project: <<http://www.walden.org/Institute/thoreau/writings/week/WeekConcordMerrimack.htm>>. Accessed 29.1.2010.

4 Ibid. p. xlv

5 Although the anthology was eventually abandoned, Emerson and Thoreau shared a “commonplace book” based on the research for the project. According to historicist critic Meredith L. McGill, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* is in some ways a continuation of the commonplace book, explaining the amount of quoted material in the finished book. (McGill 2007: 359)

solitude in which to think about spirit, art and nature. However, their respective approaches to the physical environment ultimately took different forms. Emerson, whose *Nature* (1836) and “Self-Reliance” (1841) strongly influenced Thoreau, defines nature as composed of “essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf.”⁶ He thus equals “nature” to an untouched exurban landscape which the poet alone is capable of truly seeing and appreciating. Individual parts of nature are of course visible to all, but the whole of nature and the sublime⁷ visions it offers are privileges of the poet. Emerson remains on the fringes of his landscape and exalts the impressions made by the essences of natural objects. It is the sublime effect of the landscape on the observer that matters, rather than nature itself. As he writes:

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

Emerson sees divinity expressed in all of nature's forms and finds himself transformed by its power: he is stripped of the constraints of the ego and made transparent, invisible and yet capable of taking in all of the landscape surrounding him. For nature to have value in the Emersonian sense, it must thus be transformed into a poetic entity through the art of one who is able to integrate it; the American landscape thus needs to be recognised and reaffirmed. Thoreau, on the other hand, while obviously inspired by Emerson's ecstatic response to visible nature, was less spiritual in his approach. While he, too, relied on his eyes to take in the beauty of a landscape, he used his bodily senses more broadly. As F. O. Matthiessen writes, Thoreau “knew . . . that his strength derived from ever renewed contact with

6 Emerson 1836: electronic source, no pagination.

7 E.g. Edmund Burke (1729-1797) describes the sublime as a sensation that inspires a sense of awe and horror: “whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*” (Burke, 1909-1914: electronic source, no pagination).

8 Emerson 1836: electronic source, no pagination.

the earth. But he wanted more than contact, he wanted the deepest immersion.”⁹ There is no question of Thoreau's eagerness to be able to fulfil the role of the Emersonian poet, but he was also far more inclined to imagine himself as a component of the landscape rather than isolating himself from it for the sake of artistic expression, such as focusing on the sublime. Thoreau's nature possessed the incentive for self-discovery, providing him with an opportunity to improve his self through continual engagement with the harsh realities of the natural world. The quest for an ideal self found its concise expression in *Walden*, but *A Week*, as a work of travel writing, is already a step in this direction. It is also a step away from the Emersonian philosophy that declares travel a futile effort in self-discovery, a “fool's paradise”¹⁰. But, as Casey Blanton has argued, American travel writing is generally “about something” – about the search for a purpose or the meaning of life – in marked contrast to European travel narratives:

Both American fiction and the American travel narratives that influenced it share a response to the idea of travel as a symbolic act, heavy with promises of new life, progress, and the thrill of escape. Travel elevated to an idea, rather than a response to new surroundings, paves the way for a kind of travel writing that Americans excel in and which, in a sense, justifies the intrusion of the “imperial self” in the service of a larger goal.¹¹

The voyage Thoreau depicts is Emersonian in the sense that it can be taken as a practical realisation of the much more literary approach to the natural world portrayed by Emerson. In *A Week* Thoreau spends a great deal of time reflecting on the realisation of nature's forms in art, but these reflections are grounded in the practicality provided by the journey's progress. The practicality is what ultimately distinguishes Thoreau from Emerson, if not most of his contemporaries: for him, the true value of thinking about nature is in forging a reciprocal relationship with it, in observing and understanding its forms through the renewed contact that mobility ensures. Thoreau is much more willing to get his

9 Matthiessen 1941: 88

10 Emerson 1841: electronic source, no pagination

11 Blanton 2002: 18

hands dirty in the process of discovery, as is shown in the rigorous preparation and construction to which Thoreau commits long before the actual journey takes place. Thus, based on just this hands-on approach alone, it would seem that Thoreau's nature writing is removed from the “series of ejaculations”¹² that nature inspired in Emerson. Indeed, Thoreau translates natural scenes into his narrative in minute detail, trusting that this notation will allow him autonomy in explaining nature or at least justify the more effusive tone in passages where he does experience a connection with nature. To him, the Emersonian belief in the poet's exceptional privilege is less of an issue because he is more dedicated to translating his own experience than in forming a poetic theory based on that experience. He therefore avoids the fully alienating force of the encounter with nature. As Stephen Germic observes, however, Thoreau's engagements with nature share some of Emerson's beliefs regarding the exceptionalist transformation, as it is quite clear that Thoreau does consider himself capable of forging an interaction with the physical environment. Germic's argument, in a nutshell, is that Emerson's conception of the privilege of the poet reaffirms the notion of American exceptionalism, with the environmental, cultural and social implications it entails. He ties it in with Thoreau, and especially *A Week* as an expression of exceptionalism because, as he writes,

Thoreau cannily reiterates the productions of voyages – particularly those of Columbus and John Winthrop – principally responsible for the rhetorical and, in one case, social elaboration of American exceptionalism. In *A Week* Thoreau at once rediscovers America, revises and reaffirms the nation's “errand,” and, inseparably, marginalizes or “skirts” the sites of labor that offer a source of representational alternative to the cultural production of exceptionalism.¹³

Thoreau's portrayal of the landscape in *A Week* indicates variation in the environment – not only the observable natural changes brought on by the changing seasons, but in the gradual developments which shape the entire region. This is especially pronounced in the accounts of natural history and of the comments Thoreau makes concerning commerce and progress.

¹² Matthiessen 1941: 162

¹³ Germic 2002: 245

1.2 *A Week*, travel and non-fiction nature writing

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Thoreau's works of nature writing had become so popular that their influence was reflected in the production, sales and positive critical response of environmental non-fiction that coincided with the rise of preservationist and anti-industrialist sentiment in America. Thus, later accounts have elevated Thoreau to the status of an “environmental saint” based on his role as the father of the genre of non-fiction nature writing in America, helping to cement his place in the American literary canon.¹⁴ What most descriptions of Thoreau have in common is the idea of pioneering practicality that is considered essentially American, and related to that, the well-established myth of Thoreau as “the Hermit of Concord” – an appellation that, while it may be overused to the point of redundancy, nevertheless remains a fairly accurate interpretation of Thoreau's tendency to keep human society at arm's length and for his retreats into the natural wilderness.

Thoreau's activities and achievements – the study of natural phenomena, the ability to find sustenance and shelter – come with a pastoral sense of escape, as Thoreau finds freedom from the demands of human society and instead feels accepted by the personalised, feminised entity of nature. To claim that he had no interest in human relationships would be a misrepresentation, for Thoreau was not quite the hermit he is sometimes made out to be, but his connection to – and preference for – the natural world, especially Concord and its surrounding areas, does take the front seat in the present discussion.

Besides being a work of nature text, *A Week* is obviously a work of travel writing as well. While the purpose of the journey may seem unclear, it nevertheless remains the focal point around which the narrative is formed. The voyage also provides the framework for my analysis of environmental attitudes: overall, I hope to be able to contribute to the ecocritical approach to Thoreau by regarding environmental awareness and ecological responsibility specifically in relation to Thoreau's personal

¹⁴ Buell 1995: 353-356

mobility as well as consider Thoreau's attitudes regarding various environments as he experiences them in the narrative.

The bulk text of *A Week* was written as a travel journal for a two-week journey Henry Thoreau made with his older brother John, from August 31 to September 13, 1839. In addition to the river journey, the excursion included a hiking trip to the White Mountains in New Hampshire. The hiking trip portion of the journey has been omitted from the finished book. At the time of the journey Henry Thoreau was twenty-two years old and an aspiring writer. The trip was originally conceived as the basis of an essay on natural history and travel, although the death of John Thoreau some years after the trip changed Henry's conception of the significance and implications of the journey and, consequently, of the art that would render it, resulting in a much more personal and philosophical narrative for which the journey acts as a backdrop. The narrative is organised into chapters named after each day of the journey, with the opening chapter, titled "Concord River", functioning as a preface. The journey's progress is reflected in the book's organisation as each day is anchored by an ongoing routine: the brothers resume travel in the morning and find a campsite in the evening to settle down for the night. This provides the external framework for long passages of meditative and philosophical prose interspersed with criticism of poets such as Chaucer, Homer, Ossian and Aulus Persius Flaccus. For my purposes, the more important passages are those in which Thoreau engages in discussions on natural and local history over the course of his journey. In these essays he relies on the work of French palaeontologist Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) and on John Hayward's geographical directory, *The New England Gazetteer* (1839) as well as Lemuel Shattuck's *History of Concord, Mass.* (1835). The prose passages are augmented with Thoreau's liberal use of original and quoted poetry. In most cases, the poetry acts as a gloss between separate narrative topics; in others, Thoreau relies on verse to make his meaning clearer.

My selections from the book include descriptions of the preparation and planning, as well as the execution, of the trip. I am assessing ways in which Thoreau approaches the forward motion he experiences on the river, changes in attitude relating to various stages of the journey, and the ways in which Thoreau represents the successes and plights of human as well as non-human inhabitants along the Concord and Merrimack rivers. The passages relating to local and natural history are of course essential for a closer analysis of environmental concerns. In some places, I have included in my discussion examples of the numerous verses of poetry, both original and quoted, which make up a considerable portion of the narrative. These verses act as a gloss between prose passages and they present in some cases an insight into Thoreau's environmental outlook that is lacking in the prose itself, making it necessary to include them here.

The theoretical framework within which my analysis will be conducted is ecocriticism, an emerging field where environmental studies and literary criticism converge. Thoreau has been extensively studied from an ecocritical vantage point, but the majority of such studies have focused on the ecological vision of dwelling in nature that is presented most famously in *Walden*. Many ecocritics find traditional accounts of Thoreau problematic because the focus has been on the author at the expense of the environment which he depicts. From an ecocritical point of view, human activity of any kind has no meaning without identification with the non-human and thus the canonical representation of Thoreau is in a sense lacking because it does not adequately acknowledge the fact that human self-realisation relies on identification with, rather than the objectification of, the non-human world.¹⁵ Human identification with the environment stems from a sense of place, “a sense of knowing and being part of a particular place ... to experience a sense of light or smell that is inexplicably ‘right’.”¹⁶ As Neil Evernden has pointed out, the definition of a sense of place relies on an aesthetic way of

15 Head 1998: 29. See also Kroeber 1997: 313

16 Evernden 1996: 100

evaluating one's surroundings. Moreover, it could be argued that sense of place provides a contradiction with the literary concept of the sublime, meaning an emotional or sensory reaction to nature's grandeur where its force and presence are greater than can be grasped by the human mind. The sublime distances the observer from the landscape by rendering it unfamiliar and, as the earlier example from Emerson demonstrates, alienating the observer from the rest of humankind; a sense of place, with its more realistic forms of expression, does the opposite.

Theoretical debates on whether a text can be considered environmental obviously complicate the present approach to some degree. For the purposes of this thesis, however, the most useful formulation of what might be called an environmental text comes from Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995). Buell presents four criteria which help to determine an environmental text, adapted in list form below.

1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.
4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.¹⁷

In my analysis, *A Week* fulfils at least the first three criteria. The environment in the narrative has its own agenda and it functions freely without much regard for human attitudes. Thoreau is quite adamant when it comes to the interests of the nonhuman world, and it is clear throughout his narrative that an ethical orientation directs the responses and reactions expressed in the text. Buell's final category is fulfilled at least in part in that the environment is not expressed as a given, but to what extent Thoreau is aware of it as a process is a more complex issue and one that will be examined in this discussion.

Again, it is worth considering the power of identification; it could be argued, for instance, that becoming conscious of such a connection to one's surroundings is in itself close to a sublime

¹⁷ Buell 1995: 7-8

experience. Moreover, it may be argued that rather than declaring humanity incapable of maintaining a harmonious existence with the physical environment, the concept of exceptionality in fact clarifies the significance of human responsibility to nature. I argue that the way in which Thoreau goes about accomplishing this is not limited to the kind of sentimental or nostalgic escape which many have claimed it to be.

2. Theoretical and methodological discussion

2.1 Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is a field of literary and cultural study which examines the relationship between literature and the environment and approaches its subjects from an earth-centred¹⁸ perspective. The term is used as a portmanteau for literary theories that position the relationship between human culture and the non-human environment at the center of its analysis. Ecocriticism's main theoretical position has been defined as one of interconnections and interdependencies. As Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) writes, “[e]cocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of languages and literature.”¹⁹ In other words, ecocriticism as a literary theory acknowledges that literature, as an outcome of human culture, shapes and is shaped by our perceptions of, and interaction with, the non-human environment. As Glotfelty states in the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, the idea is to include “all possible relations between literature and the physical world” under the term ecocriticism and to approach the field as a synthesis between ecology and literature. Ecocriticism assumes that all human culture “is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it”²⁰.

Analyses of the non-human environment for its own sake have traditionally been ignored in literary and cultural analysis. Ecocriticism, therefore, resists the unquestioned centrality of human concerns by locating and questioning the cultural dimensions and power structures that construct and affect the physical environment. Yet, as Greg Garrard (2004) points out, ecocriticism in its widest definition engages in studies of the culture-nature relationship “throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself”²¹. The commitment to environmentalism makes

18 The distinction between 'ecology' and 'environmentalism' is usually understood to be in the fact that ecological approaches rely on what Glen Love (2003) calls “the life sciences”, i.e. biology and ecology, whereas environmentalists generally value aesthetics, ethics and human benefit.

19 Glotfelty 1996: xix

20 Ibid. 1996: xix

21 Garrard 2004: 5

ecocriticism an inherently political mode of analysis, in which it resembles not just feminist, but also postcolonial and Marxist criticisms; as Garrard points out, “[e]cocritics generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a 'green' moral and political agenda.”²² It should be pointed out, however, that the environmentalist agenda itself takes many forms, and the sheer number of various overlapping agendas can be seen to complicate the forming of a coherent theory. As Ursula K. Heise (2006) argues, ecocriticism has “proliferated into a highly diverse field encompassing a wide variety of genres and authors as well as the full spectrum of cultural theories and methodologies, from Marxism and poststructuralism to feminism, critical race theory, queer studies, and cognitive science.”²³

A comparatively young movement in literary criticism, ecocriticism is still growing and evolving in its scope. The emergence of ecocriticism as a critical school dates back to the late 1980s, when individual publications associated with the connections between literature and the environment led to a formation of the field of environmental literary studies and, eventually, formal organisation of scholars under the blanket term of 'ecocriticism'²⁴. The first such organisation of ecocritics, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), was founded in 1992 at the Western Literature Conference at University of Nevada, Reno. A year later, the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* was established. The most influential early texts of the new field include Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) and Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), the first ecocritical anthology to be published in the US. *Writing the Environment* (1998), edited by Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells, was the first British collection of ecocritical essays.

Early ecocriticism is characterised by an American focus, and the movement remains popular in the US, although the bias has been dissipating in recent years as branch organisations for the study of

²² Garrard 2004: 3. Similarly, it has been argued that ecocriticism is “really less a method than an attitude, an angle of vision, and a mode of critique.” (Tallmadge and Harrington 2000: ix)

²³ Heise 2003: 290

²⁴ Glotfelty 1996: xvii

literature and environment have been founded in Australia and New Zealand, Korea, Japan, India and the United Kingdom. Yet it remains that of the seminal texts to which ecocritics have traced their intellectual origins most are American or British in source and scope. These include, to name a few, Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Joseph W. Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* (1974) and Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975); Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) is an influential British text.²⁵ Much of the early ecocritical canon was composed primarily of non-fiction nature writing by mostly North American authors, such as Thoreau's *Walden*, John Muir's *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911), and Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* (1949). Among British ecocritics, there has been a clear focus on Romantic poetry, with environmentalist readings of John Keats and William Wordsworth forming a basis for the new theory. Arguably the seminal text in the emergence of contemporary environmentalism and environmental literary study is Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962).

Despite the recent inception of an ecocritical theory, the field has its roots in history. Concern for the environment in literary works is of course not a new phenomenon, and all cultural artifacts can be expected to bear traces of the interaction between human beings and the physical world they necessarily inhabit.²⁶ Likewise, critical attention to the connections between literature and the environment has been around for a long time, even if literary studies have been slow to fully recognise the importance of the study of the culture/nature relationship. Ecocriticism itself is firmly associated with the contemporary environmentalist movement, which gave rise to a sense of urgency about a natural world under threat from mostly human actions and attitudes. According to Richard Kerridge (1998) for example, the starting point for the ecocritic is to recognise that there “really is an unprecedented environmental crisis, and that this crisis poses some of the great political and cultural

²⁵ There are, of course, many more works which merit inclusion to the list. For a more detailed overview, see e.g. Glotfelty, “Introduction” (xvii-xviii, xxii-xxiv), Garrard 2004 (3-15) and Love 2003 (1-5).

²⁶ Buell 2001: 2

questions of our time”²⁷. The reality of environmental threats such as pollution, overpopulation, industrial accidents and loss of biodiversity has been a driving force behind the emergence of ecocriticism into an organised literary approach. Glen A. Love, among others, has identified the Cold War era, particularly the 1960s, as the period when concern for the planet became a more pressing global issue. One definite landmark of growing environmental awareness in the United States²⁸ was the public reaction to Rachel Carson's book about the ecological impact of chemical pesticides, *Silent Spring*, which was published in 1962. Carson's book is regarded as the major work of modern environmentalism and its influence extends strongly to ecocritical thought for its literary as well as scientific qualities. Carson, a marine biologist, was able to combine scientific fact with literary expression, contrasting imaginations of Biblical apocalypse and pastoral utopia to accomplish an overarching environmental message. As Glen A. Love states, Carson “describes with a novelist's art and a scientist's knowledge the dangers posed by the indiscriminate use of chemical biocides.”²⁹ Greg Garrard further observes that what makes the text resonate in terms of environmental literary analysis is the fact that the book's passages describing the disruption of the pastoral and the eruption of the apocalyptic are clearly consequences of human action: *Silent Spring* raises questions about human impact on the environment and the cultural expression of that impact.³⁰ With regard to ecocriticism, therefore, Carson's book provides some of the initial questions regarding humans' place in nature, the interconnectedness of all life, and the ways in which literary representation of ecological concerns can direct human perception and understanding of environmental concerns. These points have since become crucial in ecocritical literary analysis.

27 Kerridge 1998: 5

28 By focusing on the US (and, to a lesser degree, UK) environmentalist movement I am excluding many other similar movements simultaneously taking place elsewhere in the world. However, in my attempt at describing the institutional formation of ecocriticism, I have had to accept the American focus of the field itself as regards the factors contributing to its emergence.

29 Love 2003: 2

30 Garrard 2004: 3

Non-fiction nature writing has been the favoured subject of inquiry in ecocritical analyses initially for at least two reasons. Firstly, non-fiction favours the factual over the fictive, allowing for a realistic (if not necessarily scientifically accurate) representation of nature and the natural and distinguishing nature writing from pastoral imaginings of the landscape³¹. Furthermore, a revival of realism has been necessary in forming an ecocritical reading because it enables us to imagine a discourse between the object world and the textual representation of that world. Buell (1995) has called this “the aesthetics of dual accountability”³², a way of bridging the gap between the individual spheres of text and ecological realities. As he argues, non-fiction nature narrative “makes no pretense of total accuracy; it is a theory of natural history; but nature is the court of appeal.”³³ Thus, it comes as no surprise that many works in the ecocritical canon reflect this notion and blur the line between literary and non-literary text. (A good example of this type of work is the already mentioned *Silent Spring*.)

Another reason for favouring non-fiction nature writing is in the challenging of anthropocentric attitudes in literary criticism. In order to draw up a more comprehensive view of the relationship between literature and the environment it has been necessary to expand the boundaries of critical attention to cover works which have been neglected due to what some critics have called an academic prejudice. Anthropocentric attitudes, it is claimed, have served to obstruct the needs of the physical environment from literary discourse. Moreover, although the genre of nature writing has been considerably popular in the United States, literary studies have tended to downplay the importance of human-nature interaction in favour of interhuman themes. Ecocritics believe that such neglect at least in part reflects the general attitudes behind our current environmental crisis. The question of academic prejudices is not central to the scope of this discussion, but it will serve as means to illustrate the shift

31 It should be pointed out here that attempts to reconcile notions of pastoral and nature writing exist. One instance of such is the term *landscape writing*, which emphasises the presence of landscape without rendering absent either human culture or the nonhuman environment (see McDowell 1996: 371n1).

32 Buell 1995: 92

33 Ibid. 1995: 94

that ecocritics hope to introduce to literary studies through focusing on realistic nature representations. In short, awareness of the physical environment should be part of literary and cultural theory so that environmental readings are present and readily accessible to the reader; ideally, ecological concerns would no longer need to be specifically justified. The position is summarised by Robert Kern (2000):

[e]cocriticism depends upon our willingness as readers to marginalize, if not completely overlook, precisely those aspects and meanings of texts that are traditionally privileged and valorized, by which I mean a whole range of anthropocentric attitudes and assumptions whose authority and even hegemony in reading and criticism is often still taken for granted. What ecocriticism calls for, then, is a fundamental shift from one context of reading to another a movement from the human to the environmental, or at least from the exclusively human to the biocentric or ecocentric.³⁴

Ecocriticism approaches literature from the point of view that recognises environmental degradation to be the by-product of human culture and searches for ways to examine that relationship in narrative. The first priority in this task was to establish a criticism that questions anthropocentric ways of thinking about nature, summarised by Lance Newman (among many others) as “the idea that people were meant to maintain dominion over nature, or that nature is a passive receptacle of the fertilizing human mind, or that limitless growth is the essence of social destiny.”³⁵ The critique of anthropocentrism is therefore based on the negation of the idea that human benefit is the highest good. Ecocritics believe that the humanities' overall focus on human concerns, such as the preoccupation with interhuman conflicts over resources, has eclipsed the needs of the environment; actively questioning this tendency was the first step towards forming a ecocritical theory. As Newman goes on to explain, however, the “negative” critique of anthropocentrism has given way to a more positive criticism where an ecological understanding (i.e., the understanding that all life is connected) becomes an essential feature of looking at the world. The approach envisions alternatives to unsustainable human practices by working “to

34 Kern 2000: 267

35 Newman 2005: 4

direct public attention to texts that embody the green values that they wish to promote”³⁶. The idea is not to displace human individuals or human culture in the reading of text but to identify a set of values that acknowledge the connection between culture and nature.

The earth-centred approach of ecocriticism forms the ideological counterpart to the emphases of socially oriented theoretical schools, i.e., the studies of race, class and gender. Arguably, one consequence of the interconnectedness of environmentalism and ecocriticism is that ecocriticism is mistaken for the exclusive study of nature writing or environmental themes in literature in general.³⁷ Yet, the claim that the study of nature writing is, or ever has been, the sole function of ecocriticism is not exactly accurate. As Richard Kerridge has argued, ecocriticism has always had a stake in all forms of literary and cultural expression: “[t]he ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis.”³⁸

The negotiation between human culture and non-human environment has obviously resulted in broad scope of inquiry. As Glen Love has pointed out, the re-examination of place and bioregion³⁹ is approached by scholars from a wide range of disciplines, including the life sciences as well as the social sciences, and as he argues, ecological literary criticism is an important part of the move towards that discourse:

36 Ibid. 2005: 4

37 Simon C. Estok challenges the notion, saying that “examining nature writing is one of the things ecocriticism does, and does well”, but that an exclusive focus on nature writing falsely suggests an inseparable link between ecocriticism as a methodology whose only object of inquiry is nature writing: “[t]hematism, though it may provide an important base from which to begin ecocritical discussions, cannot be the goal of informed ecocriticism.” (Estok 2001: electronic source, no pagination)

38 Kerridge 1998: 5

39 A *bioregion*, literally and etymologically a "life-place", refers to “a unique region definable by natural (rather than political) boundaries with a geographic, climatic, hydrological, and ecological character capable of supporting unique human and nonhuman living communities.” (Thayer 2003: 3-4) There are various geographical definitions for bioregions, including watersheds, ecosystems, related landforms and the unique human cultures that grow from natural limits and potentials of the region.

What has emerged from these studies is a virtual new science of human emplacement that cries out for attention from literary scholars, who, for the most part, have stayed on their side of the humanist-scientist barrier, limiting their focus to metaphor and language while ignoring the exciting interdisciplinary opportunities that beckon.⁴⁰

Given the diversity in the forms of engagement with various agendas, it is of course difficult to summarise in exact terms what ecocriticism is, but it is possible to divide ecocritical discourse roughly into two “waves”⁴¹ along the lines of general emphasis. It has been argued that ecocriticism has moved from its first major wave into the second. This move reflects a shift from exclusively environmental concerns to a more wide-ranging approach that includes environmental as well as social considerations, but it also further defines the relationship between nature and culture. For instance, it is characteristic of the first wave that the conception of “environment” effectively meant only the natural environment. Early ecocritical practice focused primarily on the “abstract, aesthetically beautiful concept” of a balanced and harmonious planet⁴². The first major wave of ecocriticism thus grew out of a sense that the natural world was being lost and, consequently, the focus was on implementing a cultural change in order to combat that loss and in defending its position with theory.⁴³ In terms of literature and culture, early ecocritics observed an inattention to environmental questions that, in effect, was exacerbating the ongoing degradation of the physical environment, specifically the threats that unchecked human practices present to wild nature. The first wave approached questions of human-nature interrelationships mainly from an ecocentric point of view that owes its positions to the philosophy of deep ecology and the “land ethic” developed by Aldo Leopold in his *Sand County Almanac* (1949), both of which call for a re-evaluation of Western attitudes to nature. The crucial position of deep ecology is to recognise the intrinsic value of the flourishing of all life on earth. It specifically challenges Western discourses of nature, especially the predominant dualistic separation of humans

40 Love 2003: 32

41 e.g. Levin 2002: 173; Buell 2005: 17, 21-23

42 Adamson 2001: xv

43 Tallmadge and Harrington 2000: ix

from the rest of organic life, and instead argues in favour of return to a monistic relationship between humanity and the biosphere in which the human is placed on a level with all life.⁴⁴ Dualism is predicated on the notion that the world is divided in subject and object, two entities that are separate but interact with one another. The conscious subject responds to a stimulus produced by an external object: for instance, a natural landscape is an object possessing an aesthetic value, to which visual stimulus a viewer then reacts. However, that same landscape, when viewed by another subject or in another moment, may not be primarily seen as beautiful but as a resource such as minerals or timber⁴⁵. While there are variations in the strength of the response on the part of the viewer, dualism holds that the dichotomy itself remains constant.

The inclusion of urban environments and social concerns has been one of the signs of a move towards the second wave. As Lawrence Buell has argued, “a mature environmental aesthetics – or ethics, or politics – must take into account the interpretation of metropolis *and* outback, of anthropocentric as well as biocentric concerns.”⁴⁶ Thus, ecocriticism has been moving towards a discourse where environmental and social questions are viewed in conjunction with one another.⁴⁷ This is not to say that environmental systems and environmental stress are no longer central to the ecocritical outlook but, rather, the so-called second wave of ecocriticism assumes a much broader view of what constitutes “the environment”, and hence also environmentalist literary criticism. Of course, the use of terms like first and second wave should not be taken to imply that the division between these two is clear cut; the terms, in my understanding, rather represent intersecting alternatives. A good example of this is the discourse of urban landscapes and socially oriented environmentalism which is beginning to form a greater part of the ecocritical outlook.⁴⁸ For instance, ecocriticism with an

44 Soper 1995: 49-50

45 Evernden 1981: 148

46 Buell 2005: 23, emphasis added.

47 See e.g. Rosendale 2002: 59-76.

48 It should be pointed out that the question of environmentalism in ecocriticism, although of course central to the topic at hand, is too complex to address in its entirety here, which is why I have omitted from my discussion many of the

ecofeminist or environmental justice emphasis stands in opposition to many of the first-wave assumptions regarding the relationship between humanity and nature. Environmental justice calls for a discourse on topics such as toxicity and environmental racism resulting from unchecked economic and industrial growth, and in doing so, puts a human face on issues surrounding environmentalism. Moreover, socially oriented ecology is at odds with deep ecology, and protectionist environmental discourse in general, which at least implicitly privileges notions of individualist self-sufficiency and survival in their focus on wilderness. Ecofeminism objects to the combination of historical associations and natural conditions which portray woman as nature whereas race and postcolonial studies question tendencies to associate the “new world” and the “dark continent” with an undeveloped natural environment.⁴⁹ Colonial discourse, with its practice of impoverishing, ignoring and overcoming the object, has treated indigenous cultures with depictions that were created out of a need to inhibit the sense of common humanity that was originally recognised.⁵⁰ For instance, the representation of Native Americans' “dwelling in harmony with nature” sustains one of the most enduring and widespread myths of the non-European other, dating back to at least the sixteenth century. While the European “we” cannot maintain a functional harmony with the natural environment, other, primitive cultures continue to have the mythical ability to do so. The notion is close to the trope of the noble savage, which associates Native cultures with wildness and a harmonious connection with the natural world. Garrard (2004) goes on to argue that “the assumption of indigenous environmental virtue is a foundational belief for deep ecologists and many ecocritics” and that Native Americans are “the *locus classicus* of this assumption”.⁵¹

ongoing debates on the extent to which any form of literary criticism can propose a functioning system of environmental protection. Instead, I have attempted to make a case for the inclusion of the social dimension of ecology, not in order to downplay the notion of environmental crisis but to point to the necessity of adequately examining environmentalist values and their application with regard to industrialism, progress and globalisation.

49 Levin 2002: 172

50 Murphy 1998: 42

51 As Garrard has argued, the popular environmentalist sentiment implies that pollution is a clear indication of the difference between the Indian ethics of respect for nature that are required to counter the destructive impact of white greed on the environment. Environmental campaigns to this effect have “helped crystallise a cultural stereotype of

2.2. Environmental criticism, mobility and the New England landscape

The question of human identification with, and manipulation of, the environment obviously requires a look at the way Thoreau views the landscape and how he appropriates it to fit his vision of its rightness. Here, my focus will be on the occasions where Thoreau's attention is distracted from the physical environment to a closer look at the humans in that environment. I will be looking at examples of naturalisation and of alienation, as it is in these moments that I believe Thoreau reveals a sense of entitlement to the landscape. I am following an analysis by the ecocritic Stephen Geric (2000) who approaches the question of human identification with the environment by looking at Thoreau's attitude towards industrialisation. *A Week*, Geric argues, reaffirms American industrial expansion while recognising the inherent exceptionalism in America's self-image. It reveals the close relation between two understandings of American exceptionalism: the pastoral idyll of America on the one hand, and America as a place of confused perception regarding class relations, on the other. Geric's reading of *A Week* looks at the narrative as an attempt to skirt the issue of industrial production, yet with the understanding that Thoreau's vision of the environment is itself associated with industry. As Geric writes:

Thoreau's nature is affiliated with the "axe" and the "sword." [...] he transforms materiality -- actual geography traversed by humans in their social relations -- and *manufactures* landscape, a version of nature from which he and his productions are inseparable and which is itself productive. Taking account of re-vision and re-placement (not *displacement*), Thoreau's nature *is* industry. Thoreau disclaims the industry he confronts while he reformulates the confrontation outside the relations of labor and industry and their appurtenant human relations. The independent laborer is the idealized product of Thoreau's journey through but around the sounds and sites of dependent labor.⁵²

Because the question of human identification engenders the charge of exclusive anthropocentrism, it is necessary to consider elements of change as an expression of the manipulation of the landscape. I will

'Ecological Indians' that had deep roots in Euro-American culture." (Garrard 2004: 120)

⁵² Geric 2000: 241, emphases original

thus be looking at the ways in which Thoreau shows change in his surroundings: in the environment generally, in human constructs, in animals and humans.

I will analyse the text of *A Week* with respect to Thoreau's sense of belonging to nature, his place-sense, and the ways in which he envisions the human/nature relationship. My reading involves a close look at the portrayals of the people he comes across on his journey. These instances help in examining Thoreau's own environmental awareness because they provide a way of systematically assessing the author's values against those of his subjects. My argument is that Thoreau's eagerness to exist in a participatory relationship with the environment suggests that he is expressing privileges of class, race and gender. Another reason why the inclusion of humans is necessary is that it allows for a closer analysis of the impact made on the natural environment by human communities.

As the critic Gretchen Legler points out, “Thoreau's aesthetic is that of a 'clean' body, an independent body, a firmly structured self, a 'strong' body.”⁵³ I argue that this ideal shows in his interaction with the environment in two important ways. In the first instance, the planning and execution of his excursion are strong indications of the need for a body that is strong, socially and materially independent, and free to occupy nature. Secondly, the sense of a firmly structured self informs Thoreau's attitude towards the humans that people the landscape. In broad terms, he considers the landscape his own and does not question his place in it, while often obscuring or omitting others or bending their presence to meet his own notion of a true environmental existence. That belief allows him to find a sense of rightness in the indifference of nature.

The pastoral has been used as a definition of the meaning of America to the extent where its eminence in the native imagination is plainly obvious. The reason for the inception of this ideal is clear:

The ruling motive of the good shepherd, leading figure of the classic, Virgilian mode, was to withdraw from the great world and begin a new life in a fresh, green landscape. And now here was a virgin continent! [...] With an unspoiled hemisphere in view it seemed that mankind

53 Legler 1998: 76

actually might realize what had been thought a poetic fantasy. Soon the dream of a retreat to an oasis of harmony and joy was removed from its traditional literary context.⁵⁴ The removal of the dream from its literary context is possible only as far as it finds an expression in reality, and the America of the era of discovery *is* this frank reality: an expanse of unspoiled, fresh landscapes, truly a virgin land. The English were fascinated with a new continent lacking the trappings of European civilisation – that is to say, they found a land inhabited by Indians whose existence served as further proof of America as a primal landscape that could be harnessed. It is not surprising, then, that the ideal would remain in the native imagination and become an essential element of the American national psyche.⁵⁵ Marx argues that although traditional pastoral may seem hostile towards change, a new American pastoral is capable of reclaiming the power of the ideal:

Today, looking back across the great gulf created by industrialism, we can easily see what was wrong with the pastoral theory of America. We say that it embodied a naïve and ultimately static view of history, and so it did. But to project this judgement into the past is to miss the compelling power of the ideal in its eighteenth century context. That is why we so often mistake it for a primitivist fantasy. From our perspective they may look equally regressive, but the distinction between them was once a vital element in the American consciousness, and to ignore it is to blur the past.⁵⁶

In other words, I want to discuss to what extent the narrative is an expression of environmental ethics and, in that context, I take the concept of travel as a form of existing with (or in) the landscape that is of value to Thoreau because he is committed to the idea of forward motion as a weapon against stagnation, rather than focusing on staying in one location. I examine the idea of mobility as a form of agreement that Thoreau has made with nature. With regard to nature's role, therefore, I agree with Ryan Schneider's suggestion that the physical landscape, with its borders and natural obstacles, performs a “policing task” in Thoreau's narrative. This can be seen in cases where Thoreau derives satisfaction

54 Ibid. 1964: 3

55 In Marx's view, Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia* (1781-1782) is the most accurate expression of the American pastoral ethos: seemingly primitivist, but without the intention of going all the way in the direction of a static-pastoral existence, and maintaining a coherent sense of the distinction between Europe and America. In other words, the exceptionality and moral sense of the American Everyman provides fertile ground for the continuation of the pastoral ideal even after the introduction of technology.

56 Marx 1964: 114

from the single-minded indifference with which nature carries on regardless of aberrant human behaviour. The landscape performs as a benign nurturing presence to Thoreau and his brother, yet does not yield to the whims of those who lack the level of dedication and mobility which Thoreau regularly claims to accomplish. Looking at this issue from the point of view of environmentalism, I hope to establish a way of reading Thoreau's engagement with the physical environment as something for which he is consciously (although not always too clearly) striving. Finally, I will be looking at examples of irreconcilable change and consider Thoreau's own reaction to these instances while still attempting to see beyond change as something that is always bad and always irreversible. Thoreau experiences change in two ways: of his own volition through travel as well as involuntarily, when developed areas encroach on his ideal landscape.

3. Examining mobility, intrusion and naturalisation

3.1 Mobility and material ingenuity in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*

It is through travel that Thoreau is able to transcend natural boundaries and establish his independence from other humans. In this respect, the analysis draws on the idea of the narrative as an expression of American pastoral that is at the same time conscious of the encroachment of the ideal landscape.

The narrative of the actual journey begins with a description of Saturday, 31 August, 1839, the day of departure from Concord. Thoreau begins by pointing to the unexpected delay in the departure. It is as if nature is hesitant to allow them the liberty of travel. The morning's weather has threatened to delay the voyage, but by afternoon the sky has cleared and the day becomes a gentle late-summer afternoon. Thoreau notes the experience with a prophetic statement: "A warm drizzling rain had obscured the morning, and threatened to delay our voyage, but at length the leaves and grass were dried, and it came out a mild afternoon, as serene and fresh as if nature were maturing some greater scheme of her own." (15) Once the weather settles, nature grants mobility to the two travellers. Encouraged by this, they launch their boat and glide downstream as the landscape curtsies its blessing on the journey.

The boat trip is to last only a week, yet Thoreau is eager to point out that he has been preparing for it well in advance. His preparations are in line with what Legler argues is an essential feature of Thoreau's relationship with the environment: a strong body has helped him build the means of travel; a structured self allows him to feel purpose and pride about the journey ahead. Their boat has been built the previous spring and is entirely their own handiwork, having cost them a week's labour. Thoreau is quick to point out that his boat is "strongly built but heavy, and hardly of better model than usual": in other words, it is sturdy rather than pleasant to look at, does not draw attention but is designed simply for the task of carrying a load from one place to another. It is painted green and blue, two colours which, according to Thoreau, are a reference to air and water: the elements with which the boat's

existence is to be spent. If rightly made, Thoreau reasons, a boat would be like an amphibious animal, a fish-bird equally at home in both elements. He writes:

The fish shows where there should be the greatest beam and depth in the hold; its fins direct where to set the oars, and the tail gives some hint for the form and the position of the rudder. The bird shows how to rig and trim the sails, and what form to give to the prow that it may balance the boat, and divide the air and water best. (16)

But, he adds, they have only partly followed these directions and instead have built their boat to be sufficient for their purposes. It must be heavy to float lightly enough; it must obey the rules of nature rather than of art. As Thoreau explains: "the eyes, though they are no sailors, will never be satisfied with any model, however fashionable, which does not answer all the requisitions of the art." (16)

The degree of preparation and dedication is clear. The boat is laden with home-grown fruits and vegetables, utensils, a spare set of oars, two masts (one of which multi-tasks as a tent-pole) and a set of poles for shoving the boat along in shallower waters: it is Emersonian self-reliance in action. It may be argued that this detailed description of preparation demonstrates an unspoken deal with nature and shows that the travellers know, and do not doubt, their right to the river. In other words, one may identify a sense of entitlement from the planning and work that has taken place before the journey. It is a symbolic give and take which, in a material as well as mental sense, shows Thoreau's readiness to own the voyage. The fully loaded and hand-built boat, then, is an offering on his part. But rather than being a sacrament to the wilderness, it articulates what he and his brother have been willing and able to do in order to make the voyage happen and be as little taxing on nature as possible. With these measures taken, he is allowed to travel freely.

Thoreau's aim is to travel off the beaten path, and to do so without leaving lasting traces. He believes the river to be the best way to travel without burdening the environment: other roads, in his estimation, "do some violence to Nature." (235) As the water is in constant motion, the forward movement of the boat and its travellers is, for the most part, a fact rather than an active pursuit. The

river also allows a greater mobility between Thoreau and his natural subjects. Through that mobility a kind of distance is also achieved. It may be argued that the distance is an extension of the withdrawal from the world for which Thoreau is famous. By “benefit of distance”, I am referring to Alison Byerly's argument that river journeys were a form of voyage that allowed the traveller to see the scene without setting foot in it; “to pass through, but not touch.”⁵⁷ Consider, for instance, the following comment on p. 22: “Here and there might be seen a pole sticking up, to mark the place where some fisherman had enjoyed unusual luck, and in return had consecrated his rod to the deities who preside over these shallows.” In this remark, Thoreau points to a superstitious habit common to fishermen who believe nature to be responsible for their good luck. It is likely that the comment is not meant to judge; however, it contains an implicit notion of the difference between himself and any fisherman. Thoreau sets himself apart with self-reliance and preparedness characteristic to him. It is not in return for any material bounty but for mobility.

This attitude is similar to an earlier passage at the beginning of the same chapter. In it, Thoreau expresses a reserve – and a reluctance to acknowledge fellow humans as he embarks upon the river. Although the onlookers presumably do not know it, the Thoreaus have already done their part in making sure they are welcome on the river:

Some village friends stood upon a promontory lower down the stream to wave us a last farewell; but we, having already performed these shore rites, with excusable reserve, as befits those who are embarked on unusual enterprises, who behold but speak not, silently glided past the firm lands of Concord, both peopled cape and lonely summer meadow with steady sweeps. (16-17)

Here, Thoreau acknowledges the fact that the journey is unusual. It is only a week's excursion that will lead back to the port of departure. Therefore, to be seen off with a wave of last farewell seems morbid at worst: at best, an oversized ceremony. The reserve is thus appropriate. Moreover, the comment can

⁵⁷ Byerly 2002: 92. Byerly points out that the river journeys would have been considered more interesting than land routes because the perspective offered by the rivers themselves gave a sense of connection between the various scenes. (Byerly 2002: 87)

be read alongside what has been said before about mobility. It may be argued that the unasked-for farewell is met with such reserve because human wishes or prayers for good voyage no longer matter⁵⁸. The travellers have done what they can to ensure a smooth journey. Thoreau is ready to pass, momentarily, from human reckoning to wilderness.

The fact of freedom to travel speaks of Thoreau's sense of his relationship with the river. We might call it intimacy. For him, the purpose of travelling is in the depth of the journey rather than in breadth. As he states in the introductory chapter, "Concord":

It is worth the while to make a voyage up the stream, if you go no farther than Sudbury, only to see how much country there is in the rear of us; great hills, and a hundred brooks, and farm-houses, and barns, and hay-stacks, you never saw before, and men every where, Sudbury, that is *Southborough* men, and Wayland, and Nine-Acre-Corner men, and Bound Rock, where four towns bound on a rock in the river, Lincoln, Wayland, Sudbury, Concord. (7)

The places listed are those with which Thoreau is already familiar, yet he is compelled to make his voyage directly into their midst, to survey and document them apart from the names by which they are known. He cannot get away entirely from the presence of the local people, nor can he fully escape the fact of named nature – the towns which to most people have character only by the fact of their being built and named by humans, instead of their being natural structures that transcend human influence, as Thoreau would prefer. In spite of the inescapable fact of human presence Thoreau is able to remind himself of the great hills and brooks that can be found even as near as Sudbury. But it comes as no surprise which elements he believes to be the rightful identifiers of these places. Thoreau moves on from listing names to listing nature and its citizens: the weather, birds, animals, trees.

Many waves are there agitated by the wind, keeping nature fresh, the spray blowing in your face, reeds and rushes waving; ducks by the hundred, all uneasy in the surf, in the raw wind, just ready to rise, and now going off with a clatter and a whistling like the riggers, straight for Labrador, flying against the stiff gale with reefed wings [...] gulls wheeling overhead, muskrats swimming for dear life, wet and cold, with no fire to warm them by, that you know of; their

⁵⁸ On p. 22, Thoreau mentions a pause at Ball's Hill, "the St. Ann's of Concord voyagers", not to say any prayer for the voyage, but to pick berries. Clearly, nature is more capable of furnishing a successful journey than the prayers of humans would be.

labored homes rising here and there like hay-stacks; and countless mice and moles, and winged titmice along the sunny windy shore; cranberries tossed on the waves, and heaving up on the beach, their little red skiffs beating about among the alders; --such healthy natural tumult as proves the last day is not yet at hand. And there stand all around the alders, and birches, and oaks, and maples full of glee and sap, holding in their buds until the waters subside. (7)

The description could be taken as key to Thoreau's reading of the riverscape and it can also shed light on his identification with it. Nature, when left alone, is healthy and constantly kept fresh, ready to be observed and explored, freed of human manipulation. Thoreau constructs a natural world by stripping the human of any right to interfere on his own terms and with artificial structures that are too obviously geared towards taming the wilderness. As the passage shows, the natural system is perfect and should be emulated if one is to exist successfully in the landscape – and as we have established, Thoreau believes he has already done so by designing the boat as a river creature. More accurately, however, the travellers have only accomplished the manual task of building the boat; the necessary design is provided by nature. All around the landscape the same division of labour can be seen. Thus, the nest of the muskrat resembles a haystack; it could equally well be claimed that the numerous haystacks mentioned earlier resemble muskrat nests, and it may be argued that Thoreau deems it nature's intention. As he argues throughout his narrative, nature finds its forms and does not need to be perfected. Human design, on the other hand, like all human action, is a form of intrusion and Thoreau is conscious of his part as an intruder. The narrative shows, though, that he believes some forms of intrusion to be nobler and more honest than others. For instance, coming across two men in a skiff (in “Sunday”) he compliments their silent and perfect sailing; they seem to him “still in their element”, that is, while they are only human, they are worthy of being included in the scenery for the grace of their movement. Therefore, they “have very delicately availed themselves of the natural laws. Their floating there was a beautiful and successful experiment in natural philosophy, and it served to enable

in our eyes the art of navigation, for as birds fly and fishes swim, so these men sailed.” (49)⁵⁹ The two men sail mostly unnoticed, and in Thoreau's mind, unburdening the river and travelling as part of the landscape. If he knows their purpose, he chooses not to express it; it may be assumed that their sailing, too, is recreational. But the relative indifference with which Thoreau acknowledges the men is not hostile; rather, the fact of their skilled sailing is the reason to accept their presence.

To navigate is to read the landscape; it requires the ability to apply the natural laws into practice and to see beyond the obvious— not to fix one's eye on the glass but pass through it for a better view. These men have rightly taken advantage of the opportunity to do so. Thus, the art of navigation is *enobled*: it has its place as an acceptable form of intrusion. We might read the art of navigation as an indication of Thoreau's habit of establishing nature's independence of the names of towns. As he lists the names, the towns signify nothing. They are only human history and as such, restrict a full interpretation of the land. The ability to see beyond the obvious is similar to the skill of reading the landscape beyond the named towns.

Because they do not tax the scenery with their presence, the two sailors remind Thoreau of his own ideal existence. He writes: “It reminded us how much fairer and nobler all the actions of man might be, and that our life in its own economy might be as beautiful as the fairest works of art or nature.” (49) In a similar fashion, in “Saturday”, he describes an old fisherman, “the Walton of this stream” (24)⁶⁰ who is distinguished from the race of men by the fact that his life is spent away from dry land, closer to fish than to humans. The old brown-coated man is absorbed into the scenery by the fact of his routine and appearance:

59 Here, Thoreau quotes a verse from George Herbert's “The Elixir”(1633) to express the sentiment:

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye,
Or, if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And the heavens espy.

60 Reference to Izaak Walton (1593-1683), author of *The Complete Angler, or the Contemplative Man's Recreation* (1653).

He was always to be seen in serene afternoons haunting the river, and almost rustling with the sedge; so many hours in an old man's life, entrapping silly fish, almost grown to be the sun's familiar; what need had he of hat or raiment any, having served out his time, and seen through such thin disguises? (24)

Simply by standing and fishing, the old man leaves no lasting trace to Thoreau's vision of the landscape. He falls into a natural rhythm (“almost the sun's familiar”) and can be found on the riverbank in his “old experienced coat” which has come to resemble the bark of a tree. Thus, as Thoreau says, he is “no work of art but naturalized at length” (24). There is no disconnect between the appearance and the background, and thus the fisherman's presence may be read as another example of the kind of human life that Thoreau is willing to allow into his scene. Just as the two sailors float silently, the fisherman's habit is similarly undemanding. He does not pause to question the act of fishing itself but comes out to fish because nature baits him with the opportunity. Thus, nature grants him freedom from communication with his fellows, a greater degree of independence in Thoreau's eyes than can be said of those who settle for “a civil politic life”:

Perchance he is not confounded with many knowledges, and has not sought out many inventions, but how to take many fishes before the sun sets, with his slender birchen pole and flaxen line, that is invention enough for him. . . . Some men are judges these August days, sitting on benches, even till the court rises; they sit judging there honorably, between the seasons and between meals, leading a civil politic life . . . from highest noon till the red vesper sinks into the west. (23)

Time is wasted sitting on benches and engaging in arbitrary judgements; the fisherman, instead, does not sit but stands with his dog, “the only objects to relieve the eye in the extended meadow” (23). By the very fact of his presence the man is distinguished from the scenery as he is from his fellow men, but he stands out from the landscape in a natural way. To Thoreau, this is enough to make him an entirely justified element of the landscape itself. Moreover, he states, nobody else sees the fisherman: no one besides Thoreau is able to see him for who and what he is; this, I argue, is what he means by naturalisation.

Thoreau's reading of the old man is evidence of his own attitude and particularly his values towards the forms of human culture in nature. Throughout the narrative these values serve to make the human objects described seem more Thoreau-like than themselves. To say that nobody else “saw” the fisherman or that no one even remembers him after his death is in line with Thoreau's arrogant sense of a guardian of the landscape. Whether or not the estimation is accurate is not relevant. What is important, rather, is that Thoreau believes himself to be right; he believes that his observations are beyond doubt. His vision clears the scenery of most things which do not appeal to his subjective sense of nature's economy. Take for instance the chapter “Sunday”, in which the narrative moves from the Concord River to the Merrimack and the travellers cross the state border from Massachusetts to New Hampshire. The landscape seems mystical in comparison to the familiarity of the Concord, with Thoreau remarking that it is “the only key which could unlock” the maze of New Hampshire's scenery, “presenting its hills and valleys, its lakes and streams, in their natural order and position.” (83) But here, too, human influence is everywhere present, with fishing nets and pasture lands visible. The Thoreaus have been let in through locks at Middlesex by a “serene and liberal-minded man” with whom “we had a just and equal encounter of the eyes, as between two honest men”:

The best relations were at once established between us and this man, and though few words were spoken, he could not conceal visible interest in us and our excursion. ... By this man we were presented with the freedom of the Merrimack. ... We began again busily to put to practice those old arts of rowing, steering, and paddling. It seemed a strange phenomenon to us that the two rivers should mingle their waters so readily, since we had never associated them in our thoughts. (79-80)

The lock keeper is treated positively because of his interest in the brothers and their excursion. Whether through his own action or by some natural urge, he is compelled to let them pass; at any rate, there is no question of the rightfulness of his task, as long as he bends to nature's will and consequently to Thoreau's will. The encounter of the eyes takes place as though there are two men, not three; thus, by casually omitting the presence of his brother, Thoreau reduces the encounter to between himself and the

lock keeper. From the equal relations that are instantly established between them, Thoreau assumes a kind of unspoken pact. He feels as though the man has launched them on a stream towards the ocean and is pleased to find that the boat floats freely on the Merrimack. It inspires them to row more vigorously: Here it is a fellow man rather than nature that ensures Thoreau's continued mobility. But it may be argued that the lock keeper is only a tool in the contract which Thoreau has established with nature earlier. Were he to deny passage to the travellers, the lock keeper would be violating a natural directive; but he does not, and in spite of its being Sunday, performs the task. Thoreau's attitude is clearly in favour of the man. It may be argued that he gains Thoreau's confidence because the action, as well as the resistance to a prohibition of work on a Sabbath, sets him apart from the generic white man. The same can be said for the old fisherman. Both men observe a more sensible natural order in favour of a civilised one. There is no question as to where Thoreau's own sympathies lay. He himself is committed to nature, which can be seen in his keeping the landscape clear of disturbance. Thus, his attitude is benevolent towards those with whom nature, in his estimation, has no quarrel.

By contrast to the previous encounters, Thoreau's reaction towards those who presumably do not abide by the same set of rules is one of smug indifference. In another passage from "Sunday", he is happy to let nature perform a boundary-setting task to eliminate unwanted presence from his landscape. In this passage, two stranded men appear and ask to be taken as passengers. They are merchants who, according to the narrative, are making their way from the commercial centre of Lowell, Massachusetts towards Nashua, New Hampshire (both manufacturing towns). Their interjection is clearly unwelcome, as the passage shows:

As we rowed along near the shore of Wicasuck Island, which was then covered with wood, in order to avoid the current, two men, who looked as if they had just run out of Lowell, where they had been waylaid by the Sabbath, meaning to go to Nashua, and who now found themselves in the strange, natural, uncultivated and unsettled part of the globe which intervenes, full of walls and barriers, a rough and uncivil place to them, seeing our boat moving so smoothly up the stream, called out from the high bank above our heads to know if we would take them as passengers, as if this were the street they had missed; that they might sit and chat

and drive away the time, and so at last find themselves in Nashua. (112)

Here, it is the men who are rendered powerless by nature through their own stupidity. They find themselves surrounded by strangeness, natural walls and unpredictable barriers. Nature performs its own policing task: the men, in turn, are no threat to the wilderness but only a disturbance. To Thoreau, the men's presence in the landscape is offensive. They arrogantly draw attention to themselves by calling down from above the travellers' heads, as though establishing their undeserved superiority, and dare to request transportation from the two labouring brothers. There is an element of delinquency to these men who seem "waylaid by the Sabbath" and thus temporarily cast off from civilisation, trapped in a strange place as though waiting to be punished for some aberration. Nature intervenes in their lives in the same way as they intervene in Thoreau's peaceful landscape. Here his tone becomes superior as he criticises them for behaving as though the river were a street they had missed, as though they are entitled to an idle voyage to their destination with no effort on their part. It is therefore only fair that this unsettled wild nature is intervening in their lives. The difference between them and the successfully naturalised persons seen so far in the narrative could not be more clear. Thoreau is free to judge the men as it is they who come to him with a request. His criticism is based on their being urban, clumsy and noisy, and out of place by the riverside; they work in commerce, which lacks the natural purpose of "proper" labour. They seem to him ignorant: his boat is already "crowded with necessary furniture" (112) and it requires to be worked up the stream; yet, although the labour would have been obvious to anyone watching, the men have the audacity to ask for a smooth journey. With a touch of self-satisfaction, Thoreau denies the men. However, the burden of decision is not upon him but upon nature – or more specifically, on "the unsympathizing river". He writes:

They ran about like ants on a burning brand, and once more they tried the river here, and once more there, to see if water still indeed was not to be walked on, as if a new thought inspired them, and by some peculiar disposition of the limbs they could accomplish it. [...] Whether they got safely through, or went round by the locks we never learned. We could not help being struck

by the seeming, though innocent indifference of Nature to these men's necessities, while elsewhere she was equally serving others. (113-114)

Here, Thoreau makes clear that his decisions are founded on the observation of a natural law: because his boat is too full to carry any extra weight, he is absolved of responsibility towards the men. It is clear, however, that he would not be inclined to help the men even if he had the necessary means. In fact, he is happy to leave them where they are and looks back on them with fascination. As he glides away, the men are reduced to insects, as all who make unreasonable demands on nature should be. Distance and mobility allow him a scientific gaze with which to observe these men, confessing to feeling struck as they become involuntary elements of the landscape. The two men seem to him to be part of another world; they do not belong on his quiet riverbank. Because of this, the fact that they are stranded speaks to Thoreau of a lack of common sense, which would be required to overcome natural obstacles; thus, it may be that Thoreau hopes they will learn to conduct themselves with appropriate respect towards nature. If he were to offer help, it would be a concession to their urban ways and committing a violation against nature. The reasoning here, however, seems to be that it is not he who lacks sympathy, but the river; therefore, Thoreau's indignation is resolved.

A similar indifference is expressed later, in "Monday", in another example of interruption to the two travellers' expectation of smooth sailing. Believing themselves to be the only navigators on the river that day, the Thoreaus come across a series of commercial canal boats that suddenly appear on the scene with their sails set (144). The first one is seen gliding around like a river beast, instantly transforming the scene and prompting the brothers to abandon their quiet moment of reflection. The presence of commerce forces them to reconsider their claim to solitude and Thoreau is again able to portray passers-by as intruders. Tellingly, as he contemplates the boats' presence Thoreau chooses not to acknowledge the individual sailors aboard except by mentioning a brief conversation, the contents of which however are not revealed. Focusing exclusively on the vessels while ignoring their crew may be

taken to indicate some belief that the progress of commerce relies on an uncanny power wielded by transportation itself. Do the boats distort the scene because they are heralds of manufacture and trade, or is commerce itself some unstoppable force that has lured humans into its service and must be resisted? Thoreau's reaction, at least, suggests the latter; he finds himself involuntarily “in the current of commerce once more” (144), and it is clear that he feels powerless to fight against this drift in the moment. But as he waits, the boats pass and natural order is restored: “[s]oon, however, we were delivered from this fleet of junks, and possessed the river in solitude, once more rowing steadily upward through the noon”. His mobility has thus been only temporarily compromised by the artifacts of culture, not by the forces of nature. Moreover, it seems that it is not the boats themselves but their implications that have the potential to cause a sense of alienation. In order to restore that order which is represented by his possession of the river, Thoreau is forced stay aside and wait for the “fleet of junks”, a reminder of the increasing pervasiveness of consumer goods, to pass.

3.2 Intrusion and rural life

As these examples demonstrate, Thoreau's judgement of people in the landscape is based on his understanding of what an individual is capable of doing in order to cultivate a working relationship with nature. For example, a farmer or a fisherman is viewed differently from a tradesman because the former two exist in a more or less symbiotic relationship with their surroundings. The tradesman, by contrast, imposes and intrudes, seemingly incapable of appreciating what is around him. His attempts at navigating the river are dismissed because his urban background and – more importantly – his profession intrinsically walls him off from the natural world and making it impossible for him to benefit from it. That is why he is portrayed standing out from the landscape in a negative sense, while those engaging in rural tasks are approached with much more appreciation:

All the world reposes in beauty to him who preserves equipoise in his life, and moves serenely on his path without secret violence; as he who sails down a stream, he has only to steer, keeping his bark in the middle, and carry it round the falls. [...] The forms of beauty fall naturally

around the path of him who is in the performance of his proper work; as the curled shavings drop from the plane, and bearings cluster round the auger. (317-318)

Thoreau obviously counts himself among those capable of maintaining harmony, his boat trip being an example of non-taxing engagement with the environment. Working in commerce is too far removed from what Thoreau considers an environmentally respectful existence as its success depends on the reduction of the natural world that transforms it into a consumable resource. Thus, the mere presence of commercial boats or trapped businessmen is enough to remind Thoreau of the vested interest that industry has on his valued landscape and the only way for him to resist the spread is to treat its human representatives with indifference. Compared with this response, the tone used in describing mostly-rural professions such as fishing and farming, is more respectful. It is not that such activities are any less likely to consider the utility of the natural environment, but Thoreau distinguishes between rural and urban livelihoods more on the basis of personal involvement than in terms of profit.

Yet, the representation of rural people stands out, as here, again, Thoreau's vision of human life in nature is far removed from the way he pictures himself. As we have seen, much of Thoreau's perceived success on his journey stems from the fact that he has consciously chosen to be where he is. While he describes with satisfaction the unpredictability of the river's forward motion, the journey is one of leisure and exploration, not one of necessity. Therefore, his depiction of rural communities places him at a comfortable distance again. This is particularly noticeable in his account of the cattle teamsters at the annual cattle show that Thoreau recalls towards the end of his journey. Here, individual humans are described as part of a particular autumn landscape:

The wind goes hurrying down the country, gleaning every loose straw that is left in the fields, while every farmer lad too appears to scud before it, –having donned his best pea-jacket and pepper and salt waistcoat, his unbent trousers, outstanding rigging of duck, or kersymere, or corduroy, and his furry hat withal, –to country fairs and cattle shows. (336)

The farm workers are reduced to a part in the shift from summer to autumn, scudding before the wind

like leaves. In such a setting, the farmer lad can only dress in his best to reflect nature's scheme of change; they represent in their way autumn itself, echoing the changing appearance of the landscape. The autumn festival, moreover, calls them to join in celebration of a successful harvest: thus, they leap over fences, momentarily set free from daily labour, their “tough idle palms, which have never learned to hang by their sides” representing both the exceptional American farmer and the fervour of the season. Thoreau's excitement at the memory of the scene is due to the seemingly premeditated movement of crowds gathered in the streets, a commotion in which human individuals are indistinguishable from the noises of cattle and the cluster of leaves. Being thus assimilated into the background, the farmers, in Thoreau's eyes, are as pleasant a sight as nature itself. Like most other human subjects in the narrative, these farmers appear stripped of personal agency. Their presence is actively being naturalised by Thoreau to assert the value of rural communities over urban ones, using the natural rhythm of the year as an aesthetic background. Against that background he is able to express his love for a portion of humankind with an enthusiasm he has previously reserved for his beloved classical poets. Of the farmers he says,

All the land over they go leaping the fences with their tough idle palms, which have never learned to hang by their sides, amid the low of calves and the bleating of sheep I love these sons of earth every mother's son of them, with their great hearty hearts rushing tumultuously in herds from spectacle to spectacle, as if fearful lest there should not be time between sun and sun to see them all, and the sun does not wait more than in haying-time. (336-337)

However, Thoreau's conception of nature by default excludes the farmer from the sphere of culture: were the farmer to be found pursuing something that does not come to him by his own nature, he would be estranged from his own environment. But that is not the case here – and thus, in keeping with the pastoral agenda, he too fits the landscape as an exalted American farmer.

In passages such as these Thoreau is reluctant to accept the fact that industrial manufacture makes up a growing portion of the economy in nineteenth-century New England. The larger and more

modern a town is, the further away it is from ideal forms of living and, consequently, the less inclined is Thoreau to credit its presence or go into its history and growth. Indeed, based on his narrative, Thoreau seems to avoid the issue of industrialisation entirely. Towns such as Lowell and Nashua seem little more than snags in a steady string of rural villages. The two towns are hardly seen and only briefly heard in the narrative as Thoreau maintains an emotional, if not always geographical, distance between them and himself. The resistance is illustrated especially in “Saturday” where Lowell makes itself seen and heard. On the night in question the travellers have set their camp on an isolated stretch of rising ground surrounded by pine woods and rugged hills, providing a scene of quiet isolation on their first night outdoors:

For the most part, there was no recognition of human life in the night, no human breathing was heard, only the breathing of the wind. As we sat up, kept awake by the novelty of our situation, we heard at intervals foxes stepping about over the dead leaves [...] At intervals we were serenaded by the song of a dreaming sparrow or the throttled cry of an owl, but after each sound which near at hand broke the stillness of the night, each crackling of the twigs, or rustling among the leaves, there was a sudden pause, and deeper and more conscious silence, as if the intruder were aware that no life was rightfully abroad at that hour. (41)

It is an idyllic scene and the experience of a conscious silence in nature is novel enough to have an unexpectedly energising effect on Thoreau, who is kept awake even in the knowledge that no life should be stirring the quiet landscape. He clearly feels at ease in the moment in that he finds himself liberated from traces of human existence as there are no cultivated fields and only one farmhouse can be seen in the distance. But the scene is suddenly disrupted: “[t]here was a fire in Lowell, as we judged, this night, and we saw the horizon blazing, and heard the distant alarm bells, as it were a faint tinkling music borne to these woods” (41). Given the distance of the town, the sounds of alarm bells are reduced to a faint tinkling. Rather than alarming Thoreau, the bells sound like a musical complement to a natural arrangement made up of the occasional song of sparrow, cry of owl and the “natural bugle” of baying house dogs. Thus, the noise from the town is incorporated into the natural background so

successfully that the fact of its origin catches the reader off guard: the blaze should disrupt the peaceful scene, but the distant noises only end up contributing to it. There is no further mention of Lowell in the rest of the passage: the town has succeeded in being heard momentarily, but Thoreau refuses to be drawn into a reflection of the relative proximity of industry. It seems that the reason for mentioning the town at all is to reinforce Thoreau's own experience of a quiet night on a remote stretch of land surrounded by the native sounds of the surrounding woods and distant farmland. Lowell intrudes upon that experience but Thoreau counters its presence by appropriating the noise for his narrative purposes; it also serves to mask his own intrusion in the peaceful scene. Furthermore, as Stephen Gernic argues, it could be taken as a narrative device functioning as an introduction to other sounds:

The blaze in Lowell does function narratively to introduce other sounds associated with human inhabitation (the barking of house dogs and crowing of cocks), but the passage continues and concludes without further mention of Lowell. In fact, the human sounds paradoxically evidence the *soundness* of nature: “All these sounds, the crowing of cocks, the baying of dogs, and the hum of insects at noon, are the evidence of nature's health, or *sound* state” (41-42, Thoreau's emphasis).⁶¹

To Thoreau, the barking of dogs and the crowing of cocks, together with natural noises such as the hum of insects, form evidence of nature's health. Because of this, a distant fire produces no significant digression from the discourse he has chosen: he does not find it cause enough to move towards a discussion of the “machine in the garden”. Thoreau, despite the careful measures he has taken to ensure his isolation, is nevertheless travelling through an area where signs of heavy industry and proletarian labour are hard to miss. By the time of his journey, Lowell had grown into a major city with a population of over twelve thousand (compared to about two hundred in 1820)⁶². Together with Nashua it was one of the central locations of industry and labour agitation in New England at the time, none of which deserves a remark in a narrative with an emphasis on local history and landscape. Thus, while all of this is omitted from the narrative, it comes with a certain irony that Thoreau is able to navigate the

61 Gernic 2000: 248-249, emphases original

62 Ibid. 2000: 250

river as freely as he does because of the locks and the canals that are themselves the product of industry. So although development obviously presents greater opportunities for travel, this does not compel him to include elements of industry in his narrative to any significant extent.

It is true that Thoreau avoids detailed discussion of industry unless he can wall himself off from it in order to do so. Only by maintaining an arm's length between himself and modernisation he can openly criticise its encroachment on the natural environment. Yet it is not entirely accurate to claim that the productions of industry as a whole go unmentioned. For instance, the rationalisation of the Merrimack river for commercial purposes is noticed, even though Thoreau's reflections on the topic come after the fact and are brief. He writes:

Since our voyage the railroad on the bank has been extended, and there is now but little boating on the Merrimack. All kinds of produce and stores were formerly conveyed by water, but now nothing is carried up the stream, and almost wood and bricks alone are carried down, and these are also carried on the railroad. The locks are fast wearing out, and will soon be impassable, since the tolls will not pay the expense of repairing them, and so in a few years there will be an end to boating on this river. (213)

It would be tempting to argue here that the end of boating is a positive development to Thoreau. It would, after all, leave the waterways open for leisurely travel. But even as he expresses distaste at the occasional commercial ship they come across, he cannot escape the usefulness of canals and locks and this could be taken as an indication that the rationalisation of the river is not so much a negative thing for him to begin with. In fact, in comparison to extending the railway and thus allowing industry a greater presence, Thoreau actually seems to prefer the idea of the river being used to convey goods to the notion of giving space to the railway. The railway is much too closely affiliated with industry to be an acceptable presence in the landscape he favours, although, as usual, he does not go into further detail regarding the machine in the garden beyond lamenting the incipient decay of the locks⁶³. Thoreau's mentioning the shift from the river to the railway therefore suggests that he believes industry to be

⁶³ The Middlesex Canal went bankrupt in 1851, two years after the publication of *A Week*.

committing another slight against the river by effectively closing off a vital part of the river's purpose, namely, the transportation of produce, and replacing it with the artificial/unnatural substitute of the modern railway. One obvious consequence of this development is that it facilitates an even further degree of alienation from natural forms of transportation. By gradual progression, this estrangement would spread to cover all other opportunities that rivers naturally provide to those dwelling on their banks. As Thoreau writes in "Concord River", travel, exploration and adventure are the reason why human culture has flourished and without rivers these explorations would not have been possible:

Rivers must have been the guides which conducted the footsteps of the first travellers. They are the constant lure, when they flow by our doors, to distant enterprise and adventure [...] They are the natural highways of all nations, not only levelling the ground, and removing obstacles from the path of the traveller, quenching his thirst, and bearing him on their bosoms, but conducting him through the most interesting scenery, the most populous portions of the globe, and where the animal and vegetable kingdoms attain their greatest perfection. (12)

Alienation from natural pathways is thus clearly a concern. Thoreau's personal relationship with nature may be inclined towards the romantic isolation found in the examples so far, but an analysis of his vision of the environment is not really complete without attention being paid to the way in which he approaches the actions and behaviour of the rural people he observes. We have already seen examples where humans are portrayed either as intruders or as "parts of the landscape", when their presence has been acknowledged at all. This makes it apparent that Thoreau assigns value to the people he meets, both rural and urban, based on what he believes is indicative of their relationship with nature, rather than – it appears – on the basis of what he has learned from them personally, or even what he knows objectively. Because he cannot ignore humans, he also cannot ignore their role in the natural world and that is why his reading of the rural people seems charged by Thoreau's own environmental understanding. In his reading of humans in the environment, Thoreau assumes an authority without expressing as much; his view is all that the reader is allowed, and even the persons he describes are

reduced to a representation of who they are by way of an appeal to naturalisation. With a self-appointed authority, Thoreau strips his subjects of significant agency. Describing the old fisherman, he might as well be talking about himself – and he probably is, as can be seen in his expression of the belief that the old man's fishing is “not a sport, nor solely a means of subsistence, but a sort of solemn sacrament and withdrawal from the world, just as the aged read their bibles” (25), a description that mirrors his own activity during the journey. Moreover, his own chosen task relates to fishing in a different way:

The natural historian is not a fisherman, who prays for cloudy days and good luck merely, but as fishing has been styled, “a contemplative man's recreation,” introducing him profitably to woods and water, so the fruit of the naturalist's observations is not in new genera or species, but in new contemplations still, and science is only a more contemplative man's recreation. (25)

There is another indication that Thoreau is here talking from his own vantage point. While the old fisherman is credited with the observation that human life is like a river, Thoreau cannot resist extending the statement with a poetic reference the fisherman is not likely to have known, yet it could easily be mistaken for an utterance by the old man:

Human life is to him very much like a river,
– “renning aie downward to the sea.”
This was his observation. (24)⁶⁴

A later passage calls back to this sentiment as he writes, “[a] man's life should be constantly as fresh as this river. It should be the same channel, but a new water every instant. [...] Most men have no inclination, no rapids, no cascades, but marshes, and alligators, and miasma instead.” (132) The forward motion of the water is simultaneously constant and self-regenerating. Thoreau has taken the “fisherman's observation” further to make the claim that a stagnant virtue is no virtue at all: one must be tested and kept in motion. Yet, he is convinced that the fisherman's existence, though static, is happy and free simply in the pursuit of fish, regardless of his success – or lack thereof – and, one may assume,

⁶⁴ The quotation is adapted from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. IV. 1549. Thoreau uses the quotation in its correct form on p. 11: “And thou Simois, that as an arrowe, clere / Through Troy rennest, aie downward to the sea; --”

regardless of virtue. His contentment is in fulfilling a duty set by nature which by itself abides by a higher moral than that of humans: “there would he stand abiding his luck, till he took his way home through the fields at evening with his fish. Thus, by one bait or another, Nature allures inhabitants into all her recesses.” (23)

In the instances where Thoreau explicitly focuses on human existence with/in nature, he omits the presence of women from the landscape. Instead, he follows the tendency to personify nature as a feminine presence which is portrayed as mythical and unknowable. Here, Thoreau falls into the trap of employing stereotypically feminine qualities to represent nature which serve to omit all femininity from the actual human sphere of activity and thought and to make the masculine the centre of action, thought and mobility. For instance, in all his criticism of settler culture he still praises masculine qualities, essentially leaving women out of the picture: the whites are uniformly represented as “a laboring man” of a “slumbering intelligence” and “wonderful, wonderful common sense” (53), actively cultivating a relationship of trade with the Natives. Yet it is that last characteristic which has led to the usurpation of the landscape which Thoreau so vehemently opposes. As he writes of the white man:

He buys the Indian's moccasins and baskets, then buys his hunting grounds, and at length forgets where he is buried, and plows up his bones. And here town records, old, tattered, time-worn, weather-stained chronicles, contain the Indian sachim's mark, perchance an arrow or a beaver, and the few fatal words by which he deeded his hunting grounds away. (53)

The fatality of this agreement is truly felt when Thoreau is forced to acknowledge the presence of industry. Although the route of Thoreau's journey takes him through an early hub of industrialisation and trade in North America, his portrayal of the region hardly reflects this – he may find himself on the outskirts of Lowell or Nashua momentarily, but *his* landscape remains exurban and its human inhabitants engage in a rural infrastructure, regardless of the factories, canals and mills that interrupt his preferred vision of wilderness, natural meadows and freely running streams. In “Saturday”, however, we are faced with a reality of perceptible negative consequences of industrialisation which

force Thoreau to negotiate the presence of industry and commerce. Here, the focus of the narrative shifts from the journey to a closer look at the ecological properties of Concord River as Thoreau begins a short catalogue of the species of fish commonly found in the Concord. Each fish – bream, perch and pickerel, to name a few – is given its scientific classification and a short description of appearance and characteristics. Thoreau's essay becomes more a reflection of the pleasure of locating and cataloguing something that is generally taken for granted: the bream, for instance, is awarded the longest passage by virtue of its being the most common fish in the river. Of course, it soon becomes clear that even if something is prevalent, it may not remain so for long. The goal of his essay is to draw attention to the “still undisturbed economy” of “the fishes of this century” (26), indicating both the value of our ability to appreciate the most everyday things as well as the risk of a false sense of security given by the continuing existence of a common species of fish. The abundance of a given species is not really the issue so much as awareness of plight that may befall even the most strongly represented creatures. Indeed, by specifying his catalogue with the phrase “this century” Thoreau appears to be pointing to a viable concern with respect to the future. These fishes' presence and happiness may be a regular pleasure of summer travel, but nevertheless, some indication of the vulnerability of even the most everyday natural phenomena soon becomes visible as the catalogue progresses. We learn that previously plentiful fish are no longer regularly found in this part of the river:

Salmon, Shad, and Alewives, were formerly abundant here, and taken in weirs by the Indians, who taught this method to the whites, by whom they were used as food and as manure, until the dam, and afterward the canal at Billerica, and the factories at Lowell, put an end to their migrations hitherward. (33)

Although, as we have seen, Thoreau avoids discussing industrial labour and manufacture directly, he is less timid when confronting the privileges of industrial land management in general. Thus, he wastes no time in identifying the main culprit in this development. The factory city of Lowell, with its textile mills and factories, has harnessed both rivers, the Merrimack with canals and the Concord with a dam

located outside the rural town of Billerica. The effects of the dam on the fish are obvious as the structure prevents them following their natural course. Thus, their previously unchanging existence is brought to question by human activity's constant reshaping of their natural habitat:

Still patiently, almost pathetically, with instinct not to be discouraged, not to be *reasoned* with, revisiting their old haunts, as if their stern fates would relent, and still met by the Corporation with its dam. Poor shad! where is thy redress? When Nature gave thee instinct, gave she thee the heart to bear thy fate? Still wandering the sea in thy scaly armor to inquire humbly at the mouths of rivers if man has perchance left them free for thee to enter. (36-37, emphasis original).

Thoreau's portrayal of the plight of the fish is obviously intended to inspire sympathy in the reader – the fish are not to be blamed for their fate, as they only follow their instinct and cannot know what is ahead of them. But once the initial concern passes, what stands out in the paragraph is the way Thoreau seems to be intent on countering the inherent humbleness of common river fish. He turns the concept around to introduce an unexpected side of shad by referring to the warlike quality of their scales. This “armor” hints at something going on beneath the surface or at least beyond the present day. It seems that his intention is to portray the current situation as temporary – something that culminates in his later comment about the vulnerability of industrial production (and the possibility of his own involvement in bringing it to question): “[the fish] perchance knowest not where men do *not* dwell, where there are *not* factories, in these days [w]ho knows what may avail a crow-bar against that Billerica dam?” (37, emphasizes original). Here, however, we are faced with the idea of shad and other river fish as potentially powerful creatures momentarily forced into submission by the actions of modern humans. It comes as no surprise that Thoreau portrays the fish in the way he does: their abundance means they are proof of power in numbers; moreover, they are living examples of resilience in nature, and thus, to Thoreau, one more reason for him to be optimistic of nature's innate capability of correcting itself. Most importantly, while shad may be unremarkable in appearance, their scales and numbers help account for their warlike description:

Armed with no sword, no electric shock, but mere Shad, armed only with innocence and a just cause, with tender dumb mouth only forward, and scales easy to be detached. I for one am with thee, and who knows what may avail a crow-bar against that Billerica dam? –Not despairing when whole myriads have gone to feed those sea monsters during thy suspense, but still brave, indifferent, on easy fin there, like shad reserved for higher destinies. Willing to be decimated for man's behoof after the spawning season. Away with the superficial and selfish *phil-anthropy* of men, –who knows what admirable virtue of fishes may be below low-water mark, bearing up against hard destiny, not admired by that fellow creature who alone can appreciate it! Who hears the fishes when they cry? (37, emphasis original)

The natural courage of an abused species goes unnoticed by most people, but Thoreau, unsurprisingly, places himself in the unique position of understanding their plight. What he does here is not simply expressing sympathy; he simultaneously invokes the “admirable virtue” of non-human life and derides the human inability to appreciate its dignity. Moreover, his response finally prompts Thoreau to discredit philanthropy as an endeavour that is necessarily humanistic and therefore restricted in its scope. In an imagined battle over resources, mobility and the ability to fulfil one's instincts, Thoreau then sides with the fish, but not until he has satisfied his artistic impulse to personify them as a kind of noble and patient natural military. The identification with these creatures is essential for his conception of a possible future where progress, modernity and industry have all passed over.

Of course, it is not only the fish or even non-human life as a whole that is at risk of becoming displaced, if not extinct. The rural people, too, are facing unexpected hardships and as Thoreau is quick to point out, the origins of these adversities lie in the privileges of the newly established modern factory towns.

In addition to its contribution to the gradual destruction of the natural habitat of fish and vegetation, Thoreau finds the Billerica dam responsible for adverse effects on the livelihood of the region's rural population. This contemplation results in keen awareness of the effects that progress has on the well-being of human and non-human worlds alike. Interestingly, however, compared to his affiliation with the river fish, Thoreau's response to the similar plight of the people is much more

emotionally detached. Human life is experienced realistically, in sharp contrast to the exalted image of the fish.

At length it would seem that the interests, not of the fishes only, but of the men of Wayland, of Sudbury, of Concord, demand the levelling of that dam. Innumerable acres of meadow are waiting to be made dry land, wild native grass to give place to English. The farmers stand with scythes whet, waiting the subsiding of the waters, by gravitation, by evaporation or otherwise, but sometimes their eyes do not rest, their wheels do not roll, on the quaking meadow ground during the haying season at all. So many sources of wealth inaccessible. (38)

Clearly, when change is as tangible as the one described here, and especially when it is the result of human activity, Thoreau finds it a cause for alarm. He describes the frustration of farmers whose lands have been flooded or otherwise rendered beyond cultivation, leaving sources of income and employment inaccessible to those who are directly dependent of it.

4. *A Week* and the landscape of human conflict

4.1 Noble savage and the native intercourse with nature

Thoreau reads the landscape against the background of the violence of New England's settler history and the displacement of Native culture from the area in which the journey of *A Week* takes place. The Pennacook (Merrimac) people, part of the Algonquian linguistic group, inhabited the north-eastern part of Massachusetts and southern parts of New Hampshire and Maine until white colonists began to seize land for their own purposes and caused the near extinction of native tribes through armed conflict and the diseases carried over from Europe. By the time of Thoreau's journey, the only visible signs of Indian life are the ruins of former habitats and the traces of warfare.

To Thoreau, the obliteration of indigenous ways of life is equal to the decimation of wilderness. The colonial history of New England forms a significant part of Thoreau's environmental vision most strongly regarding dwelling and the cultivation of land. In *A Week* Thoreau's attention is often focused on the white population of New England, from the earliest settlers onwards. So far as his environmental representation goes, the habits of the whites are attributed to a need to conquer and control, contrasted all the more sharply by the increasingly unfamiliar landscape further along the Merrimack. It is his fascination with the region's indigenous cultures, however, that flesh out the outlook when we look at Thoreau's narrative from the environmental point of view. As the journey proceeds along the Merrimack, the scenery, described in "Tuesday", is presented as curious and refreshing. Thoreau writes:

As one ascends the Merrimack he rarely sees a village, but for the most part, alternate wood and pasture lands [...] Sometimes this forenoon the country appeared in its primitive state, and as if the Indian still inhabited it; and again, as if many free new settlers occupied it, their slight fences straggling down to the water's edge, and the barking of dogs, and even the prattle of children, were heard, and smoke was seen to go up from some hearthstone, and the banks were divided into patches of pasture, mowing, tillage, and woodland. (194-195)

Despite ever present evidence of the land being tilled, Thoreau notes with satisfaction that there is left

some trace of wilderness. In contrast to the placid grass meadows surrounding the Concord River, the scenery around the Merrimack seems almost a strange country to him, striking in its changeability. As the river spreads out broader and the banks run further away from each other, there is some indication of the uncanny ability of nature to reflect (western) human inhabitation on its own: “we imagined that the river flowed through an extensive manor, and that the few inhabitants were retainers to a lord, and a feudal state of things prevailed.” (195)

The Native Americans, on the other hand, are portrayed as inseparable from nature, and they have faced the same kind of fall that nature as a whole faces. The settlers, on the other hand, cannot imagine a fall of any kind once the land has been tamed because, as Thoreau maintains, they are not capable of envisioning the environment as something to treat with reverence but as something to control, manipulate and improve. In a constant battle with wild nature, the white population does not know when to fall back. The actions of the whites are given to cause destructive chain reactions, at worst, whereas the Natives are credited with having perfected an intercourse with nature which is, he writes,

at least such as admits of the greatest independence of each. If [the Native American] is somewhat of a stranger in her midst, the gardener is too much of a familiar. There is something vulgar in the latter's closeness to his mistress, something noble and cleanly in the former's distance. . . . If we could listen but for an instant to the chaunt of the Indian muse, we should understand why he will not exchange his savageness for civilization. (56)

Although Thoreau does not specifically use the term “noble savage” in his discourse on the indigenous population, it may be presumed that he is at least familiar with the concept⁶⁵. It would at least seem as much based on his conviction that the Native intercourse with nature follows from a relationship with “his native gods” (55) by which he is admitted into a “rare and peculiar” society with nature that is preferable to the commodities of western civilisation: “[s]teel and blankets are strong temptations, but

⁶⁵ For instance, James Fenimore Cooper's series of popular novels, *The Leatherstocking Tales*, was published throughout the first half of the 19th century and employed a typical “noble savage” character, Chingachook.

the Indian does well to continue Indian” (56). The relationship depicted here sets native people on a different, arguably morally higher level from the one occupied by the white colonists. The Indian does not cultivate nature in an aesthetic sense but leads an existence of independence and aloofness. In the Native conception of nature – in Thoreau's understanding of it, at least – there is no need to think of nature as a conquerable entity. The civilised art of gardening, by contrast, lacks freedom. It is a kind of forceful and violent act to which nature must bend.

Further, Thoreau highlights the difference between indigenous ways of living with nature in opposition to the western forms of living against, or in spite of, nature. Western civilisation has brought with it inventions and mechanisms that, despite their sophistication, also serve to distance man from nature. Thoreau refers explicitly to early forms of mass production, using cotton yarn and printing as an example:

These modern ingenious sciences and arts do not affect me as those more venerable arts of hunting and fishing, and even of husbandry in its primitive and simple form; as ancient and honorable trades as the sun and moon and winds pursue, coeval with the faculties of man, and invented when these were invented. We do not know their John Gutenberg, or Richard Arkwright, though the poets would fain make them to have been gradually learned and taught. (57)

The reference to two inventors, Gutenberg and Arkwright⁶⁶, serves to distance the achievements of western civilisation further from those of primitive life, but this is not to the detriment of the ingenuity of the latter. The mechanical innovations make for a convenient existence – one that Thoreau himself relies on, despite his protestation that these do not affect him as much – but not as essential as the ability to hunt, fish and raise cattle. Moreover, inventions such as the printing press and especially water-powered textile work obviously relate to mass production and the harnessing of natural resources for the sake of exponential growth and capital, a way of life that leaves little sense of intrinsic value in

⁶⁶ Respectively, Johannes Gutenberg, the fifteenth-century German craftsman who originated the method of printing using movable type, and Sir Richard Arkwright (1732-1792), English textile industrialist and proponent of water-power.

the natural environment and its creatures. Such practices, Thoreau indicates, are not entirely without value; but these values lack the nobility of time-honoured activities by which people have been able to support themselves.

As has been suggested, one clear indication of the settlers' desire to dominate the landscape is the naming of the environment. In naming the river Concord – to replace the original Musketaquid (Grass-ground River) used by the Indians – English settlers have asserted their form of ideal existence to which all other life must bend. The ideal is based on European values of commodity, but it fails to give adequate credit to the needs of the natural environment: the naming indicates a desire to contain the river as an object symbolising harmony and opportunity. As a consequence, the original meaning of the Grass-ground River is brought to question, just as the river itself is gradually lifted from its primeval significance and compromised for human benefit. Over the course of the journey this awareness results in concrete disillusionment as the observer is exposed to the negative consequences of commerce and industry, or in Thoreau's terms, "extremely artificial and luxurious modes of cultivation" (214).

Something like this is already anticipated in "Concord River", in which Thoreau begins introducing the river by way of describing the rural areas through which it flows. The areas are flourishing thanks to the very properties that initially attracted settlers out of England, namely the fish in the river and the grassy meadows on its banks.

It will be Grass-ground River as long as grass grows and water runs here; it will be Concord River only while men lead peaceable lives on its banks. To an extinct race it was grass-ground, where they hunted and fished, and it is still perennial grass-ground to Concord farmers, who own the Great Meadows, and get the hay from year to year. (5)

The meadows are now owned and managed as a resource. It is a logical consequence of the European way of looking at a landscape as something quantitative, something that can be counted, catalogued

and manipulated. The European, by transforming the land from an entity possessed of an innate value to a neutral and usable object, was able to circumvent possible moral challenges presented by human use of the land.⁶⁷ In contrast to this, Native Americans viewed the same land as primarily a living being rather than a collection of extractable resources. Ownership has led to a proliferation of built environment as the names and voices of towns, villages and landmarks demonstrate. Thoreau's catalogue of these places sounds almost cacophonous – Hopkinton, Southborough, Framingham, Sudbury and Wayland now form a network of named landscape to which the river is subordinate. This roll-call of names is finally interrupted as Thoreau abruptly draws our attention to resources made inaccessible by the very river itself:

The shore is more flat on the Wayland side, and this town is the greatest loser by the flood. Its farmers tell me that thousands of acres are flooded now, since the dams have been erected, where they remember to have seen the white honeysuckle or clover growing once, and they could go dry with shoes only in summer. Now there is nothing but blue-joint and sedge and cut-grass there, standing in water all the year round. (6)

It is in the chapters “Sunday” and “Tuesday” that a sense of chain reactions really becomes illuminated. Here, Thoreau talks more about settler history⁶⁸ and the effects of the white colonists' occupation of the landscape. In the first instance the narrative focuses on the town of Billerica. Thoreau portrays Billerica as an old town, saying “I never heard that it was young” (50) and proceeds to make a case for the fact of its being an “ancient” village. Although Billerica is a fairly young settlement⁶⁹, it seems an “old gray town”:

This is ancient Billerica, [...] now in its dotage, named from the English Billericay, and whose Indian name was Shawshine. I never heard that it was young. See, is not nature here gone to decay and racked with age? If you would know of its early youth, ask those old gray rocks in

⁶⁷ Evernden 1981: 148

⁶⁸ Cf. Buell (2005: 64): “American settler-culture conquest is one of many episodes of the worldwide “production” of “abstract space” during the past several centuries for which aggressive industrial capitalism bears primary responsibility (see Lefebvre 1991: esp. 48-53), but which was underwritten by modern socialist regimes as well. As geographer David Harvey puts it, “the world's spaces were deterritorialized, stripped of their preceding significations, and then reterritorialized according to the convenience of colonial and imperial administration.” ”

⁶⁹ First settled in 1653 and incorporated 1655

the pasture. (50)

The town has not aged gracefully but has descended into senile old age, without ever being young; this is seen in the decay of nature. Its inhabitants, on the other hand, have aimed towards a civil existence which, in Thoreau's mind, seems ridiculous. He contrasts Billerica with the smaller town of Carlisle, “city of the woods, which, if it is less civil, is the more natural. It does well hold the earth together”(51) and it becomes clear from this contrast between the two towns that Billerica's perceived decay is nature's reaction to the civilising settler attitude, something which is lacking in the neighbouring town of Carlisle. It is possible to lead a prosperous existence in this town, but nature quietly pulls back from the settlement. Thus, Billerica is ancient not in a harmonious/romantic sense, but in a way that emphasises the rift between humans and the environment. The landscape has been bent to the will of the settlers, violently, and is fashioned after a civil white man's town. The sound of the town's bell, Thoreau remarks, can sometimes be heard as far as the Concord woods. Its ring is softened by the echo, as he writes in his narrative years later: “I have heard that, –aye, hear it now. [...] But to-day I like best the echo amid these cliffs and woods. It is no feeble imitation, but rather its original, or as if some rural Orpheus played over the strain again to show how it should sound.” (50) The echo is pleasant because nature sufficiently conceals its origin. The sound of the bell seems out of place in the woods – as Thoreau points out, it must have “startled the dreaming Indian and frightened his game”(50) – yet, by the time nature has carried it across the distance to his ears, it has gained enough substance to be a more pleasant sound to him. Thoreau considers nature as a perfecter of human works, to the point where the transformative power of the woods on the sound of a church bell is welcomed as an indication of the rural people's unwitting ability to achieve the standards of classical art. This attitude becomes clear as Thoreau moves on to describe the canal at Billerica Falls.

This canal, which is the oldest in the country, and has even an antique look beside the more modern-railroads, is fed by the Concord, so that we were still floating on its familiar waters.

[...] There appeared some want of harmony in its scenery, since it was not of equal date with the woods and meadows through which it is led, and we missed the conciliatory influence of time on land and water; but in the lapse of ages, Nature will recover and indemnify herself, and gradually plant fit shrubs and flowers along its borders. Already the kingfisher sat upon a pine over the water, and the bream and pickerel swam below. Thus all works pass directly out of the hands of the architect into the hands of Nature, to be perfected. (62)

Here, Thoreau appeals to nature's capacity of compensating for the damage done to it, specifically when that damage is done in the name of profit. The canal is ill-fitted to the scene because it is much younger than its natural surroundings; yet, next to the railway, it looks old enough to have been built in the ancient times. It is perhaps nature's task to put up with the aberrations of humans, but, as Thoreau believes, will repair itself: thus, the creatures which have so far avoided the disharmonious, built scene – kingfisher, pickerel and bream – are to be found as he passes through. Their mobility, too, has been compromised but is now becoming a fact again: thus, Thoreau notes with satisfaction the inevitable turn by which nature begins to recompose.

4.2 Settler culture and the New England landscape

As Thoreau proceeds to describe the chain of events that led to the displacement of Native culture from the New England region, the events of history are reduced to a series of externally simple acts on behalf of the white man, such as cutting, driving and planting. The white man comes and plants a town, the town spreads like a weed and begins to cover the area. Thus, the native lands are replaced with fields of “a soft and cultivated English aspect” (53). The expansive straightforwardness is alien to Thoreau's vision of the landscape; yet, his white man fails to see what is graceful and natural, seeing nothing but untamed wilderness to be conquered. These acts serve to characterise the straightforward personality of the settler: Thoreau is writing about the generic white man who has come to stay permanently, to secure a place in the land to call his own: thus, he builds a framed house, dries up land to farm on, plants foreign seeds and slowly begins to change the entire ecosphere to fit a cultivated image. Thoreau writes:

[The white man] culled the graceful elm from out the woods and from the river-side, and so refined and smoothed his village plot. He rudely bridged the stream, and drove his team afield into the river meadows, cut the the wild grass, and laid bare the homes of beaver, otter, muskrat, and with the whetting of his scythe scared off the deer and bear. (52)

The activities listed here form a fitting background to environmental degradation. What is striking, furthermore, is Thoreau's awareness of the irresistible forward motion incipient in the change. The change crosses a turning point as foreign plants mingle with native ones, eventually displacing them. As the landscape gradually begins to resemble an English one, the remaining traces of native plants begin to look intrusive to the settlers. Like the puritan settlers, the flowers they plant are also seeking religious freedom, and it will occur at the expense of the old inhabitants of the land. The fact is conveyed by nature itself, as Thoreau points out:

The white man's mullein soon reigned in Indian corn-fields, and sweet scented English grasses clothed the new soil. Where, then, could the Red Man set his foot? The honey bee hummed through the Massachusetts' woods, and sipped the wild flowers round the Indian's wigwam, perchance unnoticed, when, with prophetic warning, it stung the Red child's hand, forerunner of that industrious tribe that was to come and pluck the wild flower of his race up by the root. (53)

Here, Thoreau imagines mullein and other foreign flowers to be representative of their planters. They are not conventionally springing up from the soil but they coat and “clothe” it, implying a passivity in the landscape. The soil is unable fight back and must accommodate modification. The image is similar to the planting of colonies for the sake of trade as well as in search of free religious space: the impetus for establishing colonies came from an outside source, yet the colonies themselves began to fashion their existence opportunistically, going out as far as it was possible to go. In Thoreau's vision, Nature conveys a prophecy to the Indian because it is the only way the warning will be understood. The new plants are thus put to work to change the landscape, making it seem more identifiable and thus causing the new world to lose its character in a process which is unstoppable, with irreconcilable results. In a pivotal move, the settlers begin naming the nature as they expand westwards, acquiring more land from

the Indians and finally appropriating two things at once: the names of the old world and the lands of the new world.

He comes with a list of ancient Saxon, Norman, and Celtic names, and strews them up and down the river,--Framingham, Sudbury, Bedford, Carlisle, Billerica, Chelmsford,--and this is New Angle-land, and these are the new West Saxons, whom the Red Men call, not Angle-ish or English, but Yengeese, and so at last they are known for Yankees. (53)

The white man is compelled to name nature after his own history, by what feels graspable to him culturally, as a form of possessing the earth – simply owning the land would not be enough. What seems to offend Thoreau most about the naming convention is the fact that the English settlers seem too caught up in infrastructures of the past to truly consecrate the new land which they have secured. The “rude Saxon pioneer” (54), he says, will occasionally long for the beauty of an English landscape, which is refined but artificial. Against that desired background, names such as “Pentland and Malvern Hills, the Cliffs of Dover and the Trosachs, Richmond, Derwent, and Winandermere” (54) sound classical to him and must therefore be preserved, as though saved from the corrupt old world. As Thoreau points out, they are the pioneer's Acropolis, Parthenon and Arcadia: the names are an echo of a mythopoeic existence never experienced, yet strongly imagined, by the settler.⁷⁰

Although Thoreau criticises the preoccupation with familiarising the unfamiliar by naming the land, the convention is not that far removed from Thoreau's own need to identify with, and to an extent control, the environment. For instance, as the following passage from “Monday” shows, Thoreau cannot quite escape the need to identify nature as a home:

We camped at length near Penichook Brook, on the confines of what is now Nashville, by a deep ravine, under the skirts of a pine wood, were the dead pine leaves were our carpet, and

⁷⁰ In an effort to describe the ridiculousness of the white man's idea of naming nature after his own vision, Thoreau expresses the arbitrariness of this external influence in his own verse:

Greece, who am I that should remember thee,
Thy Marathon and thy Thermopylae?
Is my life vulgar, my fate mean,
Which on these golden memories can lean? (55)

their tawny boughs stretched overhead. But fire and smoke soon tamed the scene; the rocks consented to be our walls, and the pines our roof. A woodside was already the fittest locality for us. (171)

Here, Thoreau identifies a sense of rightness to the campsite that goes beyond temporary comfort and into the territory of a “sense of place” which could be taken as a further indication of entitlement. For Thoreau, his identification with the place signals a familiarity and even a sense of being nurtured. Nature constantly rewards him for his continued mobility by providing a scene which he can easily identify as a home. Even the oldest towns of the white man, he argues, are bordered by wild wood and provide more substance to existence than an excessively cultivated garden. Or, as he says: “The very uprightness of the pines and maples asserts the ancient rectitude and vigor of nature. Our lives need the relief of such a back-ground, where the pine flourishes and the jay still screams.”(171) An ideal scene is thus rich with the life of the woods, jutting in and out of view in new towns and rendering the settlements “like the sand-heaps of fresh fox burrows” (171). The landscape of Thoreau's mind is endlessly regenerating and, it seems, as endlessly fresh as a river. That is why he considers the river the “most attractive highway” (194) of all.

The sense of endlessness in the landscape is of course compromised by the values of the European immigrants. It may be presumed here that the white man as a whole cannot be absorbed into the landscape – another reason why Thoreau so enthusiastically places the few white inhabitants capable of doing so into his context of nature's economy. It becomes clear that Thoreau prefers the wary independence of the Indian who cultivates the earth only as far as it yields, taking only as much from it as is needed and using everything that is taken; the Native respect towards nature being a guiding principle in his ideal landscape. It may be argued, then, that when Thoreau openly romanticises the indigenous way of life, it is because there is an opportunity in doing so to establish a clear distinction between the values he personally abhors and the ones he wishes to claim as his own. In addition, one may detect in such an approach an egotistical attempt to establish a poetry other than the

white man's, one that is more aware of the wild and savage nature he imagines, and more worthy of the phenomena he depicts. This vision is expressed clearly when he argues against excess civilisation and cultivation of land which Thoreau considers ridiculous: he simply wishes to make clear the difference between himself and the rest of his kind. The settler culture is a monoculture that does not allow for sufficient diversity. Thoreau concedes, however, that “there are innocent pleasures of country life, and it is sometimes pleasant to make the earth yield her increase” but that this is not enough to “the heroic spirit” (56). Rather than going out of one's way to manage or control nature, he states, a true relationship is found by accepting its wildness: “We would not always be soothing and taming nature, breaking the horse and the ox, but sometimes ride the horse wild and chase the buffalo.” (56)

As we have seen, there exists in Thoreau's mind a distinction between the kind of art that goes into cultivation on the one hand, and on the other hand the more wild existence which does not care for excessive focus on a few select elements of nature but finds everything connected. His belief is that the modern sciences and arts, when applied to cultivation, approach the challenges presented by nature from the wrong angle. He reduces the landscape to a background as far as a “soothed and tamed” nature depicts the lack of vigour in human constitution, but at the same time he observes the unchangeable actions of the white man against the environment: effectively, anything wrong done to nature will return to haunt the wrongdoer.

The significance of environmental virtue is clearly seen in the narrative passages where Thoreau describes changes in the landscape that are the result of European immigration. In these descriptions, unlike in previous examples where our focus has been on human subjects, we see an account of an unstoppable process as experienced by the environment. In “Tuesday”, Thoreau begins an account of recently begun desertification in the town of Litchfield which he witnesses from the bank of the river. The desert has spread at a fast pace; as he learns, the area used to be a sheep pasture thirty or forty years ago. Now, however, “the sand was blown off in some places to the depth of ten or twelve feet,

leaving small grotesque hillocks of that height where there was a clump of bushes firmly rooted” (198). The barren area reveals heaps of stones left by the Natives; arrowheads and bullets, signs of battle between settlers and Natives, have also been found. These artefacts act as a reminder of the council fires and battles of the past, but at the same time they could be read as warnings for the future: traces of past and present forms of human existence that remain in the landscape as evidence of loss.

What is most striking environmentally, however, is the depiction of the chain of events leading up to the desertification at Litchfield. It is an example of Thoreau's awareness of small and unnoticeable acts which may cause irreconcilable modifications. While the land was still used as pasture, the sheep, “worried by the fleas,” began breaking the ground and gradually, the sand has expanded “over forty or fifty acres” (198). He writes:

This evil might easily have been remedied at first, by spreading birches with their leaves on over the sand, and fastening them down with stakes, to break the wind. The fleas bit the sheep, the sheep bit the ground, and the sore had spread to this extent. It is astonishing what a great sore a little scratch breedeth. Who knows but Sahara, where caravans and cities are buried, began with the bite of an African flea. This poor globe, how it must itch in many places! (198)

This description moves along with the inevitability of nature and hints at the manoeuvres which the environment may have to make in order to correct the faults. The expanse of sand reminds Thoreau of “the connecting link between land and water”; it seems like “a kind of water on which you could walk” (199): thus, it seems, nature appears uncannily prepared to deal with human aberration, while providing visions of an environmental apocalypse to one who will see it, as though “maturing some greater scheme of her own” (15). As he contemplates the desert, we see further indication of the kind of landscape that we know is to come: “We had read that Mussulmen are permitted by the Koran to perform their ablutions⁷¹ in sand when they cannot get water, a necessary indulgence in Arabia, and we now understood the propriety of this provision.” (199)

⁷¹ The Oxford English Dictionary defines *ablution* as “The action or an act of washing the body as a religious rite; ritual or prescribed washing of oneself or of another.”

Water, and especially the river, can be read as an embodiment of nature in Thoreau's representation. It is the symbol of a regenerative force and nature's capability of correcting itself; thus, its constant motion is noted with satisfaction, and is a sign of continued capacity in the landscape. It also carries, by its nature, the fact of mobility. As Thoreau explains of the Merrimack:

Falling all the way, and yet not discouraged by the lowest fall. By the law of its birth never to become stagnant, for it has come out of the clouds and down the sides of precipices worn in the flood, through beaver dams broke loose, not splitting but splicing and mending itself, until it found a breathing place in this low land. There is no danger now that the sun will steal it back to heaven again before it reach the sea, for it has a warrant even to recover its own dews into its bosom again with interest at every eve. (84)

As we have seen, Thoreau finds certain things to be hopeful about in nature. Although his descriptions of actual and potential environmental catastrophes make clear that the driving force behind them is to be opposed, his tone is often optimistic even in the glimpses of damaged nature. Nor does he, in the examples I have studied, truly pine for what has been lost. When he does, the loss expressed in an egotistical sense – the occasional compromises of his privacy and mobility at times seem more important than the contemplation of environmental change – yet there exists a tone of recognition that the damages cannot be healed by any action of man. I do not mean to suggest that Thoreau has no regard for the loss of wild nature, as that would not be true; what is telling, however, is the attitude that goes beyond that loss: in other words, his attitude towards progress and industrialisation that indicates an expectation of something which is beyond the imagination of modern humans.

Thoreau demonstrates a resistance to any morality other than that found in nature. The perceived misanthropy of a claim to denounce human morals in favour of the indifference of nature plays into the canonical representation of Thoreau as author. The representation paints his excursions as a withdrawal from society and as such, imagine him as a lone voice against the current of commerce and the Industrial Revolution; furthermore, it focuses on a preoccupation on his character as a radical individualist. The effect of such a representation has been the portrayal of Thoreau's actions as reactive,

rather than proactive – in other words, the belief that he isolates himself from civilisation in order to avoid responsibility for the actions of others. The fact of his withdrawal cannot be falsified, but for the purpose of this analysis it is a non-issue; what is more important here is that constant mobility allows him the benefit of an intellectual and emotional distance which still allows him to observe what is going on, whether or not he chooses to engage.

We have seen so far that the abused instinct of the fish and the accidentally destructive instinct of the sheep can be taken as a reference to the writer's own creative instinct as it is brought under scrutiny in the face of change in nature. Thoreau is aware of the power of observation and narration in directing the audience's perception. He chooses as his subjects those most vulnerable to the march of progress, positions himself as a champion of their concerns and attempts to establish a realistic context within which to approach the vague concept of change. The subjects – farmers, fishermen, fish, sheep and long gone Indian tribes – are pointers against which to weigh the present and future impacts of modernisation and human activity generally. As we have seen, the activities of different groups of people are judged on the basis of their outcome. The traces of native homesteads and the sandy expanse of eroded land are both marks of human life in the landscape. Erosion, however, is clearly caused by the kind of disregard for nature that Thoreau identifies in white settlers whereas the Indian care for the land and all its creatures is visible in even the ruins of a civilisation.

It may be argued that the “scheme” of nature is nowhere as clear as when our attention is drawn to signs of change in the physical properties of the surrounding landscape itself. These changes, occurring independently of human meddling, reaffirm nature's autonomy. An obvious example of this, the change from summer to autumn, is relevant from two angles. Seasonal change is an inescapable ecological fact and as such another sign of nature's sound state, prompting Thoreau to spend a great deal of time in reflection over the changes as displayed by the natural world. In that specific context at least, Thoreau is willing to include human life in his overall vision of the environment, as it enables

him to see the extent to which human communities subscribe to the rules and laws of nature. On the other hand, while his attention is directed to the more concrete changes in the immediate landscape, he is again able to avoid direct engagement with the fact of modernisation. The exact point in time that summer becomes autumn eludes Thoreau's reckoning, as he notes in "Friday": "[w]e had gone to bed in summer, and we awoke in autumn; for summer passes into autumn in some unimaginable point of time, like the turning of a leaf." (334) It could be argued here that Thoreau believes the same thing can be said of modernisation: in other words, a shift can be anticipated but it is not so easy to pinpoint the exact moment when one season passes into another or when the march of progress takes over rural existence. If that is so, it would then stand to reason that Thoreau is anticipating change in a much longer term, a future endgame to which the current success of modernisation is only an introduction.

Thoreau is nearing the end of his journey at the same time as August passes into September, noting that the tinge of the landscape is different after only a week's voyage. Its colour is sharper and deeper as the September air has shorn the riverbanks of the abundance of summer. All this is happening constantly, in small incremental steps that finally amount to a greater scheme. On the last night of the journey the mood is similar to the first as the travellers fail to remain asleep and Thoreau records the details of a restless natural world around him.

There seemed to be a great haste and preparation throughout Nature, as for a distinguished visitor; all her aisles had to be swept in the night, by a thousand hand-maidens, and a thousand pots to be boiled for the next day's feasting;— such a whispering bustle, as if ten thousand fairies made their fingers fly, silently sewing at the new carpet with which the earth was to be clothed, and the new drapery which was to adorn the trees. (333)

Life is shown in rushed animation the following day as well: the clouds are flitting busily and the river is rushing ahead against the changing colour of the hillside. Against this scene, however, the human inhabitants seem suspended: the hillside cottages and the faces of men simply announce that "the Fall had commenced." (335) In autumn, it seems, nature prepares to take the reins and move on with the

same indifference that the river has shown to unfortunate travellers earlier; humans, however, simply show a passive recognition on their faces that is more indicative of resignation to the fall of the year rather than marking a busy preparation for winter. Thoreau associates himself with neither the active preparation for the future nor with the passive resignation to the unavoidable. He is aware of the cyclical nature of the year's progress, but as his own journey is at an end, the change does not seem to affect him much: it allows him simply to observe. Here, his presence is again edited out while natural life flourishes around him.

5. Conclusions: *A Week* as an expression of ethics?

In this discussion I have attempted to offer a view the river journey as a tool of observation and awareness rather than simple withdrawal. From an ethical point of view Thoreau's position on the significance of the journey seems clear. If we are to take his environmental representation for the expression of an apocalyptic vision – which is what I mean by “expectation of something beyond human imagination” above – as a guide to his reading of the environment, it is evident that Thoreau himself is untroubled by the ethical conflict his reading presents. If nature re-establishes itself, as he hopes will happen, it will no longer be a question of human morals, but simply an extension of natural laws:

All the moral laws are readily translated into natural philosophy, for often we have only to restore the primitive meaning of the words by which they are expressed, or to attend to their literal instead of metaphorical sense. They are already *supernatural* philosophy. The whole body of what is now called moral or ethical truth existed in the golden age as abstract science. Or, if we prefer, we may say that the laws of Nature are the purest morality. (362, emphasis original)

The selected passages have provided a clear confirmation of the environmental aesthetics and ethics purported by Thoreau. In my discussion, I have attempted to consider his representation from two angles: firstly, regarding his personal landscape and the insistence on material and social independence which, as I have argued, is a marker of his privileged status. Secondly, from the point of view of witnessing unstoppable change, I hope to have shown that while the canonical framing of Thoreau's excursion as a romantic retreat is partly accurate, it does not tell the whole story. Rather than trying to escape named and controlled nature, Thoreau makes the effort to see beyond it – for instance, by looking at the displacement of the Native tribes from the region – and therefore, tries to see beyond the present state of things and to picture a possible future. The study of environmental ethics necessarily engenders further questions of the human impact on dwindling natural resources. Thus, it may be

concluded that continued analysis of a canonical American nature text is pertinent in pointing out the flaws of traditional environmental representation.

In narrative terms, these passages serve to make an introduction to the broader context for examining the reach of progress. Through them, Thoreau is able to present his journey as a pivotal moment offering insight to the past as well as to the future. They help to illustrate why the effects of progress are not only opposed on aesthetic grounds but are actually ethically dubious as industry encroaches on the river and its creatures in unprecedented ways. While I agree that focusing exclusively on pastoral and/or apocalyptic themes in Thoreau's work would inhibit the study of nature in literature as anything else than a framing device, it remains that whatever pastoral agenda is present in *A Week* will help in evaluating its environmental attitudes from an ethical perspective. Moreover, I am aware that canonical representations of Thoreau's environmental vision remain a problem from the point of view of ecocritical literary study so far as they emphasise the author's voice too strongly, thereby overlooking environmentalist concerns.

Since Thoreau's is the only voice we hear, it would be foolish of the reader of his narrative to expect objectivity. According to the critic Gretchen Legler, for instance, Thoreau “is able to have a *relationship with* landscape, or nature, because he is *apart from it*”⁷² and this relationship is at no point brought to question. In narrative terms, therefore, Thoreau himself never doubts his authority: even when he is letting the landscape do the talking, his own interpretation of what is ultimately right is at least implicit in the text. Moreover, nature in the narrative serves a function of moral judgement that could be taken as an extension of Thoreau's own beliefs. This can be seen in cases where Thoreau derives satisfaction from the single-minded indifference with which nature carries on in the face of aberrant human behaviour. In the passages I have selected, the landscape generally performs as a beneficial nurturing presence to Thoreau on his excursion while setting boundaries for others.

72 Legler 1998: 76, emphasis original

As I stated at the beginning of this thesis, pastoral hinges on the notion of retreat and return. The idea forms the basic premise of *A Week*. It is, after all, a travel narrative, one in which the progress of the journey is given weight in a structural sense. But it is also one where the journey's validity comprises in a large part in what is done before it. The small-scale farming and shipbuilding is presented as an undeniable fact of Thoreau's personal capacity in preparing for the voyage, a pattern of preparation and hands-on approach that was later repeated in *Walden*.

Thus, it may be concluded that the journey is not so much the “point” of the narrative. It is important to recall that Thoreau wrote his narrative during a time when mobility was still taking extreme forms in the American context. The nineteenth century was a time of Western expansion: the frontier, during Thoreau's time, was alive and well. By contrast, the area of the journey in *A Week* is circumscribed and the voyage ends where it began only a short time before. This is probably enough to make the distinction between great expeditions and a short trip around one's neighbourhood, but that is not quite enough to dismiss the journey's significance to Thoreau. While it is true that Thoreau's journey has a pastoral agenda, I submit that the narrative of *A Week* nevertheless recognises the dangers of romanticising nature. It clarifies some of the irreconcilable differences between human culture and the environment and of the incremental changes in the landscape. However, that awareness goes beyond stock speculation regarding progress and thus locates an idea of possible future at the end of the process.

Environmental text is easily distinguished from pastoral by the fact that its representations of the natural world are traditionally more realistic since the environment itself is understood to embody more than nature. In turn, nature comprises much more than simply an exurban landscape or a sublime wilderness. What falls under the term environment can be a landscape or a panorama, but it can just as well be a human construct or engineered environment, whether inhabitable or not. The upshot of the

argument, however, is not really that the environment is what surrounds us; it might more accurately be said that the natural environment shapes humanity as much as humans shape it. Here, I echo Leo Marx's suggestion that nature is something that Thoreau is actively testing: “[i]nstead of writing about [nature] – or merely writing about it – he tries it”⁷³. As Marx points out, furthermore, Thoreau transforms nature from its traditional role by writing in the first person, thus endowing nature with a credibility it had not previously possessed. The pastoral ideal is significant to the examination of the landscape that already in Thoreau’s time was rapidly becoming industrialised. The enactment of the trope of retreat and return thus comes with the added significance of human culture encroaching on the environment, taking it further away from the pure wilderness to which Thoreau himself is most drawn.

Recalling the earlier statement by Buell⁷⁴ that non-fiction nature writing presents a theory of natural history, it should be noted that non-fiction nature writing does not require complete scientific veracity in order to be effective to the reader. Nor does pastoral require exclusively idyllic or aesthetically pleasing scenes of rural or primitive ways of life to make the point of difference between the audience and the subject. And, perhaps, people who would not be “missed” in civilisation, such as Thoreau's fisherman, are memorable because the natural environment gives them shape or background, thus creating a framework that can be understood intuitively: the old man blends in with the landscape and the presence his dog underscores the effect of loyalty even further.

In conclusion, then, I propose that *A Week* accomplishes the task of what Buell calls “the aesthetics of dual accountability” of environmental non-fiction. By not restricting himself to writing about untouched wilderness, Thoreau engages in realistic representation of what he observes along the journey. Yet, it can be argued that there is an explicit acknowledgement of an attempt to envision the environment in a different, freer state in which progress is no longer a dominant presence. Nature is

73 Marx 1964: 245

74 Buell 1995: 92; cf. p. 17 above.

portrayed in a way that can be taken as a personal escape, but that alone does not explain why the short journey is enough to satisfy Thoreau's curiosity about his surroundings. Representation of the environment – wherein I have tried to include Thoreau's accounts of natural history and human inhabitation for the full effect of examining the human/nature relationship – appeals to intuition rather than reason. The laws to which Thoreau appeals are ecological, based on the natural course of the seasons and of human life, calling attention to the unsustainability of unchecked progress and, on the other hand, the perceived unproductivity of the kind of static existence engaged in by outcast figures. With regard to the latter, while life on the fringes of civilisation may not benefit society at large, it is nevertheless self-reliant; the isolation of an old fisherman, for instance, does not tax the surrounding landscape but is portrayed as an existence on the terms which nature has provided. Although Thoreau himself was finally unable to leave civilisation behind completely⁷⁵, the journey he depicts in *A Week* already clearly speaks for his desire to make it possible to do so.

On the other hand, all this attests to the fact that “nature's economy”, or ecology, must always be the driving force behind sustainable change in all life. To establish his certainty of the relevance of natural laws, Thoreau does not need to embark on a long, expansive expedition. Instead, it is enough for him to revisit the brief canoe trip of his youth to make a case for the significance of these laws in human life and the continuing relevance of a life outside the trappings of civilisation.

75 In reference to the experiment at Walden Pond.

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