THE SENSE OF VITALITY IN THE WRITING OF HENRY DAVID THOREAU AND HENRY MILLER

by
David F. Clarke

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AUTHOR: David Fisher Clarke, B.A. (Exeter)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. J. Brasch

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: The thesis involves a comparison of the philosophy and art of Henry David Thoreau and Henry Miller, with specific attention to the concept of vitality in their work.

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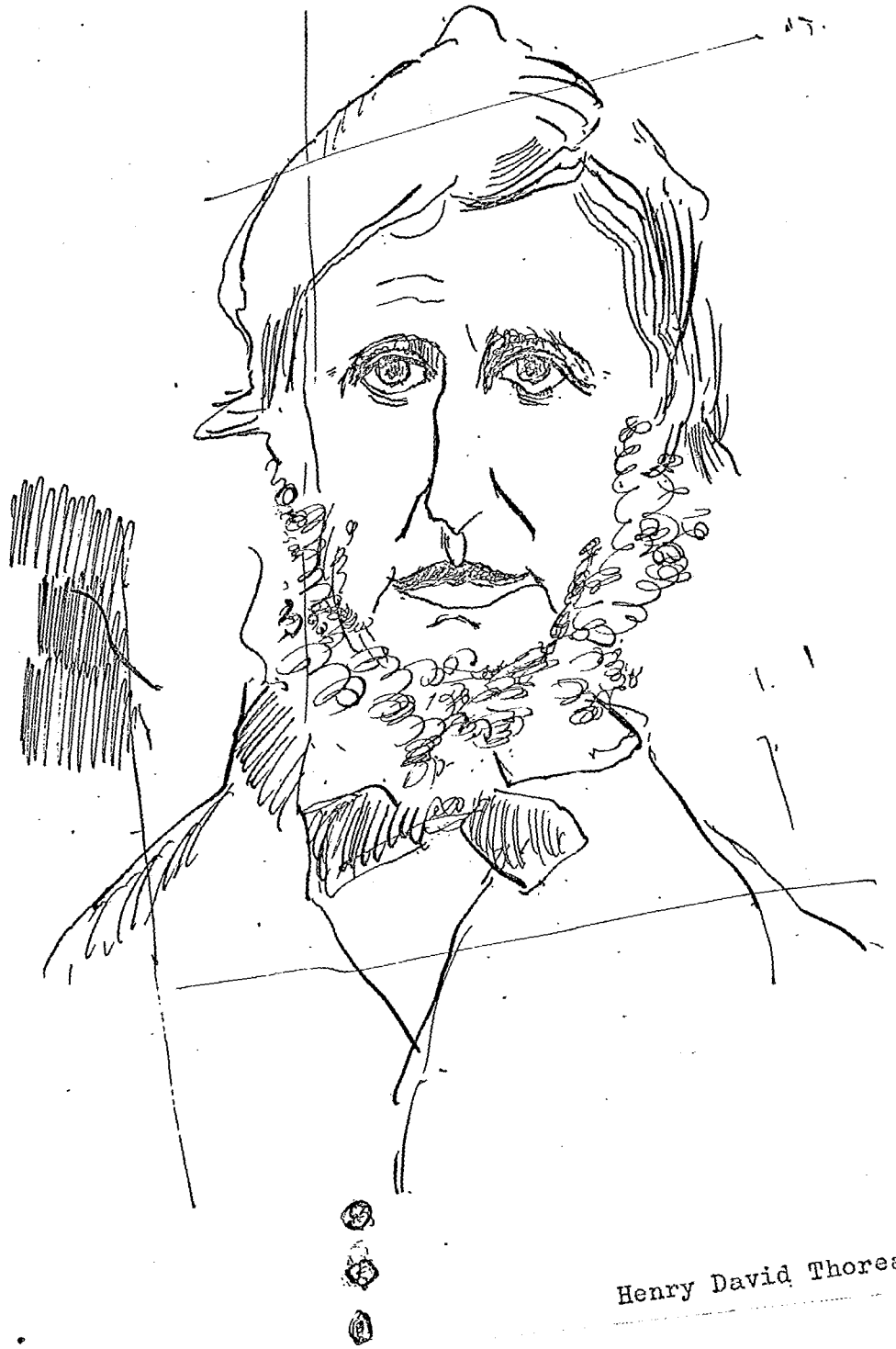

Henry David Thoreau

Henry Miller

Preface on Method

This study of Thoreau and Miller has directed itself towards the manifestation of a particular phenomenon in their work, that is, the expression of vitality and rebellion in the face of widespread despair, which is found throughout their work. There has therefore been no isolated study of any particular work, and reference has been made to those books which are seen as most helpful to the topic in hand. Thus A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers features considerably more than Walden in the discussion of Thoreau's philosophy, for the reason that Thoreau is more articulate on more issues in this work. Likewise, reference to a variety of Miller's works has superceded any attempt to analyse one in particular. This method has seemed fully appropriate to the writers in question, since the body of their writing consists, essentially, of one extended work, rather than of distinct and individual parts.

It should perhaps be noted that the drawings incorporated into the thesis have a partly illustrative function, but for the most part are simply decorative.

Introduction

The fact that Henry Miller wrote an essay on the subject of Henry David Thoreau[1] does not, in itself, justify a linking of these two names, such as this thesis proposes. And yet the fact that Miller wrote such an essay is a clear indication of the close affinity he feels with the earlier writer, for he takes no pains to conceal that he writes about other authors only when he does feel this kind of affinity. The Time of the Assassins[2], a study of Rimbaud, is filled with observations concerning the similarity between Miller and the French poet. The same can be discerned in Miller's work on D.H.Lawrence[3], as well as in the essay on Thoreau. Part of the intention of this thesis is therefore to examine the extent to which Miller's link with Thoreau is borne out by the evidence of his writing in general.

A comparison between Thoreau and Miller is perhaps surprising in the light of their apparent dissimilarity. They emerge, a century apart, from radically differing backgrounds, and are certainly of distinctly contrasting natures; but despite this, on

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1. Henry Miller, "Henry David Thoreau", from Stand Still Like the Hummingbird,(New Directions Paperbook, 1962).
2. Henry Miller, The Time of the Assassins, (New Directions, 1962).
3. For example, Miller's essay "The Universe of Death", from The Cosmological Eye, (New Directions, 1939).

closer examination, a real and unmistakable connection between both their philosophy and their art can be discovered. They are, in the first place, distinctively un-American in many ways, belonging rather to a tradition which is far removed from the central, and almost legendary driving force of American society, namely economic advancement. Both profoundly disillusioned by the pattern of American 'progress', and its objectives, they sought, through a process of personal exploration, to define their vision of a possible alternative. Their work will therefore be discussed, principally, from the point of view of their reaction to the prevailing system. Their writing is seen as representing a direct confrontation with what Thoreau calls "quiet desperation"[4], and Miller terms "the thrall of utter annihilation"[5], and constituting a demand for vitality and awareness in times of sterility and stagnation.

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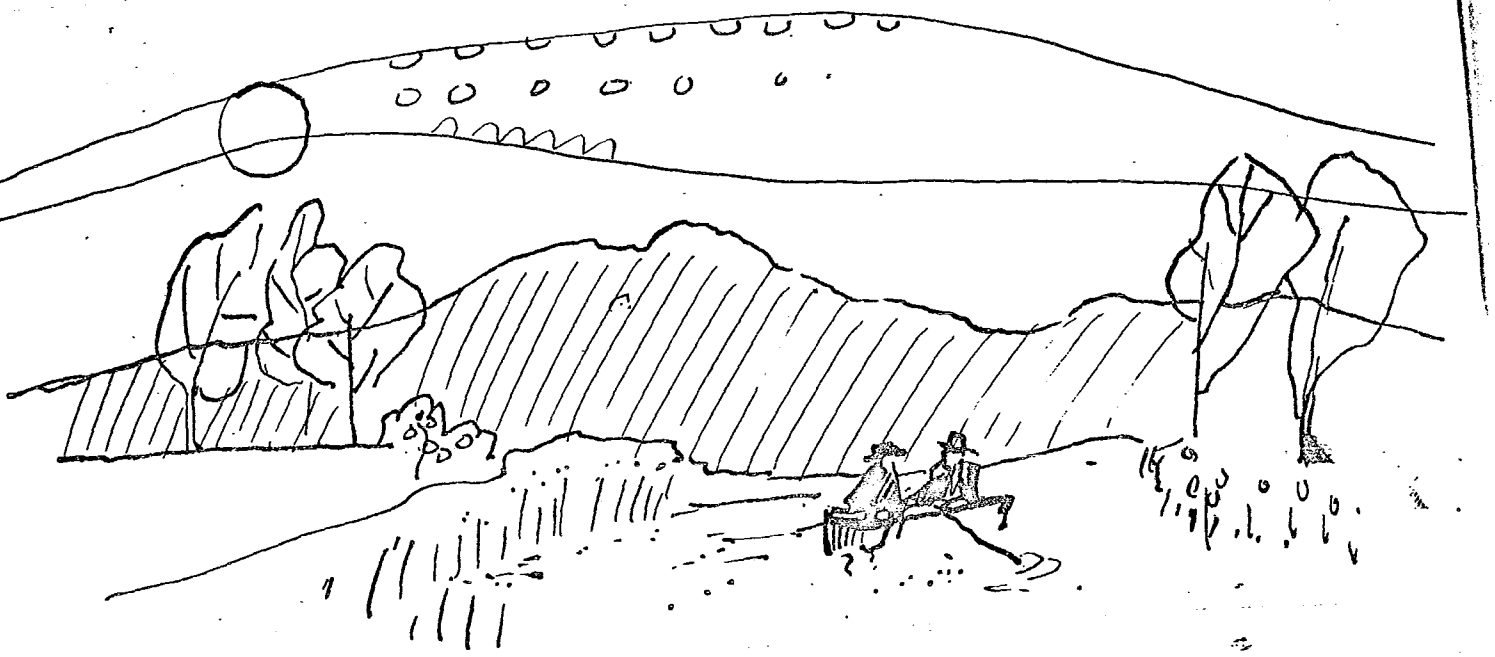
4. H.D.Thoreau, Walden, (Signet Classic edition, 1963), p. 10.
5. The Time of the Assassins, p. ix.



CHAPTER ONE

The Journey.

"To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive."

R.L.Stevenson, "An apology for Idlers".

"I have travelled a good deal in Concord..."

H.D.Thoreau, Walden.

"The most tremendous voyages are sometimes taken without moving from the spot."

Henry Miller, The World of Sex.

Henry David Thoreau, it is well-known, travelled relatively little during his life, only seldom departing from his native Concord, and yet his reputation as a traveller is quite firmly established[1], and is a significant aspect of his writing. The titles of a number of his works, such as "Essay on Walking", "A Walk to Watchuset", and A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, suggest an idea of continuous movement, albeit somewhat leisurely. His attitude towards the small journeys he made was one of high adventure, as if he were trying, on a minute scale, to maintain the mythical and epical idea of the heroic voyage of discovery.[2] A romantic enthusiasm for the

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1. See, for example, John Christie, Thoreau as World Traveller, (Columbia Univ. Press, New York, 1965). He notes, in Chapter 1, the position of Thoreau's A Week on the Concord within the current vogue for travel books.

2. A number of writers have treated the subject of Thoreau's importance as a mythic figure. F.O.Mathiesson in American Renaissance, (Oxford University Press, 1941). discusses the myth of the frontier in the chapter "Man in the Open Air", and later, in "Full Circle", he examines Thoreau's recreation of the basic myth of the union of work and culture. A further full discussion of Thoreau and the frontier myth can be found in Edwin Fussell's Frontier, (Princeton, 1965).

myth is seen in the following passage:

> "We should go forth on the shortest walk, perchance, in the spirit of stirring adventure, never to return, prepared to send back our embalmed hearts only as relics to our desolate kingdom."[3]

The extent to which Thoreau saw this minor adventuring as a true demonstration of freedom is revealed in the next sentence:

> "If you have paid your debts and made your will and settled all your affairs, and are a free man, then you are ready for a walk."[4]

Henry Miller, likewise an inveterate wanderer, interpreted such a 'walk' on a somewhat larger scale, but his attitude to travel as a process of liberation and discovery was substantially the same as Thoreau's. Miller was a world traveller in a more literal sense, undertaking a prolonged stay in Europe, beginning in 1930. He thus formed the rearguard of the vast body of American expatriate artists, which includes Stephen Crane, Henry James, T.S.Eliot, as well as Gertrude Stein's 'Lost Generation'

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3. "Essay on Walking", Writings, Vol. 5, (Ams Press edition, 1968), p. 206.
4. Ibid., p. 206.

of the Twenties. Miller sought, like them, a freedom from the background in which he was raised, in the hope of realizing his artistic vision surrounded by the cultural legacy of Europe. But finally, as with Thoreau, it was the act of moving to another place, the initiation of a voyage of discovery, which was the vitally significant fact for Miller.

Thoreau's most important travel book, in the literal sense, is A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers[5] (1849), and Miller's is The Colossus of Maroussi[6](1941). Both these works have been overshadowed somewhat by the greater notoriety of the authors' more discussed volumes, Walden (1854), and Tropic of Cancer[7](1932). A Week and The Colossus are a particularly useful starting point, since they indicate the way that both authors have used a journey as an allegory for their own spiritual progress.[8] A Week was written in 1845 while Thoreau was living beside

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5. H.D.Thoreau, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, (Signet Classic edition, 1961).
6. Henry Miller, The Colossus of Maroussi, (Penguin edition, 1964).
7. Henry Miller, Tropic of Cancer, (Grove Press, 1961).
8. The journey, or voyage, as a structural motif and allegorical method is, of course, not uncommon in literature. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress provides a good example of just such a usage, and Gulliver's Travels employs a literal voyage of exploration as an introduction to a complex allegory. Examples of the same concept in American Literature can be found in Melville's Moby Dick and Twain's Huckleberry Finn. The latter is particularly comparable with A Week, since the voyage also takes place upon a river.

Walden Pond, and ostensibly it deals with a trip made by Thoreau and his brother, John, during September, 1839[9]; is in this sense a travel book, and each of its seven sections is structured around the progress that the two brothers made along the rivers of the title. Thoreau describes the scenes they pass, an occasional character they meet, and also spends considerable space discussing the historical legends attached to certain spots. This last aspect emerges as a particularly strong element in the book, and causes the American critic Leslie Fiedler to say that:

> "Thoreau, a hundred years before Hart Crane, tried to create a handbook of American mythology."[10]

The historical aspect of the book is certainly important, as are the extensive passages of natural description, but what is finally most significant is the undertaking of the journey itself.

A Week is essentially an account of a young man and a particular emotional experience. Thoreau's

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9. Thoreau and his brother undertook a journey on the Concord and Merrimack rivers in 1839, and on June 11 1840 Thoreau began to expand the notes he had made during the trip. His brother's death in 1842 caused him to expand the work further, until it became a full-length book, which was finally published in 1849 by James Monroe and Co. In its final form, only about 40 percent of the book actually deals with the events of the journey, and the remainder consists of essays, poems and long speculative passages, thus giving it, as a travel book, an unusual aspect.

10. Leslie A. Fiedler, The Return of the Vanishing American, (New York, 1968), pp. 104-5.

brother, John, the unnamed companion of the voyage, died not long after the trip took place, and the fact that the book ends with the coming of autumn, indicates very specifically the elegaic quality of the work. Nature serves as the vehicle for Thoreau's allegory, which, indeed, extends far beyond the reference to his personal loss. A clue to the substance of Thoreau's first book can be found in Emerson's essay "Nature":

> "...good writing and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories. This imagery is spontaneous. It is the blending of experience with the present action of the mind. It is proper creation."[11]

A Week is a voyage, but entirely in the allegorical sense suggested by Emerson's statement. It is a journey into thought, into the relation of thought to experience, into the relationship of man to nature, and, finally, a probing into the transcendental connections between all things. It is a man's journey into discovery represented as an exploration of nature, and the intention of the voyage is to establish a code of behaviour and belief. The beginning of the book finds the traveller setting himself loose on the current of the river, and opening

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11. Emerson, "Nature", from The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, (Random House Modern Library edition, 1950), p. 17.

his mind to all possibilities:

> "I had often stood on the banks of the Concord, watching the lapse of the current, an emblem of all progress, following the same law with the system, with time, and all that is made... the chips and weeds and occasional logs and stems of trees that floated past, fulfilling their fate, were objects of singular interest to me, and at last I resolved to launch myself on its bosom and float whither it would bear me."[12]

The implication is clear that Thoreau, also, will fulfill his fate, at least partially, through his journey up the rivers.

Throughout A Week there is a continued indication that the journey implies travel in the broadest sense, and will by no means be restricted by the actual physical surroundings. The voyage is into a different world as yet undiscovered, where a new assessment will have to be made of even the commonest phenomena:

> "The sight of this tree reminded us that we had reached a strange new land to us."[13]

The images of exploration into such a world are sustained throughout the book, and the river itself becomes a symbol

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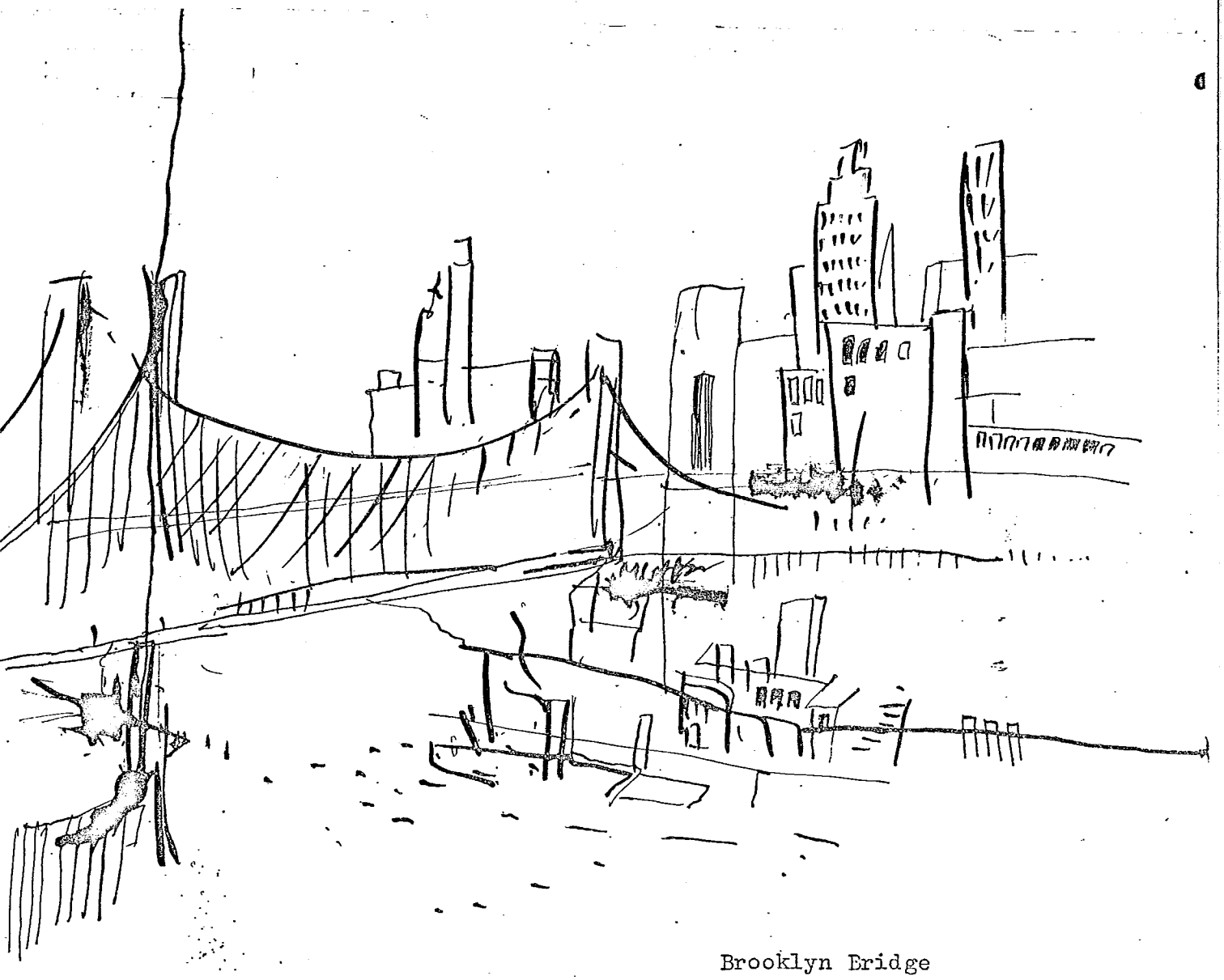
12. A Week, p. 23.
13. Ibid., p. 140.



Brooklyn Bridge

of the means by which understanding will be reached--"The river was the only key which could unlock its maze."[14] In this way, the river serves very much the same function as the road running through Pilgrim's Progress, and will conduct the traveller into experience and realization. The allegorical use of the journey as found in A Week is extended to Thoreau's other works, although sometimes the literal conception of travelling is not such a central motif. Walden does not consist of an actual journey, other than minor excursions around the pond, but in this book, the allegorical significance of the exploratory process is all the more distinct as a result. The heroic quest as a mythical basis for Thoreau's travelling is reasserted in the more static Walden:

> "Long ago I lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle dove, and am still on their trail. Many are the travellers I have spoken concerning them, describing their tracks and what calls they answered to."[15]

Such a process of searching is essential to the structure of Walden, and on the literal level, it applies to Thoreau's incessant cataloguing and measuring of the

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14. A Week, p. 79.
15. Walden, p. 16.

plants and animals he finds around him. The fact that this constitutes a discovery in the metaphysical sense as well, seems excellently summarized by the allegory which Thoreau tells in the concluding section of Walden:

> "We read that the traveller asked the boy if the swamp before him had a hard bottom. The boy replied that it had. But presently the traveller's horse sank in up to the girths, and he observed to the boy, 'I thought you said that this bog had a hard bottom?' 'So it has', answered the latter, 'but you have not got half way to it yet!'"[16]

That this allegory occurs at the very end of the book seems to suggest its particular relevance to the theme of Walden. Thoreau has in fact consistently transformed his experiences into allegories of spiritual revelation in just the terms suggested by this quotation. The image of the bog is one which recurs in various forms, to demonstrate Thoreau's idea that life is a depth which must be plumbed. His early statement of intention to "live deep and suck out all the marrow of life"[17] is conceived with the same images of exploration in depth, and his practical measurings of the pond itself reveal his urge

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16. Walden, p. 219.
17. Ibid., p. 66.

towards the Emersonian desire to find significance in the appearances of nature. At the conclusion of the passage describing his plumbing of the depths at Walden, he makes his example explicit:

> "What if all ponds were shallow? Would it not react on the minds of men? I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol. While men believe in the infinite, some ponds will be thought to be bottomless."[18]

Thoreau's meticulous approach to his study of natural phenomena, and his investigation of microscopic details, are an essential part of his extended allegory, which at the same moment sought to discover the depths of the pond and also prove it bottomless. But the most significant aspect of Thoreau's allegorical journey is that it represents a ceaseless response to the world around him and a vital awareness of its significance. The fact that nothing is too trivial to be ignored, is the essence of Thoreau's optimism, which could find life and vigour in every aspect of life;"even", he writes,"if it prove to be mean".[19]

The Colossus of Maroussi starts out, like A Week, as a simple account of a journey. Miller left

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18. Walden, p. 191.
19. Ibid., p. 66.

France for Greece in August 1939, and toured there for a few months gathering his impressions as he went. The collection of these impressions, which constitutes the book, is as much a working out of Miller's spiritual position as A Week is Thoreau's. The method of both his thought and his art is demonstrated in The Colossus, as Miller sets down his reaction to the Greek landscape. Like Thoreau, he uses nature as the central link or starting point, and builds a complex philosophical structure upon this foundation. The process found in The Colossus is one of free thought association, where Miller gives expression to his wildest fantasies and his deepest beliefs. "The blending of experience with the present action of the mind"[20] is complete, as Miller's discourse wanders in all directions around a particular scene which has inspired his fantasy. His description and definition of Saturn, for example (p. 106), recalls the medieval, encyclopaedic approach to the validity, in literature, of almost any information. With Greece as his starting point, Miller ultimately defines his vision of what civilization should be. The value of The Colossus as a travel book is significantly less than that of A Week, so entirely personal is the quality

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20. See note 11.

of Miller's picture. The trip, most importantly, stimulated his awareness of the contrast between American society and a more primitive environment, where values are, he believes, simpler, and therefore more natural. Miller assesses the significance of the journey in terms of spiritual or metaphysical evolution:

> "Other men are quicker to coordinate vision and action. But the point is that in Greece I finally achieved that coordination. I became deflated, restored to proper human proportions, ready to accept my lot and prepared to give of all that I had received."[21]

It is thus not so much the fact of physical movement which is important to Miller, as the introductory quotation from The World of Sex[22] would suggest, so much as the heightened response to the natural surroundings.

The process of The Colossus is therefore one of experience and analysis, and this is in fact the method of all Miller's work. Tropic of Cancer is perhaps the most structured example of a voyage into spiritual awareness, and the type of journey found in this book is well defined by a passage from The World of Sex, which contains a number of statements about Miller's approach

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21. The Colossus, p. 241.

22. Henry Miller, The World of Sex, (Grove Press paperback, 1965), p. 85.

to his work:

> "It is our dream life which offers a key to the possibilities in store for us. In dream it is the Adamic man, one with the stars, who comes to life, who roams through past present and future with equal freedom."[23]

This may well be the dream life which Miller is describing here, but his writing has fulfilled this dream to the extent that he has recreated in his semi-fictional alter-ego, the figure of the Adamic man. The journey represented in Cancer assumes mythic proportions, and Miller is quite explicit concerning this dimension of his work:

> "And as I ruminated, it began to grow clear to me, the mystery of his pilgrimage, the flight which the poet makes over the face of the earth and then, as if he had been ordained to re-enact a lost drama, the heroic descent to the very bowels of the earth.."[24]

Miller in fact mythologizes himself and his journey to a greater extent than Thoreau, notably in his more conscious conception of his hero in specifically heroic terms. He is still essentially the common man undertaking a representative journey, as Thoreau is, but at times

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23. The World of Sex, p. 115.
24. Cancer, p. 163.

he identifies himself with various established myths. He evokes the figure of Dante in hell as a parallel to his own situation,[25] and becomes Saint Paul just a little later in the same book.(p. 221). But most significant is his adoption of a semi-Messianic posture, in support of his experience of suffering. He groups the three books Sexus, Plexus and Nexus under the title of The Rosy Crucifixion[26], since an integral part of Miller's voyage is the crucifixion or martyrdom he endures in the course of his development. The fact that he is not destroyed by these events is strongly in support of the Christian myth, and in Miller's own terms, it constitutes a dramatic representation of his belief that out of death will spring life. The conquest, in this sense, of the power of death, recalls the positive assertion of natural regenerative forces at the end of A Week on the Concord. The movement of Cancer is towards a direct confrontation with the fact of death, which occurs towards the middle of the book. At this point Miller is in a situation such as that which faced Teufelsdröchk in Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, where suicide or improvement are the only alternatives. Having passed this moment of possible extinction, Miller becomes reconciled with the

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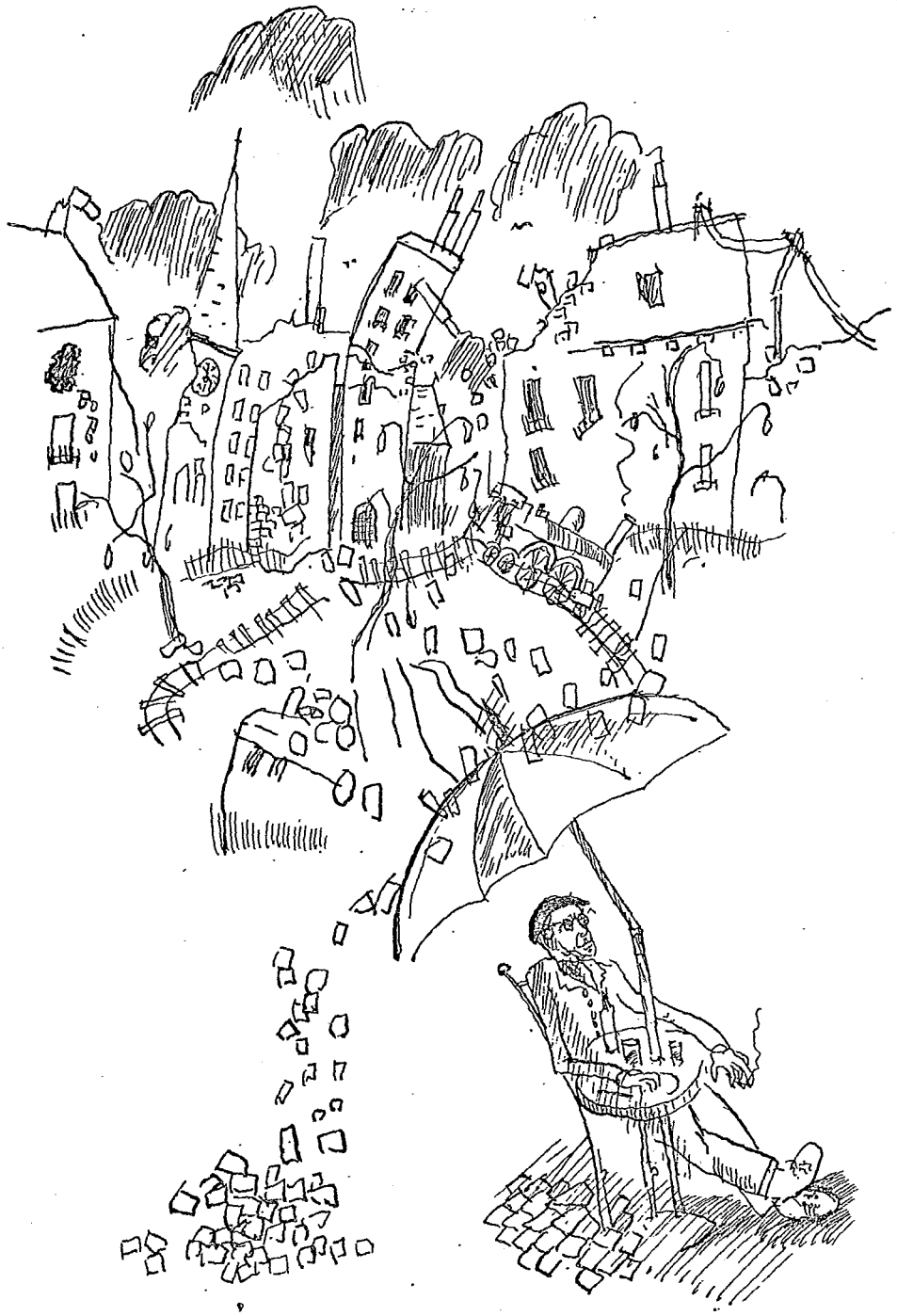
25. Henry Miller, Tropic of Cancer, (Grove Press, 1961), pp. 207-8.

26. Sexus, Plexus and Nexus, all from Grove Press, 1965.

facts of his existence, finally achieving a climax of peace and stillness as he contemplates the ceaseless movement of the Seine. Although his journey has ceased for a while, the impression is that the lull is only temporary, and his wanderings will begin again before too long.

In conclusion, two points concerning the motif of the journey should be emphasized. Firstly, it provides a structure or a framework for almost all works of both Thoreau and Miller, and, secondly, it constitutes a kinetic demonstration of their vital approach to life. The incessant movement of the voyage is set against the stagnation which they both found to pervade the environment in which they lived. The extent to which Thoreau and Miller articulate further upon the necessity of a vital response to life, and the method by which they feel this can be achieved, will be the concern of the remaining chapters of this thesis. It will be shown that the central line of their thinking and of their art focuses upon the confrontation and destruction of the forces of stagnation and death.



CHAPTER TWO

The Anarchist

1.

"Perpetual devotion to what a man calls his business, is only to be sustained by perpetual neglect of many other things."

R.L.Stevenson, "An Apology for Idlers".

"...and yet my loitering is not without defense."

H.D.Thoreau, Journal.

"People regarded me as lazy and shiftless, but on the contrary I was an exceedingly active individual."

Henry Miller, Tropic of Capricorn.

Probably the most popularly held view of Thoreau is of a man who escaped from the world and lived in solitary self-sufficiency on the shore of Walden Pond, and it is certainly true that Thoreau did much to establish this picture of himself.[1] His choice of prefatory quotations for his Journal, relating as they do to the state of being alone, suggest that to be quite solitary was perhaps his sole intention, and that the best of life was to be found away from the annoyance of company. But the integrity of the myth associated with Thoreau, of the man alone, facing up bravely to the forces of nature, is substantially

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1. Almost all studies of Thoreau involve reference to his apparant withdrawal. See, for example, The Necessary Earth, (Univ. of Texas Press, 1964), by Wilson O. Clough, which contains a lengthy discussion of the idea of solitude in American literature.

undermined when considerations of a man's public duty are entertained, and this problem has caused considerable concern among critics. The question is whether such a removal from established society constitutes a form of anarchy which results in sterility, or whether it can be seen as part of a vital response to the world around.

Emerson was one of the earliest to make direct criticism of Thoreau's way of life, and he censured his friend's solitary tendencies, along with those of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Emerson decided early that there is a definite correlation between virtue and public action, and he felt that the attitude which led a man to withdraw himself from society, to become introverted, is essentially immoral. Mark Van Doren, writing much later, in 1916, maintains this line of criticism, bringing to attention, once again, a part of Emerson's complaint:

> "Plato and Shakespeare were introspective, and learned to know the world in private; but the world they learned to know was large and important. They studied themselves along with the rest of the world...Thoreau studied himself alone...Thoreau's introspection was sterile insofar as it was a brooding

> revery of self-contemplation rather than an effort to measure and connect and check himself by reference to things beyond himself."[2]

This severe condemnation states that Thoreau's apparent withdrawal from the world ammounted to a renunciation of it, and clearly supports Emerson's view that a refusal to act publicly is not only immoral, but sterile.

It is true that there is considerable evidence to reinforce the idea that Thoreau was simply out to demonstrate the ability of a man to live on his own, and that he need not endorse the ways of contemporary society by his presence within it. There is also much evidence to substantiate the criticism that Thoreau cared little for the ideas of involvement and public duty. Emerson himself was firmly rooted within the Puritan ethic,[3] which involved,

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2. Mark Van Doren, "Henry David Thoreau. A critical study", (Boston, 1916; New York, Russell and Russell, 1961), p. 112.

3. Emerson wrote in his Journal in 1851 the famous observation that "Thoreau wants a little ambition in his mixture. Fault of this, instead of being head of American engineers, he is captain of a huckleberry party." This in many ways indicates his stricter attitude to how time may be usefully spent, and how there must always be an awarness of the moral purpose behind each action. His assertion in "Nature" that "I cannot greatly honor minuteness in details, so long as there is no hint to explain the relation between things and thoughts", also seems to imply some sort of criticism of Thoreau's extensive and often undirected cataloguing of natural phenomena. A futher interesting comparison of Emerson's strict moral attitude to nature, and Thoreau's vaguer form of Transcendentalism, can be found in Porte's book Emerson and Thoreau, (Wesleyan Univ., 1966), chapter five. Porte demonstrates here a possible reason for the break with Emerson, which Thoreau describes in the Journal. (Porte, p. 96.) Santayana, in Porte's words, criticized Emerson for only being concerned with the "poetic rendering of an inherited ethical system".

notably, the idea of a good day's work followed by a well-earned rest. There could be little more shocking to the Puritan concept of a good day's work, and, indeed, a good life's work, than one of Thoreau's opening premises in Walden:

> "For more than five years I maintained myself thus solely by the labour of my hands, and I found that, by working six weeks in a year, I could meet all the expenses of living."[4]

Thoreau's threat to the Puritan status quo is further demonstrated when he elaborates upon the above idea:

> "In short, I am convinced, both by faith and experience, that to maintain one's self on this earth is not a hardship, but a pastime, if we live simply and wisely...It is not necessary that a man should earn his living by the sweat of his brow, unless he sweats easier than I do."[5]

Examples may be multiplied to provide instances of where Thoreau appears to be establishing a cosy, self-centred existence, far away from the complications and possible responsibilities of the world at large. This is, indeed, an extremely significant aspect of Thoreau's writing, and the

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4. Walden, p. 51.
5. Ibid., p. 53.

full meaning of this apparent dissociation will be examined in Chapter three. For the present, suffice it to say that there is a vein of apparent irresponsibility running through his work, a vein which is distinctly contrary to the ethical pattern of New England at that period, which could not readily accept such expressions as the following:

> "As for Doing-good, that is one of the professions which are full. Moreover, I have tried it fairly, and, strange as it may seem, am satisfied that it does not agree with my constitution."[6]

The similarity between Miller's attitude to a man's duty, to his responsibility to things beyond himself, is strikingly comparable to Thoreau's, and often it has stood as the final evaluation of his work. George Orwell's appraisal of Miller's first two novels points the comparison very precisely between a totally involved writer, and one who does not seem to care for anything much at all. Orwell, of course, belongs entirely to the socially-aware consciousness of the Thirties, when art without a distinct socialistic or communistic purpose, was no art at all. Miller's first two books, Tropic of Cancer and Black Spring[7],

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6. Walden, p. 54.
7. Henry Miller, Black Spring, (Grove Press, 1963).

appearing at this significant juncture, seemed to Orwell to be completely out of time. He decides, delightfully enough, that "there is something rather curious in being Whitman in the Nineteen-Thirties",[8] for when Whitman wrote, he says, there was plenty of time for a romantic egotism, a voluptuous 'joie de vivre', and most importantly, for acceptance:

> "In mid-nineteenth century America, men felt themselves free and equal, were free and equal, so far as this is possible outside a society of pure Communism."[9]

Orwell's naivety concerning this period of American history is reflected in his bemused attitude to the Miller he met in a Paris café in 1937:

> "What most intrigued me about him was to find that he felt no interest in the Spanish war whatever. He merely told me in forcible terms that to go to Spain at that moment was the act of an idiot."[10]

Orwell is decidedly most concerned about Miller's irresponsibility, and he titles the essay, from which the above quotation is taken, after an idea of Miller's, found in

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8. George Orwell, "Inside the Whale", from Collected Essays, (Secker and Warburg, London, 1961), p. 125.

9. Ibid., p. 125.

10. Ibid., pp. 149-50.

Max and the White Phagocytes.[11] "Inside the Whale", Orwell's heading, is used by Miller as a symbol of escape, and the English writer siezes upon this concept as a pivot for his criticism.

It is true, however, that in Max there can be found various expressions of the tendency to withdrawal, as well as a denial of any duty to the external world. Miller seems, at times, to be consumed with an overwhelming egotism which flouts conventional ideas of morality and responsibility. Criticism of this kind of behaviour did not end with Orwell and the passing of the responsible Thirties, for even Fiedler, a radical in so many of his views, grasps the vision of the indolent Miller loafing about Paris, continually bumming for his next meal. Fiedler also makes Miller's attitude grounds for a critical standpoint:

> "The man who disavows duty, work, and conscience--those moral burdens which no earlier writers chafed against without daring to slough--who really acts as if the world owes him a living, is likely to be loaded down with a new burden of obligation and gratitude, unless he can laugh his benfactors to scorn. It is this desperate laughter, the last weapon against the last

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11. Henry Miller, Max and the White Phagocytes, (Obelisk Press, Paris, 1938).

> temptation to duty, the temptation to say thanks to those who sponsor a dutiless life, which rings through Miller's work."[12]

Fiedler's observation, heavily loaded as it is with 'responsible' words, reflects very clearly the contrast between Miller's attitude to duty and an essentially Puritanical one. Like Thoreau, Miller is fully capable of rejecting the idea of a work ethic which demands an obviously constructive use of time, and insists that good must be publicly seen to be done. He says, in Capricorn, that "work meant nothing to me",[13] but he is not content to leave the statement as applying to him alone. He wishes to reveal the futility of simply performing a day's work as a reflex action, when, he feels, it is simply not necessary to behave in this fashion in order to support life:

> "I want to prevent as many men as possible from pretending that they have to do this or that because they must earn a living. It is not true."[14]

By denouncing the traditional ethic of work, Miller is following Thoreau's idea of creating time in which other things can be done. He is creating, in effect, more time

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12. Leslie A. Fiedler, Waiting For the End, (New York, 1964), p. 43.
13. Capricorn, p. 318.
14. Ibid., p. 307.

which can be wasted, and more time in which the ego may assert itself and discover itself. There is then the leisure to undertake a voyage of personal exploration, which, as will be seen in the next chapter, is essential to both authors' conception of what contributes to a vital, healthy attitude towards life. But most significantly, as far as the question of anarchy is concerned, Thoreau's and Miller's apparant rejection of public affairs and conventions, is but the first stage in their development as revolutionaries. Their withdrawal must be interpreted, finally, as an act of dissent, and a demonstration to the effect that mere 'acceptance',as Orwell calls it, was not in fact the correct way. Their's was not merely a passive, frightened escape from the world of reality, to the romantic environments of Walden Pond or bohemian Paris. It was, on the contrary, the means to an active, and on occasions, an aggressive anarchy, which sought to upset the established framework of society, as well as to envigorate its individual members.

II.

> "Anarchism then, really stands for the liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion, the liberation of human body from the dominion of property, and the liberation from the shackles and restraint of government."
>
> Emma Goldman, Anarchy.

Despite Orwell's idyllic picture of mid-nineteenth century America, it appears from the writings of Thoreau that all was not freedom and equality, and even at that date, progress, as a concept, was apparantly not endorsed by everyone. Progress for its own sake meant nothing at all to Thoreau, and the material advantages which progress brought with it, he began to denounce early in his life. He wrote the following at the time of his graduation in 1837:

> "We must look chiefly for the origin of the commercial spirit, and the power that still cherishes and sustains it, in a blind and unmanly love of wealth...let men, true to their natures, cultivate the moral affections, lead manly and independant lives, let them make riches the means and not the end of existence, and we shall hear no

> more of the commercial spirit. The sea will not stagnate, the earth will be as green as ever, and the air pure."[15]

All modern life was too complicated, too artificial and too property-orientated for Thoreau, and it was as a reaction to this world that he wrote. A Week and Walden are practical demonstrations of a method of living, and within their structure, Thoreau includes many categorical statements, and even whole essays, denouncing the present state of affairs. People, he claims, have fallen asleep in their pusuit of luxury, and have buried themselves alive in their costly houses. The house and the tomb are both found as the basis for extended metaphors in Walden, and Thoreau's definition of what a house really should be, reveals, in many ways, his whole attitude towards the stultifying forms of modern life. The section of Walden entitled "House-Warming", elaborates upon this theme, and demonstrates that no longer can friendly hearths be found in the American countryside, and the well-built walls of the structure serve not only to keep the strangers out, but to shut the occupants away from the outside world. The hut Thoreau built on the shore at Walden symbolized a rejection of this style of living

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15. Writings, Vol. 6, p. 9.

in its unpretentious simplicity.

Being less concerned with material prosperity, Thoreau trusts that the individual will then be able to expand his consciousness, and, indeed, wake from the deep sleep into which he has fallen. "Will you live, or will you be embalmed?"[16] he exclaims in Walden, and on various other occasions invokes the idea of sleep or death to give force to his idea that awareness has almost ceased to exist:

> "Why level downward to our dullest perception always, and praise that as common sense? The commonest sense is the sense of men asleep, which they express by snoring."[17]

Thoreau's virulent attack upon materialism and the unhealthy preoccupations of modern society is well integrated into the structure of A Week and Walden, but on occasions, the doctrine is extracted, to become a concentrated statement of opinion. "Life Without Principle", which developed from a lecture given in 1854, is such an example of unconcealed didacticism, and is perhaps the briefest statement of Thoreau's ideas contained in one place. The essay reveals the public-spirited revolutionary

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16. Walden, p. 12.
17. Ibid., pp. 215-6.

in full view, and is certainly a curious document in the light of Emerson's criticism concerning withdrawal.[18]

It is not the place here to examine the political significance of Thoreau's most famous essay, "Upon the Duty of Civil Disobedience",[19] (1849), or another of his spirited short pieces, entitled "A Plea for Captain John Brown".[20] Suffice it to say that these, and a number of other documents, reveal Thoreau to be more than peripherily involved with the central issues of his day. Less than seventy years after the Declaration of Independance, Thoreau already wanted a confirmation of the vows therein established, together with a reorientation of those vows as necessity dictated. The most important aspect of his argument is that against the stagnation of the unquestioned tradition established in 1776. Thoreau demands a greater awareness of the need for new requirements, as well as of the fact that established ideas may soon become obsolete. Such change and flux Thoreau sees as inevitable and beneficial, for to him they represent the forces of life in action. His anarchy sought to produce just such a state of flux in the mind of others, and subsequently some change in

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18. With reference to this matter of whether Thoreau's stay in the woods consisted of an escape from public matters, it is worth noting an essay by Max Lerner, entitled "Thoreau: No Hermit",(from Ideas Are Weapons, cop. Lerner, 1939). Lerner mentions Thoreau's anti-Puritan tendencies, and observes that "His (Thoreau's) hermit-like individualism may easily be over-emphasized.

19. H.D.Thoreau, "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience", from the Signet Classic edition of Walden.

20. First delivered as an address in Concord Town Hall, Oct. 1859.

long-established principles:

> "This American government--what is it but a tradition, though a recent one, endeavouring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity, but each instant losing some of its integrity? It has not the vitality and force of a single living man."[21]

The government, like the mass of people, is already in an advanced state of stagnation, and is defending ideas directly contrary to the original Declaration. This corruption of the natural process of evolution where change must be accomodated, is fundamental to Thoreau's outspoken anarchism. His criticism of established Christianity, which to many was the most shocking part of A Week, is likewise based upon what he sees as the blind continuation of a belief, for no better reason than that it has always been believed. It is the calm, unquestioning acceptance of "the everlasting hills"[22] of Christian dogma which aroused his wrath:

> "Most people with whom I talk, men and women even of some originality and genius, have their scheme of the universe all cut and dried--very dry, I assure you to

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21. "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience", p. 222.
22. A Week, p. 68.

> hear, dry enough to burn, dry-rotted and powder-post, methinks,--"[23]

The image of "cut and dried" is typical of Thoreau's expression, and is of the same derivation as the "brain-rot" he speaks of in Walden.[24] The sap must be restored to the vital function of thought, and anarchy is a means to this end.

Miller's anarchy is based for the most part on the same premises as Thoreau's, and with a further one hundred years of 'progress'to deal with, it is not surprising to find the renewed attack upon the American way of life to be even more vitriolic. Some of Miller's most dramatically effective passages are descriptions of the apocalyptic chaos which he sees around him. Thoreau warned of the dangers of progress, and Miller finds himself in a world which has completely ignored the intimation of disaster provided a century before. In particular, Miller finds the acquisitive attitude, together with the false idea of work and production for its own sake, as the centre of the problem. The cult of progress has given rise to a form of insanity which he describes

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23. A Week, pp. 67-68.
24. Walden, p. 216.

graphically in Tropic of Capricorn:

> "Over this cesspool (the streets of America) the spirit of work weaves a magic wand; palaces and factories spring up side by side, and muntion plants and steel mills and sanatoriums and prisons and insane asylums. The whole continent is a nightmare producing the greatest misery of the greatest number."[25]

Miller employs this last metaphor once again in the title of the book he wrote on his return from Greece in 1940. The Air-Conditioned Nightmare[26] is a collection of essays upon various aspects of American society, the common thread between them being Miller's violent and incessant attack upon the myth of progress. In fact the book emerges as little more than a piece of pure propaganda, a distillation of the author's pent-up hatred for the America he discovers after his period of enlightenment in Greece. Like Thoreau, he found it necessary, on occasions, to emphasize his point by isolating the propagandist elements of his philosophy. Nightmare tends, therefore, to be somewhat tedious in its extended dogmatism, whereas very similar anarchical ideas are conveyed more sucessfully as integrated parts of Cancer or Capricorn.

Work, ultimately, is intended to realize profit,

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25. Capricorn, p. 12.

26. Henry Miller, The Air Conditioned Nightmare, (New Directions, New York, 1965).

which in turn is supposed to produce some sort of ideal comfort for the individual. In order to reveal the full extent of the folly embodied in this myth, Miller concentrates his attack upon the whole idea of the necessity of money. Thoreau wrote in Walden, "Cultivate poverty like a garden herb",[27] and Miller might well have adopted this maxim as his inspiration. At the beginning of Cancer, that is at the beginning of his published work, he asserts, "I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive",[28] and a little later he declares "What need have I for money."[29] Orwell, it is not surprising to note, immediately observed Miller's impecunious state, and criticised it as one part of an irresponsible attitude,[30] but Miller sees money as a thing which, if saved and hoarded, is a central cause of stagnation. The act of spending is, for Miller, a contribution to movement and to change:

> "Whoever has money, let him put it in circulation. When money circulates freely it attains a velocity."[31]

Miller's behaviour with money is a practical demonstration of how to get rid of it as fast as possible. He spends it,

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27. Walden, p. 218.
28. Cancer, p. 1.
29. Ibid., p. 25.
30. "Inside the Whale" See note 8.
31. "Money and How It Gets That Way", from Stand Still Like the Hummingbird, p. 155.

gives it away, and even throws it away, just so long as it is not added to a pile which is supposed to represent security. The saving and buying of expensive items Miller sees as a futile attempt to gain happiness, and time and again, he reiterates the ancient addage that money cannot buy those things which are really the most important.[32] Miller's anarchy is thus focused upon economic concerns. He offers as an antidote to the disaster of modern society the abandonment of the work ethic which demands such a keen awareness of how much is being earned. This constitutes Miller's greatest similarity with the anarchy of Thoreau, which also depended so heavily upon economic considerations. The kind of life envisaged by both authors as being the best, could thus only be achieved by a radical change in the whole orientation of western civilization. And within this process of complete change, there would have to be a redefinition of the individual's position in relation to the new structure. Both Thoreau and Miller go to great lengths to support their anarchical protestations with such a redefinition, and this, principally will be the discussion

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32. This attitude can be found, for example, in the essay "Money and How It Gets That Way", which contains a number of Miller's opinions on the subject of money.

of the third chapter of the thesis. Before proceeding further, however, it would be useful to conclude this chapter with an examination of the rhetoric used by both authors, since the force of their revolutionary opinions is bolstered by expression of a very similar kind.

III.

> "The words of some men are thrown forcibly against you and adhere like burs."
>
> H.D.Thoreau, Journal.

> "For a hundred years or more, our world has been dying. And not one man, in these last hundred years or so, has been crazy enough to put a bomb up the asshole of creation and let it off."
>
> Henry Miller, Tropic of Cancer.

The true vitality of the anarchy of Thoreau and Miller can be effectively demonstrated by an examination of their methods. Anarchy, for them, was not simply a process of overthrowing the established order, but more importantly of rousing people from their lethargy and making them aware that there are problems to be solved.

Both authors attempted this not so much by expressing certain ideas (for Miller's writings on specific public issues are considerably fewer than those of Thoreau), but rather by expressing their opinions in a certain manner. A distinctive quality of their work is the extreme dogmatism with which they deliver their philosophies, and a common objection to their work consists of a denunciation of this extremism. Hawthorne, writing at the time of the publication of Walden, is somewhat repelled by what Kingsley Widmer, a modern critic, refers to as Thoreau's "Moral fervency":[33]

> "He (Thoreau) is not an agreeable person, and in his presence one feels ashamed of having any money, or a house, or having written a book that the public will read--his own mode of life being so unsparing a criticism on all other modes, such as the world approves."[34]

Hawthorne's reaction is significant, seizing as it does upon Thoreau's almost belligerant morality. The world's approval was, of course, the last of Thoreau's concerns, and the provocation he offers constitutes an important

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33. Kingsley Widmer, Henry Miller, (Twayne Publishers, 1963), p. 102. Widmer observes, briefly, at this point in his study of Miller, the similarity between the dogmatism of Miller and Thoreau.

34. Edward Mather, Nathaniel Hawthorne, (New York, 1940), p. 334.

part of his intention. It is true that Thoreau's writing maintains an attitude of unsparing criticism, and his self-righteousness becomes, on occasions, a little tedious. His early rising, his economy, and his emphasis on the natural way of life tend to be carried to extremes in many instances:

> "There, too, I admired, though I did not gather, the cranberries, small waxen gems, pendants of the meadow grass, pearly and red, which the farmer plucks with an ugly rake... and sells the spoils of the meads to Boston and New York; destined to be jammed, to satisfy the tastes of lovers of nature there."[35]

The fact that even the rake involved in this despicable action is ugly, indicates something of the fanatical way in which Thoreau applies his principles. Such an attitude is likely to produce enraged reactions, but a clue to the motives behind such a procedure can be found in another, remarkable example of fanaticism, where Thoreau takes his argument to its logical conclusion:

> "I used to see a large box by the railroad, six feet long by three wide, in which the labourers locked

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35. Walden, p. 160.

> up their tools at night; and it suggested to me that every man who was hard pushed might get such a one for a dollar, and, having bored a few augur holes in it, to admit the air at least, get into it when it rained and at night, and hook down the lid, and so have freedom in his love and in his soul be free."[36]

It is certainly ambiguous as to what exactly is meant by "freedom in his love", bearing in mind the relatively cramped conditions, but the humorous intention in this piece of 'economy' is left in no doubt. That such humour is achieved by means of extreme exaggeration, is, however, the significant point.

To be unaware of Thoreau's technique of over-statement is to misunderstand his true meaning, for this, as he explains near the end of Walden, has been a fully conscious device:

> "It is a ridiculous demand which England and America make, that you shall speak so that they can understand you. Neither men nor toadstools grow so...I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be extra-vagant enough, may not

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36. Walden, p. 24.

> wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of daily experience...for I am convinced that I cannot exaggerate enough even to lay the foundation of a true experience."[37]

This idea is illustrated throughout Walden, where numerous examples of extravagance can be found, as Thoreau sets himself up against all conventionalized behaviour. To shock and to contradict is his purpose, with the result that many of his statements are provocatively dogmatic. "The old have no important advice to give to the young"[38] is a typical example of what is, essentially, a dangerous generalization, but as is made clear in the above passage, Thoreau was well aware of what he was doing. Paradox, too, is an important part of Thoreau's rhetoric of shock:

> "The greater part of what my neighbours call good, I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is my good behaviour."[39]

Thoreau, therefore, dramatically reinforces his anarchical statements with a form of expression which in itself, is a type of anarchy. The short, meaningful, though

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37. Walden, p. 215.
38. Ibid., p. 11.
39. Ibid., p. 12.

perhaps somewhat distorted assertions with which Thoreau embellishes his work, will, he hopes, serve to wake people up. The title page of the first edition of Walden is particularly interesting in this respect, since it carried the following quotation from the work:

> "I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbours."[40]

Thoreau would rather enrage his audience than leave them indifferent, and Miller likewise demands a definite reaction from his readers. To produce such a reaction, Miller adopts a pose as a flambouyant exaggerator as a means to fulfilling his purpose:

> "Though it seems at times as if nothing could rout him (man) out of the inertia in which he is entrenched, it is quite possible that he may one day be shocked into a greater state of awareness."[41]

"The whole continent is sound asleep",[42] he declares at one point in Capricorn, and, as an anarchist, it is fitting that Miller's metaphor of awakening should involve bombs.

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40. Walden, p. 73.
41. "The Hour of Man", from Stand Still Like the Hummingbird, p. 9.
42. Capricorn, p. 42.


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At the opening of Cancer he introduces this idea with the statement,"The age demands violence, but we are only getting abortive explosions."[43] Indeed, he goes so far as to conceive of Cancer itself as the actual bomb which might serve the purpose of preventing the malingering death he refers to in the introductory quotation to this section. All methods are acceptable to Miller, just so long as the explosions occur, and people are forced to react in some way. Even distortion of the 'truth' is a worthy means by which to create a state of animation and flux.

Miller asserts the validity of what he is writing, "even though every word I say is a lie",[44] and goes further than this in his essay "Reflections on Writing":

> "I invent, distort, deform, lie, inflate, exaggerate, confound and confuse as the mood seizes me."[45]

Miller's prose is full of vast, rambling, fantastical accounts of events which are supposed to have taken place at a certain time and in a certain order. The sexual

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43. Cancer, p. 10.
44. Capricorn, p. 190.
45. "Reflections on Writing", from The Wisdom of the Heart, (New Directions Paperbook, 1960), p. 22.

episodes, notably, have probably aroused greatest comment, transcending, as they do, the commonly accepted ideas of what feasibly could occur. Widmer objects to Miller's excessive licentiousness, which, he claims, denies the author's professed attachment to Mara in Capricorn.[46] Just as Hawthorne was provoked into providing the thoroughly conventional attitude when confronted with Thoreau's extremism, so Widmer is forced into extreme conservatism in the face of Miller's wild excesses. Widmer refers to the "degraded sexuality of Sexus",[47] which is certainly to mistake Miller's purpose. His attitude to sex is far from degraded, as will be established in the next chapter, and quite apart from this, Miller's sexual extravagance should be seen as part of his rhetoric. The language of sex, first and foremost, was intended to shock:

> "This is all a figurative way of speaking about what is unmentionable. What is unmentionable is pure fuck and pure cunt; it must be mentioned only in deluxe editions, otherwise the world will fall apart."[48]

There are many extremely crude descriptions of sexual

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46. Widmer, Henry Miller, p. 74.
47. Ibid., p. 76.
48. Capricorn, p. 192.

activities in Miller's writing, but it should be noted that in a number of his books, this is entirely absent. There is relatively little crudity in Plexus, and The Colossus of Maroussi contains none at all. A further aspect of Miller's sexual extravagance which Widmer overlooks, is its potential as comedy. As soon as literal belief is suspended, then many of these exploits reveal themselves to be highly amusing, and an essential part of Miller's bizarrely humorous vision.

Miller writes in Capricorn, "How easily people could get riled just listening to me talk,"[49] and he seems to summarize both his own and Thoreau's position in this statement. Both authors were the creators of fantasy, both held up ideals which most men scorned, and, as prophets speaking frankly and without inhibition, they perhaps succeeded more than they could have imagined in shocking their listeners and readers. Their anarchy thus extends from their eccentric behaviour, right through to the

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49. Capricorn, p. 110.

rhetoric of exaggeration. Their purpose, as has already been observed, was to cause a reaction in the minds of their audience, and, more than simply a reaction, they hoped to effect some definite change within the individual.[50] The nature of this change will now be discussed.

50. Thoreau's emphasis upon the individual as the central tenet of his anarchy is briefly discussed in Eunice M. Shuster's Native American Anarchy, (Smith College Studies in history, Vol. 17), pp. 46-51. Shuster makes the important observation that freedom and not reform was finally Thoreau's goal.

CHAPTER THREE

The Individual.

I.

"He is not a democrat at all in the sense we give the word today; he is what Lawrence would call an 'aristocrat of the spirit', which is to say, that rarest thing on earth; an individual."

Henry Miller, "Henry David Thoreau".

The questions raised by Thoreau and Miller concerning the ultimate fate of man in society, find their answers in their doctrine of the individual, and their assertions concerning the true nature of the ego. It is in this, the examination of the individual problem, that Thoreau and Miller differ so radically from reformers such as Orwell. Orwell sought to affect change on the general, social scale. He saw political reform as the answer to the maladies of his society, and these reforms would in effect be enforced externally upon the nation. Thoreau and Miller approached the problem from a diametrically opposed point of view. The deadness and the rottenness they saw about them, in most people's attitude to life in general, they hoped to alleviate by action on the personal, individual level. Their anarchy aought to revitalize and stimulate the individual, to make him aware

of all the possibilities. Miller recognised, in Thoreau, an example of a man who sought to effect change in just this way, by emphasizing the significance and importance of the individual. In his essay entitled "Henry David Thoreau", Miller quotes the Indian writer, Krishnamurti, as a summary and expression of this attitude:

> "The world problem is the individual problem; if the individual is at peace, has happiness, has great tolerance, and an intention to help, then the world problem as such ceases to exist."[1]

Miller's essay on Thoreau expresses much of his doctrine concerning the individual ego, and it additionally contributes a lament for what he sees as a vanishing species. He observes that there are no more individuals, or at least, so few as to make very little difference to the way society functions. In fact, the pressures of society itself have been the cause of uniformity, which has more or less annihilated the individual. Miller expresses this belief elsewhere, in Capricorn:

> "To be accepted and appreciated you must nullify yourself, make yourself

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1. Stand Still Like the Hummingbird, p. 113.

> indistinguishable from the herd. You may dream, if you dream alike."[2]

This kind of assertion may be found repeated throughout Miller's work, and it is hardly surprising, therefore, that he eulogizes the few people he discovers who are individuals. Like Thoreau, he has a personal standard of what constitutes a great man, and for both writers, greatness resided in not caring about being accepted and not accepting nullification. Thoreau found his ideal in Captain John Brown, an individual in the purest sense, who not only spoke, but acted, in defense and justification of his words. Miller finds his idols in certain artists such as Thoreau himself, and Rimbaud, and also amongst certain obscure characters whom he knew personally. The course of his narration or the train of his thought is often interrupted in order to insert a eulogy upon a certain remarkable man, such as Grover Watrous in Capricorn. At the conclusion of the section, Miller states his undisguised purpose to erect "a little monument to this great man."[3] Such remarkable persons are not those who

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2. Capricorn, p. 56.
3. Ibid., p. 176.

"live on the surface"[4] as Thoreau defined it, but those who seem to extract from life its fullest significance.

As a direct result of his attitude to the stultifying effects of a highly advance society, Thoreau turns to a vision of primitive man as his ideal of individual expression. He proclaims an almost Rousseau-like faith in the nobility of the savage, who has had little or no contact with the benfits of civilization. Thoreau, who was still able to find arrowheads and the remains of Indian fires in the countryside around Concord, naturally adopted an ideal vision of the ways of that earlier world. The depth of his interest in the American Indian is reflected by the vast amount of manuscript material he left unsorted at his death, dealing with all aspects of this primitive civilization. This way of life having vanished, the only remnant of this finer, more natural part of man can, however, still be found in the child, an individual as yet untouched by any corrupting influences. Thoreau speaks of childhood in a Romantic, idealistic fashion, as the time when "heaven lies around us"[5], and he indicates on numerous occasions,

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4. The Heart of Thoreau's Journals, ed. Odell Shepherd, (Dover Publications, 1961), p. 87.

5. Journal, p. 20.

a typically Wordsworthian attitude to this period of a man's life.

Such a dual idealization of the primitive races and the period of childhood can be found repeated in Miller's work. He adopts precisely the same attitude to these essentially natural conditions of man, where individualism can still be discovered. The Indian, first victim of North American civilization, most frequently becomes the example of primitive worthiness:

> "It seems to me that silence was a great factor in the world of the Indian, that he made no unnecessary stir, that he took the long way about rather than the short cut."[6]

But any primitive culture will serve Miller's purpose as an example of unfettered naturalness, and at times, his naive faith in the advantages of primitive times, recalls Carlyle's evocation of Twelfth Century monastic life in Past and Present. Miller goes so far as to correlate the fact of his isolation as a man and an artist with his own essential primitivism. He examines this aspect of his experience in an important section towards the

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6. Hummingbird, p. 193.

end of Capricorn, where he states:

> "Any primitive man would have understood me, any man of archaic epochs would have understood me."[7]

Here again Miller can be seen setting himself up as a universal or archetypal figure, being a representative of all that is original and finest in the soul of man. Since he has reverted to what can be found at the primitive core of the human being, Miller finds no audience in a society which he sees as dedicated to superficiality and meaningless complexity. From his exaltation of the primitive tribes of man, Miller proceeds, like Thoreau, to a vision of his childhood as the primitive and better part of his own life. The most complete statement of this attitude can be found in Capricorn, during a lyrical digression on the subject of rye bread. The bread evolves as a symbol of a particular moment in childhood, when even the killing of another child has enough of primitive naturalness about it, to make it almost praiseworthy:

> "With the sour rye the world was what it is essentially, a primitive world

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7. Capricorn, p. 287.

ruled by magic..."[8]

He goes on:

> "What I am thinking about, with a certain amount of regret and longing, is that this thoroughly restricted life of early boyhood seems like a limitless universe and the life which followed it, the life of the adult, a constantly diminishing realm."[9]

Both Thoreau and Miller look for inspiration towards a time when, essentially, the basic instincts in man have not been distorted or entirely erased. They look to the vitality of primitive man, who freely indulged his passions, and, according to their idealism, lived a richer, fuller life as a result; or they look to the child, who is likewise capable of expressing himself according to an instinctual process.

Such an emphasis upon the instinctual nature of man becomes an important part of what both authors conceive of as a fully realized individual. Such an individual must put up a fight against the forces of inhibition which society has imposed upon him, and must attempt to assert

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8. Capricorn, p. 129.
9. Ibid., p. 129.

in himself those things which come most naturally. In order that this may be achieved, the greatest force to influence Western civilization, that is, Chrisianity, must inevitably come under review. Both Thoreau and Miller make direct criticism of the way in which Christianity has perverted the natural functions of the individual, and has lead to a whole pattern of false thinking.

II.

> "Christianity should not be beautified and embellished; it has waged deadly war against this higher type of man; it has placed all the basic instincts of this type under the ban; and out of these instincts it has distilled evil and the Evil one."
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ.

The "Sunday" section of A Week very naturally becomes an opportunity for Thoreau to express his definition of the individual's relationship to the established religious system. Here he stresses the importance of living as a natural man, and the danger

of being unhealthily restrained within the doctrine of the Church:

> "There are various tough problems yet to solve, and we must make shift to live, betwixt spirit and matter, such a human life as we can."[10]

He goes much further than this, to undermine the conventional idea of duty, or, more particularly, the idea of conscience:

> "It is not worth the while to let our imperfections disturb us always. The conscience really does not and aught not to monopolize the whole of our lives, any more than the heart or the head."[11]

An awareness of man's sensual, instinctive nature is an important aspect of Thoreau's writing, emphasizing as it does an essentially non-Christian attitude to the self, or the ego. Thoreau's own, personal, indulgence of vital, sensual instinct, took the form of a relationship with nature which lasted throughout his life. He was capable of an involvement with nature which, at times,

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10. A Week, p. 71.
11. Ibid.

became so profound as to exclude all considerations beyond this relationship. He was well aware, nevertheless, that such abandonment constituted a denial of social communication:

> "By my intimacy with nature I find myself withdrawn from man. My interest in the sun and the moon, in the morning and the evening compels me to solitude...The mind that perceives clearly any natural beauty is in that instant withdrawn from human society. My desire for society is infinitely increased; my fitness for any actual society is diminished."[12]

In fact, there can be found in Thoreau's work many explicit statements of his purely sensual attitude towards nature, and his willingness to become totally absorbed in his experiences.[13] Keats wrote in 1817, "O for a life

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12. A Week, p. 79.

13. Thoreau's Journal, particularly, is full of statements which emphasize his preparedness to abandon himself to pure sensual enjoyment of the natural world around him. Thoreau admits the existence of the demands of the ego, writing "May I love and revere myself above all the gods that men have invented".(Journal, p. 52). In another place he writes, "While I bask in the sun on the shores of Walden Pond, by this heat and this rustle, I am absolved from all obligations to the past".(Journal, p.12). An even more direct statement to the effect that it is almost the duty of the individual to indulge himself to a certain extent, explains that "I can see nothing so proper and so holy as relaxed play and frolic in this bower God built for us." (Journal, p. 28).

of sensations rather than a life of thoughts",[14] and Thoreau often seems to concur with such a self-indulgent attitude. His writing is structured around ideas beginning "I have seen...", or "I have felt...", or "I have heard...", and in A Week he writes:

> "I see, smell, taste, hear, feel that everlasting something to which we are allied, at once our maker, our abode, our destiny, our very selves."[15]

And in Walden there is the statement, "A man should feed his senses with the best that the land affords."[16] Such statements were an anathema to Emerson, who, as Porte well expresses it, had:

> "no desire to glut his sorrow on a rose or die of it in aromatic pain; a quick whiff of the moral law was really what he wanted from the world."[17]

Emerson, as already observed in chapter two, was considerably more traditional in his moral outlook, while Thoreau was certainly prepared to dispense with the "whiff of the moral law" in favour of an entirely non-intellectual Transcendentalism. His preferences for and justifications

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14. Letter from Keats to Benjamin Bailey, November 22, 1817. (Hyder B. Rollins edition of the Letters).
15. A Week, p. 152.
16. Walden, p. 27.
17. Porte, Emerson and Thoreau, p. 62.

of Homer and Chaucer in A Week, give clear indication of the direction of his own work. Thoreau was not a philosopher in the way that Emerson was, nor was he reformer in an age of reform, and he disliked the idea that a work of art be turned into a propagandist tract. More often than not, Thoreau makes no attempt to extract any moral significance from his natural observations. Likewise, it is the greatness of Chaucer that he "does not plead his own cause".[18] Chaucer, too, is a poet of the emotions who "speaks to men's hearts and not only to their heads".[19] Thoreau goes on, "There is no wisdom that can take the place of humanity, and we find that in Chaucer."[20] He means by "humanity" a kind of strenuous paganism, which, as he goes on to explain, "produces the poetry of youth and life rather than of thought."[21] To condone, and indeed to stress a philosophy which involves a demand for such pagan vitality, sets Thoreau apart from the mainstream of Christian thought, and establishes him, rather, as a precursor of Nietzsche. In his preparedness

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18. A Week, p. 316.
19. Ibid., p. 315.
20. Ibid., p. 316.
21. Ibid., p. 314.

to accomodate what are undeniable elements of his personality, Thoreau insists upon the right of the ego to be self-indulgent, if self-indulgence is a prerequisite of personal fulfillment. He is, in this sense, a great adversary of the Puritan idea of sin, just as Miller would be one hundred years later. That Miller should still find repression of natural instincts to be central to the individual problem, indicates the revolutionary nature of Thoreau's writing.

Being a post-Nietzschean, it is perhaps not so surprising to find Miller denouncing Christianity as a damaging force, inhibiting as it does natural and vital forms of expression. While Thoreau uses nature as a medium to express, and, in a sense, to indulge his sensuality, Miller invokes sexuality for the same purpose.[22] His short work The World of Sex, introduces the main principles of his attitude to the function and purpose of sex in his writing. He makes an important statement towards the beginning of the book, where a

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22. Thoreau's Journal entry (p. 176) where he states that "All nature is my bride", suggests immediately the idea that nature has almost become a substitute for sex.

distinctly Nietzschean idea is presented:

> "The effort to eliminate 'repulsive' aspects of existence, which is the obsession of moralists, is not only absurd but futile."[23]

This recalls Miller's outburst in Cancer where he states his intention to include in his work all that has been previously omitted from literature.[24] His purpose, as already discussed, is to shock, but beyond this, his intention is to reveal a process of individual fulfilment, which can only be achieved by facing up to the fact that natural instinct is an important part of man's total being. Miller expresses the process in this way:

> "To live out one's desires and in so doing, subtly alter their natures, is the aim of every individual who aspires to evolve."[25]

Miller once again cites the example of primitive man as the ideal, for primitive man, he says, understood sex as a healthy and central function of life. The modern age has corrupted this basic instinct:

> "We are becoming more and more neuter,

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23. The World of Sex, p. 13.
24. Cancer, p. 10.
25. The World of Sex, p. 13.

> more and more asexual. The increasing variety of perverse crimes bears eloquent testimony to the fact."[26]

This may well be yet another example of Miller's naivety concerning the nature of uncorrupted man, but the significant point is that his argument is in favour of a healthy attitude to sex as a prerequisite for a healthy life. "To enter life by way of the vagina", he writes in The World of Sex, "is as good a way as any. If you enter deep enough, remain long enough, you may find what you seek."[27] Miller's sexual searchings are thus paralled by Thoreau's exhaustive examination of the natural phenomena he found around him. Thoreau may have sublimated his sexual desires in this way, but the really important similarity between these two processes of discovery is that they both encourage an acceptance of sensuality as a means to self-realization. The individual's evolution, they both insist, can only be effected through a recognition rather than an avoidance, of this sensuality.

The instinctual life, then, is emphasized by both authors as being a significant, but neglected part

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26. The World of Sex, p. 80.
27. Ibid., p. 44.

of the total personality. A new attitude, they feel, must be established towards the so-called 'enjoyable' or self-indulgent parts of existence, which have been so long maligned within the established Christian ethic. Nietzsche puts the following words into the mouth of Zarathustra:

> "Truly I did this and that for the afflicted, but it always seemed to me that I did better things when I learned to enjoy myself."[28]

It is just this idea of learning to enjoy oneself which Thoreau, and to a much greater extent, Miller, investigate. They are, in effect, reasserting the importance of the ego of the self, and the vital and healthful part it must play in the development of the balanced individual. Such a form of individualism, orientated as it is towards the indulgence of the self, must, however, find some sort of replacement for the restrictive structure of Christianity. Both writers turn towards Transcendentalism and oriental mysticism for such a replacement.

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28. Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, (Penguin edition), p. 112.

III.

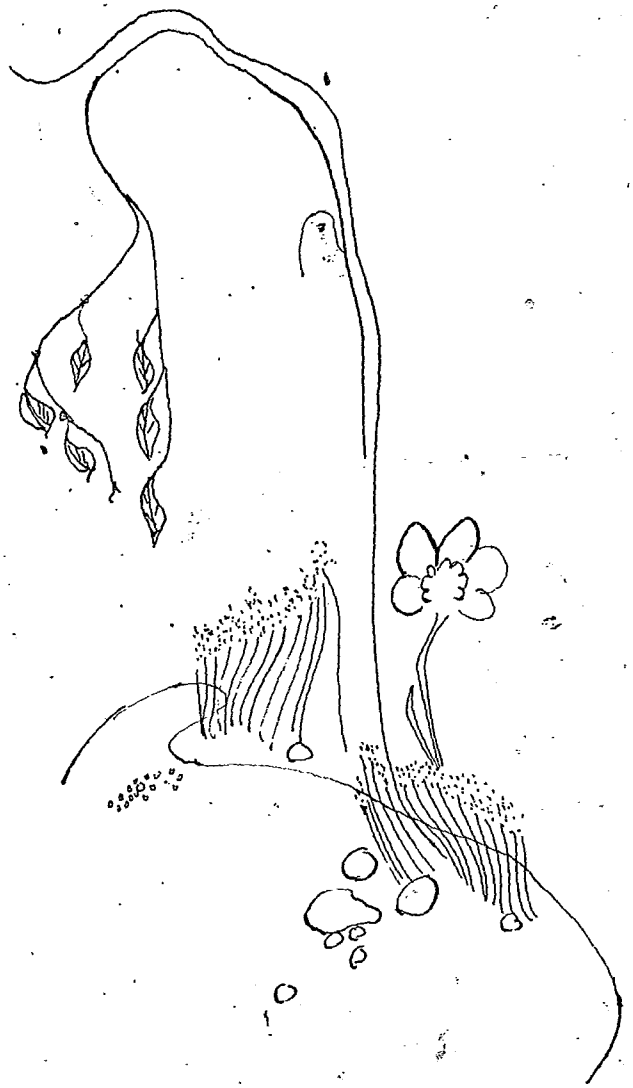
"Drifting in a sultry day on the sluggish waters of the pond, I almost cease to live...I am never so prone to lose my identity."

H.D.Thoreau, Journal.

"I have slipped away to join an older stream of consciousness."

Henry Miller, Tropic of Capricorn.

The emphasis upon the individual problem, and an exploration of every aspect of the individual's being, may, of course, be an end in itself, involving no higher considerations. But for Thoreau, the rejection of orthodox Christianity produced a state of liberation of the mind, which could lead to a Buddhist conception of Nirvanah, or realization. His self-exploration, conducted through the medium of nature, leads directly to the idea of Transcendentalism, which asserted the existence of eternal spiritual unity between all things. Thoreau read widely amongst the philosophical and religious works of the East, and his doctrine of the individual is derived largely from this source. He found there a pattern of behaviour which concerned itself, more than Christianity,



with the "thoughtful" part of man's nature:

> "The Hindoos are more serenely and thoughtfully religious than the Hebrews. They have perhaps a purer, more independant and impersonal knowledge of God."[29]

This shift in emphasis towards a more spiritual approach to life, was seen by Thoreau as an antidote to expanding materialism or progress. A man's journey towards personal fulfilment should involve a process of meditation or thought, which, in terms of this materialism, might appear to be an impractical waste of time. But the fact is that Thoreau demanded that the pace of life be slowed considerably, in order to allow time for spiritual maturation.

Thoreau's Transcendentalism or spiritualism springs directly from his observation of nature, and out of a minute experience can evolve a multitude of vaguely related revelations. The most fully dramatized example of such an experience occurs in the "Tuesday" section of A Week, where the ordinary world is both literally and metaphorically transcended by a walk to the top of a

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29. Journal, p. 34.

cloud-covered mountain. Thoreau reaches, in this position of elevation, a vision of the transience and relative insignificance of human values:

> "There was not a crevice left through which the trivial places we name Massachusetts or Vermont or New York could be seen...The earth beneath had become a flitting thing of light and shadows as the clouds had been before me."[30]

Such phenomena of nature are always the vehicle by which Thoreau reaches his vision or revelation, and it is through the example of nature that he finds a transcendental connection between all things. So involved does he become with the Eastern mystical process, that the prose of A Week very often comes to sound like the translations of the Bhagavadgita or the Vedas, which Thoreau was reading assiduously at the time. He not only adopts the style of these works, but incorporates many of the ideas found there into his own book. Notably, he repeats the idea that time must be used wisely, that haste is to no purpose, and that man must relax and be prepared to open his mind to

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30. A Week, pp. 164-5.

external phenomena:

> "All good abideth with him who waiteth wisely; we shall sooner overtake the dawn by remaining here than by hurrying over the hills of the west,..You must be calm before you can utter oracles."[31]

Thoreau attempted to demonstrate, by his descriptions of the natural-mystical experiences which befell him, the method by which a slower, and more appreciative attitude to life may be achieved. He tried to show, through his own example, how Eastern mystical philosophy could provide a substitute for Christianity and all its attendant limitations upon the individual. Eastern philosophy, Thoreau hoped to demonstrate, gives ample opportunity for the individual to liberate himself from the materialism of modern society, and to concentrate upon healing himself, before going out to confront the problems of the world at large.

Such healing, to Thoreau, involved the development of a heightened response to each passing moment, and as a result, an essentially careless attitude to the implications of the future. He is unconcerned with what problems may be involved with yesterday or tomorrow, being

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31. A Week, p. 115.

only interested in concentrating upon the significance of the present instant:

> "In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and the future, which is precisely the present moment."[32]

This apparant opportunism and unconventional regard for the traditional apprehension of cause and effect, leads, necessarily, to a reorientation of the ego's position. The ego, as already suggested, takes a more dominant role than the self-lessness of the Christian doctrine would permit. Thoreau's writing constitutes a dramatic representation of how the individual may extract the fullest significance from each passing moment, and thus enjoy to the full each such experience. By cultivating the mystical approach to experience, Thoreau is attempting to restore what he sees as a more primitive, and thus more vital, set of values, where contentment may be derived from simplicity. His 'economy' can thus be seen as part of his philosophical attitude to the intrinsic value of even the

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32. Walden, p. 16.

meanest of objects or events. To understand this, too, is to understand Thoreau's attitude to the commercial spirit which has perverted the instinctual, spontaneous response to experience, in favour of a calculated awareness of how tomorrow cannot function without preparation being made today.

Mysticism, or Transcendentalism, is thus proposed by Thoreau as a spiritual method of reducing life to its essential elements, and of re-establishing the individual in his natural, organic relationship to the cosmos. Although there is much to suggest that Miller is more devoted to hedonism than Thoreau, he does in fact propose an almost identical goal for the individual. It is true that his methods may be somewhat different to those of Thoreau, but the sexual exploration he conducts in the course of his writings, is, considered as a part of his journey of exploration, simply a means towards an ultimate spiritual fulfilment. Materialism, he believed with Thoreau, had invaded even the precincts of Christianity, and he likewise knew the necessity of a spiritual alternative.

Miller expresses the situation of crisis in The World of Sex, when he says that "the body has ceased to

be the temple of the spirit",[33] and it is his purpose to revitalize this dead or disused part of man's awareness. He, too, looks to Hindu texts for his example, and repeats insistently the importance of a fuller involvement with even the most insignificant and fleeting experiences. "Life is now, every moment,"[34] he declares, and attempts to prove this assertion by entering into each experience with his total energy. Like Thoreau, he emphasizes the need to take life slowly and to disregard, to a large extent, the concerns of the next day. He writes in Cancer:

> "I don't give a fuck what's behind me or what's ahead of me. I'm healthy, incurably healthy. No sorrow, no regrets. No past, no future. The present is enough for me. Day by day. Today! Le Bel aujourd'hui!"[35]

Clearly this extreme attitude stands in opposition to the basic economic structure of society, and to undermine this structure, it has already been noted, is an integral part of Miller's purpose. But finally this statement must be seen as part of the spiritual substitute for Christianity which Miller offers. A new perspective, or a new set of

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33. The World of Sex, p. 18.
34. Ibid., p. 83.
35. Cancer, p. 46.

values must be established, in order to approach what is, in fact, the equivalent of Thoreau's Transcendentalism. Miller quotes Amiel at the beginning of The Books in My Life[36] for an expression of the capacity of the individual to achieve such a reorientation, and to recreate the world according to his spiritual inclination:

> "All is marvellous for the poet, all is great for the hero; all is wretched, miserable, ugly, and bad for the base and sordid soul."[37]

To develop a heightened perception of the significance of each moment of experience, is Miller's first stage in the reconstitution of this "base and sordid soul".

One of the greatest contrasts between Thoreau and Miller is that sex is so obviously absent from the work of the former, and is so prominently used by the latter. But in the context of this matter of personal, spiritual evolution, sex is in fact used by Miller in just the way that Thoreau uses nature. Just as nature can provide the medium for the meditational process, so sex can provide the same stimulus. Where Thoreau may find his 'truth' lying

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36. Henry Miller, The Books in My Life, (New Directions paperbook, 1969).

37. One of Miller's "Quotations from Writers", which opens The Books in My Life.

in a field full of oats watching the drops of rain run down from the stalks,[38] Miller would probably sooner find it in the contemplation of a woman's sexual organ.[39] For example, a visit Miller makes to a whorehouse in Tropic of Cancer, provides many parallels with Thoreau's trip to the top of the mountain. The vision of the whores waiting around to be selected is somehow the starting point of a complex evolution in Miller's thought. "In that moment", he says, "I lost completely the illusion of time and space."[40] Thoreau, on the mountain, receives a startling revelation concerning the true nature of man's existence, and Miller in the whorehouse achieves a similar moment of cosmic truth, which is, in fact, the crux of the book--"Somehow the realization that nothing was to be hoped for had a salutary effect upon me."[41] Later in Cancer, Miller is transported on the wings of another moment of spiritual truth and extasy, which actually finds its beginning in the examination of a particular female organ. This part of anatomy provides the thread or link, as Miller's ideas wander in all directions, finally achieving universal

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38. Journal, pp. 12-13.
39. For example the episode in Tropic of Cancer, (pp. 222-225), which is quoted p. 74 of this thesis.
40. Cancer, p. 88.
41. Ibid., p. 89.

proportions:

> "When I look down into this fucked-out cunt of a whore, I feel the whole world beneath me, a world used up and polished like a leper's skull."[42]

Miller's sexuality must be seen, therefore, not only as part of his anarchy and his sensual indulgence, but also as a means towards a greater realization and fulfilment.

This contrast with Thoreau concerning the means by which transcendental experience is reached, is in fact the only significant difference between the spiritual position of the two writers. Otherwise they both see, and indeed demand, the necessity of a personal exploration conducted, essentially, along the lines of Hindu philosophy. Miller agrees with Thoreau that the individual's duty is first of all to himself, before he can begin to excercise his duty to others. His book The Wisdom of the Heart contains a fairly systematic account of his spritual and mystical ideas, and it is there that he clearly establishes this first responsibility of the individual:

> "...the real problem

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42. Cancer, p. 224.

> is not one of getting on with one's neighbours or of contributing to the development of one's country, but of discovering one's destiny, of making life in accord with the deepest rhythm of the cosmos."[43]

Another quotation can perhaps best express Miller's extended metaphor of man's "dislocation...from the movement of life,"[44] which can only be resolved by a vital attention to the needs of the spirit. In one section of The Wisdom of the Heart, Miller is discussing and endorsing the philosophy discovered in the literary work of E. Graham Howe:

> "Throughout his books it is the indirect or Oriental life which he stresses, and this attitude, it may also be said, is that of art. The art of living is based on rhythm--on give and take, ebb and flow, light and dark, life and death. By acceptance of all the aspects of life, good and bad, right and wrong...the static defensive life...is converted into a dance."[45]

The "acceptance of all aspects of life" in no sense implies

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43. "Reflections on Writing", from The Wisdom of the Heart, p.22.

44. "The Wisdom of the Heart", from The Wisdom of the Heart, p. 45.

45. Ibid., p., 32.

capitulation to, but rather a mastery of, those aspects, and immediately recalls Thoreau's famous statement of intention in Walden:

> "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life...and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it..."[46]

It is just such a confrontation which is the final optimism of the two writers, for the pattern of Oriental philosophy leads to the conclusion that all may be turned to the good, if only the approach is made in the correct manner. Both Thoreau and Miller attempted, by telling the story of their own lives, and by showing what the possibilities are for the individual, to indicate something of what the correct manner might be. For, as Miller expresses it in his essay "The Children of the Earth", the one real power which man possesses is "the power to alter one's way of life."[47] The whole doctrine of Thoreau and Miller concerning the nature of the individual is actually a demonstration of how this power may be excercised, and each man liberated from the constraint and distortion of modern society.

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46. Walden, p. 66.

47. "Children of the Earth", from Stand Still like the Hummingbird, p. 14.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Artist

I.

"Books are good enough in their own way but they are a mighty bloodless substitute for life."

R.L.Stevenson, "An Apology for Idlers".

"We do not learn much from learned books, but from true, sincere, human books, from frank and honest biographies."

H.D.Thoreau, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers.

"In the middle of the square four black trees that have not yet begun to blossom. Intellectual trees, nourished by the paving stones, like T.S. Eliot's verse".

Henry Miller, The Time of the Assassins.

The central concern of both Thoreau and Miller for the loss of vitality both within society in general and the individual in particular, is ultimately reflected most clearly by their approach to art. In art, as a specific aspect of life with which they are deeply involved, they see a similar tendency towards sterility, and an increasing absense of natural, vital growth. Thoreau was, above all, continually troubled by a lack of what he calls "humanity" in the work of some artists, who are solely interested

in facts:

> "A fact stated barely is dry. It must be the vehicle of some humanity in order to interest."[1]

This, to Thoreau, is the direct equivalent of the corruption of the individual, who has become interested only in the materialistic aspects of existence. In short, art, like the individual, must be vital and awake in order to justify its own existence. Thoreau's contact with literature is therefore established on very much the same basis as his contact with people. His digression on friendship in A Week, emphasizes the value he places upon genuine human contact. On meeting a man called Rice, in the "Tuesday" section, he expresses his impression in this way:

> "...I detected a gleam of true hospitable and ancient civility, a beam of pure and even gentle humanity, from his bleared and moist eyes."[2]

This example demonstrates the method by which Thoreau evaluates the authors he admires, relegating the critical faculty in favour of an instinctive appreciation of the "humanity" of the writer in question. His discussion of

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1. A Week, p. 207.
2. Ibid., p. 72.


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Chaucer, for example, rests on this particular criterion. It is important to remember that this passage occurs in the last, or "Friday", section of A Week, when Thoreau is deeply involved with both his impressions of the coming autumn, and with the death of his brother. To evoke the qualities of Chaucer as a contrast to the seasonal advancement, dramatically demonstrates the correlation Thoreau establishes between art and nature. Chaucer, being introduced at this point, represents an optimistic assertion of a rebirth in the coming year:

> "He (Chaucer) is so natural and cheerful compared with later poets that we might almost regard him as a personification of Spring."[3]

Chaucer is linked with the earlier poet, Homer, in a paeon of praise for a kind of pagan naturalism found in the works of these two authors:

> "The Iliad is not Sabbath but morning reading, and men cling to this old song because they still have moments of unbaptized and uncommitted life, which gives them an appetite for more."[4]

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3. A Week, p. 314.
4. Ibid., p. 316.

This emotional, uncritical appraisal of an author's work is typical of Thoreau's vitalist attitude to the role of the artist, indicating, as it does, a certain contempt for intellectuality. He falls back, rather, upon the primitive ideal already dicussed in chapter three, where an instinctive wildness about a work of art is its best quality. He takes this point up in the Journal:

> "A truly good book is something as wildly natural and primitive, mysterious and marvellous, ambrosial and fertile as a fungus or a lichen."[5]

The diction of this quotation is particularly significant, being so similar to that applied to Thoreau's ideas concerning the basic, primitive aspects of the individual's nature. What is finally most important about a work of art as well as a man, is the extent to which a spontaneous feeling of humanity, rather than an intellectual brilliance, is manifested from within it. Thoreau maintains that Chaucer's writing "is still the poetry of life and youth, rather than thought",[6] thus emphasizing a direct, individual response to a work of literature, rather than an objectively

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5. Journal, p. 40.
6. A Week, p. 314.

critical one.

Such a non-critical approach to literature is the characteristic most clearly in evidence in Miller's discourses upon other writers and books. His lengthy volume entitled The Books in My Life, is a supremely uncritical document, which discusses some of the most significant items in Miller's personal reading list.[7] As with Thoreau, Miller relies, in his selection of works, not upon any objective critical formula, but upon a simple emotional reaction. If a book gives him something, whether it be inspiration to write himself, or simply pure enjoyment, then it is a 'good' book. The enthusiasm of another reader, concerning a particular book, should be sufficient to recommend it:

> "We aught to be alert to these smouldering vibrations. No matter if the person recommending the book be a fool or idiot, we should always be ready to take heed."[8]

As Miller expresses it previous to this, in The Books in My Life, "The final authority must always be oneself".[9] Fiedler,

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7. The Books in My Life stands as the first half of a still incomplete volume, consisting of Miller's evaluation of some of the most important authors in his reading list. Picking as he does on such writers as Henty and Rider Haggard, he provides an unconventional selection to say the least.

8. The Books in My Life, p. 173. 9. Ibid., p. 50.

who reviewed the book in 1953, caught the flavour of Miller's spontaneous attitude to art, and the implicit rejection of the established ways of writing and of criticism, which is found throughout the book. He writes:

> "We are done with Henry James at last; Miller is squarely in the Whitman camp, in favour of the 'direct experience' of life--"[10]

Miller's reaction to organized critical criteria, or intellectuality in general, resulted from the sterility in art which he saw being caused by these things. Miller's clearest demand for an instinctual response to the life force within a work, rather than an evaluation of its aesthetic significance, occurs in an essay called "The Universe of Death".[11] Miller had ambitions at one time to write a full-length book on the subject of D.H. Lawrence, and, despite the fact that he found the task impossible, there exists "The Universe of Death", which would have been the conclusion to the work. Just as Thoreau's praise of certain authors indicates his general critical standpoint, this essay does the same for Miller. His method, here, has

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10. Leslie Fiedler, Review of The Books in My Life, Yale Review XLII, No. 3, (Spring 1953), p. 459.

11. An essay in the book entitled The Cosmological Eye, by Henry Miller, (New Directions, New York, 1939).

been to compare Lawrence with Prous t and Joyce, in order to illustrate his ideas on what consitutes a vigorous, progressive form of literature. Joyce, principally, stands as the man of ideas, the intellectual author who has eschewed a vital, emotional reaction to the world around him, in the attempt to create a perfect work of art. In a remarkable outburst of rhetoric, Miller violently attacks the sterile world of thought:

> "His (Joyce's) language is a ferocious masterbation carried on in fourteen tongues. It is a dervish dance on the periphery of meaning, an orgasm not of blood and semen, but of dead slag from the burnt-out crater of the mind."[12]

Whether he is correct or not in his final assessment of Joyce's position, is unimportant, just as Thoreau's critical correctness need not be debated. The essential point is the anti-intellectual attitude which emerges strongly throughout the essay, which has, as its pivots, the twin ideas of sterility and vitality. Miller sees Lawrence's work as a direct confrontation of all experience and particularly

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12. Cosmological Eye, p. 125.

the experience of death. Lawrence gives full play to his examination of basic emotional responses, which, as was noted in the previous chapter, is of such importance to Miller. Joyce, on the other hand, is solely concerned with an esoteric system which renders much of his work unintelligible to even the most assiduous student, let alone the larger reading public. "The Universe of Death", as the title of the essay, respresents the deadlock of sterility which Miller sees as the modern artistic condition. Joyce, as well as Proust, who is assessed in much the same way, represent capitulation to the stagnant lethargy of the present period. Miller asserts that they simply 'reflect' the times, and make no move to establish themselves in opposition to it. Their artistic stance is one of deterministic acceptance:

> "We see in them no revolt: it is surrender, suicide, and the more poignant since it springs from creative sources."[13]

The destruction of the individual as a vital, responsive being is thus extended to include the artist, and it is clear that

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13. Cosmological Eye, p. 109.

Miller's doctrine of anarchy is as much applicable to the artist as to the individual. It is not enough, he repeats, to sit down and lament the condition of modern life, and make of this lamentation a so-called work of art. If protest is needed, it is the artist above all who must make this protest.

The criticism of both Thoreau and Miller centres around the distinction that has always been made between art and life. Although "Art for Art's sake" did not really crystallize as an idea until the end of the nineteenth century, Thoreau was continually aware of the sterile processes which led art to become an end in itself, being produced far away from any contact with reality. Once again, it is A Week that contains his best definition of this dichotomy between art and life:

> "There are two classes of men called poets. The one cultivates life, the other art. One seeks food for nutriment, the other for flavour; one satisfies hunger, the other gratifies the palate."[14]

It is most important to observe the metaphor of eating which Thoreau employs here. Once again, as with his ideas of simplicity in living, he stresses what is natural and instinctual

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14. A Week, p. 319.

in man. A book should, in this sense, be of real nourishment to the reader, but Thoreau is saying that, just as the individual has become corrupted by the fatuous affectations of modernity, so the misguided artist may cease to provide the real food that his work should be. Thoreau appeals, as in his example of Chaucer, to an instinctual response in the reader, and criticizes the sophistication of taste which only looks for perfection of technical detail. He writes in the Journal:

> "When I hear hypercritical quarrelling about style and grammar...I see that they forget the first requisite and rule is that expression shall be natural and vital."[15]

So completely does this correspond with Thoreau's exhortations concerning the natural way to live, that it soon becomes apparent that he finds no real difference between art and nature. In fact, he takes an entirely organic viewpoint concerning the processes of artistic creation.[16] Nature, it was observed in the last section of chapter three, is Thoreau's medium of revelation, and he finds there, also, an example

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15. Journal, p. 204.

16. For a discussion of Thoreau's organic method, that is, the derivation of his art from the example of nature, see F.O.Mathiesson, The American Renaissance, p. 154. Later, in the chapter, "Walden: Craftsmanship and Technique", he investigates the extent to which Walden meets Coleridge's organic theory.

Thoreau's Birthplace

From a drawing by Mary Wheeler

for the artist:

> "Yet poetry, the last and finest result, is a natural fruit. As naturally as the oak bears an acorn, and the vine a gourd, man bears a poem either spoken or done."[17]

A relationship with Coleridge's organic theory of aesthetics is certainly indicated here, but more than this, such a passage demonstrates Thoreau's conception of natural vitality as related to ideas. Ideas grow into books, and books grow into an organic mass which has, as its unifying element, just such an atmosphere of life and vigour. There is the feeling of direct contact with the artist as a man, and not as an aesthete.

All this helps specifically to explain the auto-biographical form of Thoreau's writing, since he has made his life, very literally, into his art. In the most direct fashion, he created the vast Journal from the ordinary events of his existence, describing them with unsophisticated simplicity. From the Journal, he distilled the more organized collection of fragments known as A Week on the Concord and Walden, and there is a continued impression that he wrote almost concurrently with the experiences he relates. He

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17. A Week, p. 85.

expresses his affinity for this direct and personal form of creation in this way:

> "Is not the poet bound to write his own biography? Is there any other work for him but a good journal? We do not wish to know how his imaginary hero, but how he, the actual hero, lived from day to day."[18]

Thus art grows directly out of life, but what is finally important to Thoreau, is the life itself rather than the art. He writes near the end of A Week:

> "It is not easy to write in a journal what interests us at any time, because to write it is not what interests us."[19]

The life, or the way of living, Thoreau emphasizes, should be the ultimate concern of the artist as well as of any other man, and the artist's purpose is to show, by his own example, what that way should be. There was not, therefore, to be any divergence between the way the poet lived, and the way he taught, and the teaching should be derived from his personal experience of the world around him.

Miller's purpose as an artist has also been to tell the story of his own life, and in the telling, to demonstrate, dramatically, the philosophical conclusions he reaches.

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18. Journal, p. 185.
19. A Week, p. 284.

Writing, like Thoreau, in the first person, he has created a vast body of literature, each new volume adding a little to the total picture of himself. Like Thoreau, also, Miller maintains, throughout this extended monologue, an impression of sponteneity, so that the work does literally appear to grow out of each passing experience. Miller wishes to impart the organic quality of his own life to the book he is writing, and in a sense to fuse the two things forever. In "The Universe of Death", he condemns the pursuit of art in isolation and intellectual sterility, finding in Joyce's work, "A worship of art for its own sake--not for man. Art in other words regarded as a means of salvation, as a redemption."[20] In The Time of the Assassins, he refers to such a schism between art and life as "the mortal wound",[21] and he elaborates upon this idea in The Colossus of Maroussi. Here he equates the act of artistic creation with the process of living, and concludes that art simply constitutes one of the many ways of getting into life, rather than away from it. He begins:

> "Art, life religion, it now seems to me, is only a preparation, an initiation

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20. Cosmological Eye, pp. 109-10.
21. The Time of the Assassins, p. 94.

into the way of life,"

and continues a little further on:

> "...but it seems clear to me that I shall pass from art to life, to exemplify whatever I have mastered through my art by my living."[22]

Thus the essentially non-critical approach to art held by Miller as well as Thoreau, leads ultimately to their ideas concerning the function of art. It is clear that art, for both of them, is actually a process of personal discovery, which leads them towards a workable pattern of life. They are finally far more concerned with the vital, organic effect of their work, than they are with the technical means of production. It remains now to discuss the extent to which they actually dispense with the traditional critical criteria, in order to achieve such an overall organic impression.

II.

> "...one is reminded of the stuttering and stammering of a Whitman or a Melville. Like them, Miller belongs in the direct line of American genius--a genius which is essentially formless. They are portmanteau writers, discursive, rambling and prolix: vulnerable only because they do not bother to hide the fact that they are still

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22. Colossus, p. 208.

growing. They may be tiresome, but they are never bleak."

Lawrence Durrell, "Studies in Genius".

It is perhaps predictable, in the light of the intuitive or emotional style of criticism employed by Thoreau and Miller, that they pay little heed to traditional values imposed upon art by the critics. They both immediately transcend the conventional forms of fiction, by the undisguised use of the autobiographical method, and their curious amalgam of styles and subjects. The one standard that they would both maintain is that anything at all within their personal experience is relevant to the work in hand, and there is therefore no need to attempt objective realizations of matters beyond this experience. They are their own heroes or principal protagonists, and their approach to established critical criteria is as individual as this fact might suggest. The result of this disregard for artistic decorum caused considerable consternation among the readers of A Week on the Concord, and the attacks upon Miller's eccentric form are probably only surpassed by criticism of his obscenity.

The most deceptive aspect of A Week is its title, and contemporary critics who expected an idyllic travelogue, were considerably shocked and not a little amazed by what they found. The discursive method which Thoreau adapted from the Journal, involved an immense diversity of subject matter arranged in no apparent order. The work itself was badly received, as much for reasons concerning this irregularity of form as for objections to its controversial subject matter. James Russell Lowell, reviewing A Week at the time of its publication, found just such a problem. He discusses the digressions in the work:

> "We come upon them like snags jolting us headforemost out ot our places as we are rowing placidly upstream or drifting down."[23]

Henry James, notably sensitive to the structural aspects of a work of literature, opined that Thoreau was "imperfect, unfinished, inartistic; he was worse than provincial, he was parochial."[24] The latter part of this statement is evidently intended to convey the apparent rusticity and rude construction of both A Week and Walden, which according to James's

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23. Review of A Week by James Russell Lowell, in the Massachusetts' Quarterly Review, July 1849.

24. Henry James, Hawthorne, (London, Macmillan, 1887), p. 96. James's book, though primarily concerned with Nathaniel Hawthorne, does, nevertheless, give considerable attention to the general background from which Hawthorne emerged.

sophisticated principles, would certainly seem to be lacking. Even up to the present time, criticism is levelled at Thoreau's work on the grounds of its jagged if not non-existent artistry. Walter Harding, a biographer of Thoreau, worries about the lack of connection between the various sections of A Week:

> "Thoreau endeavours to manufacture a connection, even though a tenuous one, as when he introduces his comments on religion into the Sunday chapter. But at other times he drops all pretense of any connection and simply announces that he will deliver some remarks on such and such a subject."[25]

Were it true that the only possible relationship of the remarks upon religion to the book as whole, resided in the fact that they are placed in the "Sunday" section, then the connection would be tenuous indeed. In order to understand the method Thoreau has employed in A Week, his views upon anarchy, the nature of the individual, as well as his style of criticism, must all be borne in mind. It has already been established that Thoreau adopted a deliberately provocative rhetoric in order to create the stir he wished for, and that the

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25. Walter Harding, The Days of Henry Thoreau, (New York, 1966), p. 247.

lack of conventional structure in A Week is fully consistent with this method. In addition to which, his rejection of any other than an individual, instinctive kind of criticism, shows that he had no concern for conventional artistic criteria. Should such a form of restriction be imposed upon the artist, then the natural instinct of the writer would necessarily be corrupted. Thoreau was probably aware of the possible objections to his work, and in A Week it seems as if he is answering them before they are raised:

> "Enough has been said in these days of the charm of fluent writing. We hear it complained of some works of genius that they have fine thoughts, but are irregular and have no flow."[26]

Thoreau found his precedent in the Concord river itself, and demonstrates his sense of the organic growth of both nature and art, by dispensing with a structure which would symbolize artificiality. His work thus appears as organic as the natural forms he describes, encompassing anything the author deems appropriate. Thoreau's writing, in this sense, transcends all limiting forms, and he appeals finally to the total emotional effect a work may have, irrespective

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26. A Week, p. 94.

of its component elements:

> "A true poem is distinguished not so much by a felicitous expression, or any thought it suggests, as by the atmosphere which surrounds it."[27]

Spontenеity and apparent lack of form are thus dinstinctive characteristics of Thoreau's writing, including, as it does, essays and tracts within the body of the work, together with odd pieces of poetry. This method might appropriately be called fiction, since Thoreau creates himself anew as a fictitious character, and he changes and arranges his material in a fictional manner. But to put a label on his work would be pointless, denying, as Thoreau does, the validity of such restrictive methods. The same is entirely true of Miller's work, which likewise defies any attempt at convenient classification. At first sight, his writings, excluding the miscellaneous essays, seem fictional in many respects, with some evidence of characterization, and even of plot, albeit somewhat erratic. But to base any critical judgment upon the idea that Miller's work should conform to standard fictional procedure, will only result in severe complications. Kingsley Widmer, in

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27. A Week, p. 319.

his recent study of Miller, provides an excellent example of the critic (like James Russell Lowell in Thoreau's time), who insists upon a traditional and structured appearance from a work which is clearly not written with such considerations in mind. Lowell seemed unprepared to recognize the wider implications of A Week, and censured its failure as a travel book. Widmer's approach to The Colossus of Maroussi is interestingly similar:

> "The art of The Colossus of Maroussi as has been noted, is frequently defective--often vague, strident, silly and sentimental. Rhetorical assertions repeatedly override any sense of time and place, thus undercutting its own 'raison' as a travel book."[28]

It is true that The Colossus fails as a travel book in the conventional sense, but to believe that it ever attempted to be such, is to overlook the implications of the voyage discussed in chapter one. The absense of a feeling of "time and space" is certainly inevitable, when the author's intention is to try to evaluate his spiritual reaction to the atmosphere of a certain spot, rather than to describe its geographical appearance. The problem in

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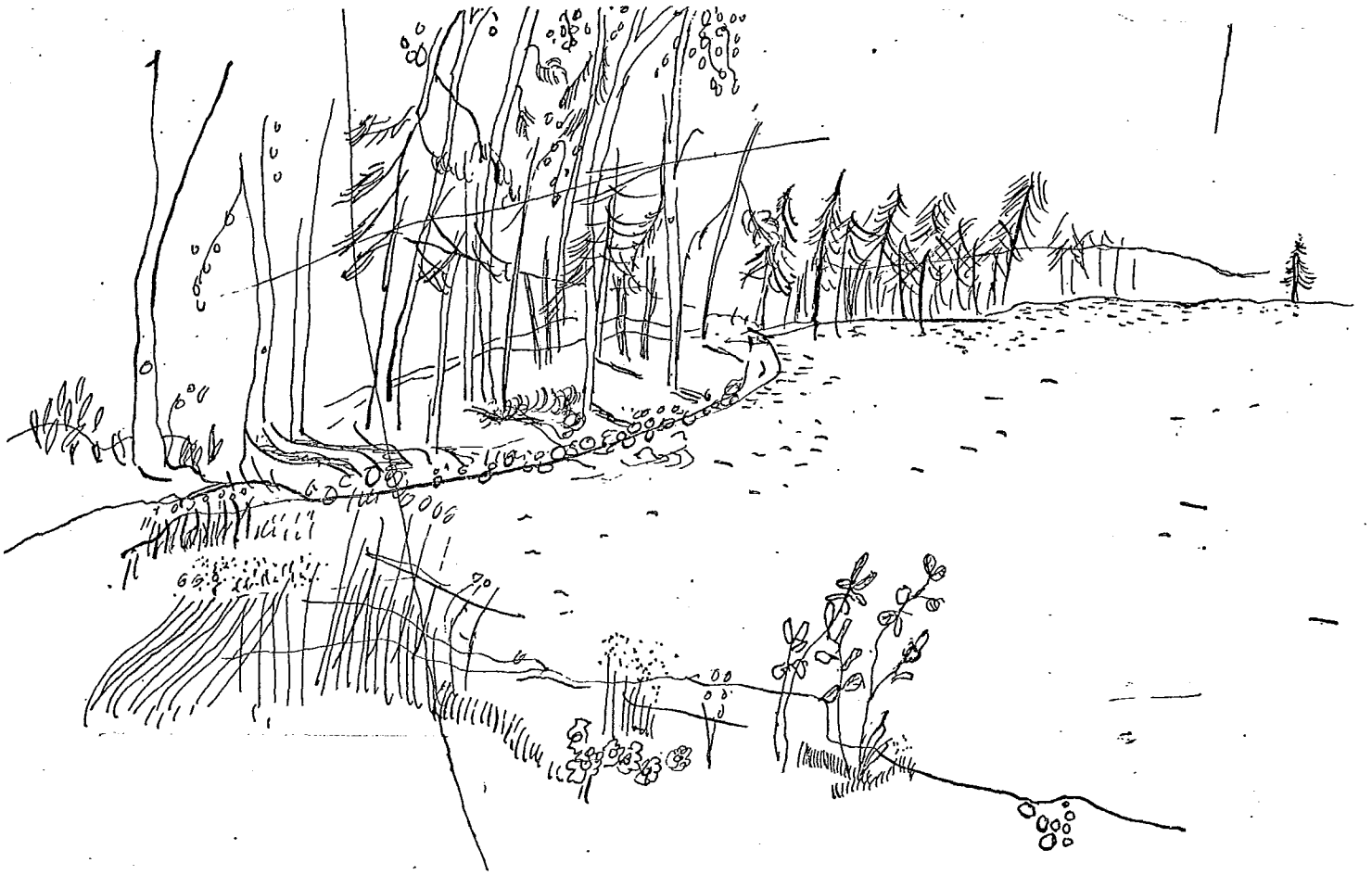
28. Kingsley Widmer, Henry Miller, p. 66.

Widmer's book is, however, greater than this, for he continues to apply inappropriate critical criteria, generally in order to discover some specific fault. He seems to expect that plot and character, the two principal blocks of novel building, should never be replaced by differerent and perhaps more versatile methods. Miller's 'plot' is in fact so chaotic as to be almost unrecognizable, and his characterization usually takes the form of brief portraits inserted in the course of the rambling monologue. He makes no attempt whatsoever to imaginatively enter the minds of other people, because his purpose is not that of a Dickens or a George Eliot, where authenticity is of particular importance. Just as Thoreau makes no attempt to present, in A Week, a character study of his brother John, so Miller's friends and acquaintances are only superficially explored.

Neither in The Colossus nor anywhere else in his work is Miller trying to achieve anything like a realistic picture of the world he lives in. His own maturation and philosophical development is his declared subject, and in the course of this undertaking, it seems that he is prepared to dispense with almost all traditional methods. He has



Walden Pond

declared his antipathy to the objective style of modern criticism, and it is curious to try to convict him of a failure to live by rules he does not acknowledge as legitimate. Widmer continues his discussion of Miller's method with an extended reference to the Mona/Mara figure, who appears in a number of the books. Having given her the title of the "Dark Lady", he goes on to examine Miller's failure with her:

> "A novelist with any feminine identification might have done much with the Dark Lady, but Miller is no novelist, or even apt story-teller, and he also lacks the skill to project into the feminine sensibility. Thus we never get his heroine's thoughts, feelings, or sense of experience."[29]

Widmer later cites Miller's one actual identification with the female, and that is when he tries to imagine what sexual penetration is like from the woman's point of view. The fact that Miller fails in this excercise seems to symbolize, for Widmer, the lamentable inability of the author in question to achieve any kind of objectivity. All these details finally prove is that Widmer did not read far

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29. Henry Miller, p. 73.

enough into Miller's work in order to discover some kind of statement of purpose, for if one thing is certain, it is that if Miller's work does lack form and organization in the traditional sense, then the author is fully aware of the fact.

It has already been indicated that both Thoreau and Miller are essentially anti-critical in their attitudes to an appreciation of art, and Miller, even more than Thoreau, provides many direct statements revealing his total rejection of the accepted patterns of writing.[30] In Sexus he says that "People have had enough of plot and character. Plot and character don't make life,"[31] and at the opening of Cancer, he declares that he intends "not to change a line of what I write."[32] He goes on to echo Thoreau's statement that "a poem is the atmosphere which srrounds it,"[33] when he writes that Matisse knows:

> "where to dissolve the human figure... has the courage to sacrifice an

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30. For an interesting discussion of the unconventional or anarchical elements in Miller's artistic method, see Art and Outrage, (Dutton, New York, 1961), which is a correspondance about Miller between Lawrence Durrell and Alfred Perlès, with contributions by Miller himself.

31. Sexus, p. 47.

32. Cancer, p. 10.

33. A Week, p. 319.

> harmonious line in order to detect the rhythm and murmur of the blood."[34]

"The rhythm and murmur of the blood", vaguely used, as is much of Miller's mystical terminology, refers to the final, overall effect of the work, an effect which is rather based upon an emotional or an instinctual response, than upon an objective critical assessment. As with Thoreau's defense of Chaucer on the grounds of his "humanity", Miller is trying, here, to demonstrate that a work of art may have a tremendous vitality and effect upon the reader, without concerning itself with tradtional form. In fact, he goes so far as to equate such concern for method and structure with the kind of stagnation and atrophied intellectualism he finds in the work of Joyce:

> "You keep bellyaching about form. I'm against the form that is imposed from the outside, the dead structure. My books represent germination in all its phases."[35]

Just as Thoreau looks to nature for an analogy to express the growth processes in art, so Miller invokes the idea of organic evolution as the basis of writing. Miller, the man, is the subject of the work, and as a man he grows

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34. Cancer, p. 147.

35. Quoted as Miller's words by Lawrence Durrell in his essay "Studies in Genius", printed in "Horizon" magazine, (July 1947), pp. 45.

and changes. He sees it as inevitable that his artistic method should reflect this "direct experience of life"[36], as Fiedler refers to it. In an essay entitled "Reflections on Writing", he discusses a few of his concepts concerning the structure of his work:

> "I have no beginning and no ending, actually. Just as life begins at any moment, through an act of realization, so the work."[37]

Such a statement does much to explain the diversity and unstructured appearance of Miller's writing, which, it is worth noting, often bears more of a resemblance to a collection of letters than anything else. Letters as a possible medium for artistic expression are held in high regard by Miller, as is evidenced by the monumental correspondendance he carried on with Michael Fraenkel, between 1935 and 1938, and later published under the title of Hamlet.[38] Significant, also, is the long rambling section of The Books in My Life, called "Letter to Pierre Lesdain",[39] which begins as a move to communicate with a friend, and ends up as a discursive account of the author's impression of books, people and variegated memories. Earlier in

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36. See note 10.
37. "Reflections on Writing", from The Wisdom of the Heart, p. 27.
38. Henry Miller and Michael Fraenkel, Hamlet, (Carrefour, New York, 1941 and 1943).
39. The Books in My Life, p. 196.

The Books in My Life, Miller makes an important reference to Van Gogh:

> "It happens that Van Gogh, without having any literary pretensions whatever, wrote one of the great books of our time, and without knowing that he was writing a book. His life as we get it in the letters is more revelatory, more moving, more a work of art, I would say, than are most of the famous autobiographies or autobiographical novels."[40]

Two things, particularly, emerge from this passage. Firstly, the reference to an unconscious, and therefore essentially 'inartistic' process of the letters, and secondly, the emphasis upon their autobiographical nature. This combination of elements effectively defines the kind of art which Thoreau and Miller produced.[41] It indicates the immediacy and sponteneity of their style, and their ultimate concern with the ways and means of life, rather than literature.

Writing, to Thoreau and Miller, was above all an act of defiance and a statement of faith, which they proclaimed as loudly and as rudely as possible in the hope

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40. The Books in My Life, p. 35.

41. Kingsley Widmer briefly discusses the discursive method of Miller's art, in his book Henry Miller, p. 155. He indicates the genre to which the method belongs, mentioning such names as Cummings, Agee, as well as Thoreau.

of being heard. Literature was nothing, they believed, if it did not manage to communicate intelligibly about the matter of immediate significance to the reader--his life. The result of such communication is to provoke change on this personal, individual level, with no critical considerations standing in the way. Miller expresses this ideal in a passage from The Time of the Assassins, where, with characteristic flamboyance and exaggeration, he could well be expressing Thoreau's sentiments at the same time:

> "The cult of art reaches its end when it exists for a precious handful of men and women...Art is something which stirs mens' passions, which gives vision, lucidity, courage and faith. Has any any artist in words of recent years stirred the world as did Hitler? Has any poem shocked the world as did the atomic bomb...I do not call poets those who make verses, rhymed or unrhymed. I call that man a poet who is capable of profoundly altering the world."[42]

In conclusion to this discussion of the artistic (or the opposite) methods of Thoreau and Miller, it should be noted that a number of studies have been made to explore

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42. The Time of the Assassins, pp. 38-9.

the extent to which order can be found in their work. Mathiesson, for example, in his chapter "Walden: Craftsmanship and Technique",[43] investigates the organization of Walden, and finds it much more tightly structured than it might at first appear. Likewise, William Drake's essay on Walden[44] discusses metaphoric patterns found in the book, thus further demonstrating the existence of conscious structure. Miller has received something of the same treatment, in such a book as Form and Image in the Fiction of Henry Miller, by J.A.Nelson,[45] where patterns of image and symbol are thoroughly dissected. Such studies are interesting in their desire to incorporate two great, but unconventional writers into the patterns of established critical ideas, and these attempts are certainly valuable in their own way, but it is to be suspected that neither Thoreau nor Miller would be greatly impressed. Miller indicates something of his contempt for academic research, when he writes, "What could be more useless, more a waste of time and energy than a college thesis."[46] No doubt, however, this is once again a characteristic generalization which should not be too literally interpreted.

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43. F.O.Mathiesson, The American Renaissance.
44. Twentieth Century Views series of essays on Thoreau, p. 78.
45. Wayne State Univ.Press, (Detroit, 1970).
46. The Books in My Life, p. 216.

Conclusion

It has become clear in the course of this comparison between the philosophy and art of Thoreau and Miller, that many of the ideas and methods of the earlier writer have been revived, whether consciously or not, by the later one. On so many important issues they are found expressing similar attitudes, and a clue to their real similarity lies in a statement of Miller's, found in Tropic of Cancer:

> "I keep thinking of my really superb health. When I say 'health' I mean optimism, to be truthful. Incurably optimistic! I still have one foot in the nineteenth century."[1]

This remark indicates immediately part of the reason why it appears that a whole pattern of thinking, as exemplified by Thoreau, is revived, after a century of lapse, by Henry Miller. Thoreau's optimism, his 'acceptance' was found to be normal and predictable by Orwell, but to find Miller still saying "I accept" in the middle of the twentieth century, comes as rather a shock to him.[2] Between Thoreau and Miller lies Nietzsche, and a whole complexity

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1. Cancer, p. 45.
2. See chapter two, note 8, together with the discussion on p. 25.

of philosophical thought, which revolves around the realization that God is dead, and the effects of this school upon literature are apparant. The Theatre of the Absurd, the literature of Existentialism, and, to a certain extent, the "Lost Generation" of the twenties, are all manifestations of a central failure of optimism. In the midst of this bleak panorama, Miller emerges, and asserts a new positivism or acceptance, and provides a new optimism which may exist,even though the old gods do not. Miller presents the ancient formula of a belief in the simple processes of regeneration, and at a time when this is, perhaps, to be least expected. Such regeneration, however, would not occur without considerable effort, and Miller follows Thoreau in his attempt to demonstrate the direction in which this effort may be made. Most importantly, they are both fighting to prevent the capitulation of the individual in the face of what appear to be apocalyptic circumstances. But the fact that Miller seems to reflect so many of Thoreau's ideas, and is himself aware of his own spiritual affinity with the nineteenth century, in no

way implies stagnation of thought. It is,rather, a very necessary rebirth of optimism, which is surely no anachronism. Miller is not suggesting that the ways of the nineteenth century were significantly better, but is asserting that positive belief and action are not impossible in the twentieth.

Miller recognized, in Thoreau, a man who stood apart from his own age, and was, in effect, a prophet who spoke at a time when change might have been more easily effected than a century later. He links the name of Thoreau with Whitman and Emerson, as one of those who tried to point out the right direction:

> "In the gloom of current events these names stand out as beacons. We pay eloquent lip service to their memory, but we continue to flout their wisdom."[3]

Thoreau's example has been flouted, according to Miller, and the only way to vindicate that loss is to repeat his words over and over again. Furthermore, as long as there remains the discrepancy between what man says he would like to do, and what he in fact does, there will be need

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3. "Henry David Thoreau", from Stand Still Like the Hummingbird, p. 112.

enough for such repetition.

It would perhaps be going too far to assert that Miller is the Thoreau of the modern period, but certainly the affinities between the two writers are demonstrably extensive, and in many ways they do fulfil the same roles as individual, anarchist and artist. In conclusion, Miller's own words provide the best statement of Thoreau's position, and Miller's relationship to him:

> "He (Thoreau) found Walden. But Walden is everywhere, if the man himself is there. Walden has become a symbol. It should have become a reality. Thoreau himself has become a symbol. But he was only a man, let us not forget that. By making him a symbol, by raising memorials to him, we defeat the very purpose of his life. Only by living our own lives to the full can we honour his memory. Each of us has a totally different life to lead. We should not try to become like Thoreau, or even like Jesus Christ, but to become what we are in truth and essence. That is the message of every great indivual and the whole meaning of being an

> individual. To be anything else is to move nearer to nullity."[4]

The writings of Miller, such as have been discussed in this thesis, reveal a man who has tried to fulfil this precept to the furthest possible extent, and by his example, has attempted to make an idea approach nearer to reality.

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4. "Henry David Thoreau", from Stand Still Like the Hummingbird, p. 118.

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