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*Marius Jucan*

## **The symbolic frontier of wilderness**

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The words “wilderness“ and “wild“<sup>1</sup> begin to live a new life once the Romantic sensitiveness proved itself as a modern issue within the growing conscience of a possible return to nature at the end of the Enlightenment period, or at least in ascertaining a consent regarding the emotional appraisal of nature<sup>2</sup>. The two mentioned words will diversify their semantic content, enriching the imagery attached to what had been before the description of “uncivilized“ world, to the degree Romantic authors, American ones as well, will more boldly explore the possibility of portraying a new universal man, relying on the particular perspectives of localism. Thus, the rising tensions between transcendence and immanence were appeased, but not to the point of a thorough vision of harmony expressed by a new religious prospect, though the religious spirituality with which nature was entrusted with was not far from such a complete reconciliation. It is so more relevant to envision the change in meaning concerning the new imagery that developed in the New World, following the mapping of the huge continent, the immensity of the space remaining beyond the firstly set frontier. The Americanization of the yet un-paced miles of the wilderness meant a change within the power of imagining the wholeness of the American territory, and it was due to the realities of the frontier that the civilization of the New World began its westward move on the ground as well as on the rough scrolls of maps. The frontier stood as the newly-made space which not only delimited civilization from wilderness, but at the same time, dovetailed these parts into

the wholeness of the a new world, seen as a divine Godsend. The last days spent by Jonathan Edwards could be interpreted as a testimony about the way in which “wilderness“ gave sanctuary, being also a home for the God elected man. “Wilderness“ and “the wild“ may now without any fear of heresy express the perfection of the work of God, admired less directly in religious terms, and more confidently in aesthetic ones. The myth of the frontier was perceived as a gate to nature, since within Romantic sensitiveness the values of creation and freedom were reinvested to give birth to the possibility of conceiving a new man. Whether the advancement of the Puritans in the depth on the New Canaan was underscored by the explicit sense of sacrifice, the expiatory and missionary aim is almost completely disappears for the Romantic spirituality which hovers over the “front“ line of the frontier to find out diversity, as well as similitude of the components if the universe, bearing the imprint of the same creative spirit. For the Romantic ego, nothing is more enlightening than to demonstrate the concealed unity of the world. At the same time, the harmonious correspondences surrounding the human ego claim for a new definition of universality, experienced by individualism in a kind of revived pantheism, yet devoid of the presence of God, elevating the symbols of solitude and contemplation as basic attitude to comprehend nature as a mystic source of creation and moral judgment. The fallibility of man is rethought once the new Romantic sensitiveness provides the revelation of kinship between man and nature within the act of creation, or rather of a free contemplation



of creation while man feels unbound from any of his former servitudes. Nature becomes for the Romantic ego the inner border of salvation, as no other entity could control or dispose of the freed man. Thoreau is the author for whom wilderness remained through his entire creation a key term, to which he often resorted to show the metamorphic structure of the Romantic ego, within what I would name and explain later on “symbolic writing”<sup>3</sup>. As inner metamorphoses encompass for Romantic authors the portraying of nature, Thoreau summoned the whole scenery of nature to witness the manifestations of the self, finding in nature an in-built stage for the crisis of Romantic individualism and its fundamental contradictions between “soul” and “spirit”, intuition and modern rationalization. Thoreau’s genuine appeal resounds as an urge to see in nature’s wilderness not the opposite of civilization, but the realm of natural perfection intuited as the authentic human abode. Nature should not be perceived as due to its later cliché of being man’s last “refuge”, but as the a-topical place where the individual could find his innerness and authentic yet unexperienced life.

With Thoreau “wilderness” gains a fully expressed modern meaning, obviously different as compared to the Puritan former description, giving nature the towering monumentality and the ineffable sublime which would persuade man to experience natural life as a parallel to the social one. Everything considered “natural” appears as virtuous as a moral sequel of Creation. The symbolic frontier of wilderness might be said to have been traced with the first locomotive whistle, which in 1844 stirred the unrest of both Hawthorne and Thoreau. Seen from this angle, wilderness appears as agonistic, since it represents the symbolic rendering of an unavoidable approaching confrontation, destruction of authenticity versus a possible reconciliation, both as outcomes depending on the individual’s capacity of self reforming, which sets the telling proof of the Romantic vision upon the individual’s unique part in salvaging himself, by following reintegration in nature, or on the contrary, to succumb into the degradation of

advancement of civilization lacking in spiritual progress. Wilderness appeals equally to feelings as well as to reason, and it is according to the new balance between the values of the “soul” and of the “mind” seen as underlying the concept of the natural man that Thoreau described his experience at Walden Pond as a recovery from the spiritual death of “the mechanical age”<sup>4</sup>. Being rendered under the seductive power of the sublime, wilderness appeals to the aesthetics of the modern age, adapting Romantic sensitiveness to the new needs of rationalizing life, suiting thus more the individualistic drives of the liberal capitalist society rather than a return to the communitary natural experience which could have been wrongly sensed as being Thoreau’s ultimate goal. Wilderness is the experience of the American Romantic ego, channeled into a therapeutic manner to resist any nostalgic return to the past, and actually to cope with individualistic values and to defend them against the advent of a new cultural and political consent, which was breaking its way into reality through the conquering of new territories and the cultural absorption of new waves of immigrants. Traveling to the heart of wilderness, and actually discovering it so near to the fragile American society, Thoreau thought of proving the authenticity of the American individualistic values in a world oblivious of the spiritual aptitudes of the individual, or what the author feared the most, that the values he defended would be entrapped into the chain of modern servitude. Criticizing the “mild desperation” of his fellows Americans, Thoreau was aware of the immense spiritual inertia stretching behind the triumphant advancement of the utilitarian modernization of America, and considered that wilderness along with what he preached to be a modern non-religious ascetic way, his experience on the frontier of wilderness, could be the issue to human restoration. Nature is imagined to provide man’s lost alternative, since Transcendentalists did not attempt to look for the possible change dealt with social actors, but rather for a wished for natural metamorphosis of the American individual, bereft of the social context. Thoreau relied too confidently on his contemporaries’ power to experience nature as both an object of contempla-

tion and action, nature being at the same time the unifying experience of mirroring the self, but also the path toward contemplating the diversity of the natural sublime, reaching far beyond the social tasks of man, accomplishing a higher “law“, namely responding to the realm reigning over man’s reason. The sublime, the harmonious core of uniting all components into an essence which did not impose itself, but rather constrained man by its seductiveness, shows in our view, the profound anxieties raised by the development of modernity in the American society, especially the fears that the individual’s self would be enslaved by the ever changing rules of an increasingly utilitarian society<sup>5</sup>. What Thoreau pointed outstandingly clearly, was that the prophecy of change that was so blatantly claimed by American politicians toward the mid- 19 century, change seen as the advent of a superior phase of progress, was fated to be controversial unless it contained the spiritual conversion of the individual, so that Americans should experience by themselves the possibility of personalized change, in other words, to pursue the course of their own becoming, according to their own in-built, yet unexplored needs. Under these auspices, man is regarded as being able to redefine the act of life as a natural experience, in which being naturally drawn toward wilderness, he would be not only protected by it against the estranging effects of civilization, but he might also steer his own life as a unique act of creation.

American wilderness would not be compared to European Arcadian nature. Which means that Thoreau borrows a model of living in nature without its mythology, being thus free to reshape the classic perception of nature, even when resorting to Greek or Latin references, as to point sometimes ironically to the frontier of his “own“ wilderness, thought about and felt through personal experience. Inside the limits of the natural *topos*, and at the same time a geographically marked place on the map of Concord, time turns into an evasive dimension, effacing objective chronological duration, being accounted for more often in its subjective intimate perception, while contemplating seasons revolving in wilderness. It is within the space of wilderness that one gains the

natural knowledge of inner time to the detriment of objective (social) time, since wilderness has no memory, outstretching freely to the personally imagined limits of time. Thoreau’s original portraying of unbounded wilderness undermines the individual’s perception of the modern present, as a time unit, starting even with the unnecessary instruments of urban civilization, severely rationalized by the modern hermit in his season of the shore of Walden Pond. The individual is thus empowered to reset the principles of his own life, according to the natural impulse of restoring the balance between artificial (urban civilization) and natural, wild experience of life, as Thoreau would not obliterate all the advantages of civilized life. Actually the line of the frontier set between wilderness and civilization is traced to remind the individual not to waste himself, and to assist the necessary endeavor of rebuilding man’s trust in the harmony of wilderness. The symbols of the unity of nature are present everywhere, and unity speaks of the longed for perfection in a fragmented modern world, and moreover brings into effect the Romantic central preoccupation with the idea of the possible, as for instance stepping into another world, as different as wilderness is from urban civilized society. The *possible* reiterates in the metamorphic cycles of nature man’s capacity to redeem life from the perils of a wholly secular world, as it point to the compact wholeness of the universe<sup>6</sup>.

The aesthetic and religious are blended within the experience of the ecstatic contemplation persuading the individual to the quest of the essence, and consequently making him let false idols of modern life fall. Wilderness renders less and less the spectacle of the natural chaos, but rather the harmonious plenitude teaching man the sense of balance and self-preservation. The anti-utilitarian message embedded in the picturesque wilderness brings up the question of the in-built capacity nature is endowed with to develop a moral educative effect, as the lesson of the beautiful is continued into its moral sequel, showing the completeness of good. Wilderness borders man’s innerness, and the natural sublime may express



the genuineness of the self, pointing to the plenitude of nature. The new Adam born at Walden rebuilds his innerness moving on the frontier between tradition and modernity, renouncing the fallibility of man, or rather the abstract prospect of progress, for the spiritual becoming, namely by envisioning nature as the potentially untarnished source of authenticity. The modern Adam would not grow apart from nature, so that he would to accept estrangement, since the in-built aptitude to rebuild his "natural" behavior was not for Thoreau, and generally for Transcendentalists, hampered by social constraints, or to put it the other way, it was according to modern social constraints, that for Thoreau, the new Adam succeeded to disentangle himself from the temptations of modern absurd social norms and requirements. It is then relevant to mention that the inner reconstruction of the modern individual engages a totally new idea of possibility, rather than a skeptical denial of change, which is made obvious within the will of the individual to increase his autonomy. The type of ascetic behavior performed by the new Adam attempts through its harmonious balance between innerness and action to leave behind man's modern servitudes, avoiding at the same time to transfer the radicalism of the change into a political manipulative vocabulary, launching thus the individual into a new servitude, that of founding his legitimacy in the political action. Though political action is not ultimately overlooked, Thoreau would resist against the corrupting the meaning of the individual's transformation and let it dissipate into political forms of affiliation. Thoreau thought that the quest for authenticity and the fully restored autonomy of man encompasses the field of the political actions through organicist symbols, and not by political ones, which due to the accelerated development of modern America, came to hold a leading place in social hierarchy. The cultivation of a new sensitiveness prompts the individual to turn to wilderness as to a natural object created in an aesthetic perception, accordingly ascertaining the relationship between the sublime and the moral. For Thoreau, modern man would not be described to be wholly "social", meaning

that man should be conceived to be ultimately determined by social norms, but the individual was destined, and the entire process of growing aware of one's conscience is to find its *alter idem* in nature. Thoreau, advocated the idea that man was endowed by the gift of his conscience with a destiny rather than a history<sup>7</sup>.

Man's innerness appears thus more enlightening to comprehend the achievement of innate propensity to plenitude and basically to freedom, to reach the realm of plenitude through experience. The vision of plenitude within the prospect of man's rhetoric of inner change is almost completely saved of tensions, as different as religious or sexual ones, finding thus no roots either in the inscrutability of the fear of death or of sexual impulses. Though such tensions converge into what we would to call the "tension of desire"<sup>8</sup>, meaning to show the tendency of pushing apart, even to the extremes, the components of a whole, do not vanish completely. Thoreau did not see in them but natural constraints ready to be converted in the plenary design of a natural life. For him, man living in wilderness could redeem himself, banishing from his imagination the phantasms of "impossible" desires. The subtle interplay between *the possible* and *the impossible* which actually enacts man's legitimate quest for increased autonomy and freedom within wilderness, would not allow though the consumption of the individual's will into an unconstrained waste. Imagination is severely controlled at Walden Pond, either by the soothing contemplation hours, by work in the field, or by accounting the inventory of the transformation of nature, the guiding light without which, for Thoreau, man would fall into the barbarity of modern society. Dispatching the hour of the new life, as in an enthralled wake, into both contemplative and active moments, the new Adam perceives the difference of the subjectively felt time. A difference that would hold true only if lived as when experiencing the possible to its creative yet unknown outcome, rather than forcing the possible into pre-established forms of social life. In wilderness, the individual enjoys the possibility appraising time, committing himself to the task of self-discovery rather than to social tasks. The



new sensitiveness allowing the individual to accommodate himself in the wilderness relies on the experience of employing time so that the solitude no longer resembles to a voluntary confinement, but to paradisiacal innocence. Man's innerness is transparent as the self experiences everything in the mirror of nature, without actually undergoing the anxiety of losing the sense of centrality, as in the case of the usually isolated individuals complaining about their being unable to flee the specter of loneliness. The preferential use of the grammatical "I" shows the author's focus on the process of transformation occurring within the emotions of living in the wilderness, paying attention to how the memory of the everyday toil of living was shaped into the bewildering surprise of whiling away a series of compact moments as epiphanic events. The Thoreauvian ego is not described as wild, untamed entity in the sense of rendering the natural traits of Romantic personality in a titanic/demon-like personification. It rather consists in the deep agreement or harmony to a natural conformity, departing from any social conformism, and consequently deploring those caught in the noose of impersonal obligations. Thoreau appears inclined to correct the myth of the liberal individualism, by accentuating the man's allegiance to nature, yet also pointing that the individual should control any excessive, violent manifestation of his will, contrary to what could be called the "natural society".

The fact that Thoreau did not grasp the underlying relations of inter-subjectivity and cultural contextuality, moulding the individual's autonomy in modern times, would not be the case to insist hereupon. Given the Romantic organicist foundation of the self, the writer is mostly preoccupied to enhance the centrality of the entity of the self, as the most suitable and rightful corresponding part of nature. The elitist consequences of his essentialist vision would not tarry to appear conveyed in the belief that nature may replace the individual's will for recognition with the cognition of the essence, in this case, authenticity of wilderness, the truest core of nature. So, Thoreau, as other transcendentalists, ignored the contradiction existing between inaugurating the autonomy of the self and the annihilation of

its will, by submitting it to a non-individual entity in contemplating nature. Nevertheless, due to the rhetoric of the symbolic writing, the author suggests that the innerness of the individual cannot be depicted as static, and that through the metamorphic chain of becoming, the individual grows aware of his resemblance to nature. Experience within wilderness demonstrates the stages of *the possible*, as lived for and consumed possibilities of existence led by a vital élan to explore the self as an inexhaustible energy, comparable only to the infinite of nature. From this angle, the solitary man at Walden Pond is the universal man, whereas his fellow citizens living in towns and cities are but provincials. The possible of the wilderness experience means for Thoreau the occasion to depart from the grandiloquent pose of man in Emersonian thinking, and to deal more concretely with the chances to bring wilderness to a sort of "everyday life", which would prove in the end the aesthetic appeal of wilderness, the importance of setting a frontier between an individualist behavior and the communitarian conduct. So, for Thoreau wilderness and its frontier could be described in the following characteristics we shall briefly commented on: the aesthetic spectacle of wilderness, the genealogical perspective, the individual's double identity, the ethic optimism, the rationalizing reduction.

*The aesthetic spectacle of wilderness* provides to the gigantesque monumentality of nature a theater stage, that is an artistic means in order to make nature be experienced as an untold saga, to be seen as a character through which its unique message would be rendered and deciphered. According to the numerous visual descriptions, nature admired, explored and investigated at Walden, is the counterpart of the solitary hero, and it is in its presence that the content of solitude is completely changed. During the solitary walks, or in the memorable fishing scene when water and the sky merge into the same surface, as depth is rendered in the surface, Thoreau presents an infinite creation of forms, and accordingly, the intimate participation of the human senses to the realization of the complexity of living. Under the surface of a simple, seeming-



ly withdrawn life, the author dramatizes nature by discovering it in what I called “the events of contemplation”, and furthermore by interpreting nature as a written page. The dramatic conscience of human finite temporality as opposed to the eternity of nature, though lingering at the end of *Walden*, is however suffused by the promise of beautiful, entertaining scenes, keeping alive the interest of the onlooker. By the *genealogical perspective*, we suggest the way in which Thoreau strove to interpret the redeeming of the individual in nature, namely by exposing the Lamarckian fixed vision on natural linkage among a finite number of species. The unity in knowing could be achieved by following the path of wilderness, contemplating the inventory of forms and seeing their interaction in their continuous metamorphoses. *The double identity of the individual* consists in antagonism between the universal condition of man, and his time and space unsurpassable limits. Man may share the universal spirit and be at the same time the inhabitant of the frontier line set between civilization and wilderness. Thoreau’s hero rambles between center and periphery, sets out for the wilderness, returns as within a spiral to his previous existence, yet with a completely changed philosophy of life. *Ethic optimism* corresponds to the double identity of the individual, granting his inner freedom to restore man as being endangered by modern servitudes, or by falsifying his essence, freedom. The moral perfectionism, characteristic to all transcendentalists allows both for the moral idealization of the human archetype and of the simple citizens, seeing no difference between them as long as they live in the wild and harmonious space of nature. The ethic optimism in *Walden* is but a symptom of modern relativism, witnessing the endeavor to construct a new type of belief, especially because it was only the horizon of the future (transcendentalists were after Emerson, members of “the party of the future”), that could transpose the wish for plenitude. Knowing nature and the genealogical perspective provide powerful motifs for the individual to act as to ascertain the authenticity of his life. Beyond all these there is a form of rationalizing reduc-

tion which express not only the unity between essence and existence, nature and human freedom, but a sensitive rationality which renders the diversity of the universe into its formal cohesiveness. Thoreau does not want to infer whether the rationalizing reduction might be attributed to a Creator, a hidden or a disappeared one, or it might be the aim of the artist to recreate it.

The frontier of the wilderness actually covers the issued of the symbolic writing employed by the author in dealing with wilderness, a theme through which the 19-th century Romantic writers experimented the innovating condition of a changed concept of authoriality, in a new literary canon<sup>9</sup>. Especially for Thoreau, the experiment of the symbolic writing was echoed in the author’s marked preference for the essay as a genre, and furthermore, for an essayistic critique of the American life. We have shown how Thoreau would not waste any opportunity to explain again and again why he chose to depart from the comfort of civilization, as he writes at the beginning of the chapter “Higher Laws“ : “ [...] The wildest scenes had become unaccountably familiar. I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good. [...] I like sometimes to take rank hold on life and spend my day more as the animals do.“ Wilderness is an alternative to the state of mind which could be described as spiritual, though an equally powerful manifestation of nature’s vitality. The inner wild drives felt as authentic as the spiritual appeals are no longer antagonistic. Romantic manicheism dissolves into the recognition of the original design of Creation, and it is according to the genealogical perspective that contrary parts of the whole are united by confines to one another. The symbolic writing employed by Transcendentalists, in our case by Thoreau, aimed at establishing an alternative view over the design of Creation as natural wilderness, by either mirroring it as a recomposed entity, or as an expanding wholeness in each of its parts. The genealogical perspective is enhanced by the accurate rendering of each event spent at



Walden Pond, actually by blending the confession of a secular revelation with its fictionalization, through a tightly drawn parallel between life and its memory. Thoreau reduced at a minimum the allegorical role of fiction, being reluctant not to invent an epic scenario that would dilute the appeal of wilderness, assessing thus the meaning of every detail, and of the entire "work" of nature. The outcome lies in the fact that one could notice an innovating effect of Thoreauvian prose going against both the abstract Emersonian philosophical considerations and against fictionalization of wilderness.

The theme of the frontier had already been dealt with by various authors before Thoreau began to write his first essays. Similarly to the recurrence of the themes of whaling and whale-hunting in Melville's literary masterpiece, Thoreau relied on the popular echo of the frontier, grasping thus the novelty and the ambiguity felt toward life on the frontier, but as for him, the frontier adventures were carried out in a totally different direction. A parallel between Melville and Thoreau could be traced only to comprehend the relevance of popular culture for Romantic authors, the manner in which the totalizing symbols are raised upon popular myth circulating in the epoch. Thoreau and Melville are not a closely related pair of American Romantics, and it is far from any remotest resemblance between them to sustain such an opinion, though the two writers may present similar characteristics in the way in which they attempted to render the metaphysics of reality, enciphering reality according to their own creative interpretation. Neither of them would display the evidence of mastering the art of allegory Hawthorne accomplished in his great achievements regarding the transformation of the ego, and so their task, again so different is to render the sense of the "frontier" in writing about the realm of wilderness. One may assert in this line of thought, that the major creative obstacle Melville met with after publishing *Moby Dick* was his diminishing aptitude to render the metaphysical layers of reality within an epic work, due to the profound cultural dislocation that took place toward the middle part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For Thoreau, who was

far from the ambition of the Melvillian epic projects, also because the intention of depicting the ambiguity of evil was not among his themes, the metaphysics of reality was still a major point of interest, as it dealt with the double identity of the individual, obviously shared and defended by the hermit from Walden Pond.

The symbolic writing remains the most complex issue of the Romantic literary canon, pursuing the reconciliation of the contradictory transcendent and immanent tendencies within a spiritually elevated perception of the wholeness of the world. The religious imaginary which motivates the attempts of the Romantic hero of going beyond the limits of his human condition, questing for the impossible and actually achieving the actualization of the possible, faces a main difficulty in the appearance of a secular vocabulary. Moving from religious to aesthetic visions, the Romantic author breaks the spell of his metaphysical perspective, driving more closely toward the rendering of the immanent self of the individual, seen as self-creation or a self-discovery. So that the spiritual elevation is gradually converted into an urge to enlarge the field of experience as personal perception and inquisitive search for self-foundation, in other words, decoding the exemplary lesson of nature (wilderness) in order to increase individual autonomy, rather than contemplation of a divine entity, whether in awe for an approaching judgment or as a reward for desolated solitude. Emancipation of the individual leaves open the task to resolve human incommunicability in the harmonious framework of wilderness, assuaging the anxiety of innerness into the harmony of natural plenitude. Regaining harmony on the frontier of wilderness, while making it reachable first in terms of the possible, sets for Thoreau the need to mark the confines of the expanding personality of the individual, avoiding the critical, excessive outbursts if its will. Harmony is regained only at the expanse of preserving will into the miraculous non-human mirrors of nature, tempering down the tendencies to devalue the experience of the self into a narcissistic adventure. The major conflicting consequences resulting from the breaking



between the religious imaginary and the secular vocabulary are present in the ambiguity of solitude, for instance, being at the same time a compelling isolation and a pre-condition for rebirth, but also in the other various recurrent symbols Thoreau employs renouncing the idea of subordinating them into a redeeming allegory of man. In our view, due to the impact of the secular vocabulary, starting from everyday life, to present-day instances of pragmatic action, the individual frees himself from any temptation to parallel existence with existential allegories, playing with the symbols of creation, experiencing in other words freedom from allegorical imagination. Solitude, marginalization, sterile ramblings, the nostalgia for the forbidden absolute are replaced by a sense of well-being in the secure frontiers of wilderness, experiencing plenitude of life.

Therefore, it would be relevant to see how different authors influencing the Thoreauvian aesthetic assessment of the individual's autonomy, namely Schelling, Coleridge and Emerson, rendered in great lines, the basic arguments for the innovative turn in the symbolic writing. This would not only acknowledge once again Thoreau's eclecticism, but also his capacity of combining the various, sometimes adverse tendencies in outlining the unity of the universe, and as regard Emerson, the compelling need to outgo the abstractness of Emersonian man. So, for instance, the organicity of the universe sustained by Schelling, the principle of associationism, in Coleridge's concept of imagination, and the concept of nature as the cornerstone for Emerson's symbolic writing. Starting with Schelling, one remarks upon the organicity of nature, which endows nature with an intelligent essence, seen as a form of permanent organization<sup>10</sup>. Stating that each "plant is a symbol of intelligence", Schelling questions the possibility of describing the absolute form of the organic, the newness which gives birth to matter as creation, as well as to its manner of organization. Setting as a fundamental basis for the organic matter, the self-creation which start from an inner center progressing outwards, the philosopher states, that the universe is nothing else the

rudimentary and farthest organ of self-conscience. Further on, Schelling asserts that the organic organization form allows the intelligence to reflect itself, to control, so to say, its own form within a conscience, which for the purpose of this demonstration means the outlining of a limit, and also the successful/failed attempt to transgress it. Reaching this point, one may comprehend the anxiety of perceiving wilderness as an unbounded space, having already an organizational, intelligent form, yet escaping to be directly interrelated with man. Creation of the organic world may be then seen as a permanent opening of new frontier, within the expanding progression from a central innerness to its outreaching limits, noticing also that centrality of the process would be acknowledged as belonging only to a single central point. Nature in itself is the message of the expanding progression, a sort of writing (the manifest form of creation) meant to be read, reuniting what was separated. The representation of nature as a symbolic writing is for Schelling the standing proof that nature is the outcome of a creative process, the work of an archetypal Subject embodied in the sensed yet unreachable profile of God. The reconciliation between art and philosophy, intuition and reason, the working of the meaning through the play of words, all converge toward the principle of originarity<sup>11</sup>. In most of his arguments, closely following Schelling, Coleridge's contribution to set the unity between impressions and representations is rendered in the concept of *phantasia*<sup>12</sup>. Conceiving imagination as "esemplastic power", that is, stating its shaping capacity, Coleridge supported the idea of the intuitive knowledge which grasps in an epiphanic manner essence. At his turn, Emerson wrote in the beginning of his essay "Nature" about the necessity of a theory of nature, setting the unity of universe in its twofold organization, nature and soul. Through nature, Emerson understood a structure of the manifesting spirit, as nature not only "wears the colors of the spirit", but it provides the support to ascertain the premonition of reason and so, the conscious reflection of natural intelligence. A relatively changed perspective is set in "Experience", where the organic vision of the universe is clad in "the train of moods" displayed by life. Life shown as





a manifestation of power and form supports the bold and contradictory definition of man as a golden impossibility, claiming for a pragmatic intervention in order to set for the possible, the realm of man's natural freedom.

As we have already stated, Thoreau departs from the vague philosophical status of man in the Emersonian interpretation of transcendentalism, trying to bring into life a practical model of survival in the "mechanical age", inferring the importance of redefining the place of each individual within the perception of the totality of the universe. "[...] We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our sounded sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavour". Thoreau's writings, *Walden* among all, is focused on the idea of achieving the "expectation of the dawn" in everyday life by acknowledging the possibility of achieving happiness in its everyday content. The provisions of everyday happiness become for each individual in modernity an effective constraint of the consent to increase the autonomy of the individual, and to credit the autonomy of everyone as an act of "organic" creation. For Thoreau, the expectation of achieving everyday happiness would not appear as a "pure" possibility, but rather as a transparent chain of the acts of living, leading to transformation of the self, the captive self of the modern world, into the freed entity of wilderness. No matter how metaphorically expressed, everyday happiness emancipates the will to live by any dogma, constraining it as a limit to modern hedonism, utilitarianism and skepticism. Accordingly the most common activities of everyday life, transferred in wilderness, are presented as epiphanic moment through which the individual's life may be accounted as a form of self-creation. Bringing ideality into limelight, even if still far from the reach of the urban masses, Thoreau portrayed it beyond the frontier of wilderness, reminding his readers in all times, that the experience of living in the everyday framework of time, means to experience each day as a spiritual adventure.

So, happiness would not be experienced any longer promised reward of a dogmatic teaching, not met by chancy games either, but steadily built by man's capacity to portray his alter-ego rooted in wilderness. The frontier elicited since the foundation of the first Puritan settlements, and until the birth of the notion of Americaneness the outlining of a different mode of life, linking images of natural wilderness to the pursuing of happiness. The novelty of the frontier traced by Thoreau inside urban and utilitarian American civilization, aimed to save the American native identity, seen as a natural one. Withdrawing from society, the Romantic hero sets for the discovery of the inner side of the frontier, since the prospect of happiness is possible only by the personal growth of a new belief ascertaining the innate abilities of the individual to ensure his own secular salvation. Thoreau's Romantic and liberal radicalism strongly opposed expansion toward the Mexican border, but considered that the task of setting the natural frontier of each individual should be let in the individuals' valid rights, rather than be coerced by the State. One of the inadequacies deepening the crisis of the American modernity, and therefore imposing the necessity the making of a new cultural and political consent, is in our opinion, the distinction between the appraisal of the American nature as a manifestation of the American spirit, should one follow the Emersonian precepts of the spirit-nature relationship, and the formation of a cultural and political legitimacy noticeable for instance in John O'Sullivan notion of "manifest destiny", and later on, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a trait of American nationalism.

The symbols of the American sublime were beginning to be secularized by the political discourse, a fact that was strongly opposed by Thoreau in his writings. Thus we consider that Thoreau convincingly managed to seize cultural differences in a *naturalized* form, as the frontier, reviving the anxiety of separation which kept American individualism not only alive but also effective. It is one thing to consider the naturalization of the westward moving frontier as for the American statesmen before and after



Thoreau, and the anxiety our author felt to start to conquer the inner American space as a manifestation of everyday happiness (or rather the chance of it) the quality of the non-violent idealism Thoreau proclaimed was firmly opposed to its use in any political discourse, to any identification of the self of the individual with the archetype of the group, community, nation. Holding nature as the only judge and witness for man, Thoreau defies political representation of the individual in modern society, making the political symbols which actually sustain the definition of modern individual as elusive as possible. The moral insurgency set by Thoreau uses the political legitimacy of the individual, as it was built by the liberal tradition to revive the cultural consent, that is to claim a complete restoration of man, which goes over the limits of any political prospect. In this way the illusion of a biography lived on the frontier of wilderness does not follow any political doctrine, as the solitude of the transcendental man does not worship any altar, though political and religious reminiscent are mingled into the context of a saved natural life.

## Notes

1 The essay starts from some of the open-end conclusions of our previous work on Thoreau (*Singurătatea salvată. O încercare asupra operei lui Thoreau din perspectiva modernității americane*, EFES, Cluj, 2001 / *The Redeemed Solitude. An Essay on Thoreau's Work from the Perspective of American Modernity*), namely from the still challenging aspects of delineating the line of the frontier of the wilderness in a society profoundly changed by capitalist cultural values. We were attracted by the particularly innovating manner in which Thoreau

dealt with the theme of *the possible* vs. *the impossible*, imagining the redemption of the modern individual in secular times. Reflecting on Thoreauvian wilderness and its aesthetic description, we follow its dividing versus uniting line set between nature and society, reason and intuition, human destiny and history, abstract human salvation and the prospect of everyday happiness.

2 Buell, Lawrence, "American Pastoral Ideology Reappraised:", in Ross William, *Walden and Resistance to civil Government*, Henry David Thoreau, second edition, A Norton Critical Edition, University of Oregon, W.W. New York, London, 1992, p. 463.

3 Idem, *Literary Transcendentalism. Style and Vision in the American Renaissance*, Cornell University, Ithaca & London, 1974, pp 17-18, 42-44, 220-234, 296-300.

4 Marx, Leo, *The Machine in the Garden. Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America*, Oxford /University Press, London, New York, 1964, pp. 3, 11-16.

5 Golemba Henry, *Thoreau's Wild Rhetoric*, New York University Press, 1990, pp. 5-10.

6 Bercovitch Sacvan, *Rites of Assent. Transformations in the Smbolic Construction of America*, Routledge, New York, London, 1993, pp. 184-185, 183-192.

7 *Ibidem*, pp. 19-20, 169-170, 356.

8 Cavell, Stanley, "Captivity and Despair in Walden and Civil Disobedience", in William Rossi, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

9 Bloom, Harold, *The Western Canon, The Books and Schools of the Ages*, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, San Diego, London, pp. 284-288

10 Schelling, F.W J., *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, 1979, 1995, Romanian version, Humanitas Printing House, Bucharest, pp. 166-167.

11 *Ibidem*, pp. 307-308

12 Coleridge, S. T., *Biographia Literaria*, London, Dent, 1906, p. 52.