Modernism in Settings

Literature and its Leverages on Culture, Philosophy, and Society

By

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Acknowledgements

This book is an expression of my gratitude to my family, academic friends, and colleagues for their support over the last years as I have been able to conduct in-depth research on how contemporary ideologies affect both public and private life in nowadays society. Partially, this book reflects the intention of my postdoctoral research performed at the Faculty of Theology within the University of Pretoria, South Africa, which revolved around concepts like anthropology and nature as completed ecodomy. The conclusion that every ideological endeavour should also have anthropological results remains, even though this previous research is not included in the current volume. This conclusion shapes the entire book, as it's chapters themes are believed to speak for the ministry that literature brings into the world.

Ramona Simuț

Introduction

This volume is both a survey and an analysis of the trans-generational and multi-contextual concept of modernism. It starts from the premise that modernism is a variable cultural movement rather than a transient moment of unleashed anxiety and individualistic attempts of writing situated at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Even though these initiatives were not disregarded, this work is rather an investigation of what we consider to be the three phases of literary and cultural modernism, namely its classic and romantic tones during late 18th and early 19th centuries, its inner self throughout the first decades of the 20th century, and its late overtones hidden in the post-modern discourse of the last decade.

This being said, apart from various themes and delineations that this concept generated within the history of ideas in literature, aesthetics, literary theory, cultural studies and perhaps contextual ethics and politics, this volume will investigate the intertextuality unique to modernism in a slightly different way. It will thus present a hypothesis that will be investigated thoroughly and have exact repercussions. Although the idea that modernism was not born in a literary setting is not our first-hand hypothesis, the observation that it was precluded by significant philosophical and theological shifts in the 19th and 20th centuries certainly is. For the sake of a sound exposition of this hypothesis, some of the paragraphs below will be reiterated in the opening of every new chapter of the book. Also, as the chapters that form the content of this book have been published in past years as separate studies in specialized volumes or journals, the present research is the result of cumulative experience in the subject of modernism and modern literary and philosophical theories.

The chapters included in this book are analytical and oftentimes critical about the subject they investigate, and this is mainly noticeable around topics such as literary and cultural aesthetics, social and political

literatures, national identity speeches, and the psychoanalytic theory of language. Those chapters are in fact attempts at reevaluating some important debates in those fields from the 19th and 20th centuries (and in fact quite actual). At the time, such debates failed to take into consideration their full philosophical, social, theological or political implications, as chapters two to five, seven and ten disclose. Most of all, the intention and purpose of all the proposed chapters were to signal and underline those situations where either the investigated authors or their researchers then and now, presented in the critical apparatus, prove too confident and laudatory of their respective ideas to allow for a prerequisite sense of objective argumentation. Other chapters were included in this large arena of literary modernism in order to further inspect and establish new ways of discussing literature and its neighboring fields which have hardly been brought together before, which only speaks for the lack of context thereof.

That being said, this book opens with a theme that illustrates modernism in both literature and religion, *i.e.* the problem of death in 18th and 19th centuries Romanticism as expressed in the American transcendental philosophy of the time, more exactly in Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Death was ostensibly a theme in Romantic art and literature particularly in relation with the natural processes related to it as a transforming event of the human body and mind. However, toward the 19th century there seem to be a certain shift from what it was considered a normal perspective on death to a rather accessorized and scientific approach. Our hypothesis is that although in Emerson and Thoreau's work the shift is illustrated in connection with their concept of nature (both the human nature and the external-physical nature) as opposed to the innovative technologies implemented in their society, this was not motive enough for them. The new accidental and commercial facets of death as destruction of nature especially in their work imply more data, an awareness that they were also highly spoken for their transcendentalism, a particular philosophy that advocates the indestructible bond between man and nature. It is perhaps only in this complex background that one could come to terms

with the conflicting realities of industrialization as a sudden and repressive phenomenon within the society of men, and it was precisely this phenomenon that caused them to use their naturalistic judgment in order to make sense of their century deaths and diseases. Their criticism was not social in essence, but rather philosophical, and they used their transcendentalism into a science as relevant for society as the positivism theory at the heart of the Industrial Revolution.

The fact that this volume is multi-national in purpose surfaces in the second and third chapters of the book, which essentially question the problem of cultural and political progress in 19th century Europe, more exactly inside the national program developed in Romania by Junimea, a cultural organization empowered by its mentor Titu Maiorescu and his philosophical principles. Given that this is a problem which the author of this book deals with in various academic courses and seminars, it was expanded on two chapters, each analysing the onset of cultural and political modernism in 19th century Romania.

The modern problem of Romania's identity in Europe as an Eastern European country verified in Maiorescu's essays receives Hegelian overtones and also hierarchical pretenses which basically encourage the idea of an art for the "electi" through the elitism and aestheticism expressed in Maiorescu's theoretical program at Junimea. In the end the chapter assesses the input of those particular doctrines as liberty of expression and critical spirit, that he though boosted culture over against the social and political movements of mid 19th century Europe. What this chapter proposes is an interrogation addressed to nowadays Romanian theoreticians who dwell upon Romanian literature and culture in its classical times, mentioning those scholars who appreciate that literary era for the inherent beauty and wealth of its creations, but also those who try to defend the then cultural achievements by going against younger contemporary critics whom they accuse of a lack of loyalty towards our classical writers. These "attackers" are especially targeted here, firstly because their accusations are considered biased, and because the sometimes negative analysis of the Romanian classics

made by the younger critics is not necessarily derogatory. This chapter both revisits and amends their unnecessary nostalgic attitudes, while investigating just how much Maiorescu's work influenced the 19th century Romanian society though his theory of "forms without substance". It also draws attention to the fact that the legacy of Romanian classics can be assessed only when correctly understood, and not in a rushed attempt to salvage it from oblivion.

The following chapter offers an interrogation into the nature and final results of a national project which the Romanian cultural association "Junimea" intended to implement both culturally and socially through its aesthetic program and its outspoken leader Titu Maiorescu, in the context of their country staying well behind its possibilities in the second-half of the 19th century. Though there are quite a lot of studies already dealing with this phenomenon in the then Romanian culture, our endeavor will not ignore their contribution to this field; it will, however, challenge the idea that Maiorescu's efforts towards a better art were in great consonance with the real need for a satisfactory politics and society. The title of this chapter is itself questioning the accuracy of some traditional inquiries into the Junimea moment of Romanian culture, which are more that laudatory of the role of this association as represented by Maiorescu, but tend to leave untouched its failure to improve society or discredit such allegation all together. The purpose of this chapter is, on the contrary, to ask if Junimea and its classical culture had a social impact whatsoever, and thus why should nowadays society keep its memory alive at a political level. Although this cultural movement was indeed an enormous step towards modernism, a paradigm in a country socially and politically way behind Western Europe, there should still be doubts whether or not it brought some progress whatsoever. In this context a great importance is given to the concept of *Vorstellung* as Maiorescu borrowed it from Hegel but misused it to support the idea of cultural progress at the expense of social advancement. An insight here will be offered by some younger critics inside and outside Romania whose thought, understandably lacking the old melancholy, may bring a fresh air into

the picture, and also by a comparison between Maiorescu's ideas and Hegel's philosophy.

Chapter IV envisages the dawn of modernism in 19th century Norse literature, starting from the cultural forums that at the time tried to redefine the new structures of authority that suited social-political paradigms in this context and especially the original social and artistic movements prompted by "women emancipation". The key words her are Norwegian literature, realism, modern women, and literary style, since this new writing style is deemed the only alternative for the then women to make their voice heard in and outside the household. To spoil the surprise, the second-last chapter of this book will illustrate how nowadays feminist attempts to make their voices heard sound like by comparison. In the meantime, such efforts in 1870s Denmark and Norway were only encouraged by the Danish/Norwegian Women Society, which in this chapter is treated as the next logical step towards restructuring social policies after the legalization of the United Left or the Liberal Party, which supported the reforms of the international workers' associations. This is a conclusion that unfortunately lacked in the Romanian state of affairs discussed in the previous chapter. As in the social sphere, the revolutionizing ideas regarding women's role in public and private Norwegian life were promoted in literature as a good material for writing by already established male writers who gave voice to iconic female characters, where the case of Ibsen creating his Nora based on a real model is promoted as axiomatic. This chapter investigates such "materials" in both masculine and feminine writings throughout 19th century Norwegian literature, highlighting the visionary, realistic, and shocking perspectives offered to their respective readers. An important conclusion is that the type of woman born under their pen name does not fit the feminist profile of today's literature, since at a closer glimpse the former models inspired the change of social institutions, and not an alteration of roles.

Chapters V and VI propose a metaphorical and realistic cruise into the modern novel of the early 20th century, which suggests that it presents

its public with a leverage as compared with previous debates on 19th century non-fictional and socially oriented literatures. Chapter V inspects the literary setting as the leverage of individualism mainly on Santayana and Mann's work, who apart from their fictional novels made use of theoretical notes in order to express their distinct aesthetic and political philosophy. The fact that these modern writers were in a constant process of changing perspectives and denouncing the infatuation of society with democracy or of realism with objectivity was traced back to their method of bringing their private political thought into the character of a novel. This method served to the test the functionality of subjectivism through the stimuli mediated either by their awkward relationship with some of their colleagues in the field or with the public itself. The question remains though as to how these modern writers will push their inner experience into drawing back from society and creating styles which allow for one way or both ways communication.

A similar question is raised in chapter VI, where the leverage of technology on the modern novel is considered in James Joyce's experimental method. The words of the day chosen for Joyce's trip into the modern novel are technology, style, and epistemology, since just like the previously mentioned modernists Joyce is in a constant process of changing perspectives and denouncing Realism's infatuation with objectivity. Their common habit of leaving behind works unfinished just to try on the newly launched technologies on the market, or to put to the test the functionality of subjectivism through the stimuli mediated by scientific discoveries, is again analysed in this chapter as the writer's attempt to push his inner experience into drawing back from society in order to achieve his personal style. We felt that in Joyce's case there is this constant peril for one to misinterpret concepts like "experience" and "technics" at an inspection of his novels. This is why this chapter debates on the nature of Joyce's epistemology at the very impact with urban technology, and it concludes that it is precisely this approach to technology that keeps Joyce's work forever unfinished and thus open to ongoing interpretations.

Since there are still controversies to explain concerning the cultural milieu today and the relevant models who can help to delineate its roots, statements, and demurral, the next chapter comes with two such models and their propositions for post-modernism based on their academic modern values and against other "seductions" which are unfairly called models. This chapter brings together Allan Bloom as a classicist philosopher and Wolf Lepenies the sociologist, two scholars whose work deal with a problem that ignited contemporary discussions on culture and politics, namely the role of Modernism both in American and European academia and society. With a gap of almost twenty years between Bloom's and Lepenies' major works, this study launches a new perspective on the American and German cultural spaces where men would eventually learn how to become citizens, but often find themselves failing in this project due to the false expectations with which Modern philosophy, literature, and science meet them. These fathers of nowadays culture are presented along with their respective projects for an academia which is both fighting the closing of minds and the seduction of tradition.

As "mother" of postmodern semiotics influenced by her ever present passion for psychoanalysis, Julia Kristeva makes the subject of the following two chapters mainly because of her observations and analysis of the divergent sense of language and life which characterizes the nowadays society of men and the subsequent colonies of women. As we are about to find out, the members of the latter find their way to affirming their identity both through passion manifested in words, and through aversion for brutal maternal figures. This debate will use Kristeva's metaphors of modern "matricide" crystallized in her thought and exemplified by two of her seminal biographies, namely those of Melanie Klein and Hannah Arendt, all these in order to bring to the surface the conflicting sub-cultures which these theoretical approaches deal with. Finally, Kristeva's model of contemporary semiotics linked to genetics and the individual crisis will be inspected as to see if it conveys anything more than a pastiche in a Freudian key, and how is

this model representative not only at a literary level, but also in a practical setting through a theological symbolism.

It is, however, an error to think that Kristeva's complex psychoanalysis can be grasped simply by associating it to other names in this field: that would imply a suspension of her ideas into the thin air of modern feminism, an error which, as this chapter shows, have been made by many scholars as far as Kristeva's literary methods are concerned. It is now the time to readdress the issues posed by her semiotics in its proper medium as a derivative of Modern theology with which she became acquainted in the 1960s France. A Bulgarian expat who recently bypassed the restrictive religious and political environment of her homeland, Kristeva's thought should also be analysed today within this retrospective and crisis. The purpose of this survey is to find out how the end result of notable crises, such as the conflict between traditional dogma and the new hermeneutics of the *nouvelle théologie*, for instance, led to more revolt amid the young generation rather than to the promised improvement and hope for a better future both socially and culturally. It will be shown that the new language associated with psychoanalysis and literature was mainly derived and encouraged by post Vatican II continental theologies, whose critical spirit allowed for such redefining of doctrinal statements as to make them acceptable to the young, revolted generation that departed from the source of faith and Scripture. In this chapter this is the context against which we can then conclude on the practical relationship between revolt and liberalism.

Among the recurrent concepts which one cannot ignore at a closer look at the 19th century literature and the more recent cultural paradigms of postmodernity are those of "being" and "the city". Or more exactly "being in the city". Or is it role play in the city? This is the primary interest of the second-last chapter of this book, which first sheds some light on the late 19th century idea of the city and how it became a metropolis of self-conscious observers of themselves and the others, especially in Poe's modern short story *The Man of the Crowd*. Secondly,

though, and precisely because this first input reveals huge gaps between men and women's social role plays (and even highlights strategic selective words Poe used to describe their urban functions), this chapter will consider a new reading of Poe's piece from Hélène Cixous' feminist angle. We will thus test her hypothesis that a fresh perspective like hers can fill this gap with new understandings of the same social beings living in the postmodern city. While as a researcher in this field Cixous does not speculate over the stereotypes associated with man power in today's society, she nevertheless questions a dilemma which Poe intentionally left unsolved as far as this gap is concerned. For instance, the fact that in Poe's English there is no feminine for his "flaneur" type – although there is one in French – is a reminder in Cixous' reading of Poe's literature of other similar "masculine" urban functions that are defective of their feminine counterpart and thus of the respective social position of women within the city. Since for Cixous the language barrier in such situations is not a matter of insufficient feminist terminology to complete an already created social vocabulary, but a case is made for "the sex which is not one", we will put to the test her idea that the masculine view of life and the city goes from life to death, while the feminine view is from this point back to life.

The final chapter is meant to make sense of the unique work of the Armenian writer Armen Melikian, who is relatively new on the literary market through his niche novel *Journey to Virginland*, indeed his only novel as a blogger, that literarily is challenging for a rush-hour lecture because it hardly resembles anything intended for an easy reading. Thus, Melikian was chosen for his novelty, but at the same time for his unconventional way as a post-modern expatriate writer in the United States who reassesses his *modus vivendi* in a new setting that does not meet his expectations. Melikian is sought as an author whose style and reactions are set against the ambivalence and double standards of today's American society, hereby his unhappiness which in this final chapter goes three ways: political, religious, and cultural. We estimated that his novel announced Melikian as a freelancer in the literary field,

which is why we here propose a specific line of interpreting his work. Our contribution to the poorly represented critical stances in this field is to see how Melikian combines intertextuality with synecdoches in order to exhort his readers to better visualize the problems of nowadays politics, religion, and culture East and West. We also questioned Melikian's ability to maintain a composed attitude in this respect, as he expresses the same concerns via his web site, interviews, and his media hyperlinks, thus taking more personally the ideas that seem to be understated in the novel. More interestingly though, Melikian's journey looks like it was never into the unknown: the relegated writer is in fact self-deported, as we believe that he could have easily made his opinions manifest either in the United States or in Armenia, if he is right when we says that the two civilizations are governed by common principles and impede on people's liberty in the same manner. The auto-ironic and critical notes so specific to literary modernism are intended as a way to understand Melikian's unhappiness as post-modern farce.

Chapter 1
Death as Surprise in 18th and 19th Century Romanticism

Introduction and Hypothesis

One of the major themes of discussion in the art and especially the literature of the 18th and 19th centuries was the problem of death. In the beginning this seemed to be the case mostly because of the natural processes related to death as a transforming event of the human body and mind. However, towards the end of the 18th century and well into the 19th century, a certain shift took place from the common and normal perspective on death to a rather accessorized and scientific literary approach. Our attempt is to notice and make the necessary connections between the concepts of nature (both the human nature and the external/physical nature) and the innovative technologies implemented in the society of the time, with reference to the new accidental and commercial facets of death felt as destruction of nature especially in the work of the American Romantic writers Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Being aware that they are highly spoken of in view of their transcendentalism as a particular philosophy dealing with the bond between man and nature, we will slowly come to terms with this type of concern, and we will connect them to the conflicting reality of industrialization as a sudden and repressive phenomenon within the society of men. Finally our point is that this very phenomenon caused these writers to make a historical detour and use their formation as naturalist thinkers in order to make sense of those deaths and diseases in their century.

From a Romantic perspective, the signs of progress in the 18th century were perceived as unequivocal ways to destroy human personality and discard it from history. This perception is due to the fact that the attack which these mechanisms brought upon man was sudden and eclipsed

the soul with the shadow of a violent and accidental death. Their cause is well portrayed in Nietzsche's aphorisms, for instance, where he staunchly resents a future perspective on life as that developed by Martin Heidegger with regard to the relationship between man and machine. On the other hand, the 19th century Romantic writers looked at the diseases of their time from a totally different angle, being aware that some of them were indeed new and had a consumptive nature. As this was the case with tuberculosis, the Romantics would not speak of it as being denigratory or regressive in a scientific manner, but regarded it as a means for spiritual and intellectual progress with a purgatory and reparatory purpose, all this in the midst of the industrial colossus. Thus, the failure pertains to the machine, which can sweep away the flesh, and not to the intellect or the soul, which in this case is always a step behind in matters of material productivity.

The differences between the 18th and 19th century Romantic writers consists in their respective view on the main death agents: the latter were faced with both the element of surprise and the urge to accommodate with the new death agents first in their own homes, and then all around them. It should be stressed, however, that the surprise is always the prerogative of the technique, while a repressive disease smoothly turns into habit. Though it is as old as the 18th century, sudden death has never had a solid logic as the slow death, and what modernity did was merely to diversify the terminology related to it so that it could become meaningful for the new existentialist context. Moreover, in a Romantic work which stresses the man-nature bond as a psychological and physical relationship, nature is a projection of the self, which in its absence remains without an object. Nowadays, that would be the case with the cultural meaning of man's travel to space or man being void of nature as we know it: man's displacement is considered a type of death, a divorce from nature in a more than symbolical sense.

The surprisingly element related to death and its definition within Romantic literature and philosophy is the accidental, a term perceived as merely commercial just like the causes of death: the windmill, the pit

or coal mine, the first usage of vaccination in the 18th century, the new inventions and the 19th century industrialization. If we broaden this context to also comprise the 20th century, we could include the atomic bomb and space crafts. At the same time, the rituals associated with accidental deaths are from the very start commercial, a truism which is universally accepted (mourning, for instance, is rapid and conscious, and its reward implies more materiality than humanity, an idea which can be found both at the beginnings and at the end of the Romantic fictional and non-fictional works).

For our purpose here, we will consider mainly the non-fictional work in a particular setting of the Romantic school, namely the American Romantics of the 19th century, whose oeuvre was strongly influenced by death in both its personal and technical terms. As representatives for this Romantic school, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were surrounded by consumption (tuberculosis) all their life not only in their enlarged families, but wherever they went: "The first known case in the Emerson family was that of Reverend William Emerson, Ralph Waldo's father, who had the disease when he died in 1811 at the age of 42..., all [his children] had symptoms of tuberculosis. Both Edward and Charles died of it in their late twenties [also the case of Waldo's first wife Ellen Tucker, who died at 19]. Waldo appeared to have symptoms of the disease at various times in his life, once writing of having *a mouse gnawing at his chest*, but died of an unrelated illness at age 79." Also, "Henry David Thoreau succumbed to tuberculosis at age of 44... His grandfather had died of it in 1801, and when Henry's father died in 1859 his symptoms were consistent with tuberculosis. His brother John was living with it,... ad their sister Helen became a victim in 1849 at age thirty-six."[1] Death itself was the main reason why they even travelled to see other parts of the world and other cultures, thus to become Romantics.

[1] Constance Manoli-Skocay, "A Gentle Death: Tuberculosis in 19th Century Concord", *The Concord Magazine* (2003).

This experience with death that Emerson and Thoreau came to acknowledge was a century old in the Romantic literature, however they are among its few representatives who would associate death in its many shapes with the need for natural purity in the form of transcendentalism and as utopia of the soul in a deadly body. But consumption was not the foremost accidental disease of their time, a reality reflected by their journals and memorialist work. So were the pitfalls, windmills, coach travels on poor roads, horse riding, deep waters and suicide at the pressure of industrialization. Our aim here is to identify consumption as a kind of personal and communitarian disease which brought a graceful and slow withering, while on the other hand the accidental deaths mentioned above trapped the body and instantly eliminated the mind, allowing the Romantic writers no time to adjust to it and temper their enthusiasm.

Though this type of literature depicts the personal thoughts of these Romantic writers (who used to separate these diseases and deaths into different classes), we do not have to take their very word for it while searching for the truth or to suspect that their non-fictional work is subjective in all respects. One of the reasons why we chose to present aspects of deaths in these authors' oeuvre was precisely the existence of factual documentation about their lives and the historical details which illustrate a common fear of everything accidental both in Emerson and Thoreau's works, as well as in their contemporaries' mind.

Emerson and the Natural: When Death Defies Nature

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) stands among the Romantics of his generation as a pioneer of a new type of taste for nature. In his essay *Nature* from 1836, Emerson challenges all lovers of nature to take a stand and review their relationship with the external elements individually. In this attempt, he believes, one must be able to tell nature's prerogatives from man's intrepid actions which can cause the world irreparable damage. Emerson sets to describe nature as a powerful force that transforms not only its own state and climate, but man's state, too, in that it surprises him with views and feelings which

determine sensorial modulation in man's mind and soul: "Nature is a setting that fits equally well a comic or a mourning piece. In good health, the air is a cordial of incredible virtue. Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. Almost I fear how glad I am."[2] When Emerson says that nature "fits" both a benevolent and a negative state of mind, he rather exempts man from having anything to impede on nature or from being nature's commander. Unlike his fellow European or British Romantic writers, Emerson seems to walk in the footsteps of those mild pre-Romantics and Classics when he describes this special type of liaison between what is of nature and what belongs to man.[3] But neither does he imply, as his predecessors did, that man should overcome the powers of nature or that he could masterfully force his own feelings and will on nature.

However, neither of these realms seem to prevail on each other, since nature only "fits" a man's state, while man only enjoys whatever nature brings along. There is, however, a special spot in which nature is believed to work its magic on man, in the sense that nature changes man's state of mind and revives his body and soul: "In the woods, a man casts off his years and... is always a child. In the woods is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed... In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life – no disgrace, no calamity, which nature cannot repair."[4] Moreover, in the woods, "the name of the nearest friend sounds foreign and accidental."[5] Faithful to his theory that nature and man are individually part of the

[2] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Boston, MA: James Munroe and Company, 1836), 12.
[3] In the 18th century, Oliver Goldsmith, for instance, is considered a pre-romantic writer who makes the smooth transition from the classics' relationship with nature as governors to the romantics' suffocating "yearn" for nature, see Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, volume III, *Rococo, Classicism and Romanticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 60 fwd.
[4] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Boston, MA: James Munroe and Company, 1836), 12, 13.
[5] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Boston, MA: James Munroe and Company, 1836), 13.

transcendental being of God, and that God is not himself a unity, but an *oikonomy*/economy (*i.e*. he is not merely one, but many in multiple manifestations), Emerson first rebels against his religious heritage as a unitarian Christian, and then plunges into the deep waters of natural theism, also known from Antiquity and the Classics as polytheism or divine substance spread in each of nature's particular elements. He begins to sound more and more classical as he makes further comments about the necessity that man be moral as nature's actions are virtuous and thus beautiful.

On these grounds Emerson states that all heroic individual actions manifest virtue because they maintain universal balance, and since the universe is all we can find deep inside ourselves, nothing we do should harm the universe, otherwise it is suicidal. Emerson's idea is that heroic (human) action is not to be understood as an act of bravery, but as an act of makings good and meaningful sense of our innocence. Everything contrary to this strife for purity is contrary to nature, to human nature, and thus to reason and faith. This uncommon thinking for a Romantic writer is due to Emerson's transcendentalism which gives us a close up into his life and work unevenly molded in comparison with his fellow Romantic writers of the 19th century[6], whose aim was to cause exceptions and not to attain the state of personal inner and external progress in good terms with the universe around us.[7] While not so inclined to technical details as Henry David Thoreau in observing nature, Emerson is nevertheless prone to gathering physical data which help him understand nature in its raw form, that is the rawest (purest) the better. This does not affect though the meaningful purpose (reason) of what is natural, from whence we can only assume that by definition everything unnatural lacks proper reason and equilibrium. Even the

[6] See David Morse, *American Romanticism,* volume *I, From Cooper to Hawthorne. Excessive America* (New York and London: Macmillan, 1987), esp. chapters 3 and 4 on Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman.

[7] See this idea related to Emerson's bio and bibliography in Andrew Ballanthyne, *Architecture theory: a reader in philosophy and culture* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005), 30, and also Robert D. Richardson, *Emerson. The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 485 fwd.

loss of his brothers, his first wife and his first born he thought of as natural, because their fading away was gracious, slow, communitarian, and perhaps they reminded him that everything under the sun will eventually fade away.

Nevertheless, his Romantic spirit reacted in shock when in one special situation the unnatural happened and it suddenly took away a dear friend in the most "tragic" of ways: "The death of Margaret Fuller when she was only forty was a shock to Emerson... Somehow, Margaret's death caught him unprepared and undefended. Her loss drove him in on himself and made him intensely conscious of a side of life he usually tended to rush over. It is easier to call this conscience a sense of tragedy,... rather a sense that something was fundamentally wrong with the universe, an awareness of some elemental lack at the core of things..."[8] A journalist, editor, and transcendentalist herself at the age of forty, Margaret Fuller surely outlived other cultivated and notable women of her time who died from consumption, for instance. But why her death only was a matter of tragedy for Emerson is a fair question. Why did he perceive its circumstances as unnatural and shocking?

For a start, it was probably because Margaret's death in 1850 was caused by a shift in the natural order, by something which should never have happened to mankind. And indeed it was something bigger that one death, an event which foreshadowed the sink of the Titanic, the supreme naval incident that for several years changed the face of the world. But the shipwreck in which Margaret died was perceived as so far from natural that afterwards people had to find a logic in building lighthouses before, and not after they built impressively large ships. The tragedy of Margaret's death (extensively commented on at that time and beyond)[9] cannot be fully grasped, according to the then Romantic American philosophy, without examining the second

[8] Robert D. Richardson, *Emerson. The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 486.

[9] Abigail Rorer and Bradley P. Dean, eds., *Of Woodland Pools, Spring-Holes and Ditches: Excerpts from the Journal of Henry David Thoreau* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), 4.

personality besides Emerson who helped shape transcendentalism by relocating it from "Nature" into the woods.

Thoreau and the Individual: When Death Defies the Universe

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), a Harvard fellow himself, lived the life of a Romantic both in terms of his expenditures (which exceeded his income by far), and in terms of his confrontation with sickness and death (a true testimony of a life in the context of the Industrial Revolution).[10]

Reading Emerson's *Nature* as early as 1837, Thoreau was also passionate about Goethe and the Latin classics like Virgil, an enthusiasm which drove him to scientifically explore the natives of North America and their virgin land.[11] He was equally concerned, as Emerson for instance, with the innocence of heart and mind, which is one of the reasons why he wrote *Walden*[12], and he wrote it in the woods. But in Thoreau, the soul does not enter its state of well-being until its need for morality and "right" is secured and protected by the civil government. However, for what is worth Thoreau himself felt that he was compelled to retrieve into the woods in order to write and, as he said, "to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."[13] To resume, Thoreau's literature cannot be fully grasped without his philosophical system, also known as his transcendental

[10] See the comprising study about Thoreau's life and career written by Andrew Ballanthyne, *Architecture theory: a reader in philosophy and culture* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005), 150, and even more details about him in Robert D. Richardson's biography, *Henry Thoreau: a life of the mind* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Richardson, 1986).

[11] Robert D. Richardson, *Henry Thoreau: a life of the mind* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 1-15.

[12] An association of terms can be made here from Walden, the surrounding placed of Concord, Thoreau's home, to the German "Wald," a word meaning "woodland; of the woods".

[13] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York, NY: Harper, 1950), 118.

philosophy[14] and his naturalist thinking, which just like Emerson's is imbued with an utopian vision of man and nature. In Thoreau, it seems, the result of new experiments and industrial inventions is commensurate with the magnitude of natural disasters and calamities, and both realities match the reaction that a Romantic writer is capable of in times of distress.

Many critics tried to grasp the emphasis of Romantic literature on irreparable realities, but in what Thoreau is concerned, Leonard Neufeld best captured this meaning in his work *The Economist: Henry Thoreau and Enterprise* from 1989, where he compared human natures themselves: "Thoreau is awake and alert; his neighbors are stagnant, asleep, little better than dead... One of his most common accusations is that ordinary men are dead in life, or they might as well be dead, or they are incapable of dying because they have not lived. Thoreau's romantic "half in love" with death deserves study."[15] However, Thoreau behaves like the classics when he uses his skills to observe the inner life of nature in the same habitat where purity and beauty are to be found, namely in the woods. In this respect, Thoreau is a follower of Goethe, who in a nutshell used to say that "we are pantheists by searching nature, polytheists as poets, and ethically monotheists."[16] The relationship between sentiment and contemplation in Thoreau's *Walden* and in his *Journal* is particularly important here, since it shows that he thinks as a classicist whose feelings spread from the observation of natural complexity and form. In other words, this binary relationship is what was called "Thoreau's juxtaposition of his metaphysical musing with the scientific knowledge that triggered the excitement."[17] Moreover, whatever triggered the excitement was the form, which

[14] See a very informed analysis of Thoreau's perspective on life and the world in Alfred I. Tauber, *Henry David Thoreau and the Moral Agency of Knowing* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).
[15] See Leonard Neufeld, in Jack Turner, ed., *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau* (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 4, 34.
[16] This is, *in nuce*, an account of J. W. Goethe's "affair" with nature as a poet, see Jean Livescu, Preface to Goethe, *Opere/Works*, volume 1 (Bucharest: Univers, 1984).
[17] Alfred I. Tauber, *Henry David Thoreau and the Moral Agency of Knowing* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 145.

ultimately drives man to reassess his bond with nature: "How was it when the youth first discovered fishes?... [What interested] mankind in the fish, the inhabitant of the water?... A faint recognition of a living contemporary, a provoking mystery."[18] The conscious nature of this bond with nature expressed in the tenth part of Thoreau's *Journal* from 1858 comes through observation and contemplation only, because the mystery or the divine is peculiar to all natural things.

Consequently, Thoreau's transcendentalism comprises not only natural, brute elements, but also areas where civilization has been installed and became traditional for our civil society. His naturalist taste is nevertheless obstructed by the civil order, in which Thoreau cannot find the natural order that the universe displays, hence his mistrust of ranks of power and human standards that are in breach with natural laws. Thus, in his essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience", sometimes placed as an appendix of *Walden*, Thoreau extensively comments on the peculiarities of the then American government, which "has not the vitality and force of a single living man…, it is a sort of wooden gun to the people themselves. But it is not the less necessary for this…; for the people must have some complicated machinery… to satisfy that idea of government which they have."[19]

Thoreau's idea of "naturality" then does not apply to the state, and his transcendentalism is not an all-encompassing concept. Since man cannot enact his free and moral order into a social law, Thoreau shows, and since all law is a product of state technicalities, man as an individual must oppose whatever "does not keep the country free and… does not educate."[20] As a Romantic writer, Thoreau stands in awe at what "the people" (men) come to enforce as right and wrong and worthy of respect, which is in sharp contrast with the conscience that

[18] Henry David Thoreau, *Journal* X (November 30, 1858) (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1906): 11, 360.
[19] Henry David Thoreau, "On the Duty of Civil Government", in Waldo R. Browne, ed., *Man or the State*? (New York, NY: B. W. Huebsch, 1919): 70-71.
[20] Henry David Thoreau, "On the Duty of Civil Government", in Waldo R. Browne, ed., *Man or the State*? (New York, NY: B. W. Huebsch, 1919): 71.

the individual (man) uses to decide on civil matters. Disobeying the civil order regards extensively the law of men and the intricate and foremost corrupt structure of their government, but also what the law of modern men praises as innovative and bountiful. In this respect, Emerson and Thoreau have their own special place within American Romanticism as they come from Concord, Massachusetts, an expanding commercial route and a promising industrial hub in their time.

Emerson and Thoreau sure had much to see and in part repel in the dawn of this modern era, many things and facts of life which to a natural mind seemed disruptive. Every day the two writers would witness the forceful power of industrialization on their once beautiful town, and also people being proud of their achievement: "A lead pipe manufactory was set up in 1819, a shoe factory was built in 1821..., a group of entrepreneurs had set up the Milldam company in 1821, developing thereby a new commercial district in the center of town,… and the town was also a center for the manufacture of pencils, clocks, hats, bellows, guns, bricks, barrels, and soap... Wagons rumbled through town continually on roads that were both dusty and noisy. Concord was a busy transport hub, and its numerous taverns were full of teamsters. It had six warehouses, a bindery, two saw mills, two grist mills, and a large five-story cotton mill."[21] Thoreau's retreat in the woods for two years before commencing any civil or educational duties and at the peak of the industrial development of his homeland was an act of conscience directed towards his fellow citizens, as well as an act of self-instruction and observation. However, a devoted Romantic spirit would not go on with his retreat for too long: he is an effervescent spirit; he would rather re-enter society with new ideas and new brute forces so as to overturn and invalidate the existing order.

However, the fact that Thoreau does not advocate for a new government to replace the actual ruling, but for a better one instead, says a lot about his intentions as a citizen: he does not wish to abolish

[21] Robert D. Richardson, *Henry Thoreau: a life of the mind* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 15.

the present government, but to improve and educate it, which is as classical a method as it can be. Thoreau and Emerson alike were not the type of Romantics that would constantly complain about any kinds of inconveniences including their own fate and misunderstood genius, and they were mindful of the beneficial nature of progress.

As known, Emerson and Thoreau were loved by their fellow citizens and respected for their education, talent, and stamina manifested in spite of hardship of life and a tradition with consumption. They even had the conduct of a respected fellow Concordians, as Emerson was read by every cultivated American and gathered lots of cultivated men in his philosophy circle at the Emerson home, while Thoreau gave lectures which for all audiences and thus considerably maximized his incomes.[22] They were men of their time and did not oppose development, but given their family and friends dreadful history with consumption, they were also men of prudence aware that their contemporaries could not fight death and disease with more machines and money, or not just yet. For them it was the machine that imposed on people and increased the unknown of the natural order by expanding man's territory, and thus by exposing him to further perils and diseases. For both Thoreau and Emerson, this exploration of the unknown creates an uneven relationship between social and moral, between industry and art, since the machines valued man's physical powers only, leaving his soul behind. The machine (industrialization) works with machines void of sentiments.

Conclusions on the Unknown Death

Thoreau and Emerson's fear of the unknown is likely triggered not necessarily by universal forces, cataclysms and furies: this kind of

[22] See details in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson in Concord. A Memoir Written for the Social Circle in Concord Massachusetts* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004); Bradley P. Dean, and Ronald Wesley Hoag, "Thoreau's Lectures After Walden: An Annotated Calendar", *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1996): 241-362. For Emerson's necrology, see "Concord's Irreparable Loss! The Death and Funeral of Ralph Waldo Emerson", *Concord Freeman* (May 4, 1882).

unknown has an observable source, which is the magnificence of nature and its raw material. These Romantics' fear is located deeply within the human habitat and was caused by people's search for rapid progress and transgression of nature and inner self. The unknown which brings fear is not of the elements. They welcome the elements because they bring them the joy of research and discovery, the return to essence. Of course that, for instance, water is an elements of which man manifests fear, but he that will not adventure into deep waters, but instead will respect and cherish the life embedded in them.

This means that in our large universe (cosmos) another universe (microcosm) exists and from the latter life itself springs: "In one of his last works, *The Dispersion of Seeds...* [Thoreau] recounts having "leveled for an artificial pond at our new cemetery, Sleepy Hollow". The pond was finally completed in 1859, and the following year sported "several small patches of the large yellow and kalmiana lily", a fact which led him to remark, "Thus, even in the midst of death, we are in life." A few lines further we find out that Thoreau loved to see how Nature was rife with life, and nowhere is the life of Nature so rife as in vernal pools. However, Thoreau also insisted that the "universe is wider than our views of it"... "The nature of vernal pools masterfully celebrate not just life, but the larger universe in which we live. In fact, his woodland pools, spring-holes, and ditches are microcosms of that... universe in which energies are constantly transmuted one into another."[23] The same image captured in the presence of the pond (see Walden pond) or at Sleepy Hollow, where life is created at the surface of waters as a microcosm is encountered under the water, and we already learned about Thoreau's passion for ichthyology in that he considers the fish as "another image of God".[24]

[23] See Abigail Rorer, and Bradley P. Dean, eds., *Of Woodland Pools, Spring-Holes and Ditches: Excerpts from the Journal of Henry David Thoreau* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), 3, 4.
[24] Alfred I. Tauber, *Henry David Thoreau and the Moral Agency of Knowing* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 145.

Thus, either naturally created or handmade, ponds, ditches, and pools which are water recipients are not perceived as agents of death, at least not of unwilling death. Yes, deep waters are to be feared, however murders at that time were deemed as exceptional "acts of God", though the voluntary action of suicide was considered common even in the most uncommon places.[25]

The innovative nature of medicine, commerce, manufacture, transportation, food and mine industry, and leisure were particularly exponential as causes of death in both 18th and 19th centuries. They were the real unknown and unnatural factors which caused bereavement and uncertainty both physically and mentally, in spite of the progress they promised especially in the 19th century. They were feared more than cancer and heart failure both because they were everywhere in the news, and they implied a foreign object that brought death instantly rather than slowly. Be it the inoculation formula against new infectious diseases such as smallpox[26], which required many testing on real people, or the new windmills, coal pits, wagons or carts traveling with increasing speed, accidents at work, shipwreck or simply a horseback ride commonly practiced at the time for leisure but with no proper harness classes and skill, they were all perceived as unreliable, surprising, and sudden ways to produce death and suffering.

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[25] See, for details, for details, Tony Lonton, "Vaccination, Windmills, and Other Causes of Death in 18th Century Whitkirk", *Barwicker 92* (2008); also, Lewis R. Aiken, *Dying, death, and bereavement*, fourth edition (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2009). As for the plagues which the Industrial Revolution helped spread, see Tony Lonton, who takes into consideration the varied causes of death in the 18th and 19th centuries especially in England, but broadly representative for all the other parts of the world. Such were the deaths induced by inoculation against smallpox and later on by tuberculosis, the pitfalls, bad roads, accidental drowning caused by lack of swim practice, free-lance horse riding, etc., all of them lowering the then average life span, so that those who died at 60 were thought to have died of old age. In this context, suicide in the 19th century were also associated with the increasing "pressure of industrialization".

[26] Again, Tony Lonton mentions this practice as common in England from as early as 1722, for instance, before the proper means of vaccination were even approved of in 1796.

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