

SOLITUDE, THE LOVE FOR NATURE, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS AS TRANSCENDENTALIST BELIEFS : A CASE STUDY OF *WALDEN OR LIFE IN THE WOODS*

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Abstract : In this study, we examine how *Walden*, written from a transcendentalist approach, has over history taught moral lessons or themes which, though called into questions by some critics, have received significant attention. Thoreau, in fact, prompts his readers to be connected to nature for their spiritual awakening, their well-being, and free thought. However, by the means of personification, he reveals at which point nature is important in humans' life. In this regard, one should argue that his retreat at Walden Pond, as portrayed in the first section, is with no doubt what elucidates his love for nature which he views as a living being that needs protection. In other instances, this connection with nature has to do with spirituality and, as discussed in the second section, humans and nature are creatures that are closely linked, meaning that through nature humans can both seek God and themselves. Finally, questions about individualism and withdrawal from social conventions are addressed to further explain Thoreau's mindset which makes him a free person who seeks to live according to his individual conscience.

Key words: self-reliance, faith, nature, solitude, transcendentalism.

Résumé : Dans cette étude, nous examinons comment *Walden*, écrit à partir d'une approche transcendantaliste, a, au cours de l'histoire, enseigné des leçons morales ou des thèmes qui, bien que remis en question par certains critiques, ont reçu une attention significative. Thoreau, en effet, incite ses lecteurs à se connecter à la nature pour leur éveil spirituel, leur bien-être et leur libre pensée. Cependant, par le biais de la personnification, il révèle à quel point la nature est importante dans la vie des humains. À cet égard, on peut affirmer que sa retraite à Walden Pond, telle que décrite dans la première section, est sans aucun doute ce qui élucide son amour pour la nature qu'il considère comme un être vivant qui a besoin d'être protégé. Dans d'autres cas, ce lien avec la nature est lié à la spiritualité et, comme nous l'avons vu dans la deuxième section, les humains et la nature sont des créatures étroitement liées, ce qui signifie qu'à travers la nature, les humains peuvent à la fois chercher Dieu et se chercher eux-mêmes. Enfin, les questions relatives à l'individualisme et au retrait des conventions sociales sont abordées afin d'expliquer davantage l'état d'esprit de Thoreau qui fait de lui une personne libre qui cherche à vivre selon sa conscience individuelle.

Mots clés : confiance en soi, foi, nature, solitude, transcendantalisme.

Introduction

Henry David Thoreau, being one of the most prominent figures of the transcendentalist movement, has, through his seminal book *Walden or Life in the Woods* (1854), presented a new way of life that consists in being simpler, happier, and more meaningful. In fact, on account of the advent of technology, it has been noticed that life has changed in many different ways in that human beings were driven by the desire of pursuing material life rather than living naturally. In a like manner, the environment has not escaped from the consequences related to the pursuit of material life and as Thoreau notes, “*while civilization has been improving our houses, it has not equally improved the men who are to inhabit them*” (Thoreau, p. 42). Thoreau strictly criticizes the pursuit of materialism and the American way of life while advocating for an ecological responsibility through the protection of the environment.

In the United States, those events, resulting from different factors, had considerably marked American intellectual history to the point of drawing the attention of writers among whom Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Elisabeth Palmer Peabody, Margaret Fuller, James Freeman Clarke, and George Ripley, who are better known as transcendentalist writers. They rejected social conventions and the attachment to materialism and that is, indeed, what explains their philosophy and ideologies that are basically centered on spirituality, self-reliance, and free thought.

As a non-conformist who intended to live naturally, spiritually, and unconventionally, Thoreau decided to withdraw from society in order to better experiment his life. However, his decision to live in a remote place where there are no social conventions reflects his project of living a simple, a spiritual and natural life which, as he suggests, is the life that people should live. At Walden Pond, Thoreau has lived with great frugality to show how people should live independently and also be close to nature. The presence of God in nature is, in fact, one of the core beliefs on which transcendentalism is built.

This study attempts to have a closer look at the connection between solitude and the love for nature which, as explored in the novel, are undeniably essential for the protection of the environment. From a transcendentalist perspective, it is

interesting to outline that in order to protect nature one should love it. His experience is very telling and that is the reason why he remarkably acknowledges the advantages of living independently in a natural and simple way. The first section of this study explores the influence of transcendentalism in Thoreau's retreat. In the second one, our focus is centered on the link there is between faith, nature, and humanity. Lastly, the third section highlights the sense of individualism and withdrawal from social conventions to see at which point it is possible to live a more meaningful and natural life.

1. The Influence of Transcendentalism in Thoreau's Retreat at Walden Pond

Transcendentalism is a religious, literary, and political movement that evolved in the 1820s and 1830s from New England Unitarianism. Its authors, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Henry David Thoreau, just to name but a few, examined issues that promoted spiritual development and fulfilment. Thoreau, for instance, describes the quest for freedom and the spiritual life that distances him from social conventions. His retreat illustrates his reject of social norms but more importantly his love for nature which evidences his transcendentalist spirit. It is in this regard that Paul S. Boyer et al., in *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*, highlight:

Walden had a larger transcendentalist message. Thoreau's retreat taught him that anyone could satisfy his material wants with only a few weeks' work each year and preserve the remainder of his time for examining life's purpose. The problem with Americans, he said, was that they turned themselves into "mere machines" to acquire pointless wealth. For Thoreau, material and moral progress were not as intimately related as most Americans liked to think. (Paul S. Boyer et al., p. 330)

As clearly explained in the aforementioned excerpt, Thoreau's retreat has been inspired by transcendentalist beliefs. As a religious, literary, and political movement, transcendentalism is founded on ideas that reflect self-reliance, free thought, and detachment from social conventions. In this context, while living at Walden Pond, Thoreau has managed to experience a life which, he believes, people should live rather

than a life in which the acquisition of material wealth is the main concern of mankind. His love for nature evidences his transcendentalist and naturalist philosophy which has led him to Walden Pond, a place where, for two years, he has lived a life of simplicity, magnanimity, and independence.

Similar to Thoreau, transcendentalist authors namely his mentor Emerson, Hawthorn, and others have, through their literary texts, portrayed their love for nature and their quest for freedom. Thoreau's stay at Walden Pond shows how Thoreau has undertaken to live according to his individual conscience rather than following the will of the majority or society governed by conventions that are put in place to restrict our freedom. Transcendentalists, therefore, value individual attitude above social acceptance and creativity above material or financial acquisition.

Such a spirit is what has driven Thoreau's stay at Walden Pond and in his chapter "Solitude", he states that *"sometimes, when I compare myself with other men, it seems as if I were more favored by the gods than they, beyond any deserts that I am conscious of; as if I had a warrant and surety at their hands which my fellows have not, and were especially guided and guarded"* (Thoreau, p. 131). This passage brings to light Thoreau's freedom compared to other men whom, he observes, live in an environment where they are victims of the lack of freedom on account of the social norms which they should comply with.

The word freedom is central to Thoreau's life and, as noted above, it is part of the core beliefs that have, considerably, marked the transcendentalist philosophy. Michael Sims, in *The Adventures of Henry Thoreau: A Young Man's Unlikely Path to Walden Pond* (2014), recalls Thoreau's love for freedom when he writes *"The characteristic of our epoch is perfect freedom – freedom of thought and action"* (Sims, p. 36). This is a message that Thoreau delivered during his commencement at Harvard in 1837. Graduating from Harvard, Thoreau's life has been marked by simplicity, individualism, solitude, and the rejection of material life, which mirrors his devotion to transcendentalism. In some respects, it is worth noting that his solitude and love for nature have been inspired by his mentor Emerson who states in his book *Nature* (1836)

that, *"To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society"* (Emerson, p. 5).

Considering Emerson's analysis with respect to solitude, one should point out that Thoreau's retreat at Walden Pond is a good illustration of this solitude. Furthermore, since his philosophy reflects the one advocated by his mentor – considered as the founder of American Transcendentalism – there is no doubt that both authors have in common the way they perceive life. For them, life should be simple in order to be more meaningful rather than being characterized by both the pursuit and acquisition of material wealth as was the case in the American society of that time. Indeed, through his retreat, Thoreau gives some moral lessons not only to Americans but also to the entire world given that his philosophy has, over history, influenced other people throughout the world.

Also important to point out when examining Thoreau's philosophy is his perspective with regard to a life of luxury. In his chapter "Economy", for instance, he presents different scenes where he invites people not to seek a life of luxury but rather a simple, spiritual, and more meaningful life and it is in this context that he argues that *"Most of the luxuries, and many of the so called comforts of life, are not only indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind... Of a life of luxury, the fruit is luxury, whether in agriculture, or commerce, or literature, or art"* (Thoreau, p. 14). Building upon this statement, one should acknowledge why Thoreau has spent two years in the woods to avoid living a life of luxury, but more importantly, to give lessons to humanity that seems to value the pursuit of materialism rather than living a natural life. In another sense, the life of luxury may hinder the protection of the environment owing to the different means that people resort to in order to satisfy their needs.

To a certain extent, his stay at Walden Pond can be considered as a divine mission since, in addition to getting closer to nature, Thoreau protects it from destruction and it is in this sense that he writes in his chapter "Philanthropy" that, *"Probably I should not consciously and deliberately forsake my particular calling to do the good which society demands of me, to save the universe from annihilation; and I believe that a like*

but infinitely greater steadfastness elsewhere is all that now preserves it” (Thoreau, p. 73). Thoreau’s divine mission consists here in protecting and preserving nature, and to achieve such a mission, he should get closer to it; hence his retreat at the woods.

It should be highlighted that Thoreau’s life coincided with American industrialization, an epoch during which many changes have been noticed in different sectors. Also, innumerable consequences have been caused by the advent of industrialization, and to avoid the consequences of American industrialization, people like Thoreau had started raising awareness while advocating for the protection of the environment or by addressing issues that call into question the relationship between people and wealth. With regard to his commitment to help his society, he sustains that:

While my townsmen and women are devoted in so many ways to the good of their fellows, I trust that one at least may be spared to other and less human pursuits. You must have a genius for charity as well as for anything else. As for doing good, that is one of the professions which are full. (Thoreau, p. 73)

In addition to inviting individuals to do good for society, Thoreau reveals how the latter are motivated by the pursuit of wealth which can prevent them from taking care of their environment or living naturally. In this way, through *Walden*, he attempts to call the attention of his readers but also of society in general to undertake a life built on values among which simplicity, individualism, self-reliance, freedom, and philanthropy.

His philosophy has, undeniably, gained ground and that is what Rick Anthony Furtak, Jonathan Ellsworth, and James D. Reid, witness in their book *Thoreau’s Importance for Philosophy* (2012): “*Walden is, among many other things, a sustained meditation on the appropriate conduct of life, and on the importance of living our lives with integrity, avoiding what he calls “quiet desperation” and unhappy resignation*” (Furtak et al., p. 9). As the authors of *Thoreau’s Importance for Philosophy* put it so well, *Walden* teaches, among many other lessons, about moral lessons through which we should learn to live independently, naturally, and simply. Considering the different moral lessons present in *Walden*, one should note that Thoreau attaches great importance to faith and it is in

this sense that he draws a connection between humanity and nature which are creatures that are closely linked.

2. Faith and the Connection between Humanity and Nature

In *Walden*, the theme of Nature is widely present and this presence deeply expresses Thoreau's love for it. In the same vein, it is also important to suggest that his love for nature goes along with his spiritual life. His devotion to nature is, it seems, what makes him call into question the instruction of the Catholic priests which he finds inadequate compared to the limitless instruction provided by nature. In his words, *"When nature made him, she gave him a strong body and contentment for his portion, and propped him on every side with reverence and reliance, that he might live out his threescore years and ten a child"* (Thoreau, p. 147). Here, Thoreau refers to the completeness of the instruction of nature by contrast to the instruction given by humans.

From another standpoint, the above passage describes a scene in which Thoreau questions the instruction received by his visitor, the Canadian wood-chopper and post-maker. The latter has, like many other individuals, been instructed in a way that does not make him an intellectual or even a man: *"He had been instructed only in that innocent and ineffectual way in which the Catholic priests teach the aborigines, by which the pupil is never educated to the degree of consciousness, but only to the degree of trust and reverence, and a child is not made a man, but kept a child"* (Thoreau, p. 147). What should be retained from this assertion is that Thoreau calls into question the instruction given by humans which, for him, does not value awareness raising but rather keeps people ignorant, narrow-minded and submissive.

When it comes to nature, its instruction is, according to Thoreau, more complete. It should be observed that he attaches great importance to nature to the point of finding God in it through meditation. Taking into account Thoreau's lessons on faith and nature, some critics consider *Walden* as a religious document that teaches spiritual lessons. As a case in point, in the forward of *Walden: An Annotated Edition* (1995), Walter Harding describes the spiritual side of the book as follows:

Walden reaches its highest levels as a spiritual autobiography, a Pilgrim's Progress to the good life... It is one of the book's claims to greatness that it can be appreciated on many different levels. But to Thoreau as to the perceptive reader, *Walden* is as much a religious document as any scripture... Thoreau is concerned with spiritual values throughout *Walden*. (Harding, p. ix).

Walter Harding draws our attention to the spiritual aspect of the book. This spirituality can be analyzed at different levels depending on how the author presents it in various passages. Thoreau sheds light on spiritual discovery as he states:

Yet I experienced sometimes that the most sweet and tender, the most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural object, even for the poor misanthrope and most melancholy man. There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still. (Thoreau, p. 131)

On the basis of the above excerpt, it seems interesting to point out that nature is central to our life and, as Thoreau makes it clear, any natural object has a great value that should be acknowledged. In the same direction, his perception of nature can be correlated to his mentor's perspective which holds that "*visible nature must have a spiritual and moral side*" (Emerson, p. 33). In his book *Nature*, particularly in his chapter "Discipline", Emerson portrays nature as a discipline from which many lessons can be learned:

In view of the significance of nature, we arrive at once at a new fact, that nature is a discipline. This use of the world includes the preceding uses, as part of itself. Space, time, society, labor, climate, food, locomotion, the animals, the mechanical forces, give us sincerest lessons, day by day, whose meaning is unlimited. They educate both the Understanding and the Reason. (Emerson, p. 34)

While Thoreau recognizes the significance of any natural object, Emerson, in the same way, brings to light the virtues of nature. In this regard, both authors commonly raise concern about the importance of nature and its relationship with humans. When living at Walden Pond, Thoreau tries to find God in nature through solitude and meditation but also he attempts to find himself in nature. This is what Soromenho-Marques evidences in an article "Walden: A Tale on the Art of Living" as he writes:

Walden is the testimony of a life seeking the unity of idea and action, of values and deeds... For Thoreau, as well as for Emerson, there is no truly ontological barrier

between man and nature... For Thoreau, humans are the creatures that are able to find themselves while looking for nature; or the beings that, when in silent meditation, achieve the clear notion that trees, birds, sunlight, running water, the shifting seasons, nature as a whole is a core element of our identity. Nature is not only our home, but also the best part of ourselves. (Viriato Soromenho-Marques, p. 4)

In this passage, Soromenho-Marques brings to light the significance of nature which, without any doubt, holds a central position in humans' life. Based on its importance on humans' life, one should recall at which point humans must, therefore, love nature not only to preserve it from degradation but also to better know it and find themselves as well as God in it.

It is of significant importance to quote Stephan R. Kellert' s *Building for Life: Designing and Understanding the Human-Nature Connection* (2005) as he states:

Human physical and mental well-being inextricably depends on the quality (if not the quantity) of people's experience of the natural environment... To explain this reliance, we considered the notions of ecosystem services, biophilia, and the spirit of place, all concepts rooted in human biology but highly shaped by people's experience, learning, and culture. Assuming that the human affinity for nature is partially genetically encoded—a product of our having evolved in a natural rather than an artificial world—the importance of childhood must be recognized as the period when this contact with nature first occurs. (Kellert, pp. 63-64)

In this study, the author presents comprehensive arguments that help better understand the connection between nature and humanity. He describes how the connection between childhood and nature is essential mostly when it comes to cognitive and affective development. Kellert's analysis on the importance of nature in the development and well-being of humans should be acknowledged and can also be correlated with Thoreau's perspective given that both authors outline the contribution of nature in human physical and mental well-being. In this regard, it is necessary to recall that Thoreau considers the instruction received from nature as being more complete than the one received from humans while discussing with his Canadian wood chopper visitor in the woods. Furthermore, Thoreau's experimentation and description of nature illustrate his love for it but more importantly his ecologist and environmentalist spirit.

Additionally, it is worth reminding that Thoreau is a preservationist who advocates for environmental protection: *"the finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling"* (Thoreau, p. 6). As regards this statement, he calls the attention of humanity to preserve nature and the environment not only for present populations' well-being but also for that of generations to come. Reading Judith P. Saunders' *"Biophilia in Thoreau's Walden"*, a study published in the *American Studies Press*, we discover different elements that justify Thoreau's ecological attitude and love for nature:

A sense of cosmic kinship tends to reduce the intensity of competition between individuals and between species, at the same time fostering a conservationist spirit. Thoreau clearly is committed to biodiversity, a crucial component of twenty-first-century environmentalism, and he manifests a concomitantly respectful and protective attitude towards all life forms... Wilson credits Thoreau with having articulated *"the first elements"* of a *"global land ethic"*. Thoreau insists, moreover, that *"nature is not elsewhere, but everywhere, and all the land holy, not just a few last, best places"*. (Saunders, p. 54)

Saunders' observation clearly exemplifies Thoreau's biophilic philosophy which consists in loving nature to better know it and protect it as well. His stay at Walden Pond is, among other things, what should help authenticates his biophilic propensity. Thus, his love for nature reflects in some respects his love for freedom which leads him to oppose the will of the majority through individualism and withdraw from social conventions.

3. Individualism and Withdrawal from Social Conventions

Considered as a non-conformist, Henry David Thoreau has long advocated for the freedom of every person based on individual conscience rather than social norms. For Thoreau, every person's life should be different from other people's lives and each person should, therefore, be willing to oppose the majority if necessary. He declares: *"I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue his own way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead"* (Thoreau, p. 71). His perception of life is common among other transcendentalist authors who value individuality above social acceptance.

However, although Thoreau opposes social conventions, this does not mean that he hates social life but, rather, he wants each person to follow his or her own path depending on their individual conscience. In his chapter “Visitors”, he draws our attention to the fact that he is not naturally asocial when he posits: *“I think that I love society as much as most... I am naturally no hermit, but might possibly sit out the sturdiest frequenter of the bar-room, if my business called me thither. I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society”* (Thoreau, p. 140). This excerpt clearly provides information on Thoreau’s ability to live in society; nonetheless, he prefers experiencing another life in order *“to test who he is and how he should live”* (Johnson, p. VII) in an environment where he is his own master and has not to follow rules established by humans not by nature.

To some extent, Thoreau’s individual attitude and rejection of social norms mirrors his philosophy of civil disobedience. As its name indicates, “Civil Disobedience” is Thoreau’s 1849 essay in which he suggests that individuals should not allow governments to overrule their conscience or even worse make them the agents of injustice. As a result of his philosophy, he states in *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays* (1849) that *“I heartily accept the motto, – ‘That government is best which governs least’ and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically... But a government in which the majority rule in all cases cannot be based on justice, even as far as men understand it”* (Thoreau, pp. 1-2).

By analyzing Thoreau’s approach on how a government should work, one can conclude that he exhorts individuals to follow their inner conscience rather than the rules established by legislators. More often, such rules benefit the legislators themselves at the expense of those people supposed to follow them. Given this situation, he further argues that *“I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume, is to do at any time what I think right”* (Thoreau, p. 2). By doing what he thinks is right, Thoreau promotes individualism and free thought while rejecting social acceptance. In such a way, he overtly expresses his transcendentalist philosophy and his civil disobedience ideology.

Cynthia Brantley Johnson, for example, in the introduction of *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (2004) emphasizes the influence of Thoreau's ideology on the American culture. She writes:

The countercultural movements of the 1960s claimed *Walden* as a literal prescription for life and dubbed Thoreau the first hippie. Environmental activists and writers have come to see *Walden* as one of their seminal texts. Political conservatives have celebrated *Walden* as a doctrine of rugged individualism, even as they warn that "Civil Disobedience" may lead in anarchic lawlessness. (Johnson, p. IX)

Not only has Thoreau's philosophy called the attention of activists but also that of writers and politicians as well as other people who, after the publication of *Walden* and his essay on civil disobedience, have noticeably shared his perspective. However, by contrast to some of his predecessors, Thoreau—just like his friend and mentor Emerson—urges American writers not to follow the traditions of England and Europe, but rather to focus their writings on American ideals and history. This attitude reflects, among other things, his withdrawal from social conventions which, as earlier discussed, are meant to restrict the freedom of individuals. From another angle, one should highlight that Thoreau attaches great importance to individualism and it is for this reason that he states, "...the man who goes alone can start today; but he who travels with another must wait till that other is ready, and it may be a long time before they get off" (Thoreau, p. 72). This quote substantiates Thoreau's individualist attitude which has led him to Walden Pond to experience a life different from the one he used to live in the community.

Anthony J. Parel, in his chapter "Thoreau, Gandhi, and Comparative Political Thought" edited by Jack Turner in *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau* (2009), casts light on Thoreau's love for freedom and how he has also influenced Gandhi through his essay "Civil Disobedience". Parel argues that "It is only when we get away from the institutions of society and retreat into our inner self that we experience true freedom. Not only are absolute freedom and civil freedom put in oppositional terms, but the importance of the political seems to be downgraded" (Turner, p. 374). Parel's analysis accentuates ideas about individualism and retreat into our inner self as being what can bring true freedom.

It is, in fact, what Thoreau experiences in the woods by staying connected to nature. Admittedly, nature, as portrayed in *Walden*, gives absolute freedom to humans unlike society where the latter are, too often, either directly or indirectly constrained to follow rules that may hinder not only their individual freedom but most specifically their free thought. Other critics have commented on Thoreau's love for nature, which, literally, justifies his quest for freedom but even more importantly his detachment from social norms. In this regard, Philip Cafaro introduces, in *Thoreau's Living Ethics: Walden and the Pursuit of Virtue* (2004), topics which clearly illustrate the important place that freedom occupies in *Walden*. His chapter "Solitude and Society" makes this point clear:

Freedom is perhaps the most frequently praised virtue in *Walden*. For Thoreau, freedom means, most simply, doing what he wants to do during the course of his day. Solitude makes this possible, both by encouraging personal focus and by limiting the direct claims others make on us (if they aren't there, they can't make any claims). Solitude limits indirect claims as well. When we are with others our behavior changes, as we consciously or unconsciously gauge their responses to us. This is not all bad, but it does limit our freedom. Taking a larger view, solitude also allows us to escape, to some degree, the expectations and demands of family and society and to set the larger parameters of our lives. (Cafaro, pp. 108-109)

Central to Cafaro's examination is the connection he has made between solitude and freedom that may result from it. What one should note here is that, similarly to many critics of *Walden*, he points out the importance that Thoreau attaches to freedom. This freedom, it appears, cannot be obtained in society hence the interest of solitude which, in *Walden*, is metaphorically represented by Thoreau's life in the woods. Additionally, in mentioning the virtues of solitude, Cafaro lays emphasis on personal focus, self-reliance, philosophical reflectiveness, which are topics that can be associated with what Thoreau terms as individual conscience. To put it another way, both authors underline the influence that other people's lives may have on our own life if we are not ready to live according to our individual conscience.

To escape from such a situation, Thoreau recommends a life where each person will be their own master, that is to say a life based on individualism, simplicity, and

more importantly, a life in which people are connected to nature given that humans are part and parcel of it. While living at Walden Pond, he has demonstrated that it is possible to live independently or naturally with the resources one has; and this can, evidently, help humans to avoid destroying the environment on account of the pursuit of a material or luxurious life. In other words, by means of his experience, he represents an example of the human nature connection, that is how to live happily in nature while protecting and preserving it from degradation, which further exemplifies his environment consciousness.

Conclusion

Walden, or Life in the Woods has always have and continues to have a remarkable impact on people's lives thanks to its various themes that teach, among others, philosophical, moral, environmental, and political lessons. Its author, Henry David Thoreau is an American transcendentalist writer, activist, and naturalist whose ideology has substantially inspired several people around the world. In fact, while some critics consider Thoreau's life in the woods as being motivated by his transcendentalist spirit, others, however, highlight his quest for absolute freedom which is a constituent of transcendentalism. As for the relationship between humans and nature, Thoreau reminds us that the former are part of nature and should, accordingly, take advantage of it by preserving it in order to benefit from its rewards.

From a naturalist perspective, he calls upon our consciousness to recognize the important part which nature and all the elements it encompasses play in human existence on earth. Building upon this analysis, it should be held that his retreat at Walden Pond is a good account of his love for nature and environmental consciousness as well.

As a naturalist and transcendentalist author, Thoreau committed himself to raising awareness about how important life is and how it should not be complicated or endangered by the different obstacles that threaten our environment. The theme of solitude is, in some ways, one of the elements that evidence his intention to protect the environment against destruction and stay away from luxury and material wealth.

Definitely, one should not deny the fact that the pursuit of material wealth may lead to the loss of moral and human values. To preserve those moral values, Thoreau distanced himself from society so as to get closer to nature; which substantiates his environmental consciousness.

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