

**THE REVIVAL OF TRANSCENDENTAL THOUGHT
IN THE WRITINGS OF GARY SNYDER, WENDELL
BERRY AND ANNIE DILLARD**

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**THE REVIVAL OF TRANSCENDENTAL THOUGHT IN THE WRITINGS OF
GARY SNYDER, WENDELL BERRY AND ANNIE DILLARD**

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ABSTRACT

The transcendentalist movement had a huge influence on literary and cultural circles in nineteenth century America but witnessed a severe decline in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century due to an anti-idealist mood that grew to dominate society. This study deals with three contemporary American writers, Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Annie Dillard, whose writings have given new life to transcendental thought. In this thesis, I argue that these writers revived transcendental values to deal with contemporary American and worldwide ecological, social and spiritual issues. To be specific, these transcendental values deal with the harmonious relationship between man and nature, the rejection of modern society's materialism and the assertion of individual freedom along with the call for the adoption of an authentic relationship with God which goes beyond organized religion. They found a cure for the diseases of modern civilization in these transcendental ideals. Snyder, Dillard and Berry's writings represent a link between transcendentalism and ecology since their ecological-oriented writings embody their interest in transcendental principles within new eco-approaches to literature that inherit and develop transcendentalism fundamentals concerning an individual's relation to society, God and the natural world. This study is based on thematic units and does not deal with each writer separately. Chapter One provides a background on Transcendentalism and its founding fathers, Ralph Waldo Emerson and H.D. Thoreau in addition to a background of the twentieth-century ecology movement and ecocriticism. Chapter Two explores the ecological visions of the three writers and how they embody transcendental values through an analysis of the writers' selected poetic and prose works. Gary Snyder's ecological vision, considerably derived from Buddhism, emphasizes the coexistence and equality of humans and living and non-living beings. Wendell Berry is less radical than Snyder; he supports farm life simplicity rather than a primitive life and calls for a reconciliation between the farm and the wilderness. Annie Dillard meditates on the contradictions in the natural world as she realizes that beauty and violence complete each other and cannot be separated. It is the rule of the wild, according to Dillard, and should be accepted by people. Chapter Three deals with the social implications of Transcendentalism in the works of the three writers. Berry dignifies physical work and presents an ideal image of farm-town unity. To him, fidelity to the land is true citizenship. Snyder's vision of an ideal political world is basically based on bioregionalist attitudes. Snyder also calls for a new kind of democracy that is not limited to human beings but shared by all living beings and it is only through this democracy that the earth can survive and be preserved. Dillard hardly touches on social issues directly but does elevate the position of the human condition in society. In the heroine of her novel *Maytrees*, she embodies the Emersonian concept of self-reliance as a way of preserving consistency in society. Chapter Four deals with spiritual and religious matters in the works of Snyder, Berry, and Dillard. Snyder draws considerably from Buddhist ideals in his spiritual vision while Berry presents a new vision of Christianity and an agrarian approach that leads towards a mystical life. Dillard's spiritual vision is Christian but her use of scientific methods gives her spirituality a scientific dimension.

ABSTRAK

Pergerakan '*transcendentalist*' mempunyai pengaruh yang besar dalam lingkungan kesusasteraan dan kebudayaan pada abad ke sembilan belas Amerika tetapi menyaksikan kemerosotan teruk dalam dekad akhir abad ke sembilan belas dan separuh pertama abad kedua puluh disebabkan oleh perasaan anti-idealis yang berkembang untuk menguasai masyarakat. Kajian ini berkaitan dengan tiga penulis kontemporari Amerika, Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry dan Annie Dillard, penulisan mereka telah memberikan kehidupan baru kepada pemikiran '*transcendental*'. Dalam tesis ini, saya berpendapat bahawa penulis ini menghidupkan semula nilai-nilai '*transcendental*' untuk menangani isu-isu kontemporari Amerika dan ekologi di seluruh dunia, sosial dan rohani. Secara khususnya, nilai-nilai '*transcendental*' ini memperkatakan tentang hubungan yang harmoni antara manusia dengan alam, penolakan masyarakat materialisme moden dan penegasan kepada kebebasan individu bersama-sama dengan seruan untuk menerima pakai hubungan sah dengan Tuhan yang melampaui agama yang dianjurkan. Mereka mendapati penawar bagi penyakit-penyakit tamadun moden terdapat dalam '*transcendental*' ideal. Tulisan-tulisan Snyder, Dillard dan Berry mewakili hubungan antara '*transcendentalism*' dan ekologi memandangkan tulisan-tulisan berorientasikan ekologi mereka memaparkan minat mereka dalam prinsip-prinsip '*transcendental*' dengan pendekatan-eko bar u kepada sastera yang mewarisi dan membangunkan asas-asas '*transcendentalism*' mengenai hubungan individu dengan masyarakat, Tuhan dan dunia semula jadi. Kajian ini adalah berdasarkan kepada unit tematik dan tidak membincangkan setiap penulis secara berasingan. Bab Satu memberikan latar belakang '*Transcendentalism*' dan tokoh-tokoh pengasas, Ralph Waldo Emerson dan H.D. Thoreau sebagai tambahan kepada latar belakang pergerakan ekologi dan '*ecocriticism*' abad kedua puluh. Bab Dua meneroka pandangan ekologi daripada ketiga-tiga penulis dan bagaimana mereka memaparkan nilai-nilai '*transcendental*' melalui analisis karya puisi dan prosa terpilih. Pandangan ekologi Gary Snyder, ketara berasal dari Buddhism, menekankan kewujudan bersama dan kesamarataan manusia dan makhluk hidup dan tidak hidup. Wendell Berry adalah kurang radikal daripada Snyder; dia menyokong kehidupan berladang secara sederhana daripada kehidupan primitif dan seruan untuk berdamai antara ladang dan tanah gersang. Annie Dillard merenungkan antara percanggahan dunia semula jadi seperti yang beliau sedari bahawa keindahan dan keganasan melengkapi antara satu sama lain dan tidak boleh dipisahkan. Ia adalah peraturan alam, menurut Dillard, dan perlu diterima oleh rakyat. Bab Tiga memperkatakan implikasi sosial '*Transcendentalism*' dalam karya-karya ketiga-tiga penulis. Berry memartabatkan karya-karya fizikal dan mempersembahkan imej yang ideal bagi perpaduan ladang-bandar. Bagi beliau, kesetiaan kepada tanah adalah kerakyatan yang sebenar. Pandangan Snyder terhadap dunia politik yang ideal pada dasarnya berdasarkan sikap '*bioregionalist*'. Snyder juga menyeru kepada jenis demokrasi baru yang tidak terhad kepada manusia tetapi dikongsi oleh semua makhluk hidup dan hanya melalui demokrasi ini, bumi boleh terus hidup dan dipelihara. Dillard hampir tidak menyentuh isu-isu sosial secara langsung tetapi tidak mengangkat kedudukan keadaan manusia dalam masyarakat. Dalam heroin novel beliau, *Mayrtrrees*, dia memaparkan konsep Emersonian

berdikari sebagai satu cara memelihara konsistensi dalam masyarakat. Bab Empat memperkatakan perkara-perkara spiritual dan keagamaan dalam karya-karya Snyder, Berry, dan Dillard. Snyder agak menjauhi ajaran Buddha dalam pandangan spiritualnya, manakala Berry membentangkan pandangan baru agama Kristian dan kaedah pertanian ke arah kehidupan yang mistik. Dillard sentiasa mencari Tuhan dalam karya-karya utama beliau dan pandangan spiritual beliau ialah Kristian tetapi penggunaan kaedah saintifik memberikan beliau kerohanian satu dimensi saintifik.

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This thesis is dedicated to:

**The Memory of my Father, Mother, Wife, Sons (Aws&Somer),
daughter (Wajd) and my Sisters**

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Research objectives

The present study aims to explore the revival of nineteenth century American transcendental thought in selected works of American literature from the 1950s onwards. Transcendentalism reached the height of its glory during the mid-nineteenth century but lost its impact on intellectual life in the later decades. The optimistic mood about man's potential gave way to skepticism of any ideal thought; hence, there was a sharp decline of transcendental ideals. This present study focuses on the revival of those ideals in American literature that took place in the second half of the twentieth century. To do so, I have chosen three contemporary American writers, Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Annie Dillard, whose writings represent a revival of American transcendental thought. This study demonstrates the immense influence of Transcendentalism on the three writers and the movement's impact on their works. More importantly, this study investigates how the revival of these transcendental ideals addresses contemporary American and international ecological, social, spiritual and religious issues. This study, therefore, also explores the ecology movement in depth as it shares Transcendentalism's focus on the dignity and sanctity of the natural world. I will examine Snyder, Berry and Dillard's ecological views to show that each writer has their own distinctive ecological vision though they are all concerned with

preserving the natural world from any possible harm through raising people's ecological consciousness.

On a social level, this study explores transcendental concepts like an agricultural society, refusal of political systems, civil disobedience, self-reliance and a rejection of modern man's sense of despair. All the aforementioned transcendental ideals will be examined and analyzed to demonstrate how they have been revived and reproduced to address contemporary issues in American society. On religious and spiritual levels, this study focuses on the revival of spiritual transcendental ideals present in the works of Snyder, Berry and Dillard. The presentation of these spiritual and religious ideals will be studied to demonstrate how they urge people towards a new spiritual relationship with God and the natural world. This study will analyze selected poetic and prose works from the writers. The poetic works are Gary Snyder's *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*(1959),*The Back Country*(1968), *Turtle Island* (1974), *Mountains and Rivers without End* (1996), Wendell Berry's *Collected Poems (1957-1982)* (1987), and *The Sabbath Poems 1979-1997 A Timbered Choir* while the prose works are Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974), *Holy the Firm* (1977), *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (1982), *The Maytrees* (2007) and Wendell Berry's *The Long –Legged House*(1969), *The Unforeseen Wilderness*(1971) as well as Gary Snyder's *Earth House Hold* (1969), *The Practice of the Wild* (1990) and a few more essays written by the three writers.

1.2 Methodology and Theoretical Framework:

The methodology of this research is qualitative, using library research and textual analysis. The critical approaches used in the study are a blend of both sociological and ecocritical approaches to literature. The selection of poetic and prose works will be analyzed and assessed thematically in accordance with the theoretical framework I have developed for my study. The whole study focuses on the transcendental ideals of the nineteenth century which have been revived in the writings of Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Annie Dillard. Transcendentalism is at the heart of this study and its key concepts are divided into thematic sections. Each chapter will cover thematic strands of my study which are ecological, social and spiritual and religious. I believe that presented in this manner, there is a more deliberate focus on particular themes and it provides readers with more opportunities to evaluate and compare the writers' visions. As such, although the social and the ecological are inextricably connected and the transcendentalists are engaged with community, I have chosen to focus on ecology and society as two separate strands in the organization of this thesis. The notion that nature writing is apolitical and asocial is untenable and the division of chapters in this thesis is not meant to suggest otherwise. The relationship between humanity and the natural world is given prominence in the present study as mankind's relationship with his environment greatly preoccupied the pioneers of Transcendentalism like Emerson and Thoreau. They thought that humankind and nature cannot be separated as one cannot understand humankind apart from nature and vice versa. Gary Snyder has his own vision of nature which gels to a great extent with the transcendental

concept of nature for he believes in the interdependence of all life forms on earth. For Wendell Berry, on the other hand, the relationship between creatures and the environment is sacred and there should be ethical treatment of the natural world while Annie Dillard is interested in ecological systems and looks at humans as just a part of the vast natural world. In short, Snyder, Berry and Dillard have much in common in their transcendental and ecological attitudes yet they are not identical.

This study investigates the social implications of transcendental revival. The transcendentalists advocated the moral and disparaged the material; they did not trust technological progress. Thoreau wrote in *Walden*, “As with our colleges, so with a hundred ‘modern improvements’; there is an illusion about them; there is not always a positive advance . . .” (365). Snyder, in “I went into the Maverick Bar” from *Turtle Island*, protests against the materialism of society while Wendell Berry praises those like the original Indians who were kind to the land in the past and condemns those who abused the land, like miners and farmers who cared only for their own profit. Another key transcendental concept on a social level is the call for individual freedom and the release from any kind of restraint imposed on individuals by society. These transcendental ideals did not approve of the elevation of society at the expense of the development of individual. Snyder, Berry, and Dillard assert that it is the individual that should be the focus of attention, not society. The transcendental ideals of democracy have also been revived to deal with issues of the American nation. Snyder has a deep concern for America’s spiritual growth and asserts Whitman’s belief in democracy and freedom as being the only way to achieve real progress for Americans.

The binary opposition between wilderness and civilization which Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman tackled in their writings is another central transcendental concept which has been reproduced by Snyder, Berry, and Dillard. Wilderness is the place that shows human limitations and weakens his sense of superiority over other elements of nature. Snyder presents a new vision which seems to suggest the possibility of creating harmony between the wilderness and civilization while Berry suggests the possibility of farm-town unity. In her masterpiece *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Dillard seems to advocate living in a natural rather than an urban place. Dillard, however, has her own vision of the natural world. She thinks that violence and beauty in the natural world complete each other and cannot be separated for they are two sides of the same coin. Thus, each of the three writers has his or her own distinctive view of the wilderness and civilization despite sharing a basic transcendental attitude towards the wilderness and the natural world.

On religious and spiritual levels, Snyder, Berry and Dillard present transcendental religious and spiritual ideals on a global scale. They aimed to renew people's faith in spiritual and religious matters which have been greatly weakened as a result of the dominance of material philosophies in the twentieth century. Emerson, the founder of Transcendentalism, looked for an authentic spiritual relationship with God that was more than organized religion by adopting Unitarian philosophy. Snyder, who was fascinated with the East and greatly influenced by Buddhism and other Oriental philosophies, discovered in them new ways of life, expression and methods of spiritual enlightenment. Snyder's spiritual and religious concerns can be seen in his works, especially his poetic book *Mountains and Rivers*

without End (1996). Dillard, on the other hand, shows Christian concerns in most of her works, particularly in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. Wendell Berry, unlike Snyder and Dillard, seems to be rather disinterested in spiritual and religious matters.

This study is an exploration of a revival of nineteenth-century transcendental ideals by contemporary American writers Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Annie Dillard. This revival, which took place in the second half of the twentieth century, has mainly occurred on three levels. First is the ecological level which deals with the ecological issue of human's relationship with their environment not only in America but on a global scale. Second is the social level, which tackles concerns of modern American society. Third is the spiritual and religious level which deals with the spiritual and religious dimensions of human beings.

1.3 Transcendentalism

American Transcendentalism which thrived during the early to mid-nineteenth century (c.1836-1860) is an important movement in philosophy and literature. Transcendentalism is not easy to define because it includes complex philosophical and religious ideas while its principles are imbued with a certain mysticism. The Transcendentalists, however, were an organized group of independent individuals who shared a formal doctrine and adopted some basic beliefs about man's place in the universe. The most prominent factors which unified them were "their common tendency toward an intuitive philosophical method, their generally romantic approach to the universe, their almost invariable optimism about human nature, and their common feeling of participation in a movement of awakening and protest"

(Hutchison 30).Through Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Margaret Fuller, who were the most prominent representatives of the movement, and through some other writers, like Walt Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville who were associated with the movement, Transcendentalism stimulated a renaissance in American literature.Indeed, Transcendentalism helped American literature gain international recognition during the mid-nineteenth century. Transcendentalism is described as “a protest against materialism. In place of the experience of the data of the senses, of the force of circumstances, of the animal wants of man, it insists on consciousness, on the power of thought and of will, on inspiration, on individual culture”(154-155).

American Transcendentalism is derived from oriental mysticism, Neoplatonic idealism and Kant’s philosophy as interpreted principally by Coleridge and Carlyle. Emerson, the leading exponent of the American transcendental movement, presented in his essay *Nature* (1836) a systematic exposition of principles that was considered the manifesto of the Transcendentalism movement. Emerson wrote, “Why should not we also enjoy an original relation with the universe?”(7). All the Transcendentalists, in fact, asserted the significance of a direct relationship between humans on the one hand and God and nature on the other. Each generation and each individual should take nothing for granted, “but re-fashion the world for him-or herself, starting from the premise that personal identity, moral values are all up for grabs” (Buell, *The American Transcendentalists* xiii).Thus, Thoreau went to live in Walden Pond for two years (1845-1847) to experience nature directly. In his book *Walden* (1854), Thoreau describes his connection with nature as very intimate.

“The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature . . . of sun and wind and rain of summer and winter . . . Am I not partly leaves and vegetables mould myself?”(389). Thoreau’s idea of his oneness with nature is central to Transcendentalism.

Transcendentalism, then, is a form of idealism which goes beyond the inferior physical needs of life and moves from the logical and reasonable to the spiritual realm. The human soul is part of the universal soul or the “Over-Soul” as Emerson called it. Therefore, every human being should be respected because he/she is part of the Over-Soul. Thus, that Over-Soul can, consequently, be found everywhere and, therefore, it is not necessary to seek it in holy places. Furthermore, the Transcendentalists thought that Jesus was no different from other human beings with regards to divinity. Like other humans, he is part of the Over-Soul and that he is only different in that he lived a transcendental life and could make exceptional use of that power which is inside each person. The Transcendentalists believed that only people in the past gave importance to the miracles of the Bible while miracles are all around us and the whole world is a miracle. The Transcendentalists were more concerned about life than the afterlife. They did not fear death since when a human dies, his soul merely moves to the Over-Soul. Also, the Transcendentalists did not believe in the Calvinistic concept of man’s innate depravity as they thought humans are principally good and if they do evil things, they do so out of ignorance. What is more, the Transcendentalists challenged the Calvinistic concept of predestination and instead, asserted free will and the unity of man, nature and God as well as called for faith in intuition (Reuben).

In his article “Transcendentalism in American Thought,” Woodbridge Riley writes about the Transcendentalist belief in microcosm. Because of the indwelling of divinity in every element of the world no matter how small, every element is “held to contain within itself all the laws and the meaning of the universe.” Riley adds, “the soul of each individual is identical with the soul of the world” (142). Instead of the mechanical separation between God and humankind which was dominant until the time of Emerson, both God and humankind were joined by nature itself. Since God is in the world and man is part of that world, the human can feel the divine currents within himself. Transcendentalism claimed that it was the intuitive faculty, not the rational or sensual that served as the means for a conscious union of the individual soul with the world soul (Over-Soul). The Over-Soul is, thus, a kind of cosmic unity between man, God and nature. It is the divine spirit that is present in each man and all nature (Riley 147).

Transcendentalism is better understood in its historical, social, religious, philosophical, and literary context. The historical events certainly had a vital role in the development of the movement. Activities such as exploration, expansion, slavery, industrialization and technological development dominated the American social and political scene in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Transcendentalists were fully aware of these historical events and were heavily influenced by them. The issue of exploration and settlement was of importance to them because it was related to slavery. The antislavery movement, therefore, came to be the most significant reform movement of the period. Most of the Transcendentalist writers were enthusiastic supporters of abolishing slavery.

William Garrison who was a radical abolitionist issued the periodical *The Liberator* in 1831 in Boston which was a center of anti-slavery activity. The Transcendentalists, however, were not assured by the abolitionists' efforts to reform society through political and legal procedures. They, rather, wanted to reform society through the improvement of the individual, not through external ways. The tremendous progress in industry, technology, and transportation affected the Transcendentalists' lives. Emerson, Thoreau and the other Transcendentalists observed how the changes affected society. Mechanized factories increased rapidly throughout New England and the process of change encompassed all fields of life. The Transcendentalists were doubtful about the social consequences of this process of industrialization on the entire society.

The years from around 1820 until the civil war (1861-1865) witnessed an increasing awareness of a number of social issues that led to a number of social reforms movements. There was a tendency to reshape society idealistically through communal living and education reform. In the 1840s, several Utopian communities were established to reform society. The Transcendentalists were closely associated with two of those communities: Brook Farm and Fruitlands. Brook Farm was established in 1841 by George Ripley and continued up to 1847. The residents of this community lived a simple life and focused on balancing between doing physical work and individual self-culture. Emerson and other Transcendentalists did not join the community but supported it and were regular visitors there. Despite the demise of those communities, the notion of returning to the pastoral life as

opposed to the industrial life became established in the American imagination.
(Bickman)

The Transcendentalists made it clear that all Utopian communities and all kinds of reform movements should look at the individual as the principle unit in any reform. In his essay “New England Reformers” (1844), Emerson declared:

The union is only perfect when all the uniters are isolated . . . Each man, if he attempts to join himself to others, is on all sides cramped and diminished of his proportion, and the stricter the union, the smaller and the more pitiful he is . . . the union must be ideal in actual individualism. (599)

That is why Emerson and other Transcendentalists did not join the Brook Farm community. While they supported educational reforms that attempted to develop the individual by promoting intuitive understanding, they did not support common school reform. Like Emerson, Margaret Fuller, a leading transcendental writer, emphasized self-reliance and individualism and as a woman writer, she applied these concepts to women. In her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Margaret Fuller urged young women to gain more freedom and independence from family and home. She refused the idea that women are only able to do domestic duties and should be satisfied with that and suggests instead that women should be given the opportunity to achieve their personal potential by doing any work they are interested in. As a general principle, the Transcendentalists sought a form of community which would free them from degrading materialism and spiritually ruined conventions and institutions of American society. Thoreau moved to Walden

Pond and lived there for two years in order to put into practice the principles that the Transcendentalists had long expressed: simplicity, self-reliance, spiritual meditation, and the love of nature. Thoreau wrote that he was motivated to free himself from the false luxuries of life to return to the real necessities: the spiritual riches of solitude and self-denial. He said that even though he lived alone, he had great recompense in the company of nature.

Transcendentalism, as a matter of fact, has deep roots in religion and cannot be understood properly without being aware of Unitarianism which dominated New England during the early nineteenth century. Unitarianism developed in the late eighteenth century as a liberal branch of Christianity. It spread throughout New England primarily because of those members of the Church who were dissatisfied and split from the traditional, Calvinistic church. Most of the Transcendentalists were “Unitarian ministers or in a sense lay preachers who came to distrust the institutional aspects of religion and were drawn to literary life” (Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism* 21). Transcendentalism and Unitarianism share three fundamental ideas. First, both Transcendentalism and Unitarianism reject the idea of the Trinity and declare that God is one being instead of the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is, they deny the divinity of Jesus and emphasize his humanity. Second, both reject the exclusive and sectarian nature of Calvinism by emphasizing that all men may hope to realize the Christian ideal through perfect self-dedication. Third, they strongly oppose the Calvinistic emphasis on sin and the idea that humankind is born depraved. Both Transcendentalism and Unitarianism posit that inherent human nature can change while both believe in the goodness and

justice of God and human's likeness to God. To them, mankind can comprehend God and improve spiritually and intellectually (Carpenter 129-130).

William Ellery Channing, the recognized leader of American Unitarianism, dictated its major beliefs of faith in his sermon "Unitarian Christianity" in 1819. Channing asserted more his own understanding of biblical writings than the doctrine passed on by his ancestors. He said "our leading principle in interpreting Scripture is that the Bible is a book written for men and that its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as other books" (qtd. In Dorrien 30). The Unitarians sought for a new relation between God and man: "God was no longer a searing flame of power, before whose unsearchable will man must bow in awe and love; He was a benevolent Father who designed and governed the world to assist man in his moral education" (Whicher 7). The Unitarians also reject the idea of predestination and adopt the ideas of free will and personal responsibility instead. Emerson and other Transcendentalists found much to admire in Channing like his concept of "likeness to God" which was then merged into transcendental philosophy and developed. However, some other aspects of Unitarianism could not satisfy the needs of the Transcendentalists.

The Transcendentalists' concept of truth, nevertheless, was not only based on religion but also on the Platonic sense of the divine which was independent of religion. Also, the Transcendentalists believed that the individual can intuitively make a relationship with the God they imagined without being committed to formal religion. They even questioned the authority of the Christian doctrine as they claimed that the core of spirituality does not lie in specific formal religion but

rather in the formation of human personality through life practices. In addition, the Transcendentalists assume there is a fundamental unity of thought and values across cultures. Emerson asks “Can anyone doubt that if the noblest saint among the Buddhists...the highest stock in Athens, the purest and wisest Christian, Confucius in China . . . could somewhere meet and converse together, they will find themselves in one religion” (*Nature* 47). This viewpoint may seem naïve today, Buell remarks, because of clashes between religious fundamentalists. However, if one perceives the real heart of the Transcendentalist project to be a desire to find moral and spiritual universals in the hope of achieving a greater common ground, the project seems to be cosmopolitan (Buell, *The American Transcendentalists* xx).

To know the philosophical context of Transcendentalism, it is necessary to shed light on the intellectual and philosophical trends which greatly influenced Transcendentalism and contributed in forming the movement’s theoretical frame. The philosophy of eighteenth century Enlightenment in England and Europe gave prominence to trust in reason, elevation of the individual, and called for more serious ways of scientific investigation. The Enlightenment writers refuted tradition and the authority of religion and by so doing, paved the way for both Unitarianism and Transcendentalism to come into existence. The English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) had a considerable impact on Transcendentalism, which partially appeared as a reaction to his philosophy. To Locke, human knowledge is derived empirically from the experience of the senses. The Transcendentalists rejected Locke’s materialism as they longed for a more idealistic philosophy which

is based on an innate understanding of God and morality. Emerson protested against Locke's attitude as Emerson thought that there were truths higher than those given by experience and there were intuitions higher than those given by the senses (Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism* 3-5).

The Transcendentalists found the philosophy of German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) more convincing. In his philosophy, Kant distinguishes between the world of the senses and that of understanding. He believed that sensory experience reveals things as they appear but understanding reveals them as they are. Kant was the first who distinguished between the terms transcendent and transcendental. Transcendent refers to subjects like God and the soul which exist outside human experience and are, therefore, incomprehensible while the term transcendental is used to "signify a priori forms of thought, that is, innate principles with which the mind gives form to its perceptions and makes experience intelligible" ("Transcendentalism").

However, the influence of German idealistic thought raises the question of whether it came to America through the interpretations of English romantic writers like Coleridge, Wordsworth and Carlyle or through a more general passage of ideas between America and Europe. Many Americans thought that the romantic philosophy principally came through Coleridge, Carlyle and Wordsworth. Carlyle, who studied German philosophy through German literature, heavily influenced American Transcendentalism by emphasizing the need to wonder in viewing nature, convinced that everything in the universe is a symbol of God and rejected tradition in favour of the present. Wordsworth impressed the Transcendentalists in

his romantic belief that childhood is a visionary state to which man should try to return. This concept of childhood is repeatedly echoed in the literature of American Transcendentalists like Emerson and Whitman. In reality, the emergence of the Romantic Movement in Europe significantly contributed to the rise of Transcendentalism by providing it with a wide literary background.

The Romantic Movement, which emerged in Germany and England in the late eighteenth century, was heavily indebted to the intuitive philosophy of Kant. Romantic writers saw literature as, to use Wordsworth's famous words, "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", it was the flux of the inner spirit. Imagination for them was a means of kindling the spirit. They opposed the restrictions imposed on individual imagination and the freedom of expression. The romantic ideals were communicated principally through the writings of Emerson, Thoreau and Fuller in the form of Transcendentalism. However, to say that American Transcendentalism is just another version of European Romanticism would not be appropriate because Transcendentalism, says Carpenter, stimulated an American Renaissance by re-examining old assumptions and ideas which Western European civilization had come to consider as proven. Apparently, American Transcendentalism shares Romanticism's basic literary characteristics. It exalted nature and intuition, revolted against an industrial style of life, called for the return to the past and glorified the common human. However, American Transcendentalism "converted the romantic revolt from the past into an assertion of the independence of American literature and culture from the European past. And it

converted the romantic idealization of the common man into an assertion of the infinite potentialities of all men and of their equality before God” (Carpenter 135).

The Transcendentalists disseminated their philosophy and concerns through Periodicals that were significant to the cultural life of the mid-nineteenth century. *The Western Messenger*, which was issued in 1835 and continued to 1841, included writings about Transcendentalism, Unitarianism and German and Eastern literature. *The Dial*, edited by Emerson and Margaret Fuller was issued between 1840 and 1844. In addition to Emerson, *The Dial* introduced Thoreau as well as several minor poets to the reading public. It gave Margaret Fuller and the American philosopher Bronson Alcott a new voice and helped to introduce new realms of literature from the writings of the German romantic poets and transcendental philosophers and the religious literatures of the East to the American public (Carpenter 133).

Transcendentalism in America contributed significantly to social reforms but its real greatness chiefly lies in its contribution to American literature. “Emerson and his associates”, says Carpenter, “used the abstract ideas of philosophy, the emotional faith of religion, and the forms of a democratic society to create literature that was new and challenging” (135). In order to understand Transcendentalism in more detail, it is necessary to take a closer look at the movement’s great leaders, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

1.4 Ralph Waldo Emerson:

Emerson is considered one of the greatest thinkers in the history of America and is still widely read by people almost a century and a half from his death.

Emerson's transcendental ideas are echoed in modernist literature. His views and ideas were central to the American Transcendental Movement and, therefore, will be discussed through an analysis of a selection his essays, in particular, *Nature* (1836) which included most of the Transcendentalism assumptions. Ralph Waldo Emerson, born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1803, was a lecturer, poet, philosopher, Unitarian minister and a leading exponent of the American Transcendental Movement. Emerson visited Europe in 1832 and his trip provided him an opportunity to discover the world and meet people who subsequently influenced him. He met Romantic poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth in England and Thomas Carlyle in Scotland. On his return to America, he served as a minister in different Unitarian parishes and worked as a lecturer, a job which occupied him for several decades. His job as a lecturer provided him the opportunity to make use of his skills which he developed as a preacher and enabled him to develop his ideas about God, human, and nature. The influence of his diverse readings of German philosophers, Plato, Eastern sacred books and the English Romantic poets, in addition to his Unitarian background, produced his visionary idealism. In 1836, Emerson's *Nature* was published and with its publication, Transcendentalism as a movement gained impetus and Emerson established himself as a leader of the movement. Soon after the appearance of *Nature*, a group of writers met at George Ripley's home in Boston to discuss moral and theological subjects. This group was known later as the "Transcendental Club" which included Ripley, Frederic Henry Hedge, Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Ellery Channing, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Thoreau and others. The club met till 1840

and led to the establishment of *The Dial* (1840-1844), the most significant magazine of the Transcendentalists (Bloom 1-2).

Emerson was influenced by the mysticism of the ancient East, the idealism of Plato, New England Calvinism, Unitarianism, Coleridge and Carlyle. However, his interpretation of his ancestors and contemporaries was his own. Emerson believed that man should develop a personal understanding of the universe. In the introduction to *Nature*, Emerson rejects the reliance on inherited and institutionalized knowledge:

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? (7)

Emerson refused to look to the past or the interpretations of society's forefathers because each human should have his own interpretation of the world. He believed that people of the past had an immediate relationship with God and nature and could arrive at their own understanding of the world. All the elements humans need may exist in every moment. "The sun shines to-day also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship" (*Nature* 7). So we do not need to look always to the past because what has been done once can certainly be done

again. Emerson, then, insists on “an original relation to the universe.” He did much to elevate the position of humans in relation to God, nature, and human institutions. In all his writings and lectures, Emerson emphasized the importance and the dignity of man as an expression of God and rejected the view that mankind should be subject to traditional, religious and social frameworks. He wrote:

That spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old. As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws, at his need, inexhaustible power. Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man? . . . man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the Creator in the finite. (*Nature* 41)

Emerson’s attitude is fundamentally humanistic and defies the Calvinistic concept of the independence of God from men. Mankind derives endless power from God and his possibilities, and as a result, he becomes boundless. Emerson elevates not only humanity’s position in the universe but also suggests a democratic view where each and every human being is equal in value and capacity. Things such as race, position or religion are irrelevant in measuring the value of an individual. Emerson adds, “All that Adam had, all that Caesar could, you have and can do” (*Nature* 48). This positive concept of equality among people seems as attractive to us today as it was for Emerson’s contemporaries. Emerson calls for a kind of democracy which no political or social system could achieve. He looks at genius as a demonstration

of the potential of men. He wrote essays about great figures like Shakespeare, Plato, Napoleon, Goethe and others, demonstrating his high admiration for them. Emerson presented his worldview when he wrote about individual humans from different fields and different countries to say “no individual was great, except through the general”(Matthiessen 632). Emerson, thus, was not so much interested in the particular excellence of those figures as he was in asserting the potential and aspirations of all humans. In “Representative Men,” Emerson says, “There are no common men. All men are at last of a size; and true art is only possible, on the conviction that every talent has its apotheosis somewhere” (630). Emerson believed that humans are not identical as each man has a particular tendency and no human is perfect (Paul, *Emerson’s Angle of Vision* 165). In “Self-reliance” Emerson asserts that each human should have independent thinking and trust his ability to understand and act. He warns individuals against giving up their freedom to oppressive beliefs and common values:

We must go alone. I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preachingWhy should we assume the faults of our friend, or wife, or father, or child because they sit around our hearth, or are said to have the same blood? All men have my blood, and I have all men’s. Not for that will I adopt their petulance or folly But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation. (272 –273)

Emerson’s glorification of mankind was based on his view of the vital connection between God, human, and nature. human’s potential stems from his

intimate relationship with a larger entity. The concept of the unity of human with nature is expressed in his essay “The Over-Soul”:

We know that all spiritual being is in man . . . there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so there is no bar or wall in the soul, where man, the effect, ceases, and God, the cause, begins. The walls are taken away. We lie open on one side to the deeps of spiritual nature, to the attributes of God. (387)

The divine can be reached because God directly communicates to humans. Thus, they will be able to understand their spiritual nature and the unlimited potential of higher development. “Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul. The simplest person, who in his integrity worships God, becomes God” (“The Over-Soul” 398). Self-improvement or moral and spiritual elevation towards the divine is, then, a limitless process and God-likeness can be achieved by even the simplest and humblest person.

Nature is a mediating factor between man and God; it is the third element of the equation between the human, the natural and the divine. Human understanding of the significance of nature is fundamental to his perception of God. If the human fails to comprehend nature, he will be far from God. Emerson wrote: “As we degenerate, the contrast between us and our house is more evident. We are as much strangers in nature, as we are aliens from God” (*Nature* 42). In a degenerated state, “man feels himself stranger in nature and, therefore, alien to God. To know God, man must first feel at one with nature” (Koster 34-35). Emerson explained in “The

Over-soul” the ways by which the individual understands his own place in the universe:

We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul. Only by the vision of that Wisdom can the horoscope of the ages be read, and by falling back on our better thoughts, by yielding to the spirit of prophecy which is innate in every man, we can know what it saith. (386)

Thus, the only way to understand one’s own place in the universe is to be visionary and prophetic. Human needs the divine spark of intuition rather than logical understanding to have a deep insight into the world. To Emerson, nature is an expression of the divine and also a way of understanding it. Emerson wrote:

To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds will separate between him and what he touches. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. (*Nature* 9)

To be in true solitude, Emerson thinks human should go out to nature and be completely distant from society. Human goes to nature to be the creator of his own world in solitude and freedom (Santayana 32). Nature gives humankind comfort and support and makes him aware, when looking at the stars, of his separation from

the material world. The stars also show humankind the eternal presence of the sublime and that God is ever-present. Emerson mentions in *Nature* three assets of natural beauty. First, nature gives pleasure and can elevate human's mood even in its harsher moments:

In the presence of nature a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows Not the sun or the summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight . . . The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me. (10-11)

Secondly, nature works together with the spiritual element in mankind to increase virtuous human actions. Thirdly, natural beauty is able to stimulate human intellect to comprehend the divine order of the universe. The universe, then, can be understood by everyone through the mediation of nature. human cannot be understood without nature, nor nature without human. Emerson emphasized that there is a correspondence between moral and material values. All men should understand this correspondence in order to comprehend the laws of the universe. Buell explains Emerson's theory: "Man and the physical universe are parallel creations of the same divine spirit; therefore natural and moral law are the same and everything in nature, rightly seen, has spiritual significance for man" (*Literary Transcendentalism* 149). Moreover, Emerson made it clear that man has a particular power over nature and human in his relation to nature enjoys a superior position. Nature was made to satisfy both humanity's physical and spiritual needs. In

addition, Emerson adds that nature alone cannot create human reaction because it requires human's inner process to become meaningful : "Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both" (*Nature* 11). Emerson is not so much concerned with the external appearances of nature as he is with its inner and eternal beauty. Nature satisfies human's needs yet it is not an end in itself because "beauty in nature is not ultimate. It is the herald of inward and eternal beauty and is not alone a solid and satisfactory good" (*Nature* 19).

Emerson developed the idea that each object is a microcosm of the universe. He wrote: "A leaf, a drop, a crystal, a moment of time is related to the whole, and partakes of the perfection of the whole. Each particle is a microcosm, and faithfully renders the likeness to the world" (*Nature* 29-30). The idea of the microcosm is important to Emerson because it represents the whole on a small-scale. To Emerson, we are not required to see all the parts in order to understand the whole. It is not necessary to be aware of the details to comprehend meaning as we can understand the whole through our insight from only one example in nature. The religious and literary independence of attitude which characterizes Transcendentalism makes it possible to make use of any object in nature, no matter how small, common, and unimportant, to find in it spiritual meaning (Sutcliffe 135). Emerson, consequently, promoted the intuitive mind as a way of acquiring insight into the laws of the world because empirical science thwarts true perception in its interest in the details rather than the whole. There should be a unifying principle behind the diverse natural expressions. Humans use rational

understanding of nature and, therefore, they just perceive it materially but if they use their intuitive reason, they would better understand the world. People, then, lack the sense of universal unity which can only be gained when people restore spirituality in their approach to nature.

Emerson debates that country life greatly supports a powerful mind because it provides the mind with a great number of sensual images. Those images cannot be evoked freely but present themselves when urgent needs call for them:

The poet, the orator, bred in the woods, whose senses have been nourished by their fair and appeasing changes, year after year, without design and without heed, ---- shall not lose their lesson altogether, in the roar of the cities or the broil of politics At the call of a noble sentiment, again the woods wave, the pines murmur, the river rolls and shines, and the cattle low upon the mountains, as he saw and heard them in his infancy. And with these forms the spells of persuasion, the keys of power are put into his hands. (*Nature* 23)

People tend to look at things as ultimates and not at the higher spiritual reality beyond them though intuitive reason opposes the absolute acceptance of material reality as the final reality. Intuition counteracts sense perceptions and stresses human's intellectual and spiritual independence from nature. Emerson thinks that through intuition, human can perceive the fundamental unity behind the different expressions of God. Having insight into the divine does not come successively, but rather in flashes, which brings joy besides vision (Howe 1).

Intuition uncovers new worlds to human. Emerson explains in detail the difference between Understanding and Reason. Both instruct human but understanding is tied to the material world and leads to common sense rather than to a comprehensive vision. Reason alone can move human from the material world to the spiritual. Intuition, then, promotes spirituality and works against the approval of material reality. To get strength and inspiration from God, human needs to enrich and assert his own importance in the divine scheme ,“And no man touches these divine natures, without becoming, in some degree, himself divine”(Nature 37).

Intuition hence works on man immediately and cumulatively, giving him a deeper insight to the divine and the absolute. It lets him form a new picture of life. Emerson's ideas about humanity and nature heavily influenced his contemporaries, especially his disciple Thoreau who shared many of his views on the relation of humanity to the universe.

1. 4 Henry David Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau is a key figure in American Transcendentalism. He was born in Concord, Massachusetts in 1817. He was educated at Harvard (1833-1837) where he showed considerable interest in Greek and Roman poetry, the philosophy of the East and botany. Thoreau worshiped nature and dedicated most of his life to exploring the woods and ponds and made detailed observations of everything in nature, both plants and creatures. In 1839, Thoreau and his brother, John, made a boat trip down the Concord River and up the Merrimack. This journey inspired him and furnished him with material for his first book *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849). Thoreau was close to Emerson, and since Emerson was

older and a leader of the Transcendental movement, Emerson was both a teacher and a friend to him. Thoreau lived alone for two years in a small hut he built by Walden Pond near Concord. He stayed there from 1845 to 1847. Thoreau's unique experience of living alone in a natural environment inspired him to write his masterpiece *Walden*. He lectured and wrote against slavery and criticized both the northern farmers and the Southern slave-owners who cared more about material profits than about human considerations.

Thoreau's straightforwardness and personal independence were not welcomed and even considered harsh by some people. Thoreau made many journeys throughout his life; those journeys provided him with the material for his books that were published after his death *The Maine Woods* (1864), *Cape Cod* (1865), and *Yankee in Canada* (1866). Thoreau's journey to Maine provided him with the opportunity to be in touch with Native Americans whom Thoreau greatly admired since boyhood. In Maine, Indians were still able to live freely to a certain degree and did not lose their culture. Thoreau observed their life and kept a lot of notes on them but did not write an independent book on the subject. ("Henry David Thoreau").

Thoreau carried out the Transcendentalist principles of self-reliance and spontaneous intuition through his personal example. Koster remarks that Thoreau "speaks more effectively than does Emerson, his advocacy of anarchy, his theory of civil disobedience, his insistence on simplifying life, his delight in nature, his straightforward style of expression have all found a ready response among modern readers"(50). In "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau asserts that a higher law demands

the obedience of the individual rather than civil law for human law and government are subordinate. He wrote:

The government does not concern me much, and I shall bestow the fewest possible thoughts on it. It is not many comments that I live under a government, even in this world. If a man thought-free, fancy-free, imagination-free, that which is never for a long time appearing to be him, unwise rulers or reformers cannot fatally interrupt him. (133)

Thoreau did not pay much attention to the rules of government; he felt it was sometimes a waste to devote much time to speak about them. To him, the search for understanding of universal laws is the proper use of a human's time, energy and intellect. He assumes "That government is best which governs least" ("Civil Disobedience" 109). Government, according to Thoreau must be just a means to attain an end and exists for only one aim of assuring individual freedom. Humans should not indisputably obey a government's authority and should keep their dignity and freedom. Thoreau urges for rebellion against the government and violation of the law if necessary. The government exists by the agreement of citizens to ensure individual freedom that allows the search for deep thinking and high living. The government, for Thoreau, is just like a machine that may or may not function well enough.

Thoreau asserted that a human should lift his spiritual energy through "a conscious endeavor" and distinguish between material and spiritual life. He emphasized the destructive effects of materialism and the necessity of achieving

individual humanity and spiritual development. Thoreau urged people to be more spiritual, to seek divinity within and not to be obsessed with material needs of life. That is, people should be less preoccupied with the status quo and seek more independence, self-reliance and simplicity in life. His stay in Walden for two years was, in fact, his conscious experiment to test his ideals practically.

Thoreau's writings were dominated by the idea that there should be a higher truth behind the natural world and human life. To Thoreau, this natural world represents the higher truth which we might come to understand through its universal rules. Such an ideal concept goes in line with the transcendental notion that absolutes can be understood by the human mind.

As Bode points out in his introduction to Thoreau's works, Thoreau was a typical transcendental writer in his affirmation of the intuitive mind, belief in the supremacy of spirit over matter and great admiration of nature (16). Thoreau's concept of higher truth chimes with that of Emerson in regard to the final unity of God, man and nature in the Over-Soul. To Thoreau, nature, human and God are unified and his transcendent God is immanent-- present everywhere, in rain drops and animals as well as in human beings. Thoreau's movement between the particular and the universal and from the ordinary to the divine can be traced in his works. The relationship between the particular and the universal is central to Thoreau's ideas. Thoreau suggests this in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. The image of a river composed of many small streams flowing into it and all of which flow into the ocean alludes to such a relationship between the particular and the universal. Thoreau demonstrates this relationship between the

particular and the universal in *A Week* through several examples. He looks at the places inhabited by human beings along the river within the context of universal history. Thoreau was principally interested in the broader perception of things. Details are meaningful only when they are interpreted by a broad vision. He thought, therefore, that the men of science should transform particular data into universal meaning.

Nature dominates Thoreau's works and it was a central theme to him. Being close to nature makes man familiar with it and consequently, man can gain a deep understanding of higher truth. Thoreau thinks, "different persons see different objects in nature that you see mainly what you are looking for . . . Nature's supply depends on your fitness to receive"(qtd. in Foerster 41). Thoreau's great interest in nature led him to live in Walden Pond for two years during the peak of the Industrial Revolution from 1845 to 1847 in total solitude. The Industrial Revolution's enormous impact is shown clearly in the noisiness of the train as it passes the pond which is a contrast to the peaceful environment of the pond and the natural sounds of the birds. Such progress had a negative effect on people's lifestyles and the purity of the natural environment. Thoreau then decided to live in Walden Pond to prove that humans can live peacefully and happily amidst nature. Even the animals gave Thoreau a sense of companionship and did not consider him as an outsider but as a familiar part of their environment.

In a chapter of *Walden* titled "Higher Laws," Thoreau finds in himself "an instinct toward the higher or as it is named, spiritual life . . . and another toward a primitive rank and savage one" (457). Thoreau suggests that there are two

conflicting natures inside us as human beings; one is our wild animalistic nature and the other is our spiritual one. Thoreau revered them both. He believed that all people were hunters and fishermen at a certain point of development. Hunting and fishing express human's animalistic aspects and represents human's intense involvement with nature. Thoreau wrote that he was himself a fisherman for a day but had no more wish for fishing: "There is unquestionably the instinct in me which belongs to the lower orders of creation, yet with every year I am less fisherman At present I am no fisherman at all" (*Walden* 460). A man, then, cannot deny his animal or spiritual side.

Like Emerson, he thought that nature elevates mankind's mood even in its harshest moments. However, he exceeded Emerson in his enthusiasm for nature because nature clearly became less of a Deity and more of a collection of details for Thoreau, as Bode points out (17). Thoreau was aware of the danger of being preoccupied with the details at the expense of understanding higher truth. His excursions to Concord and other places were made through nature to gain revelations. Nature for Thoreau demonstrates human emotions. Walden Pond is repeatedly described by the writer as a mirror that reflects his emotional state that follows the state of the weather. Thoreau felt sad and doubtful in winter when everything was silent and cold as the pond was frozen while he felt happy in spring when the ice began to melt and new life seemed to grow. The seasonal and even daily changes in the pond and the surrounding environment corresponded to the changes in Thoreau's intellectual meditations. The idea that nature reflects human emotions consolidates Thoreau's belief that humans are part of nature rather than

being separated from or even superior to it. Thoreau looked at nature as an outstanding supporter of the human spirit in an age devoted to material profit, dehumanizing industrialization and urbanization. In his essay "Walking," Thoreau points out that nature could enhance human vision, "For I believe that climate does thus react on man, ---as there is something in the mountain-air that feeds the spirit and inspires. Will not man grow to greater perfection intellectually as well as physically under these influences?"(173)

Thoreau was suspicious of the idea that any outward improvement of life can bring humans inner peace and satisfaction. Civilization and society impede human's communion with nature. Thoreau opens "Solitude," a chapter in *Walden*, with a lyrical expression of his pleasure and sympathy with nature:

This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself. As I walk along the stony shore of the pond in my shirt-sleeves, though it is cool as well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial to me. (380)

There is an intimacy in Thoreau's connection with nature; everything for him is friendly and amiable. This intimacy gave him a sense of companionship with nature and excluded any possibility of loneliness. Solitude, Foerster says, "invited fruitful brooding [for Thoreau] as society did not" (42). Thoreau was, therefore, happy to spend his days away from people. Thoreau differentiates between solitude and loneliness. Solitude offers humans sufficient companionship in self and nature with

having the possibility of spiritual understanding. Loneliness does not provide any kind of meditation or a sense of companionship. In *Walden*, Thoreau wrote about solitude: "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude" (386). Though Thoreau was captivated by the nature around him, he also wanted to discover his inner self. *Walden* is, above all, Thoreau's exploration of the inner self and a quest for spiritual understanding. Through his experience of living in Walden, Thoreau wanted to develop his understanding of self and the universe and cultivate his spiritual needs. In his final chapter "Conclusion," he urged a person, who may not be able to travel to Africa or India, to explore his own self instead. He believed that there are new depths within the human soul which are yet unexplored.

Thoreau displayed great admiration for the primitive man. He was fascinated by the Native American Indians and liked them since they had a closer relationship to nature than civilized humans. Such a close relationship between the Native Indians and nature revived his idea of the connection between human and nature which had been lost as a result of the development of civilization. Thoreau saw in people who lived close to the woods and nature an intuitive understanding of the universal order which civilized people lacked. "Fishermen, hunters, woodchoppers, and others, spending their lives in the fields and woods, in a peculiar sense of nature themselves, are often in a more favorable mood for observing her . . . than philosophers or poets even, who approach her with expectation" (*Walden* 457). Those people, then, in the opinion of Thoreau, were

able to know things depending on their intuition and instincts, and follow other ways of life and authorities different from that followed by others.

Simplicity to Thoreau was more than a mode of life; it was a philosophical ideal that he repeatedly dealt with in his works. Thoreau urged people to be simple and cried “Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!” (*Walden* 344). E.B. White, in his introduction to *Walden*, comments on Thoreau’s cry: “In our culture of gadgetry and the multiplicity of convenience his cry has the insistence of a fire alarm” (xiii). Thoreau’s doctrine of simplicity seemed to owe much to the self-culture preached by the Unitarians and especially by William Ellery Channing. Humans should minimize their material needs and achieve a more spiritual life. He emphasized the crushing effect of materialism and commercialism on an individual’s life. Thoreau thought that the material needs of life may corrupt the moral and spiritual values of people and if human is always preoccupied with material life, he will not be able to gain higher understanding. Thoreau could achieve the simplicity he longed for and which made life meaningful for him. He wrote:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear I wanted to live deep and suck out all marrow of life. (*Walden* 343-344)

Simplicity to Thoreau, nevertheless, was never an end in itself but a way of attaining self-realization and spirituality.

The importance of the individual is expressed in the writings of Thoreau as it is expressed in the writings of other Transcendentalists. If a human wishes to be free, he/she should give up the inconveniences of a life of luxury, “to live wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity and trust” (*Walden* 270). People should not spend their time maintaining and securing material possessions because that would distract them from their main concern which is the enrichment of their inner lives (Koster 53). Thoreau was preoccupied with the relationship between the individual, God, nature and human institutions. Thoreau believes that if the individual enjoys centrality in the universal view of things, he will not enjoy such a position in relation to human institutions. Thoreau suggests that both the individual and community may threaten each other. The community may impose on the individual and similarly, the individual may be guided by principles that could threaten community complacency. To Thoreau, the individual should first cultivate himself and not care for the judgment of society. He rejected organized reform for individuals. If the individual works on reforming himself, he reforms the world more efficiently than any humanitarian organization. The individual alone is capable of meaningful, influential change. Thoreau severely criticized reformers and felt that the reform of society would best be achieved through the individual. As Hyman remarks, “Thoreau fought his way through Emersonian doctrine that a man wash his hands of wrong, providing he did not himself commit it”(31). Thoreau wrote in “ Civil Disobedience,” “It is not a man’s duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the

most enormous wrong . . . but it is his duty at least, to wash his hands of it, and if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support” (117).

Thoreau’s achievement, indeed, is unquestionable; his worship of nature inspired many of his contemporaries and some modernist writers. In his *Eulogy*, in 1862, Emerson praised Thoreau’s genius dedicated entirely to the love of his native town, its landscape, waters and hills, making them known and interesting to successive American generations. Thoreau’s transcendental ideals, in addition to those of Emerson, formed the core of the transcendental movement in America and created a great legacy for the movement.

1.5 The Transcendental Legacy in American Literature

The Transcendental Movement had, as a matter of fact, an immense influence in shaping the direction of American literature. Many writers were and still are inspired by transcendentalist ideas, in particular, those of Emerson and Thoreau. To know the legacy of Transcendentalism, we may need to look back, in brief, to the circumstances of the emergence of the movement in the first half of the nineteenth century. We may ask why Transcendentalism had such a moving impact on literary writers in America for more than a century and a half. Does the greatness of Transcendentalism arise from the indispensable need of people to live more spiritual and natural lives? Do transcendental beliefs provide shelter from the restrictions of materialism? Transcendentalism as a great movement in the history of American thought can be read on one level as a revival of the ideals the first settlers aspired to achieve which was to create an ideal society on the new land. Equality among people, individual freedom, and the emphasis on the spiritual side

of humans were among the ideals which the first immigrants called for and that transcendental writers asserted. With Emerson and Thoreau, the transcendental movement came into maturity. Both laid the theoretical grounds of what came to be known as American Transcendentalism. The originators of Transcendentalism were not principally literary men; they were thinkers such as Emerson and Thoreau and social reformers like Fuller. Transcendentalism, after all, was a movement in philosophy as much as it was a movement in literature. It was a widespread movement which called for the reshaping of society according to its principles.

Undoubtedly, Transcendentalism had a tremendous influence on literary circles in America during the nineteenth century, especially during the years between 1840 and 1860 which was the peak of the Movement. Writers like Walt Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson, John Burroughs, John Muir, Robert Frost, and Wallace Stevens reflected transcendental ideals in their works to varying degrees. Some were contemporary to the Movement like Hawthorne, Burroughs, and Frost, while others like Muir and Stevens were not.

Walt Whitman (1819–1892) is considered by many to be the greatest of all American poets. His poetry has many characteristics of transcendental thought. In his poems, Whitman celebrates nature, freedom and dignity of the individual and called for democracy and the brotherhood of man. Whitman was a typical transcendental writer; he believed in the intuitive mind and came to conclusions intuitively rather than through the analysis of knowledge as the rationalists do. Like Emerson and Thoreau, Whitman separated himself from the world for some time in order to be able to study nature carefully. I believe the most significant lesson one

may learn from his poetry is that laws made by human cannot rule the individual spirit bestowed by nature. In other words, humans should not only live in the world they create but should also look towards the natural world which existed before them to find the right way of living in this world. In *Leaves of Grass* which Whitman published in 1855, nature was not presented as a passive setting, rather it acted as a character in all poems through which the identity of human is built either in harmony or conflict with the natural world. Due to Whitman's intimacy with the natural world, he tried to construct its own identity regarding how to live in harmony with nature. For Whitman, nature is a reflection and source of inspiration for individualism which he desires for people. Like Thoreau, even a small blade of grass may motivate him to profoundly meditate on the meaning of life.

In most of his poems in this collection, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Whitman portrays nature as showing the true soul of humans and this keen interest in nature shows his adoption of the transcendental principles of Thoreau and Emerson:

O powerful, western, fallen star!

O shades of night! O moody, tearful night!

O great star disappear'd! O the black murk that hides the star!

O cruel hands that hold me powerless! O helpless soul of me!

O harsh surrounding cloud, that will not free my soul!(7-11)

The lines display the power that nature has over the poet and on humankind. Darkness dominates when the sun sets in the west. This darkness of nature associated with the night holds the human soul.

Whitman's confidence in the natural goodness of humans is another transcendental element which is embodied in his poetry. He thinks that what corrupts humans is civilization and if human is left by himself, he/she is moral and good:

Behold, the body includes and is the meaning, the
main concern and includes and is the soul;
Whoever you are, how superb and how divine is your
body, or any part of it! ("Starting From Paumanok" 13:16-19)

The body, according to Whitman, is naturally good and it integrates the soul so both body and soul are good but what impairs them is civilization.

In "Song of Myself," Whitman uses "I" to refer not only to himself but to humanity in general. This universal "I" establishes a celebratory tone and suggests themes of equality, nature and goodness. The poem deals implicitly with equality and democracy:

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.(1:1-3)

Later on in the poem, Whitman uses grass symbolically to suggest equality:

A child said *What is the grass?* Fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more
than he.(6:1-2)

Whitman looks for an answer and reflects on several possibilities before he suggests the following:

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white,
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I
receive them the same. (6:10-14)

The grass is used here as a symbol of equality. Since grass grows everywhere in all areas broad and narrow and among all peoples black and white, it is a symbol of democracy.

Whitman greatly celebrates the self as a gift of nature. He identifies the soul as merged into flesh, associates the body and soul and therefore, diffuses the body with spiritual importance:

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is. (48:1-3)

Whitman's "Songs of the Open Roads," another poem from *Leaves of Grass*, includes some essential concepts of Transcendentalism:

From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines,
Going where I list, my own master, total and absolute,
Listening to others, and considering well what they say,
Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating,
Gently but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds that
would hold me. (5:1-6)

Here, the poet dedicates himself to the concepts of individual freedom as it was expressed by Thoreau and to the independence of the self from all authority imposed from without. Later in this poem, Whitman asserts the necessity of close contact with nature in order to create the best qualities in the individual (Koster 61). Whitman's most "transcendental" poem is probably "Song of Myself" because of its vision of the self and its relationship to the universe. As Buell points out, "Myself" in Whitman's poetry becomes "by turns, a demiurge or Over-Soul" (*Literary Transcendentalism* 326). The poem explores the possibilities for communion between individuals. Whitman, thus, embodies in his poetry the most prominent ideas of Transcendentalism; the worship of nature, the superiority of the intuitive mind, the communion of human, nature and God, the idea that everything in the universe is a microcosm of the whole and individualism.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), on the other hand, represents an example of a nineteenth-century woman writer whose works echoes transcendental concepts. In her poetry, Dickinson searches for universal truths and investigates the circumstances of the human condition, sense of life, immortality, God, faith and human's place in the universe. Dickinson was fascinated with nature. She summed up all her lyrics as "the simple news that nature told":

This is my letter to the world
That never wrote to me,--
The simple news that Nature told,
With tender majesty. (1-4)

Dickinson loved “nature’s creatures” like the robin, hummingbird, the bee and butterfly, no matter how insignificant. Dickinson is considered by some modernist critics as a forerunner of what is now known as ecological literature. Dickinson engaged with the ecological concerns of her time and anticipated later attitudes about the possibilities and limitations of human interaction with the natural world. The dawning of ecological discourse that spread across the U.S. in the mid-nineteenth century occurred, as Max Oelschlaeger notes, when the majority of Americans moved from looking at wild nature as just a valuable source and obstruction which ought to be invaded by civilization “toward conception of wilderness as an end in its own right” (4). A poem which might constitute one of Dickinson’s most ecologically sensitive contemplations of human-nonhuman relationships is “Four Trees - upon a solitary Acre,” which she wrote in 1863:

“Four Trees -- upon a solitary Acre --
Without Design
Or Order, or Apparent Action--
Maintain--” (1-4).

The poem mainly seems to be an expression of Dickinson’s sense of isolation caused by the absence of nature’s divine order. The fragmented language reflects the poet’s inner chaos.

As the nineteenth century proceeded further towards its close, the Transcendental Movement came to lose its impact on the intellectual life in America. The last decades of the nineteenth century left no doubt that American society was undergoing a process of industrialization and technologization which

reshaped the face of life in the whole country. Americans were mostly influenced by new intellectual and philosophical trends which emerged in Europe during the last decades of the nineteenth century. America was subject to a process of reconstruction based on materialistic principles that ushered the way to twentieth century America. Scientific skepticism and materialistic values left no space for any kind of idealism which had colored American thought in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Religion was weakened, to a great extent, by the impact of Darwinism and people felt as if they were left suddenly without any divine protection. "Instead of being exalted, thoughtful, Americans were overwhelmed with consciousness of . . . promises unresolved and certitudes lost"(Commager 49). The mood of optimism in man's potential which Emerson and Thoreau asserted, consequently, gave way to a mood of skepticism of any ideal thought. American idealism had been shaken under the influence of materialism, Darwinism, commercialism and capitalism. Capitalism heavily influenced social values; it laid the foundation of new social ethics in the sense that humans came to be of secondary importance and the machine came first (Parkes 113). People, accordingly, came to think of many fundamental issues in an urban-industrial frame of reference. The influence of materialistic values which increased tremendously in the early twentieth century affected all walks of life in America.

The First World War, which is associated with the emergence of Modernism, was another critical factor that weakened any possibility of transcendental thinking. The moral and philosophical structures of earlier society had collapsed because of the impact of the war. The harsh facts of American life

after the war caused a shocking decline of idealism that had characterized the American atmosphere before. Under such circumstances, transcendental thought, inevitably, declined. The tendency of society to adopt material principles made it difficult for transcendental ideals to survive. The rise of Modernism which initially began in Europe and spread to the United States after World War I had heavily influenced American writers. Writers such as T.S. Eliot and William Faulkner who were the pioneers of the Modernist Movement in America were against any sort of ideal thinking like Transcendentalism. Like all other Modernist writers, they were pessimists and had concerns about the accelerating pace of society towards destruction and meaninglessness. Existentialism, one of the major movements in the twentieth century, mostly stands in opposition to Transcendental ideals. Existentialism depicts a world in which there are no absolute values outside the human himself. Existential phenomenology, which appeared in the early twentieth century, turned phenomenological analysis away from the transcendental consciousness to the reflective lifeworld of everyday experience. The mood in the first half of the twentieth century was hostile to any kind of transcendental concept. Only a few writers tried to resist the mainstream; among them were Robert Frost and Wallace Stevens. The first half of the twentieth century, indeed, left no space for transcendental ideals.

Transcendentalism, however, witnessed a new rise and revival in the second half of the twentieth century. However, we should understand that Transcendentalism is less of a specific doctrine than as a presiding spirit behind many movements that resisted the dominant culture. Transcendental meditation

became popular in the last decades of the twentieth century as a reaction to the thrust to increasingly materialistic and technological world. The transcendental ideals had a considerable influence on the Beat Generation writers of the 1950s and the young radicals of the 60s and 70s who were rebellious and opposed material tendencies. The writings of Thoreau shaped both the passive resistance methods of Martin Luther King's civil right movement and the fundamental vision of the ecology movement. The ecology movement seemed to be a new version of nineteenth century American Transcendentalism.

1.6 Deep Ecology, ecocriticism and ecopoetry

The phrase deep ecology was coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973. Naess refused the idea that living beings were ranked according to their value. Naess believes that from an ecological point of view, "the right of all forms [of life] to live is a universal right which cannot be quantified. No single species of living beings has more of this particular right to live and unfold than any other species." ("Deep Ecology"). American sociologist Bill Duvall and American philosopher George Session share Naess' views. They assert the need for restoration of the spiritual relationship between human beings and the natural world. Human beings must develop a new understanding of the nonhuman world and the interconnection of all organisms in the ecosphere. They should, therefore, develop an ecological consciousness and a sense of ecological unity. This biocentric principle of interconnection was broadly developed by the British environmentalist James Lovelock who assumed "that the planet is a single living,

self-regulating entity capable of reestablishing an ecological equilibrium, even without the existence of human life”(“Environmentalism”).

Social ecology, founded by Murray Bookchin, the Green author and activist, on the other hand, focuses on the social aspect of the environmental crisis. It shares deep ecology’s main principles yet it focuses more on reforming social organizations rather than cultivating individual consciousness which is the main focus of deep ecology. In other words, social ecology tends to deal more with social and political issues which it considers as factors behind environmental deterioration. “Social ecologists claim that the systematic issue of hierarchy cannot be resisted by individual actions alone as ethical consumerism but must be addressed by some nuanced ethical thinking and collective activity grounded in radically in democratic ideal”(“Social Ecology”). As such, deep ecologists share social ecologists’ distrust of industrial civilization and reject centralized forms of social organization.

Deep ecology is a call for a new way of life which rejects anthropocentrism and adopts a biocentric perspective. Adopting such a stance on life requires a new understanding of the self (human being) and the other (the natural world). The importance of the self should be minimized to allow more importance for the fundamental values of other species and systems of nature. The exploitation of the world by human beings is denounced and the entire natural world is superior to any of its elements. Deep ecology principles had a considerable influence on society and culture and, thus, found an echo in the literature of the period.

Ecocriticism was formally presented when two influential works were published in the mid-1990s: *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, and *The Environmental Imagination*, by Lawrence Buell. Lawrence Buell defines “‘ecocriticism’ . . . as [a] study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis” (*Environmental Imagination* 430). Ecocriticism goes beyond the limits of literary theory, which traditionally confines itself within the social sphere, to include the entire ecosphere. In other words, ecocriticism expands the scope of literary interests from humanity to a broader realm of the natural world. As Cheryll Glotfelty points out, “as a critical stance, [ecocriticism] has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman” (xix). Scott Slovic who was elected as the first president of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) in 1992 emphasises the significance of both nature and writing in cultivating an awareness of the self and the other, “Both nature and writing (the former being an external presence, the latter a process of verbalizing personal experience) demand and contribute to an author’s awareness of self and non-self” (Slovic, “Nature Writings” 352). Slovic, thus, believes that nature writers may sharpen the awareness of self (the human) and the other (physical world) in the hope of establishing a new relationship between human beings and the physical world in which they live in.

The most decisive feature of ecocriticism is related to the pragmatics of environmental advancement, especially in challenging exploitive beliefs and

practices towards the environment. This mostly deals with socio-economic issues. Ecocriticism, thus, is involved in ethical as well as political considerations. The socio-economic aspect of ecocriticism can be shown in current concerns of ecocriticism, specifically in the issues of environmental justice and environmental racism. The former considers which environments are protected and why while the latter investigates which social groups' environments are polluted and destroyed. Kamala Platt and Michael Bennett examined environmental justice and environmental racism. Platt connects environmental racism and justice, "The coined term environmental justice poses questions for environmentalism. Whose environment is protected? Whose environment is neglected?" (140) Bennett studied the inadequate representation of urban life in ecocriticism. He argues that urban experience should be represented together with the wilderness as promoted by deep ecology which argues that the wilderness should be protected because it has innate value (305).

The second crucial feature of ecocriticism is related to the relationship between nature and culture. This binarism might have been generalized and put in simple categories set up according to the human (culture) and the nonhuman (nature). Some ecocriticism asserts that these binarisms are connected and investigate the form these relations may take. Opposing binarisms, Coupe suggests, may limit the understanding of the world, "Beyond duality, beyond the opposition of mind and matter, subject and object, thinker and thing, there is the possibility to 'realise' nature" (1). Coupe keeps debating that it is important not to fall into the "referential fallacy" where culture is denied and only references to the natural

world are significant or the “semiotic fallacy” where the world “exists only as signified within human culture” (2). Coupe argues that both the world and language should be part of human’s engagement with the environment.

Environmental poetry is a central factor in my study since I deal with it in my investigation on transcendental thought in my writers’ works. Environmental poetry works the same way as other poetry. Both use a series of features to achieve their aims and they are only different in the treatment of content. Bryson thinks that environmental poetry has three features. The first is the recognition of the interdependence of the world between both the human and nonhuman which leads to a recognition of the worth of place and living beings. The second feature is that humility is required in dealing with the natural world and its living creatures. The third feature is skepticism of technology and its hyperrationality which Bryson considers as prioritizing science to elevate an “over technologized modern world” (6) at the expense of the environment. Buell defines environmental writings in general, including of course, environmental poetry. His definition suggests some basic features: “1. The non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history. 2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest” (Buell 1995: 6-7). Scigaj writes that sustainable environmental poetry “offers exemplary models of biocentric perception and behaviour” (78-9). Environmental poetry is more than an independent artistic patterning of language; it is about the world where we live. The special care given to its composition makes it a powerful way of communicating. It strengthens in us the feeling that we are not

separate from the plants and creatures with which we share the world. In general, environmental poetry is concerned with the personal domain as well as being concerned with social, economic and political ideas. Environmental poetry's ideas may come from several different discourses which negotiate their meaning in a single poem.

1.7 Literature Review

I previously discussed the Transcendentalist movement of the nineteenth century which influenced the writers of the time like Walt Whitman, Emily Dickenson, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Margaret Fuller. Transcendentalist premises were broadly investigated in nineteenth century American literature through a great number of studies. However, the studies which tried to investigate this idealistic thought in the works of twentieth century writers are few and mostly fragmentary which seemed logical because transcendental thought itself declined in the modern age. Even these few studies either did not explicitly touch upon transcendentalism or focused on one aspect of transcendental principles without making any effort to study it comprehensively and systematically. It seems clear, therefore, that there is a gap in this field of research which was what motivated me to conduct my study on transcendentalist ideals in the selected works of three contemporary writers, namely Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Annie Dillard. I chose these writers for my study because I discerned in their works a transcendental spirit which seemed promising. Such a study is vital for a richer understanding of transcendental ideals and how they address contemporary issues on ecology, society and spirituality.

Furthermore, no serious efforts were made to make a link between Transcendentalism and the new environmental literature of the second half of the twentieth century and early years of the present century. I tried to make a link between them in my study.

In her article “The Creek and the Waters of Walden” which she published in *The Concord Saunterer* in 1995, Donna Mendelson compares Thoreau’s *Walden* to Dillard’s work *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and investigates some aspects of similarity between them. Her study, I can say, is the most important piece of research on transcendental echoes in Dillard’s major work *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. The study gives almost equal importance to both *Walden* and *Pilgrim*, equally citing from both to prove the thesis of the study which, however, seemed to result in a weakened focus on Dillard. Mendelson touches upon different aspects of Dillard’s work which show ‘*Walden* currents’ in imagery, figurative language, motifs, diction and themes. The study, I realized, provided some sort of “road signs” for further investigation of the topic. The present study proceeds with a deeper investigation on these transcendental ‘currents’ and explores them. Dillard’s dialectical vision, her concept of wilderness and the importance of place which Mendelson wrote about are comprehensively investigated in my present study.

In another remarkable study about Annie Dillard entitled “The Ecotheology of Annie Dillard: A study in Ambivalence”, published in *Cross Currents* in 1995, Pamela A. Smith studies Dillard’s attitudes towards God, the natural world and the place of humans in the world. This study that deals with several works sheds light on Dillard ecological views and her concept of God. Smith shows Dillard’s critical

attitude to God and Christianity. Her ambivalence to God is part of Dillard's dialectic vision. Dillard says that there is beauty which deserves to be praised but there is also cause for fierce lament. The present study elaborates on Dillard's ambivalence in her vision of God and nature and investigates the ways Dillard plays on this ambivalence to create her consistent ecological vision. In this vein, Smith's study does not make any effort to explore social issues since Dillard does not show interest in the outside world. The present study, however, sets out to carefully examine Dillard's works to identify any social dimension that may be related to transcendentalist principles and its treatment within the context of modern society.

In his book *Understanding Gary Snyder*, Patrick D. Murphy dedicates a chapter entitled "Of Wildness and Wilderness in Plain Language: *The Practice of the Wild*" to discuss the ecological impact of Snyder's writing. Murphy discusses Snyder's emphasis on the need to re-establish the traditional practices of the wilderness that once harmoniously connected humans with other living beings in detail. The present study explores Snyder's concept of wilderness and Snyder's mediation between wilderness and civilization which Murphy did not focus on in his study. Snyder's middle ground between wilderness and civilization suggests a solution to this opposition and consequently, might suggest a solution to the environmental crisis caused by people's inability to find reconciliation in this respect. By so doing, the present study tries to fill in the gaps that Murphy's study left.

Though there are no explicit studies on Snyder that investigate transcendental thought, there are several studies that explore Buddhist's beliefs in his works which may represent some transcendental tendency in Snyder. In his study "Buddhism and Energy in the Recent Poetry of Gary Snyder," Bert Almon explores Buddhist spirituality in Snyder's work. Almon thinks that Snyder's opposition to industrial civilization may be understood by exploring the Buddhist influence on him. He principally studied *Turtle Island* and *Regarding Wave*. Almon discusses the concept of the enlightened mind according to Buddhism which reflects a world beyond conflict and opposition. The study goes on to explore Buddhist spirituality in the two works. This is, of course, one of several studies which investigate Buddhism in Snyder's works but no study has yet made a link between Buddhist beliefs and transcendentalism. What the present study seeks to add in this respect is to make that connection and discuss the way Snyder uses this idealist thought to resist current material tendencies and find a way out of the misery of the modern age.

In his study "'The Country of Marriage': Wendell Berry's Personal Political Vision," which was published in *The Southern Literary Journal* in 1983, Daniel Cornell investigates Berry's use of marriage to metaphorically refer to the relationship between man and earth. "Marriage is not a cultural abstraction, but the basis of true community" (Cornell 70). Cornell explores the political and economic implications of Berry's collection of poems to reveal Berry's vision of an ideal society which is based on pastoral agrarianism. Berry argues that the model of life he presents both literally and metaphorically represent values that modern culture

has missed. Cornell's study implicitly touches upon some transcendental elements in Berry's vision of modern community and reveals some important aspects of his ecological vision.

In another study "Into the Woods with Wendell Berry" which was published in *Essays in Literature* in 1996, John R. Knot investigates the role of wilderness in Berry's work. Knot analyzes Berry's opposition in separating nature and culture and the meaning and health Berry finds in their interaction. Knot discusses the presence of wilderness in Berry's work not as a substitute to ordinary life but as a source of peace, illumination and pleasure which helps to understand and sustain life. Knot explains Berry's historical dimension of the wilderness which is distinguished from Berry's concept of wilderness.

Both studies reveal important aspects of Wendell Berry's vision of the relationship between humans and the natural world. However, the present study goes on to investigate this relationship on ecological, social and spiritual levels and to reconstruct this relationship in a productive way.

CHAPTER TWO

Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Annie Dillard: Transcendental

Influences and Ecological Visions

2.1 Introduction

I explained in Chapter One that transcendentalism as a movement witnessed periods of rise and decline after 1860. My concern and focus are on investigating the new revival of transcendental thought in writers I have selected for the present study, namely Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Annie Dillard. Thus, this chapter includes two sections. The first section, a short one, examines the influence of nineteenth-century transcendentalists on Snyder, Berry, and Dillard. Specifically, I examine how these writers' works show an echo of the pioneers of Transcendentalism, Emerson and Thoreau to varying degrees. To do so, I traced Thoreauvian and Emersonian influences on the works of the writers included in this study. I also identified those influences in some of their works to establish the theoretical grounds for the present study. The second section is an extension of section one which unfolds this study's main argument by exploring the ecological concerns in Snyder, Berry and Dillard's nature writings. Nature writing as a literary genre is, in fact, the most obvious demonstration of transcendental ideas today. Nature writing is nonfiction prose set in a rural place. The narrator usually has enough scientific knowledge about the place to report his/her own observations and record its every detail without being involved in political or social commentary.

Their ecological-oriented writings, therefore, represent their interest in transcendental principles in new eco-approaches to literature which unmistakably inherit and develop transcendentalism fundamentals concerning the relationship between humankind and the natural world. Consequently, I investigated the ecological visions of these writers and how their works contributed significantly to promoting the ecological consciousness of people.

2.2 Transcendental Influences on Snyder, Berry, Dillard

As a young boy, Snyder developed a love for nature which lasted all his life. Growing up in the woods, Snyder says, “[that] made me what I am. It didn’t just make an impression to me. I was part of the woods” (O’Connell 366). His keen interest in the landscape is shown in the title of his masterpiece, *Mountains and Rivers without End* (1996). When he was young, Snyder wrote, “I had an immediate, intuitive, deep sympathy with the natural world which was not taught me by anyone. In that sense, nature is my guru” (*The Real Work* 92). In many ways, he seems to be a successor to Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, the pioneers of the American Transcendentalist movement.

Snyder mainly developed his concept of the wilderness through his reading of Thoreau. He studied *Walden* in his early life when he was nineteen. *Walden*, consequently, had significantly framed Snyder’s concept of the wilderness which would provide the basis for his works *The Back Country* and *Mountains and Rivers without End*. The Transcendentalists and their descendants in the twentieth century enjoyed the wild landscape and considered its destruction as an act of desecration and blasphemy.

Influenced by Thoreau, Snyder believes that a balance of civilization and wilderness is necessary for a healthy society; without a connection with the wilderness, people become weak and bored. Both Snyder and Thoreau were close observers of nature and through their frequent travels, grew concerned with the whole universe. Yet, they are drawn inevitably to the places of their birth. As Steuding observes, “that each writer’s attempt to mythologize his own life and locale--- Thoreau at Walden Pond, Snyder in the forests and mountains of the West” (117).

Like Thoreau, Snyder expressed profound respect for non-human life forms; he asserts the importance of adherence to organic cycles rather than responding to formal institutions and dogma. The influence of Thoreau was immense with regard to Snyder’s organic and cyclic views, reverence for all life forms, and essential cosmic optimism. Snyder quotes Thoreau’s last sentence in *Walden*, “The sun is but a morning star,” to conclude his book *Myths & Texts* (1960). Nature, for Snyder, is equal to human beings and is no less important or less original; human beings are likewise not superior and do not have the right to dominate the natural world. Snyder conveys the life of seemingly inanimate nature and his mystical-ecological relationship with it in his Pulitzer Prize-Winning collection *Turtle Island* (1974). The whole work is dominated by one major idea; how to reinhabit the land. His work was, therefore, described as a book of “reinhabiting.” To reinhabit the land, you must know the land and you should be completely aware of the place you live in and how you interact with the place. Only then can you know who you are and where you live.

The opening poem of Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers without End* describes a Chinese landscape even though the collection is based on the American West. In an interview with John P.O'Grady, Snyder said of *Mountains and Rivers without End*: "In a sense, what I have done there is globalize the West . . . it is a Western poem that starts and ends in the West, and never is far from it. But it uses the West, the Western landscape, almost as a metaphor for the whole planet---it becomes the whole planet" (O'Grady). Here, Snyder seems significantly indebted to Emerson's concept of the microcosm where it is not necessary to see all parts to understand the whole. Snyder formed his views about the land and how humans should interact with it through the American West and Asia. In other words, Snyder's knowledge of particular places would inevitably lead him to understand the larger whole. He wrote in *The Practice of the Wild* (1990), "To know the spirit of a place is to realize that you are part of a part and that the whole is made of parts, each of which is a whole" (38). Snyder wanted to establish a fundamental connection between the eastern world of Asia and the western world where he grew up. He did not like to make a division between the two worlds but rather, he emphasized the continuity of both sides of the Pacific (Smith 10). In this respect, I believe Snyder looks to be a true inheritor of Transcendentalist beliefs in the unity of human culture, unity of traditions and unity of the human race.

My next writer, Wendell Berry, worshipped nature and constantly resorted to it but not to retreat from society to a simple life of nature or to escape from social obligations. Rather, he emphasized the need for a new view of nature that

goes beyond the mystical treatment of nature presented by poets like William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge.

In *The Long-Legged House*, a collection of essays published in 1969, Berry meditates on different issues; his relation to place, civilization and ecology. Berry speaks of the years between childhood and manhood and how he was uncertain about several issues. The place “offered no escape from these troubles, but it did allow them the dignity of solitude” (*The Long-Legged House* 122). Solitude, for Berry, is dignified and fruitful as it was for Thoreau before. “Like Thoreau at Walden,” Berry says, “we found out what the essentials are. Our life will never be distorted by the feeling that there are luxuries we cannot do without.” Berry says that during those days he read Thoreau’s *Walden*. Berry explicitly expresses his sympathy for Thoreau: “I have always had a lively sympathy for Thoreau’s idea of a hypaethral book, a roofless book. Why should I shut myself up to write? Why not live and write at the same time?” (*The Long-Legged House* 132 ,135). Berry, thus, echoes Thoreau’s idea that the natural world may teach people as much as books. Like Thoreau, Berry looks to nature as a great source of information and, therefore, refuses to confine himself to an education offered by books. Berry shows an instinctive love for nature and, at the same time, doubts about education. Education seemed to him a doubtful process. He thinks “the good of it is taken too much for granted. It is a matter that is overtheorized and overvalued” (*The Long-Legged House* 127).

Berry seems close to Thoreau in his book *Recollected Essays, 1965-1980* which he published in 1981. The similarity between Berry’s work and *Walden* is

unmistakable in regards to the style, structure and embodied themes. As Charles Hudson points out, Berry, like his ancestor Thoreau, developed principles in his life which were based on simplicity, chose a simple lifestyle and repeatedly called his readers to adopt the same in his writing. Also, Berry shares Thoreau's criticism of modern society which does not support his principle of simplicity in life. Berry argues that it is difficult to gain society's acceptance to be a small farmer leading simple life (220). Thus, Berry exposes people's disapproval of the simple life which, according to Berry, may restore human's harmony with the natural world. Berry left New York and went to live in a small house near Port Royal on Kentucky River. He became more involved with the place with the passing of time. The essays that Berry chose to include in his book *Recollected Essays* show that if Port Royal is a grain of sand, a world exists within it, and this world is connected to the entire universe" (Hudson 220). It is, to borrow Emerson's concept of microcosm, the part which stands for the whole.

Annie Dillard, the lone female writer in my study, was considerably influenced by nineteenth century American Transcendentalism, especially Thoreau. Dillard, indeed, is a true inheritor of Thoreau's transcendental beliefs. She is greatly indebted to him as her writings, like Thoreau, revolve around nature and her relationship with nature. Her childhood interests had much in common with that of Thoreau. Dillard's childhood was filled with rocks and bug gatherings and a keen look at pond water through a microscope. Dillard received a degree in English literature from Hollings College after writing a thesis titled *Walden Pond and Thoreau*. These details clearly show the great extent to which Dillard was

influenced by Thoreau's views on nature. Dillard led a life that allowed her to be close to nature. A representative example of this tendency in Dillard is her masterpiece *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974) which is seemingly written in Thoreau's style in *Walden*. Dillard follows the successions of seasons and records the evolution of the writer's consciousness through reflection on life in Roanoke Valley. She observes life there and describes the two facets of nature, its beauty and majesty and its horror and violence. Dillard's observation can be read as a metaphor for the universal self and its relation to Nature and God. Dillard displays in this respect similarities to Emerson. She investigated the natural world around her by paying much attention to details. This is demonstrated in the description of a moth that had come out of its cocoon, "It emerged at last, a sudden crumple. It was a male; his long antennae were thickly plumbed as wide as his fat abdomen. His body was very thick, over an inch long, and deeply furred . . ." (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 61). Though Dillard may have her own way in writing about nature which seems unique, her interest in the details of nature brings her close to transcendentalists like Dickinson and Thoreau.

Dillard tried to avoid social reform movements, became more involved in nature and began to develop as an environmentalist and natural historian. Dillard was a keen observer of nature but not an activist. Her observations seem to be objective and scientific. In other words, Dillard in this respect seems similar to Emerson and Thoreau who also avoided being involved in social reform movements but chose to observe and describe the natural world around them in their writing.

2.3 Ecological Visions

2.3.1 Gary Snyder: Loving the Earth

Although Snyder belongs to the school of deep ecology, his interests also associate him with social ecology as social ecology mainly deals with debates about modes of power in the world which enable man to control nature. It stresses the need for a social solution to prevent the destruction of the nonhuman world. Deep ecology, on the other hand, is more interested in changing human consciousness and draws from religious and philosophical attitudes. I argue that Snyder concurs with both, stressing the necessity to change human consciousness while endorsing a social change to harmonize the relationship of humans to the nonhuman world.

Snyder's ecological views are derived from certain traditional beliefs taken from Native Indian culture, Buddhism and other contemporary beliefs. Snyder looks at the earth as a 'mother' to living beings. This image is repeatedly seen in his book *Turtle Island* (1974). According to Snyder, the relationship between the earth and living beings should be motherly since the Earth is like a mother that provides its inhabitants with food, water and air. The earth, therefore, deserves the respect of its children and their protection. More significantly, Snyder believes in the interdependence of all life forms on earth; this concept seems to be considerably derived from Buddhism. Snyder shares the Buddhist belief in the interrelation of all living beings not only on a spiritual level as Buddhism perceives, but also on a biological and physical level as shown in the food chain. Humankind, for Snyder, is a transient form with particular characteristics of its own

among the various forms of other living beings. However, humankind is by no means superior to others as humans are only a part of them. To survive, mankind should keep the diversity in those forms of life because their extinction would threaten human life on the planet. Snyder states:

The treasure of life is the richness of stored information in the diverse genes of all living beings. If the human race, following on some set of catastrophes, were to survive at the expense of many plant and animal species, it would be no victory. Diversity provides life with the capacity for a multitude of adaptations and responses to long-range changes on the planet. (*Turtle Island* 103)

This variety may make adaptation to unexpected problems such as natural catastrophes or climate change more possible. For Snyder, the extinction of any living being, no matter plant or animal, inevitably weakens the earth's natural stability and leads to deadly consequences on the environment. Civilization and its indifference to ecology is a fundamental component in Snyder's view of the natural world. Snyder writes:

At the root of the problem where our civilization goes wrong is the mistaken belief that nature is something less than authentic, that nature is not as alive as man is, or as intelligent, that in a sense it is dead, and that animals are of so low an order of intelligence and feeling, we need not take their feelings into account. (*Turtle Island* 107)

The sense of superiority humans have over other elements of nature can be seen in a civilized legislation which allows the killing of nonhuman beings. This, according to Snyder, is considered a crime. Modern civilization, Snyder remarks, deprives people of the natural world and impedes people from being conscious of its significance to their survival: "They buy vegetables in the supermarket, but do not think about the soil these grow in" (Snyder, *The Real Work* 3).

Snyder's reverence for all forms of life is expressed in his poetic and prose works. He writes: "I have had a very moving, profound perception . . . that everything was alive . . . and that on one level there is no hierarchy of qualities in life--- that the life of a stone or a weed is as completely beautiful and authentic, wise and valuable as the life of say, an Einstein" (*The Real Work* 17). In fact, the concept of equality of all things in nature where the life of a great genius like Einstein is no more important than the life of a stone seemed revolutionary to many. The idea may seem unfair to us but to Snyder who has frequently been described as "the laureate of Deep Ecology," it is quite fair. Humans must recognize that all living beings are valuable regardless of their usefulness and value to humanity. Oceans, lakes and rivers should not be contaminated not only for the sake of human beings' need for clean water but even for fish that need it to survive. A deep ecologist stresses the sanctity of all living beings (Naess 95-100).

Snyder's poetry is described by Haw Yol Jung and Petee Jung as "the way of ecopiety." It promotes the "moral recognition and affirmation by each person of his/her coexistence with other living beings and non-living things as well as other human beings" (77). It is a mutual relationship and sacred bond of

coexistence among all beings. Snyder tempts us to return to the primitive, the wild and the sacred as a way to cure the sickness of civilization. The primitive is understood as the condition in which all nature is so sacred that we do not need to put up temples to sanctify it. "The primitive condition where the wild, the sacred, and the good are one and the same amounts to the idea of Earth first, Gaia first, Mother Earth first"(80). Snyder thinks that the primitive is better than the civilized in that it supports ideas of protection, stability and quality while the civilized is attached to ideas of production, growth and quantity (Yol Yung, and Petee Yung 80). To Snyder, one should love the earth with all its human and nonhuman components and to love the earth, one must engage in "the real work" which is to acquire a sense of place where one lives in, to understand and to enthusiastically take care of it. This goes together with a strong sense of uniqueness through physical work as well as the Buddhist practice of purifying the mind so that it will be able to internalize abstract ideas.

Snyder's writings about the natural world express the interrelation of all elements in the universe. Greg Garrard's evaluation of Snyder's achievement is significant here, "Snyder's youthful experiences of working as a logger, and contact with socialists as well as Buddhist and Native Americans, give his writings a breadth of references and sensitivity to people's social and material needs that is unusual amongst wilderness writers." (82) It is Snyder's diversified life experiences that made him sensitive to people's social needs and made his poetry more approachable to the general reader.

The cultural and environmental changes in the 1940s and 1950s which Snyder experienced motivated him to write about the divergence between humanity and natural world. Such divergence started with the industrial revolution and increased, dangerously, in the modern age. In his preface to *No Nature* (1992), Snyder interprets this divergence as a result of the inability of human beings to perceive nature:

Human societies have their own nutty fads, mass delusions, and enabling mythologies. Daily life still gets done. Wild nature is probably equally goofy, with a stunning variety of creatures somehow getting by in all these landscapes. Nature also means the physical universe, including the urban, industrial, and toxic. But we do not easily know nature, or even know ourselves. Whatever it actually is, it will not fulfil our conceptions or assumptions. It will dodge our expectations and theoretical models. There is no single or set “nature” either as “the natural world” or “the nature of things.” The greatest respect we can pay to nature is not to trap it, but to acknowledge that it eludes us and that our own nature is also fluid, open, and conditional.(v)

Snyder sees the failure of human beings to understand nature or even themselves; both are “fluid, open, and conditional.” Thus, Snyder must accept the discrepancies and reconcile human awareness of the natural world with his approaches to it. Charles Altieri considers that it is this discrepancy that distinguishes Snyder’s poetry, “In other words, the balanced elements each achieve their full significance,

obtain their fullest life, only when seen as a dialectic unity. . .”(“Gary Snyder’s Lyric Poetry” 50). What makes Snyder’s poetry significant and distinguishes it from other ecological poetry, according to Altieri, is this combination of the dialectic, “One might even claim that Snyder is preeminent among the literary figures concerned with ecology because he has developed a state of balance and symbiotic interrelation between man and his environment” (*Enlarging the Temple* 48). I may agree with Altieri in this respect but Snyder also plays with disharmony which creates an unstable tension to make his ecological point. Let me refer to his poem “Marin-An” from his collection *The Back Country* (1967). Snyder depicts the discrepancy between humans and the natural world:

sun breaks over the eucalyptus
grove below the wet pasture,
water’s about hot,
I sit in the open window
& roll a smoke. (1-5)

The separation between human and nature is shown in the first two lines through the description of an eucalyptus grove. These elements of nature were carefully chosen by the poet to represent different degrees of wilderness because the sun is unreachable by man and the grove is unplugged so it is partly wild. Snyder then mentions the wet meadow which was cultivated by the hands of human beings that stands in contrast to the untamed sun and deserted grove. The poet depicts barriers between wild and cultivated land and consequently, between man and nature. This separation increases in the next three lines by focusing indoors where water is

apparently boiling on a stove and fogs the window which separates him from the outside world. The second stanza moves outdoor using sound elements:

distant dogs bark, a pair of
cawing crows; the twang
of a pygmy nuthatch high in a pine—
from behind the cypress windrow
the mare moves up, grazing. (6-10)

The second stanza draws the reader's perspective to a wider view of nature which combines wild and domestic elements. The domestic is represented in barking dogs while the wild is depicted through the pygmy nuthatch sitting "high in a pine." Like what he does in the first stanza, Snyder asserts the barriers and separation of the domestic and the wild, man and nature, through the use of the cypress window as an isolating line behind which the tame "mare moves up, grazing."

The third and the final stanza moves into a new scene at "the far valley":

a soft continuous roar
comes out of the far valley
of the six-lane highway—thousands
and thousands of cars
driving men to work. (11-15)

The reader may initially deduce that the continuous sounds from the distant valley may come from a big waterfall but soon we discover that it is the sound of the highway which is not in harmony with the wild sounds of crows and the pygmy nuthatch. The image of "thousands and thousands of cars" taking men to work

elucidates the discrepancy between the concept that technology serves human needs and gives them more freedom and the perspective that human beings became slaves to technology.

Just as Snyder creates barriers between man and nature, he delves into merging the two in a subtle clouding of the barriers he created between man and nature. In the first stanza, the poet appears to be isolated from the natural world by the window but at the same time, he is connected to it by opening the windows and allowing the elements of nature such as sunlight and air to enter his home and simultaneously allowing the smoke and steam from the boiling kettle which represents home to slip away through the open window. In other words, the window is presented as a point of merging between man and nature rather than as a barrier. Similarly, in the second stanza, Snyder clouds these barriers through blending elements of wildness and domesticity in the animals he uses in his poem. Dogs are close to humans and therefore represent domesticity while crows are wild birds who live apart from the human world. This duality of the tame and wild, the dog and the crow acts as a link between human and nature. The final stanza presents a clear separation of human and nature through the six-lane highway where cars and work stand in contrast to the natural world of trees, birds and the sun. Yet, Snyder seems to confuse the reader with “the soft continuous roar” and misleads us in the first two lines to think that it is the roar of waterfall or a river to later discover that it is not.

“Marin-An” apprehends the difficulty of a complete separation between humans and the natural world or a complete communion between them. Snyder sits

at the open window relaxing while other people at the far valley hurry to work in a foolish drive. Snyder could have achieved a partial reconciliation with the natural world by separating himself from the thousands of people going to work and present himself as a contemporary Thoreauvian disciple in choosing the best way of life. The sounds of the six-lane highway which invade Snyder's peaceful and charmed valley is reminiscent of Thoreau's railway whose noise also invades the peacefulness of Walden.

Snyder admits that the possibility of complete communion between human and nature is far beyond reach but he demonstrates that human as an individual can achieve a partial communion. What makes the poem ecologically important is Snyder's demonstration of what man could possibly have, that is to live a peaceful life in harmony with the natural world of which man is a part of, to give up destructive modern amenities to start living a more "deliberate" life, as Thoreau would call it.

The publication of Pulitzer Prize-winning *Turtle Island* in 1974 marked a turning point for Snyder in terms of developing his ecological view which made him a major spokesman of an ecological vision of the world. *Turtle Island* is divided into four sections; the first three comprise of verse while the last is prose. In this work, one can see Snyder the ecologist more clearly. In *Turtle Island*, Snyder wrote verse which not only deals with ideas but "with modes of action and with the unity of interrelationships in nature, and its verification is the fullness of the environment it creates" (Altieri, *Enlarging the Temple* 135). Snyder presents a model of poetry which looks significantly different from his previous poetic works.

Snyder describes his new model of poetry in an essay in *The Old Ways* (1977), a work contemporary to *Turtle Island*:

We're just starting, in the last ten years here, to begin to make songs that will speak for plants, mountains, animals and children. When you see your first deer of the day you sing your salute to the deer, or your first red-wing blackbird—I saw one this morning! Such poetries will be created by us as we reinhabit this land with people who know they belong to it; for whom “primitive” is not a word that means past, but *primary*, and *future*... These poesies to come will help us learn to be people of knowledge in this universe in community with the other people—nonhuman included—brothers and sisters. (42)

Snyder stresses the importance of being primitive to be in harmony with nature. In accordance with his ecological concerns, Snyder calls for poetry that includes man, animals and ecosystems; a kind of poetry which presents a community of humans and nonhumans as “brothers and sisters.” It seems to me that Snyder is now less concerned with spiritual states than with human’s harmony with the environment. Human should know plant life, weather, soil and all knowledge needed to preserve biological life.

Snyder attempts to establish a connection between his scientific language as an ecologist and his literary production. When “ecologists talk about ecology of oak communities,” Snyder writes, we should understand “they are communities” and that oak and human communities “share attributes” (*Turtle Island* 108). In

other words, human beings are part of a broad community with the non-human; plants, animals and “a variety of wild life” (108). To Snyder, “the richness and diversity of the nonhuman world only deepens felt responsibility for the human one” (Hunt 1). Snyder’s ecological vision is that nature, society and spirit are interdependent and what happens to one would inevitably affect the others. To be more specific, what happens in nature has social and spiritual effects. Thus, what happens in society has natural and spiritual consequences and what happens spiritually has social and natural results. *Turtle Island* is “evidence of Snyder’s flowering social conscience and of his continuation of ministry of love and concern for one’s fellow creatures and for the biosphere” (Steuding 156).

Snyder also believes in the unity of cultures which can be realized through an ecological perspective that focuses on the interrelation of people. Snyder thinks that the majesty of the land would take people away from their little selves to a broader world, a world of mountains and rivers. Native American traditions as well as Buddhist traditions, which Snyder greatly admired, teach people how to go beyond their selves. Buddhism as a philosophy was greatly admired by Snyder as it opposed materialism and did not disagree with modern science. Buddhism used an experimental approach in the question of final truth. Both Native Americans and Buddhists have an ecological understanding of the interdependence and equality of all living and nonliving “citizens” of nature (McClintock 121).

Published in 1990, *The Practice of the Wild* may be the most influential piece of prose that shows the impact of Gary Snyder’s ecological vision. In an interview with David Robertson, Snyder spoke of *The Practice of the Wild* prior to

its publication, “I hope that the book I am now writing will be stimulating to a broad range of people and provide them with historical, ecological, and personal visions all at the same time. I would like to see the book be political in the sense of helping people shape the way they want to live and act in the world”(qtd. in Murphy 155). The book is, in my opinion, optimistic but not idealistic or Utopian. This optimism unmarred by naivety is admired by Robertson who comments, “One of the things I like so much about your prose writing is your ability to lay out a vision of life as it ought to be, at the same time recognizing very hardheadedly that actual life is rooted in ambiguity and frustration over uncompleted goals”(qtd. in Murphy, *Understanding Gary Snyder* 155).

Snyder discusses the concept of home as a fireplace and moves to an understanding of the region as a living and interactive place. “It is not enough,” he writes, “just to ‘love nature’ or to want to be in harmony with Gaia. Our relation to the actual world takes place in a *place*, and it must be grounded in information and experience”(*The Practice of the Wild* 58). Snyder is certainly one of the strongest advocates of “Bioregionalism” which calls for new boundaries that reflect the land we live on and to respect it. Essentially, “bioregionalism is the entry of place into the dialectic of history. Also we might say that there are classes which have so far been overlooked—the animals, rivers, rocks, and grasses—now entering history” (*The Practice of the Wild* 60). Snyder perceives the limitation of this vision; not only do boundaries have to be changed but our desires which move the economy that destroys the wilderness has to change also. The possibilities of this

revolutionary change of desires that requires a radical change in our souls prevails
in *The Practice of the Wild*:

Native Americans to be sure have a prior claim to the term native.
But as they love this land they will welcome the conversion of the
millions of immigrant psyches into fellow “Native Americans.” For
the non-Native American to become at home on this continent, he or
she must be *born again* in this hemisphere, on this continent
(59)

Tom Clark, writing about *The Practice of the Wild*, says that the book revolves
around a central theme which is “the need for reestablishing those traditional
practices of wilderness that once linked humanity in a single, harmonic chord with
the animals, plants, lands and water”(qtd. in Murphy *Understanding Gary Snyder*,
158).

“For All,” a poem from Snyder’s later volume *Axe Handles* (1983),
demonstrates a developing sense of place in order to become native to North
America with equality among all living beings. Snyder calls for a new loyalty
which is loyalty to the land and environment rather than to a flag or government:

I pledge allegiance
I pledge allegiance to the soil
of Turtle Island
and to the beings who thereon dwell
in diversity

under the sun

With joyful interpenetration for all. (*The Gary Snyder Reader* 14-21)

The poem promotes loyalty to and responsibility for all components of the universe; human, animals and plants. I see Snyder's presentation of a new pledge as a revolutionary concept. He shifted the focus from national identity to nature. Loyalty is sworn "to the soil," "the beings" and the ecosystem. He stresses what he considers the most important characteristic of nature: the interdependence of all beings. Human beings are only implicitly mentioned and are never given superiority over other forms of life. The poem holds central parts of Snyder's ecological consciousness.

To develop the sense of place implied in "For All", one should "learn the flowers" (18) as Snyder suggests in "For the Children", a poem from *Turtle Island*, and to know "all you can know about animals and persons/ the names of trees and flowers and weeds/ the names of stars and the movements of planets" (1-3) as written in "What You Should Know to be a Poet" from *Regarding Wave* (1970). In other words, the practical acquisition of knowledge strengthens our human connection with our environment, making us native to a specific place with specific features that contrasts with the ethnocentric urban style place.

For Snyder, a possible solution for the global crisis is to reconcile and bridge the gap between civilization and wild culture. Snyder's commitment to this presentation of nature is instrumental in shaping modern environmental thought. Although Snyder's concern and involvement in environmental activism may be

seen as an active display of passion, I argue that his writings are more active and influential than his activism.

Snyder considered himself a mediator between civilization and nature. His campaign for ecology has never ended. Snyder wrote in an essay entitled “Writers and the War against Nature” in one of his latest collection of essays *Back on the Fire* (2007), “What is happening now to nature worldwide, to plant life and wildlife, in ocean, grassland, forest, savannah, and desert in all spaces and habitat can be likened to a war against nature” (62).

In “Mother Earth: Her Whales” from *Turtle Island*, Snyder accuses political leaders of destroying the planet. He accuses Brazil of exploiting its jungles and Japan for hunting whales and even medieval China for its huge acts of deforestation: “How can the head-heavy power hungry politic scientist/ . . . paper-shuffling male non-farmer jet-set bureaucrats/ Speak for the green of leaf? Speak for the soil” (40, 42-43). Snyder is very angry at an elite that is hardly educated in ecological issues who selfishly seek its own interests and pay no heed to the deadly consequences of their actions. Snyder’s vision of a humble, clear-minded humanity that accepts its dependence on the welfare of other living beings may be helpful in facing global warming and the environmental crisis.

2.3.2 Wendell Berry: Mediating between Culture and Nature

Berry seems greatly indignant at the damage caused to nature because of human selfishness, greed and their hostile attitude towards the natural world. There is a possibility of saving nature from destruction, Berry assures us, but it lies only in the giving up of the idea of human's superiority over other living beings in the universe that presumably gives us the right to destroy them. Berry emphasizes labor and the cultivation of land for he is in between the civilized and the wild. As John R. Knott points out, "Berry resists the common tendency to oppose nature and culture, the wild and the domestic, and finds meaning and health in their interaction" (124). Knot's words seem to suggest the peculiarity of Berry's ecological vision. He enjoys manual labor as part of his ecological commitment and in this aspect, he is very close to Gary Snyder.

Berry thinks that culture and nature cannot be separated, and his conviction of the close connection between poetry and farming can be understood accordingly. Are poetry and farming connected to each other? It seems hard for Berry to make a convincing argument, yet, he never stopped demonstrating that it is possible. In an interview, Wendell Berry explained that he is a farmer and a poet at the same time "a poet who writes about farming, and a farmer who reads and thinks about poetry" (Berry, "A Question A Day" 22). To Berry, a good farmer is a highly skillful person and, therefore, he is an artist. Both the poet and the farmer are masters of the form. They must bring many models into harmony and should understand that diversity can only be understood within unity. They should also know how to deal with the unforeseen. These are, according to Berry, the features of the best poets and the

best farmers. Berry believes that his knowledge of farming deeply influenced his work as a writer. He emphasizes the similarity and the mutual influence of farming and poetry as they explain and sustain each other (Berry, "A Question A Day" 22).

Berry discusses his relation to the place and emphasizes that he is a placed person. He considers the place his fate and he is absolutely related to it. In this respect Berry displays a rather linear movement from alienation to belonging and this is what makes him different from Dillard and other nature writers like Thoreau and Barry Lopez who always fluctuate between correspondence and otherness and whose writings are clearly more dialectical (Slovic, *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* 121). Berry presents a remarkable reversal of the relation between a person and a place; he thinks "we are the belongings of this world, not its owners" (*The Long-Legged House* 143). Berry comes to realize that his life is just one of many lives in this vast universe, it is just one kind among many kinds. He says only a small part of the beauty of the world comes from human origin and it is highly superficial to say that human beings are the owners of the world or that they are the centre of the universe. Human beings, Berry says, are but one element in a world inhabited by different creatures, "whose ancestors were here long before my ancestors came, and who had been more faithful to it than I had been, and who would live as well the day after my death as the day before" (*The Long-Legged House* 149). Berry turns down the sense of belonging to the place as he feels that even if he belongs to the place, nothing in the place belongs to him. He belongs to the place just as the thrushes and herons belong to it. He depicts an amazing picture of sharing life with other creatures; he describes how some birds made their nest in

his house “Instead of one room; I had begun to have a house of apartments where several kinds of life went on together” (*The Long-Legged House* 159). He feels honored to be a part of the life and home of other creatures. Berry shows a great interest in the nonhuman world and wants to learn more about it but recognizes that only a little could be learned about nature during one’s lifetime.

However, in his essay “Wendell Berry’s Watchfulness,” Scot Slovic is of the opinion that Berry does not mean that nature should be civilized or “flooded with the light of human intellect-- in a word domesticated” (*Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* 119). Rather, *The Long-Legged House* shows the gradual growth of Berrys’ understanding of how to be aware of and accept the natural place for what it is. Berry shows less intrusion and more attentive reception of what the place offers. Berry contends, however, in an essay titled “Getting Along with Nature” that this process involves both making changes and also accepting what nature is:

The survival of wilderness--of places we do not change, where we allow the existence of creatures we perceive as dangerous-- is necessary. Our sanity probably requires it. Whether we go to those places or not, we need to know that they exist. And I would argue that we do not need just the great public wildernesses, but millions of private or semiprivate ones. Every farm should have one; wildernesses can occupy corners of factory grounds and city lots-- places where nature is given a free hand, where no human work is done, where people go only as guests. These places function, I

think, whether we intend them to or not, as sacred groves -- places we respect and leave alone, not because we understand well what goes on there, but because we do not. (qtd. in Slovic, *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* 119)

Berry, as Slovic points out, unmistakably echoes nature writers like John Muir and Wallace Stegner in reconciling wilderness with the city but adds a new element. These patches of wilderness may help give people perspective of their lives by showing them that there are processes which surpass their own. However, Berry does not try to enhance the disjuncture between human and nature. Instead, Berry thinks that there is a separation between the wild and the domestic; they are isolated but “these are not exclusive polarities like good and evil. There can be continuity between them and there must be.” Therefore, neither the complete humanization of nature nor complete detachment is possible or desired. Berry says:

People cannot live apart of nature And yet people cannot live in nature without changing it. But it is true of all creatures; they depend on nature and they change it. What we call nature, is in a sense, the sum of changes made by all various creatures [including humans] and natural forces on their intricate actions and influences upon each other and upon their places. (qtd in Slovic, *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* 120)

Berry tries to mediate between nature extremists who assume natural good is human good and civilization extremists who exploit nature to serve human needs. Berry asserts the presence of wilderness in his work as a source of illumination,

peace, order and joy which helps humans to understand and maintain life but never to escape civilization. But how does Berry reconcile two apparently conflicted concepts of wilderness and domesticity as he adopts the values of agrarian life without giving up his attraction to wild nature?

Berry presents a unique vision of agriculture and the connection that supposedly exists between farmers and the wilderness. It is, to use David E. Gamble words, “a moral agriculture that transforms the farmer from the enemy of wilderness to its most devoted guardian” (40). Berry goes beyond the contradiction between the farmer and the wilderness by trying to reconcile them. His vision seems to be in line with his attitude of rejecting the opposition of nature and culture, the wild and the domestic. This may seem quarrelsome as traditionally, the farmer’s role is to destroy wildlife with its plants and animals in order to be able to grow crops. The farmer, then, must remove the forest to produce agricultural crops. Berry, however, argues that it is possible to achieve reconciliation between wilderness and civilization with enlightened farmers who find space for the wilderness on their farms. Berry calls for a revolution in agricultural ways and styles which inevitably requires a revolution in thought about agriculture about the interrelation between farming and wilderness, demanding a new awareness on the part of the farmer. Berry’s “mad farmer” poems which deal with the ideal relationship between agriculture and the wilderness seem to be the most daring embodiment of this relationship. Berry’s mad farmer is a revolutionary who calls for equal care for both agricultural crops and natural life. The farmer should not

only be interested in his own property but should be interested in the whole earth which is much more significant than all human property.

In “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front,” Berry indicates that the human system of production not only destroys the natural world which is the creation of God, but also harms the dignity of human life:

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made . . .
. . . . Your mind will be punched in a card
And shut away in a little drawer.(1-8)

Berry rejects the idea that material profit justifies the destruction caused to the environment. For the mad farmer, it is those who exploit the system and consider profit as the only important value that are truly mad. Berry’s advice to this mad farmer is specific:

Plant sequoias. Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will never live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. (24-30)

The farmer must not consider profit in relation to what he can sell but in relation to what is good for the environment which he ought to care for. Profit should not be defined by an individual farmer’s own profit or even by a larger group of human

beings; rather, it must be a profit to all elements of the natural world such as the forest, the stream, the insect, the bird, the mammal, the microbe, and even the humus.

In “The Satisfactions of the Mad Farmer”, Berry depicts his own image of this mad farmer. This mad farmer should exalt the wildlife on his farm and his satisfaction should also include:

deer tracks in the wet path,
the deer sprung from them, gone on;
live streams, live shiftings
of the sun in the summer woods;(58-61)

What is unpleasant for most farmers, like the deer that eats the corn before it is harvested, is presented here as not only having a legitimate place on the farm, but also as having the right to share the crops of the farmer’s labor. Berry suggests that the farmer should be as pleased with the healthy deer as he is with his own farm animals. In addition to what he cultivates, his responsibilities should be broadened to keep plant and animal life flourishing in the midst of his fields (Gamble 44).

Berry, therefore, calls for the ethical treatment of the natural world. This ethical treatment can only be achieved through an intimate knowledge of it. His relationship with the earth, woods, lakes, mountains and streams is dominated by a developed deep understanding and experience rather than being dominated by the requirements of science, technology and profit. This approach to the treatment of the earth is fully contrasted with dominant attitudes.

According to Berry, the relationship between creatures and the environment is sacred. We must respect the creation of God and do not do it any harm. The environment bestows human beings life so they must preserve it in return. This sense of sacredness can be seen in one of his early poems, “The Sycamore”:

It is a fact, sublime, mystical and unassailable.

In all the country there is no other like it.

I recognize in it a principle, an indwelling
the same as itself, and greater, that I would be ruled by.

I see that it stands in its place, and feeds upon it, and is fed upon,
and is native, and maker. (16-21)

William C. Johnson says, “what dwells within all living things is at once concrete and mystical, the self and the self’s ruler. As it feeds in its place, and in turn is fed upon, the tree is ‘native and maker’ ” (184). We should be aware of the other elements of the natural world, respect them, and look at them as being complementary to our life and never to feel isolated or independent of them.

Let me take Berry’s prose work *The Unforeseen Wilderness* (1971) and try to explore his vision of wilderness in it. The book was written on Kentucky’s Red River Gorge. The writer describes his discovery of the Red River through his boat trips over several years. He looks to those years as landmarks in his life. The book records Berry’s transition from his initial sense of “strangeness” towards the place to a familiarity that enables him to surrender to it. Berry documents his own observations and reactions and from the very beginning, Berry’s main concern, the land, is explicitly exposed. He praises those who were kind to the land in the past

like the original Indians and condemns those who ill-treated the land like the farmers and mineworkers who cared only for their own profit. In the opening chapter, Berry traces his first visit to the gorge in spring, describing spring wildflowers and the sounds of waterfalls which convey a strong sense of the freshness of the landscape:

Again and again, walking down from the wooded ridgetops above the Red River Gorge one comes into the sound of water falling--- steady pouring and spattering of a tiny stream . . . One looks up twenty or thirty or fifty or more feet to where the water leaps off the rock lip, catching the sunlight as it falls. (*The Unforeseen Wilderness*)

The natural order, according to Berry, is too complicated to be understood “within the limits of human life”. Berry strongly opposes any violation of the natural order; those who would dam the river add to the history of the violation of nature done by miners, loggers and farmers before. He presents a romantic vision when he describes an isolated farmhouse in the bottomlands of the gorge on the edge of the woods at the foot of a great cliff: “the quiet of wilderness rises over it like the looming gray cliff face. . . [the house] seems somehow to have assumed the musing inwardness of the stone that towers over it” (*The Unforeseen Wilderness* 25). As Knott points out, “This remarkable vision embodies a yearning for a natural world in its pure state, not a world without humans but a world of primitive simplicity that admits no sense of a division between man and nature, a world before any human destruction” (133). Berry draws no borders between humans and

nature but suggests a perfect harmony between them. In “An Entrance to the Woods,” the central essay in the collection, Berry describes a single trip to the gorge. Berry undergoes a sense of displacement as he moves from the city, his familiar place with its human society, to the complete solitude of a campsite by a creek at the bottom of the gorge. This displacement causes sadness for Berry, yet, by experiencing such solitude, he is able to undergo the spiritual rebirth which he seeks. It is the same solitude Thoreau experienced one day in Walden, a solitude which is fruitful and productive. Entering the world of the wilderness provides the opportunity to feel a sense of “nonhuman time” which makes human existence secondary and shows the transient existence of those who lived in the place before: Indians, hunters, loggers and farmers, all of whom left nothing other than chimneys and flowers to indicate their extinct lives. Berry identifies with those who lived in the place before him and has to go beyond his awareness of civilization at that time, symbolized by the sounds coming from the highway that could be heard in most parts of the gorge. Civilization and wilderness, according to Berry, are inseparable and should be closely related. He describes the wilderness as:

The element in which we live encased in civilization, and as a mollusk in his shell in the sea. It is a wilderness that is beautiful, dangerous, abundant, oblivious of us, mysterious never to be conquered or second-guessed, or known more than a little. It is a wilderness that for most of us most of the time is kept out of sight, camouflaged, by the effects and the busyness and the bothers of the human society (*The Unforeseen Wilderness* 37).

Berry's remarkable metaphor of the "mollusk" demonstrates that both civilization and wilderness are indispensable to man. He expresses the need for people to experience nature but not in Thoreau's way. People need not go to Walden to live in loneliness for the sake of spiritual rebirth. Rather, they can achieve spiritual recovery through imagining the wilderness as a wrapping element in which man lives "encased in civilization" in an inevitable primitive nature.

In "The Unforeseen Wilderness," the essay which gives the book its title, Berry addresses the human illusion that the world is stable and fixed. The continuous change of the world is necessary for him, and this process of change occurs spontaneously without adhering to certain plans. Rivers, for example, may change their directions and make new bends in response to obstructions and gaps. Wild birds do not go to the kitchen or restaurants to eat but eat what they may find throughout their daily search for food. Berry emphasizes the idea of spontaneity; he urges people to go on foot into the wilderness with a readiness to learn lessons from it. The wilderness "will teach [people] the wisdom of taking no thoughts for tomorrow—not because taking thought is a bad idea, but because it is not possible; [they do not] know what thought tomorrow will require" (*The Unforeseen Wilderness* 48).

As an environmentalist, Berry rejects the trash of material civilization, "old tires, buckets and cans, the various plastic conveniences of our disposable civilization." To be civilized, Berry says, we should protect our environment and preserve wild places such as the Red River from human abuse. He describes a day he spent in nature:

All day we have been in motion ourselves, and now we see it very still and watch motions of the world: the flight of the birds, the stirring of the wind, the flowing of the river, the darkening of the day. In our weariness and stillness we watch it happen without impatience, with candid interest. It is as gratifying as watching somebody else works. (*The Unforeseen Wilderness* 54, 56)

Berry presents a radical concept of the relationship between humans and the natural world. He thinks that it is not enough for us to be in the natural world; we should be a part of it and move within it. Nothing in nature is fixed or immortal, not the hills or mountains, but there is an immortal process of creation which is quite different from human action that is described by Berry as destructive to the natural world. This everlasting process of creation cannot be understood within humans' limited and selfish view. It cannot be perceived as an act of destruction, says Berry, even when hills are torn down, it is a creation.

In the last chapter of "The Journey's End," Berry meditates on the sense of place and the relation between a place and its inhabitants. Berry enquires whether the place is strange to him or to other living beings. The place, for Berry, is neither strange to its creatures, to the birds, animals and insects, nor is it strange to human beings for Indians had once lived in its caves and near its streams. It is the explorers who made the place strange through the planting of their own values of conquest, exploitation and destruction. To be familiar with the place, human beings should not merely be observers but to be creatures overwhelmed by creation. Going to wild places is not related to recreation; it is related more to creation, "For the

wilderness is the creation in its pure state, its processes unqualified by the doings of people. In the woods, we come face to face with the creation, of which we must begin to see ourselves as part” (*The Unforeseen Wilderness* 66).

Berry thinks that people become more familiar with the wilderness only when they become less fearful of it. The wilderness does not change; it is the same. It is our fear of nature that changes. When we stop looking at it as an enemy, it will become comfortable and familiar. We fear it as we fear the unknown. Our fear should change from that which is associated with contempt and ignorance of “the fear that accompanies awe that comes with understanding of our smallness in the presence of wonder that teaches us to be respectful and careful”(*The Unforeseen Wilderness* 67). It is fear that is mingled with love. Berry came to know about the mystery of the nonhuman world during his stay in the wilderness at the gorge. He came to recognize that only little was created by humans as the natural world can always challenge human power and reveal our weakness. Berry does not consider himself a master of the world but an inhabitant of it which, for Berry, is the right position of human beings. The vastness and complexity of the natural world reminded Berry of his place among other animals and inhabitants of the natural world.

Unlike Snyder, Berry endorses farm life simplicity rather than the primitive and if we associate Snyder with the wilderness of the Rocky mountain landscape, Berry is associated with the mountain farmland of Kentucky. Berry does not believe in the tribalism of Snyder “but in the neighbourliness of the rural community to which he belongs”(285), to use Lothar Honnighausen words. Berry

does not have the anti-humanist attitude that radical ecologists have. He shares the ecologists' regionalism which focuses on an ecological knowledge of their region but, as I see it, Berry has his own version of regionalism. Berry expresses his regionalist sympathies in an essay titled "The Regional Motive" in *A Continuous Harmony*. He strongly refuses "the moral distortion of exploitive or sentimental regionalism". Berry criticizes the "tendency to love the land, not for its life, but for its historical associations". He says, "The regionalism that I adhere to could be defined simply as *local life aware of itself*. It would tend to be a substitute for the myths and stereotypes of a region a particular knowledge of the life of the place one lives in and intends to continue to live in" (*A Continuous Harmony* 63, 64, 65). It is a conservative regionalism, indeed compared to that of Snyder, which can be described as revolutionary.

Wendell Berry loved nature that is not wild, nature that is adapted to the support of human society without being exploited or abused. The territory of Berry is not the wilderness but the farm and human society. Berry's meditations deal with matters that Thoreau and Emerson did not pay much attention to such as marriage, love, neighbourliness, shared work and responsibility. What I mean to say is that his intense interest in the natural world was not inward toward transcendental awareness but outward toward membership, family and human cohesion. Berry did look at the earth in a mystical way but in a practical way as a responsible husbandman. Berry is not a mere observant of life and an eloquent meditative writer but a highly responsible writer who rejects setting aesthetics and ethics apart to avoid their clash but insists on keeping them together in harmony.

Wasting any part of creation, for Berry, is a blasphemy. The land and its creatures, including the predators, are all divine gifts; they are all creations of God and, therefore, must be preserved. Wendell Berry made great efforts through his works to reform the relationship between civilization and the earth. Unless human society renews the vision of its relationship with the natural world, there will be little hope of substantial and permanent environmental reform. Berry might not have provided solutions for all environmental dilemmas but he certainly has inspired people with the spirit of real reform. He urges people to reconsider their daily interaction with the environment with a new vision.

2.3.3 Annie Dillard: A Dialectical Vision

Annie Dillard expresses the bitter feelings of alienation which sweep over her because of the damage inflicted on the natural world as a result of the development of scientific methods. She believes that human beings have separated themselves from the earth, exploited it in a horrible way and consequently, caused great harm to our ecosystems and spirits. Dillard is considerably interested in ecological systems and looks at humans as just a part of the vast natural world. Dillard has dedicated a significant part of her literary production to ecosystems; it is this remarkable blending of the human and nonhuman that distinguishes Dillard's ecological perspective. Dillard looks to the naturalness of humankind. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Dillard is a solitary pilgrim who encounters the natural world and, indeed, she is criticized by some critics as taking a kind of retreat from society. However, through her experiences, Dillard explores nature and the correspondence

between humans and nature on physical and spiritual levels which may cure the split between them.

For Dillard, the first-hand investigation of the mysteries of nature is of great importance and she can grow from precise observations which only solitude may provide her. Meeting nature directly beyond human beings enables her to return to life with a new moving perspective. Two crucial questions may be asked about Dillard's ecological vision. Firstly, what does she deduce about the mechanism of nature and living beings? Secondly, how does she react to them? Both questions are significant in view of the current ecological tendency which considers the world as a sacred community and that all living things are like a family living in communion. What then does Dillard see in the world? In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, she sees nature as "profligate," wasteful, marred with "extravagance" in the way that it throws off leaves, insects, lives" (76). It is deadly and productive, destructive and self-renewing, buzzing with "a swarm of . . . wild, wary energies" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 229), sacred and cursed, adaptive and terrible.

Dillard shares some of the transcendentalist writers' attitudes towards the natural world. However, she draws conclusions which highlight the contradictory forces in the natural world. I suggest that what distinguishes Dillard is her dialectical vision of the universe. She does not tend to make final explanations about human community, rather, her conclusions seem highly personal and depend entirely on her observations.

Dillard emphasizes on the opening page of her book that the natural world is both beautiful and cruel. She wonders whether those two seemingly paradoxical

aspects can go together. How can the beauty of nature which she is obsessed with be closely related to violence? “Looking so closely at eternity, Dillard was torn between beauty and horror throughout her ‘mystical excursion’ in *Pilgrim*.”(Tietjen 104).The book begins with the narrator describing her old tomcat who used to jump from the window to her bed “stinking of urine and blood” and covered her body “with paw prints in blood” until she looked as if she was “ painted with roses”(*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 8). As Norwood remarks, Dillard attempts to “reconcile the images of beauty and horror: humans and their civilization are really the only true holders of moral beauty in the world; or the terror itself contains beauty if we only look correctly, or in the contradiction, beauty does not exist” (341). Dillard realizes that violence and beauty in the natural world complete each other and cannot be separated; they are two sides of the same coin. This is the rule of the wild and human beings should accept it. As the narrator explores the natural world, she gradually realizes that she is a part of the violence as well as beauty. She is not innocent, not unfamiliar with the violent spreading of blood:

I am not washed and beautiful, in control of a shining world in which everything fits, but instead I am wandering awed about on a splintered wreck I’ve come to care for, whose gnawed trees breathe a delicate air, which bloodiest and sacred creatures are my dearest companions, and whose beauty beats and shines not in its imperfections but overwhelmingly in spite of them, under the wind-rent clouds, upstream and down. (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 271)

Dillard depicts an image of the world which blends contrasts between good and

evil, ugliness and beauty. Dillard sees much cruelty compared to which human acts of evil seem pale and acceptable. She sees creatures eating other creatures alive; she sees a female creature eating its young once they are born. Dillard seems uncertain in her interpretation of such contrasts but seems to accept it and not be irritated by it. She even tells us that the frightening creatures of the world are dear companions to her. Dillard presents the transcendental perspective that one should be close to nature in order to see it better or, in other words, to acquire a new way of seeing. That is, to see things not in the traditional sense but to see things in the mind in order to be able to produce a more precise picture of things. To use Scott Slovic's words, Dillard "makes herself a more meticulous observer of the commonplace, an observer able to appreciate the strangeness, or otherness of the world" (10). Dillard tells a story of how she visited her aunt and uncle on a farm one day and wanted to draw a horse, "I couldn't do much of anything useful, but I could I thought, draw I produced a sheet of paper and drew a horse" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 26). Her cousins made fun of her drawing. All her cousins could produce much better drawings than her. They can do so because they are closer to horses and love them more than Dillard. They can, therefore, see them in their minds to draw them. It is this kind of seeing that Dillard wanted to acquire.

Two aspects of Dillard's vision can best be seen in the chapters "Intricacy" and "Fecundity." "Intricacy" celebrates the "extravagance of minutiae." "This is the truth of the pervading intricacy of the worlds' detail: the creation is not a study, a roughed-in sketch; it is supremely, meticulously created, created abundantly,

extravagantly, and in fine” (153). In the midst of the excessive profusion, the narrator shows anxiety, “The wonder is—given the errant nature of freedom and the burgeoning of texture in time—the wonder is that all the forms are not monsters, that there is beauty at all”(*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 165). Dillard concludes that anything can happen in such a world. In “Fecundity”, Dillard expands on her anxiety that the world becomes a nightmare. She looks equally upset by birth and death. She focuses on the indisputable reproductive craving of all species:

I don't know what it is about fecundity that so appalls. I suppose it is the teeming evidence that birth and growth, which we value, are ubiquitous and blind, that life itself is so astonishingly cheap, that nature is as careless as it is bountiful, and that with extravagance goes a crushing waste that will one day include our own cheap lives.

(*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 181)

Endless repetition and senseless reproduction reduce life to “a universal chomp.” In this universe, mothers eat their children; children demolish their parents, and insects eat their mates. “What kind of world is this, anyway?” she asks in astonishment. “Are we dealing in life, or in death”? (197) Dillard struggles with the meanness and atrocities of life and speculates about which is wrong: the world as a

“monster” or humans with their “excessive emotions” (199-200). The violent and apparently futile birth and death are spiritually “two branches of the same creek, the creek that waters the world We could have planned things more mercifully, perhaps, but our plan would never get off the drawing board until we agreed to the very compromising terms that are the only ones that being offers”(*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 203). For Dillard, accepting the evil and beauty of the world is the cost that all living beings should accept to gain freedom.

Dillard shows the conflicting processes of nature which are the most essential and common processes in the natural world (Slovic 358). Dillard is astonished at the ability of some kinds of plants to survive in terrible conditions. The fecundity of nature may be admired and appreciated by human beings as far as it is related to plant life since it is central to human survival while such fecundity in rats or cockroaches as part of the animal world is rejected. Dillard seems to suggest a prejudice exists on the part of human beings with regards to the view of other living beings. In other words, human beings consider the matter of fecundity by how much it is of human interest and benefit. Also, Dillard suggests the insignificance of a human’s role in this vast universe. As Berman points out, one should drop the ego when aiming at a truthful experience of nature and should be aware that he/she is only a part of a larger system (177). Dillard is bewildered by the natural world and wonders if the excessiveness of nature is justified and if there is a contradiction between human values and nature’s values? She sees a lack of understanding or even ignorance in human beings regarding their natural environment. She writes about the locusts and how humans did not know for

centuries how they suddenly appear and disappear. The idea which people believed for hundreds of years was that locusts were a plague sent by God which is a blatant form of human ignorance. Humans use spiritual interpretation of a natural phenomenon and herein lies the problem.

Pamela A. Smith thinks that story of nature is not just a casual passage of seasons for Dillard; it is a story of eating. She wrote chapters on snakes, parasites and the abnormalities of feeding. The law of nature is the law of endless “chomp”: kill or be killed, eat or starve. Dillard reflects on the cycle of life and the food chain. While she examines the copperhead near her, a mosquito perches on the snake and starts to suck blood from it. The mosquito feeds for a few minutes and leaves. Dillard leaves too and reflects on life “Is this it’s like, I thought then, and think now: a little blood here, a chomp there, and still we live, trampling the grass? Must everything whole be nibbled? Here was a new light on the intricate texture of things in the world” (254). Life seems to Dillard as a chain of creatures feeding on each other in order to survive. Dillard wonders about the violence of the natural world, “But we live creatures are eating each other, who have done us no harm.” (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 254, 267). To Dillard, it seems that the laws of nature preserve its continuity and existence. Dillard accepts the contradictions of the laws of nature and suggests that the beauty of nature can cure the disgust Dillard sometimes feels when confronted with the cruel aspects of the natural world. In many ways, Dillard seems very close to American Transcendentalism and may be placed in the tradition of Emerson and Thoreau but she constantly distinguishes herself from them. For example, Emerson believes in the unity of the

world and denies the horror in the natural world and if it exists, it is due to the lack of understanding on the part of human beings. Dillard does not agree with Emerson's vision in this respect but fluctuates between her delight and wonder on one hand and horror and disgust on the other. As Margaret Loewen Reimer points out, Dillard's experiences "lead her to see the unity and the diversity, the order and the chaos, the uplifting and the destructive The power of Dillard's vision arises from her strength to maintain the contradictions within a single vision."(189)

For Dillard, the law of nature is not the survival of the fittest; rather, it is for those who accidentally survive. All creatures of the natural world have the right to survive which is why humans have no right to deny other creatures the right to live and progress. Things should be left to happen coincidentally; they should come together with nature's unique quality of coincidence and freedom:

The point of the dragonfly's terrible lip, the giant water bug, birdsong, or the beautiful dazzle and flash of sunlighted minnows, is not that it all fits together like clockwork- for it does not particularly, not even inside the goldfish bowl- but that it all flows so freely wild, like the creek that it surges in such a free, fringed tangle. Freedom is the world's water and weather, the world's nourishment freely given, its soil and sap (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 156)

This law of freedom which preserves the rights of all ecosystems to survive and progress is also a law of death. Progress will inevitably end in demise and "Evolution loves death more than it loves you or me" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

198).

Dillard shows her relentless resistance to human's aggressive acts towards it in "winter," a chapter in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. The story of the starlings in this chapter seems central to display her attitudes to the natural world. Dillard tells us how the starlings were introduced to America by a man who wanted to bring all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's plays to America. The presence of those birds in America "was the result of one man's fancy" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 45). One year, the people of Radford, Virginia decided to get rid of all the starlings in their village. They made several attempts to exterminate the birds but failed and the birds survived in spite of repeated efforts by people to kill them. It depicts the notion that one species seems unable to live while another survives. The birds merely live their lives in their environment so it is unfair that it becomes a nuisance to humans. This story, in fact, illuminates the theme that people's efforts fail if they wish to break the sacredness of the natural world order. The failure to get rid of the starlings stands for the failure of humans to be masters of the world. In other words, human interference with nature is unnecessary and futile as nature will continue to exist. The story of the starlings also shows human's weakness against the natural world.

The theme of the indifference of humans towards the natural world is shown in the story of the Polyphemus moth. While she was a child, a student brought in a Polyphemus cocoon to school to study it, "We were delighted, and wrapped it tighter in our fists We kept passing it around. When it came to me again it was hot as bun; it jumped out of my hand. The teacher intervened. She put

it, still heaving and banging, in the ubiquitous Mason jar.”(*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 72). The cocoon finally hatched and the newly hatch moth was not able to stretch its wings. The heat of the hands was the reason behind the harm caused to the moth. Dillard says that this experience is unforgettable for her while the students and even the teacher seemed indifferent to the dilemma of the polyphemus moth. Dillard’s story alludes to the concept of equal rights for all living beings to survive and grow as well as sympathy for the suffering of living beings. Dillard, furthermore, compares the state of man to the state of nature. She considers the continuous flow of Tinker Creek which suggests to her the stability of nature as opposed to the change of human beings.

Dillard’s attentiveness, vigilance and close observation are admired by scholars and environmentalists. However, I agree with Pamela Smith who is perplexed with Dillard’s policy of non-intervention. There is never a hint that she is moved to contribute to the World Wildlife Fund, campaign against the destruction of rain forests, push legislation against refrigerants that might expand the ozone hole or do any other ecologically minded things. Dillard tries to justify her policy of non-intervention in her essay “The Deer at Providencia”. Dillard describes watching a young deer’s day long fight to free itself after it has been chained by Ecuadorian villagers. The fight is hapless and the deer is killed at the end of the day. Dillard narrates a journalist’s amazement at her passivity. Dillard could observe but not take action. She says with indifference, “I looked detached, apparently, or hard, or calm, or focused, still. I don’t know.” Then she comments, “I was thinking . . . I have thought a great deal about carnivorousness; I eat meat.

These things are not issues; they are mysteries” (*Teaching a Stone to Talk* 76). Hunting habits and killing customs seem facts of life. Like numerous things in the nonhuman world, strange killings and cruel feedings overwhelm the human world. Dillard is an active observer but not an active activist. She observes, records but does not make any suggestions to deal with things she observes. Bruce Ronda says, “In Dillard’s writing, one feels the awful inner tension between wanting to control and wanting to let go; one sees the amoral career of nature that separates it from our sympathy”(486).

While I can see a sort of sympathy towards the natural world and its living beings, I can also see a kind of unmistakable separation. Dillard shows uncertainty; she seems moved to goodness and sounds doubtful when witnessing brutal phenomena. Dillard confessed that in *Teaching a Stone to Talk*: “I alternate between thinking of the planet as home- dear and familiar stone hearth and garden -- and as a hard land of exile in which we are all sojourners”(137). Dillard’s split vision of darkness, chaos and death together with light, unity and life seems to share similarities with that of Thoreau. In “Spring” a chapter in *Walden*, Thoreau expresses a similar fluctuation about the spontaneous overabundance of living things:

I love to see that Nature is so rife with life that myriads can be afforded to be sacrificed and suffered to prey on one another; that tender organizations can be so serenely squashed out of existence like pulp,—tadpoles which herons gobble up, and tortoises and toads run over in the road (328).

Dillard sees a possibility of correspondence among all living beings that supports modern man's attempts to live in harmony with nature but she is not involved with its practicalities. Life, Dillard says, "is a faint tracing on the surface of a mystery We must somehow take a wider view, look at the whole landscape, really see it, and describe what's going on here" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 16). Taking action, however, may take a very long time. But as we carry on, Dillard's efforts may help us repair the split between human beings and nature.

2.3. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, there is much in common between Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, and Annie Dillard in their transcendental thought and their ecological vision of the world. However, each one has their own visions of the natural world and the relationship between human beings and other components of the natural world. Snyder believes in the equality of all living beings and refuses to rank them according to their values or usefulness. In this respect, Snyder shows significant Buddhism influence and there are significant parallels between Buddhism and his ecological beliefs. Snyder, also, calls for reconciliation and bridging of the gap between civilization and wild culture in order to find a potential solution to universal crisis. He suggests a blending between civilization and the wild and imagines the wilderness underneath the structure of civilization.

Wendell Berry, on the other hand, clearly agrees with much of Snyder's vision and seems to go further in connecting poetry to manual labour. He is a farmer and a poet at the same time and his knowledge of farming profoundly

influenced his career as a writer. Berry struggled against the tendency to contrast nature and culture because nature and culture cannot be separated and should interact. That is to say that both civilization and wilderness are important to human beings. Annie Dillard is greatly interested in ecosystems . She blends the human and nonhuman in a remarkable way. She calls for a new way of knowing and seeing which may elevate the position of the natural world and result in a new vision of this world. What distinguishes Dillard's ecological perspective is her constant inquiry about the contradictions of the natural world. She seems confused in finding convincing justifications for them, yet she accepts them and tries to reconcile them.

All three writers have much in common regarding the call to protect the natural world from the damage caused by human beings and to demand a sacred bond between human beings and the natural environment. They call for a new vision of the universe, a vision which does not elevate the human at the expense of other components of the world. All agree that humans are just part of and perhaps even a smaller part of a much greater world. The next chapter will delve into the social implications of Snyder, Berry, and Dillard's revival of transcendental principles and how they deal with the contemporary issues of American society and also worldwide.

CHAPTER THREE

The Social Implications of the Revival of Transcendentalism: Reorganizing the Politics of Community

The previous chapter was entirely dedicated to studying the kind of relationship between human beings and the natural world as envisioned by Berry, Dillard and Snyder. Berry, Dillard and Snyder tried to reshape this relationship in a way that preserves both human and nature. This chapter will investigate Snyder, Berry and Dillard's transcendental vision of society. The three writers were interested in reorganizing the relationship between human beings as much as between humankind and the natural world. Snyder, Berry and Dillard touch upon social issues in varying degrees, providing their vision of modern society's crisis. This chapter studies selected texts of the aforementioned writers who deal with the social matters of American society and human society in general during the twentieth and present century. The chapter, then, investigates social themes, dealt with before by nineteenth century transcendentalist writers and how they are re-presented and adapted by Berry, Dillard and Snyder to present their transcendental vision of contemporary American and global society.

3.1 Gary Snyder: A Bioregionalist Perspective and Revolutionary Concept of Democracy

In response to Eliot Weinberger's question about the validity of the writer's involvement in social and political issues during an interview in 1992, Snyder

replies that, “The whole history of Chinese poetry is full of great poets who played a role in their society. . . I believe deeply in civic life. But I don’t think that as a writer I could move on to a state or national scale of politics and remain a writer. My choice is to remain a writer” (Snyder, “Interview”). Snyder, it seems, thinks the writer should play a vital role in society without being involved in political and state issues. Snyder’s social views can be seen in his major poetic works as well as in his prose works. To Snyder, both poetry and language are significant tools in changing the values of modern man. I read Snyder not only as a nature writer but as a postmodernist writer who rejects the modernists’ despair and alienation. Snyder presents his vision of the political world and asserts the need to sustain benevolent human manners in a contradictory and changing world. Snyder himself shows a kind of tension and contradiction in his political views. On the one hand, he believes that the ideal political system helps to consolidate individuals’ relationships to the welfare of society. On the other hand, Snyder considers that all political systems are exploitive and are, therefore, bad. Snyder, however, does not let these two contradicting attitudes fight each other but tries to reconcile them. Molesworth indicates that in Snyder’s poetry, there is “a form of mediation between the social and the individual, the historical and the transcendent” (11). However, Snyder’s transcendental background inevitably leads him towards more loyalty to the individual than to society. Snyder strongly disapproves of the illness of modern civilization which has destructive effects on individuals, resulting in the degradation of the entire society.

In his poetic and prose book *Turtle Island* in 1974, Snyder's 'Turtle Island' seems to be a symbol of the whole universe and not limited to America as implied in his "Introductory Note." Snyder wrote:

'Turtle Island' is the old / new name for the continent, based on many creation of myths of the people who have been living here for millennia.[It is] a name: that we may see ourselves more accurately on this continent of watersheds and life-communities--- plant zones, physiographic provinces, culture areas; following natural boundaries (unpaginated).

He symbolically uses 'Turtle Island' to expose his nostalgic sense towards the past and his future hopes. "Hark again to those roots, to see our ancient solidarity, and then to the work of being together on Turtle Island" (unpaginated). *Turtle Island* embodies much of Snyder's Utopian vision of the world that corresponds considerably to what was known by the mid-1970s as the bioregionalism movement. Snyder expresses his bioregional attitudes in the prose section of *Turtle Island* entitled "Plain Talk." The world should be divided, according to Snyder, into "natural and cultural boundaries rather than arbitrary political boundaries"(100). Political boundaries are artificial and should be removed accordingly to give more variety to life, therefore, giving human society a better chance to develop and prosper. Snyder's vision of the ideal political world seems to be derived from the bioregionalism movement to a considerable extent. In addition to his bioregionalist attitudes, Snyder argues for the necessity of seeking the use of unobtrusive technology. He attacks the ideology of consumption and

mal-use of energy sources. New ethics, thus, should be created to reconcile current ethical standards and behavior, which may lead to a balance between immediate needs and its final results. Snyder thinks that it is not enough to change ourselves because we “must transform the five-millennia-long urbanizing civilization tradition into a new ecologically-sensitive, harmony-oriented wild-minded scientific/spiritual culture” (*Turtle Island* 99). Snyder’s words echo Emerson who rejected our ancestors’ interpretations of the world, urging humans to a new and original understanding of the world. Snyder here expresses a similar transcendental vision in calling for new understanding and interpretation of our tradition to one that preserves both the environment and human beings and balances between the scientific and spiritual needs of humans.

In a prose section of *Turtle Island* called “The Wilderness,” Snyder describes the poet as a kind of senator whose constituency is made up of the wilderness. The poet supports “a new definition of democracy that would include the non-human.” Snyder criticizes human beings for their lack of “ecological conscience.” He says:

A culture that alienates itself from the very ground of its own being—the wilderness outside (that is to say, wild nature, the wild, self-contained, self-informing ecosystem) and from that other wilderness, the wilderness within—is doomed to every destructive behaviour, ultimately perhaps self-destructive behaviour. (*Turtle Island* 106)

Snyder claims that civilization underestimates the natural world which should be incorporated into the democratic process. For Snyder, the democratic process is not limited to humans but should include all living beings; the grass and geese should have equal rights to that of Republicans, Democrats, Communists and philosophical anarchists. “Tomorrow’s Song” a poem from *Turtle Island* may be the most radical poem in the whole work:

The USA slowly lost its mandate
in the middle and later twentieth century
it never gave the mountains and rivers,
trees and animals,
a vote.
all the people turned away from it
myths die; even continents are impermanent.(1-7)

The poem expresses Snyder’s most radical and challenging notion where animals and plants should be represented in government. If America wants to maintain its status and power, it should give the right to vote even to mountains and rivers. I perceive this as a remarkable development in Snyder’s vision of the nonhuman world.

The failure to recognize the political interdependence of humans and non-humans is the greatest danger to the earth and its inhabitants, both to the human and natural community. In other words, only by adopting such a democracy can the earth survive and be preserved.

“I went into the Maverick Bar” from *Turtle Island* can be read as a cry against the destructiveness of society’s materialism. The poem strongly catches the despairing lack of social possibility that contrasts with Snyder’s Utopian vision:

I went into the Maverick Bar

In Farmington, New Mexico.

And drank double shots of bourbon backed with beer.

My long hair was tucked up under a cap

I’d left the earring in the car.

.....

And with the next song, a couple began to dance.

They held each other like in High School dances in the fifties;

I recalled when I worked in the woods and the bars of Madras,

Oregon(1-6,13-18)

The setting of the poem is a working-class bar in “Farmington, New Mexico.” The speaker seemingly feels alienated from other people in the bar. Against this setting, the speaker remembers the fifties when he worked in the woods and bars of Oregon. The feelings of rejection and fear mixed with nostalgia and fondness actually meld to the phrase “I came back to myself / To the real work / ‘What is to be done’” (25-27). As Molesworth remarks, Snyder “realizes how far his values are from those of many of his ordinary fellow citizens, but he also realizes he must and will maintain those values” (98). The poem makes us feel the speaker’s frustration to the extent that he seems not to belong to a place at all. Yet, unlike the Beat writers of the 1950s, Snyder does not reject urban life; rather he tries to reconcile it.

“Night Highway 99,” a poem from *Mountains and Rivers without End*, takes the reader south from Ferndale through the cities of Washington and California and ends in San Francisco. Snyder’s choice of Highway 99 cannot be easily understood since there are other highways that might have been used instead. However, Anthony Hunt thinks that Snyder chose it because “it runs in the symbolic middle between the inland mountains and the ocean, as a major north-south truck route [and therefore] was the obvious choice to sustain a poetic lament for those suffering at the hands of consumerism” (73). On the one hand, the poem is gloomy as it depicts some remarkable portraits of poor people who strive for their lives like those in T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. These robotic people walk through the city streets with loud sighs. The hitchhiking speaker meets travelers on the highway as they pass through it; the shingle weavers, the weary Indians, the burnt-out minds and others:

While shingle weavers lost their fingers
in the tricky feed and take
of double saws.

.....
Waste of trees& topsoil, beast, herb,
edible roots, Indian field-farm & white men
dances washed, leached, burnt out
minds, blunt,ug!talk twisted. (48-51, 58-61)

The to and fro traffic on Highway 99 is symbolic of chaos and dissatisfaction. “The travelers show the dilemma as the travelers attempt to follow

the road to a place where problems do not exist: their desire to escape creates a cycle of dissatisfaction” (Smith 25). On the other hand, however, Snyder keeps his optimistic vision of life and does not surrender to the gloomy mood that tints some parts of the poem. Snyder rejoices in a simple life that Thoreau celebrated before in *Walden*.

On second Street in Portland

What elegance. What a life.

Bust my belly with a quart of buttermilk

& and five dry heels of French bread

from the market cheap

clean shaved, dry feet (197-201)

“The Market,” a poem from *Mountains and Rivers without End* shows how Snyder is very close to Whitman’s vision of America. Snyder has a deep concern for America’s spiritual growth and asserts Whitman’s belief in democracy and freedom as being the only way to achieve real progress for Americans. Much of Snyder’s poem “The Market” seems to be derived from his trip to India in 1962. The poem may be read as a severe attack against materialism; “Like Whitman before him, Snyder calls for an end to debilitating materialism, for more open relationships between people, and for a sacramental relation to life in general” (Stueding 98). The poet begins with markets close to the place where he lives in the American West and then adds other examples from the markets of Saigon (Vietnam), Kathmandu (Nepal) and Varanasi (India). Snyder visited all those places during his visit to India that lasted for six months. Here, Snyder expresses

his belief that such voyages of discovery are important to strengthen the concept of brotherhood and show the great diversity of life which Snyder considers helpful in maintaining harmony and order in the world. The outset of the poem refers to Snyder's vision of a perfect society in which the city and countryside should complete each other and be in harmony to achieve a healthy society, "Heart of the city / downtown / the countryside" (1-3). By fluctuating between the city and the country, Snyder makes us aware that the market is the place where the country, becomes the "heart of the city" through the goods sold in it. The market exposes its chaos and disorder that refer to suffering. The human desperation in this poverty-dominated market is inescapable. People are less interested in the quality of their labor as they are more interested in the financial value of their products.

A carrot, a lettuce, a ball of cooked noodle

Beggars hang by the flower stall

give them all some.

Strong women. Dirt from the hills

in her nails

Valley thatch houses

palmgroves for hedges

ricefield and thrasher

to white rice

dongs and piastre(36-45).

"The Hump-backed Flute Player," another poem from *Mountains and Rivers without End*, deals primarily with Native Indians. Snyder highly admires them and

considers the American Indian his 'original teacher.' He says that our cultural task now is to establish a felt connection with our ancestors, learn the spirit of the land and thus know our past and ourselves as well. In an interview with Bruce Cook, Snyder stated "I think the Indians are going to show us the next stage of this other culture. But of course if we had only looked before, they could have shown us earlier. We really had the opportunity to learn from them . . ." (Cook 131). For Snyder, the Indians play the role of teachers and victims at the same time throughout American history; they were a model of primitive ecology and the living embodiment of mythic consciousness and preservers of a tradition which values psychic life. They are also victims of white American civilization (Studing 101). "The Hump-back Flute Player" traces an arc of rivers that stretch around the northern Pacific Rim and down to the southwest of North America. We can trace the path of the legendary journey of Hsuan Tsang, the Chinese Buddhist monk, who set out to journey across mountain ranges and deserts from China to the holy rivers of India: "the Pamir the TarimTurfan / the Punjab the doab / of Ganga and Yamuna" (13-16). The poet evokes the ghost of the American Indian Jack Wilson called "Wovoka". "Wovoka, the prophet / Black Coyote saw the whole world / In Wovoka's empty hat"(62-64). Wovoka had a vision that if the Indians danced the "Ghost Dance," they would become safe from bullets and that the dead buffalo would rise up and crush the white oppressor. Snyder clearly shows his sympathy for the Native Indians and the poem can be read as a kind of criticism of the white men who invaded North America as they nearly obliterated the traditions of its original inhabitants, the Native Indians. Snyder explores the feeling of guilt the

white people have towards the Native Indians and calls for a return to their primitive life and to learn from it. He declares: “We won’t be white men a thousand years from now. We won’t be white men fifty years from now. Our whole culture is going somewhere else. The work of poetry is to capture those areas of the consciousness which belong to the American continent, the nonwhite world . . .” (qtd. in Stueding 102). Snyder is not speaking about “white men” as a race but as “a certain set of mind. When all become born-again natives of Turtle Island, then ‘white man will be gone’” (*Mountains and Rivers Without End* 163). Snyder’s words are not to be read to be racially prejudiced against white people or as a warning of what might happen to them in future. Rather, they show his vision of a peaceful society in which all races are valued and given equal rights to live and prosper, no matter their color or origin. Snyder asserts his attitude of reconciliation for what modern society considers as differences like races, cultures, religions. Snyder believes that white people should reconstruct their consciousness to connect to the life web. He calls for the creation of a universal consciousness that surpasses cultural and racial borders.

“For the West,” a poem from Snyder’s collection *The Back Country* (1967), touches upon one of his lasting preoccupations which is the tension in the relationship between civilization and the wilderness. Such tension can be read in the discourse of modernist writers in varying degrees. Snyder describes Western civilization as chaotic and in disharmony with nature:

the universe---“one turn”-----turned over.
gods of revolution.

sharp beards----fur flap hats----

kalmuck whip-swingers,

hugging and kissing

white and black,

men, men,

girls, girls, (19-26)

The poet exhibits the confusion of civilization and describes its “gods” with explicit criticism. He compares Western civilization and “America” in particular to a “flowery glistening oil blossom / spreading on water-- (45-46). Snyder presents its dangerous properties: “it was so tiny, nothing, now it keeps expanding” (47). He asserts the necessity of creating a balance between civilization and the wilderness for a healthy society. Without a connection with the wilderness, people become weak and bored. Snyder’s travels to Asia and other parts of the world made him concerned for the whole universe. He is inevitably drawn towards the place of his birth, that is, the forests and mountains of the American West; yet, he presents the issue on a global scale. Setuding compares Snyder to Thoreau in their expression of regionalistic tendencies in their attempts to mythologize their personal lives and locale--- Thoreau at Walden Pond, Snyder in the forests and mountains of the West. (117)

Snyder goes on to illuminate his vision of the relationship between civilization and wilderness in “Walking the New York Bedrock,” a poem from *Mountains and Rivers without End*. The poem explores the wilderness in the city landscape to speak about plant and animal life within the city. The poem begins

with the description of trees and leaves as the speaker enters New York City. The speaker is preoccupied with the sounds of the city:

A murmur of traffic approaching,
Siren howls echoing
Through the gridlock of structures,
Vibrating with helicopters. (10-14)

However, Snyder does not show resentment against the urban environment as he is ready to “slip into migrating flow.” Christopher Benfey points out that “Snyder imagines a world of wild nature beneath the structures of civilization” (42):

Squalls
From the steps leading down to the subway.
Blue-chested runner, a female, on car streets,
Red lights block traffic but she like the
Beam of a streetlight in the whine of Skisaw,
She runs right through.
A cross street leads toward a river
North goes to the woods
South takes you fishing
Peregrines nest at the thirty-fifth floor. (100-101)

While contemplating the city in a dreamlike vision, the speaker comes to recognize that he could escape it and head towards the woods and rivers nearby but he does not need to. One can have illumination in the city as well as in the country. Wherever one is, one must inhabit the place, know it deeply and flow with it. Like

the ginkgo trees in the subway, the wild peregrine hawk is at “home” on a ledge “at the thirty-seventh floor” (Hunt 187). Snyder’s view of civilization is different from that of his contemporaries of the Beat generation writers and it is precisely at this point that Snyder and the Beats differ. While the Beat writers like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg refused the urban style of life and opposed all kinds of civilization, Snyder did not. Though he celebrates nature and wildlife, Snyder believes that one may explore the wild within the city and gain enlightenment without going to the mountains. It does not make a difference for Snyder, therefore, whether one lives in the country or the city since he can be enlightened in both. Snyder can discover the wild even within the city and thus, I believe, the wilderness has acquired added meaning from that which was known to Thoreau and Whitman, the pioneers of Transcendentalism. Snyder certainly elevated the wild and was its poet for the second half of the twentieth century, yet he added a new urban dimension to it. Snyder once told *New York Quarterly*, “It is simply placing myself at a different place in the network, which does not mean that I’m any less interested in the totality of the network, it’s simply that’s where I center myself” (*The Real Work* 37). “Walking the New York Bedrock” shows the wild dispersed throughout the city:

The lessons we learn from the wild become the etiquette of freedom. We can enjoy our humanity with its flashy brains and sexual buzz, its social cravings and stubborn tantrums, and take ourselves as no more and no less than another being in the Big Watershed . . . The wild requires that we learn the terrains, and nod to all the plants and

animals and birds, ford to the streams and cross the ridges. And tell a story when we get back home. (Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* 38-39)

Snyder never believed in provincialism but looked to the universe as a whole with all its variety. Snyder hence has a cosmopolitan view that goes beyond the limitations of both place and time. It does not make any difference to Snyder whether he adopts ideas from the American Native Indian traditions or Asian Buddhism because he looks at barriers between races and cultures as being artificial.

3.2 Wendell Berry: True Citizenship as a Fidelity to the Land

Wendell Berry is often read for environmental ethics as demonstrated in the previous chapter but here I explore the social significance of his texts because the environment cannot be considered apart from society. “Berry’s thoughts about nature do not merely grow from contemplation but are shaped and informed by a long commitment to working the land” (Terthewart 78). Berry’s socio-political vision may not always be noticeable in his writing. He did not join any political party or adopt any political agenda, even seeming scornful of them. However, Kimberly Smith points out, “Berry has never been apolitical. He has simply pursued a vision of citizenship deeply at odds with conventional American politics” (50). Citizenship for Berry has a meaning which goes beyond the traditional definition of the word associated with patriotism. Citizenship is fidelity to the land which motivates people to serve society and resist harmful government policies. Berry, therefore, presents a consistent picture of social responsibility on the part of

each individual that may lead to a re-establishment of American society social structure.

Berry always asserts the interrelatedness between the natural and nonhuman on one hand and the human and social on the other. His search for the right relationship among human beings themselves and between humans and the natural world is significantly influenced by the nineteenth-century transcendentalist utopian vision. In his introduction to his edited collection, *Wendell Berry Life and Work*, Jason Peter evokes Thoreau stating that echoes of Thoreau can be heard in Berry's simplicity, spirituality and pacifism (1-4). Berry's political stances, mostly represented in his nonviolent civil disobedience and great interest in manual labor, bring him very close to Thoreau. Thoreau's emphasis on manual labor seems to correspond to ideological changes regarding worker conditions in America in the nineteenth century (Newberry 683). Like Thoreau, Berry should not only be read as a nature writer where the social and cultural contexts of his works are overlooked. Rather, Berry's works reflect the historical moments in the society where he lived. Berry considers work as the core of human culture through which we can comprehend nature. He regards farming as the most suitable job for a human being's health and happiness as it is in collaboration with the natural world. He, therefore, emphasizes the potential of farming to establish a culture that cultivates harmony and stability in the universe through his writing. Berry dignifies physical work and presents an idealized image of farm-town unity. His concept of nature is, therefore, closely related to his commitment to social life. In *The Unsettling of America*, Berry writes, "There is an uncanny resemblance between our behavior

towards each other and our behavior towards the earth”(124). Berry’s words emphasize the interdependence between what is social and what is natural. When we look at the earth in terms of human benefit and interests, we inevitably exploit it and because exploitation seems justified, we exploit other people.

In many ways, Wendell Berry’s political values resemble Thomas Jefferson’s. They have much in common with their vision of the ideal society. Both believe that the ideal American society should be an agricultural one, a community of honest workers who lead simple and modest lives of virtue, developing peaceful and honest friendships with other people from different places. This community should not be centralized but individual freedom preserved and secured in active citizenship. As Eric Smith points out, Berry and Jefferson’s vision of an ideal society have much in common but are definitely not identical. While Jefferson believes that the tree of liberty should be refreshed by some blood from time to time, Berry strongly disagrees. Berry avoids any violent acts in his ideal agrarian republic based on environmental integrity. His ideal community consists of good and responsible farmers and citizens who keep the harmony between the environment and human beings. The basic purpose of any political community, according to Wendell Berry, is to preserve the land and culture related to it. Accordingly, patriotism is not a matter of love for one’s own nation but a caring and satisfying love for the land as the physical basis of human life. Patriotism is primarily the protection of the land’s beauty, health and productivity (Berry, *Citizenship Papers* 75).

Berry detaches himself from the radical tradition of public protest: “I do not like public protests or crowd actions of any kind” (Berry, *The Gift of Good Land* 161). Yet, Berry participated in social protests as an act of civil disobedience. As Marshal Berman remarks, public protest represented for Berry a kind of dialogue with culture (314).

I choose some poems from Berry’s collection *The Country of Marriage* published in 1973 to explore his social views. This collection seems to present Berry’s socio-political attitudes in a purely metaphorical language, even in the very choice of his collection’s title. The opening poem of this collection “The Old Elm Tree by the River” appears to assert Berry’s image of human and nature communion or “marriage,” as Berry terms it in another poem:

Shrugging in the flight of its leaves,

It is dying. Death is slowly

Standing up in its trunk and branches

like a camouflaged hunter. In the night.

.....

When we stood it was beneath us, and was

the strength by which we held it to

and stood, the daylight over it

a mighty blessing we cannot bear for long. (1-4, 15-18)

The poem arrests all emotions aroused by the dying Elm tree. The poet wants to say that everyone granted life in any form is a blessing, however, life does not last forever. The poems emphasize the similar fates between humans and the tree. The

poem starts and ends with the mortal conditions of both humans and trees. Both human and nature share the same fate of decay and death. In addition to sharing mortality, they share the land where they stand. What is implied here is that the land's ability to endure is not distinct from "the strength by which we to it [to land]." The poet sees, then, "a fundamental identity of kind between himself and elm tree, who speaks of them with literal intent as being 'neighborly as two men,' should look upon the degradation of the environment as a degradation of the self" (Trethewey 80). The poem provides a hint of Berry's land ethics that he significantly developed in his essays. In short, the harmony between humans and nature, seriously weakened and broken by adopting standards of economic efficiency, adds to the extravagant waste of natural resources and destruction of the earth.

The word 'Marriage' is used figuratively to represent Berry's vision of the relationship between spouses which is the structural basis of human community. "Berry's world picture is one of microcosmic analogies based on man's unity with the land, and, consequently, with his wife and his creator. Harmony with nature both creates and reflects a continuous harmony with others, and man is husband to the land as he is husband to his wife" (Hiers 100). In an essay in his book, *A Continuous Harmony* (1979), Berry elucidates the principles of his united system of metaphors and analogies:

Living in our speech, though no longer in our consciousness, is an ancient system of analogies that clarify a series of mutually defining and sustaining unities: of farmer and field, of husband and wife, of

the world and God. The language both of our literature and of our everyday speech is full of references and allusions to this expansive metaphor of farming and marriage and worship. A man planting a crop is like a man making love to his wife, and vice versa: he is a husband or a husbandman. A man praying is like a lover, or he is like a plant in a field waiting for rain. As husbandman, a man is both the steward and the likeness of God, the greater husbandman. (169-170)

Berry's words clarify the techniques of metaphors and analogies that he uses to deal with serious social and spiritual concerns of the age. He uses the system of unities in the farmer and field, husband and wife, praying and love, planting and making love to emphasize his belief in analogies in this vast lifeweb.

For Berry, social bonds among people were destroyed by the economic models of the second half of the twentieth century which made people compete in an unproductive way. Berry shows how the "ties among spouse, family, land, community, country and world have been shattered by values based on false economic models that reduce individuals to inefficient competitors" (Cornell 64). The earth must not be defined only according to economic standards because this will lead to its exploitation and if we accept such exploitation, we are expected to accept the exploitation of the people whom we share life with such as our spouses. For Berry, it is the organic rather than the economic model that may produce both true farming and true marriage (*The Unsettling of America* 137). Let us have a look at the shortest poem "The Mad Farmer's Love Song" of his collection *The Country*

of Marriage which consists of only five lines. The poem looks to be a personal poem of love rather than political. However, love is presented not as a romantic or emotional object, but as supreme political action:

Oh when the world's at peace
and every man is free
then will I go down unto my love
O and I may go down
several times before that. (1-5)

A peaceful world, for Berry, is associated with love and freedom. In other words, love and freedom are prerequisites for establishing a peaceful and nonviolent community.

The poem which gives the collection its title, "The Country of Marriage," develops the discrepancy between real and false economy clearly through the metaphoric use of marriage. In seven short lyric poems, Snyder celebrates his marriage and his wife Tanya to whom the whole volume is dedicated. He refuses to look at their marriage based on false economic theory. He says "Our bond is no little economy based on the exchange / of my love and work for yours, so much for so much / of an expendable fund" (38-40). Their Marriage is not a microcosm that reflects the universal laws of economy because it is more than that. It is a mutual relationship which can be defined in terms beyond that of supply and demand. Marriage has a depth of unity which may not be recognized by spouses, "We are more together/ Than we know, how else could we keep on discovering/ We are more together than we thought?" (43-46).

Possession, which is the most basic principle in economy, is shown to be a false value here according to Berry's organic understanding of a right marriage economy. Possession is required for exchange but Berry says that possession is related to his wife through blessing and not through exchange. Berry's relationship with his wife is much more than an exchange; it is a partnership of tender communion which is a source of material and spiritual delight to him, "More blessed in you than I know, / I possess nothing worthy to give you, nothing / not belittled by my saying that I possess it"(49-51). The main theme of the poem, then, is the denunciation of economic considerations of love and marriage. Marriage, in other words, rejects the political definition of economy based on exchange.

I choose another poem from *The Country of Marriage* collection entitled "The Mad Farmer Manifesto: The First Amendment." The 'Mad Farmer' is a frequent character in Berry's works. This 'Mad Farmer' is a revolutionary who abides by a traditional concept of nature and humanity in a world dominated by material considerations. Berry's mad farmer shows the mistaken economic values of marriage. Berry uses two personifications, one of "ignorant love" and the other of "ignorant money:"

It is ignorant money I declare

Myself free from, money fat

.....

And I declare myself free

from ignorant love. You easy lovers

and forgivers of mankind, stand back!

I will love you at a distance,
and not because you deserve it.
My love must be discriminate
or fail to bear its weight. (15-16, 21-27)

Berry announces that he is free from both ignorant money and ignorant love. He rejects ignorant money because he is loyal to his land and cannot harm its spirit for the sake of material values. Likewise, Berry rejects ignorant love because he is loyal to his marriage. Love like money is ignorant when it becomes exploitive and uncommitted. John T. Hiers points out, “Discriminating love is harmonizing love; it is passion without lust, pleasure without hedonism. It is, in the final analysis, participation in the seminal processes of all plantings and all harvests and thus a consummation of all time” (109). Berry shows his attitude towards the kind of love on which a healthy society is based. It is not a love which cares for nothing but lust but a meaningful love which should have an ethical value and be based on a commitment that goes beyond the false idea of exchange. Berry, in fact, exposes his own vision of love and the relationship between spouses that is the basis for society’s social structure. If we can create a relationship based on personal commitment to each other instead of mutual benefit and exchange, we can then satisfy the first requirement of feasible political action. In other words, to quote Cornell, “A faithful marriage is a revolutionary political action of the highest kind” (69).

Fidelity to marriage is analogous to fidelity to the land and people around us. The concept of fidelity constitutes an essential element in establishing a healthy

and balanced society. Individual actions are consequently important and through the metaphoric use of marriage, Berry brilliantly suggests to readers what should be done. Berry stands for the political heritage of 1960s personal activism which had great doubts about government organizations that deprived individuals of their privileges and legal rights in favor of industrial corporations. Thus, marriage for Berry is the core of a community and the poems expose Berry's fundamental vision which substitutes industrial exploitation.

Berry always laments the loss of traditional ways in how to deal with the farm and he is always preoccupied with presenting his ideal vision of society that is based on right agriculture. This is not to say, however, that Berry wants to restore the old ways of farming; rather, he calls for the preservation of the knowledge and values related with those ways as well as the people who experienced them. As Steven White points out, "Berry's writing places value not on a literal or historical return, which is impossible, but on the restoration of the traditional understanding that measures the value by mutual interdependence and by fidelity to place, to community, and to family" (White 10). If past ideas and values can be absorbed, then the community can survive from one generation to the next. Berry's definition of community depends on the connections between the generations. This exchange of knowledge and traditions should be associated with love for a particular place. To stick to one place means recognizing its importance and loyalty:

. . . Tell your children. Tell them
to tell their children. As you depart
toward the coming light, turn back

and speak, as the creek steps downward
over the rocks, saying the same changing thing
in the same place as it goes. (28-33)

These lines are from Berry's poem "Voices Late at Night" from *Entries* (1994). The poem looks to be didactic in that the speaker gives instructions and emphasizes that it is not enough to preserve ideas of the past if not for its place in the present moment. The importance of a place can also be shown in Berry's first collection of poetry, *The Broken Ground* (1964). Berry delineates the requirements of the place and the human and natural forces that mold it. In "Elegy", Wendell Berry says: "Below the hill / The river bears the rain away, that cut / His fields their shape and stood them dry" (37-39). Although he is dead, the father speaks to his offspring about the place where he worked:

Water wearing the earth
Is the shape of the earth,
The river flattening in its bends
Their mingling held
Ponderable in his words—
Knowledge polished on a stone. (40-45)

In these lines, Berry demonstrates the contradictory nature of forces that work and are worked on. While water has a powerful force, water itself is shaped by the banks of the river. The influence of its force has a direct relation to the shape of the land. Water is slow in some places and in others; it is quick. Water drains itself along watersheds into the seas and oceans. It takes with it the wreckage of nature's

process and the waste of human beings which pollute it. “Berry’s metaphor also reveals the symbiotic nature of all human endeavors. Each generation molded by its preset circumstances also shapes the life around it” (Whited 23).

Wendell Berry stands among the leading activist literary writers in the last fifty years. He is a member of urban and rural communities but above that, he is a Kentucky farmer. Berry is very much interested in the politics of agriculture which he considers the basis of a healthy society. He refused the industrial agriculture that dominated American economy. His refusal is shown in his essays, especially in his book *The Unsettling of America*. Berry’s attitude became more radical as the crisis in America grew with its destructive manifestation clear to Berry everywhere. Gregory McNamee thinks that the crisis of American agriculture strongly felt by Berry “mirrors the worldwide political and ecological crisis generally” (93). Berry’s literary works shed light on those matters and always celebrates the pastoral. In this respect, he has affinities with Vergil and Horace. Vergil uses the pastoral as being the contrast between urban and rural lifestyle. He presented an ideal portrayal of lives of shepherds while Horace dreamed of escaping the busy urban life to the peaceful country. Berry’s lyric poem “The farmer Among the Tombs” may illustrate this point:

I am oppressed by all the room taken up by the dead,
Their headstone standing shoulder to shoulder,
The bones imprisoned under them.
Plow up the graveyards! Haul off the monuments!
Pry open the vaults and the coffins

So the dead may nourish their graves

And go free, their acres traversed all summer

By crop rows and cattle and foraging bees. (1-8)

This poem, written in the 1960s, is included in Berry's book *Farming: A Handbook*. At first reading, it is a poignant poem about death but upon contemplation, the poem also shows Berry's cultural and political concerns. The poem which was written in one of the most unstable decades in American history, condemns the wilder excess of culture such as temporariness, amnesia and the war in Vietnam while glorifying the pastoral ideal.

Wendell Berry dealt with socio-political values in his literary writing and had a deep belief that literature should significantly contribute in reorganizing society. Through his politics of agriculture, Berry exposes his own ideals for society, advocating a return to the values of the nineteenth century, to those of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. Berry restores the transcendental ideals of those great writers and incorporates them into the urban values of the age in order to present his own transcendental vision of the crisis of modern American and global society.

3.3 Annie Dillard: The Active Observer

Unlike Gary Snyder and Wendell Berry, Annie Dillard does not involve the social concerns of her age in her major writings. In her masterpiece *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, one can hardly find a direct reference to society which is something Dillard seems to have done intentionally. In her masterpiece, Dillard's

transcendental vision is explicitly religious and spiritual rather than social. Only in her two novels, *The Living* (1992) and her latest novel *The Maytrees* (2007), may the reader find Dillard openly touching on social issues. Those two novels marked a change in Dillard's focus from the solitary narrator and self-absorption in her previous works to dealing with many characters that belong to different types of people. However, it is her second novel *The Maytrees* that reflects, as it seems to me, much of her transcendental philosophy. In her immersion in the natural world and avoidance of the current social issues of her age, Dillard reminds me of her ancestor Emily Dickenson. Yet, Dillard seems to deal with society on a larger scale that goes beyond specific reforms or social policies. It is a transcendental vision of society grounded on the individual but not related to a specific society; it is a universal vision. Human understanding of his position in the world and his relation with the natural world are Dillard's main preoccupations. In this part, I will deal with two of Dillard's works; the work that brought her fame, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and her novel *The Maytrees*. My reading of them will be a social one. I will explore the social implications of those works which will significantly serve to illuminate Dillard's transcendental vision of the universe.

Annie Dillard lived in an age when people have been devastated by a sense of alienation and despair. Scientific ways have led people to separate themselves from the earth, exploiting it and damaging both the environment and themselves as human beings. Unlike Eliot and many other contemporary writers who describe the wasteland of the modern age in their writing, Dillard looks for the wild and uncultivated to reconsider modern misery and to seek a way out of despair. She

describes the world around her in detail using a mixture of literary images and scientific terms. Dillard describes her experiences and celebrates the connection between humans and the earth through inspiration from the wilderness and the food chain.

I read Dillard now not so much for the ecological implications of her writings but as more of a post-modernist writer who rejects the overwhelming sense of despair of modern man and instead, presents her own transcendental vision. She asserts that humans should understand their position on this planet and their relation with the other that is the natural world. Dillard writes out of a modern landscape in reaction to the alienation and fragmentation that dominate modern culture and literature. Wars, violence and conflicting cultures have demolished traditional beliefs. People are preoccupied with the material aspects of life while the world is dominated by shallow relationships and consumerism as well as threatened by ecological disasters. The spiritual side of humans has been ignored and seems a desolate place with a lack of meaning of life which has led people to despair. In *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, Dillard writes:

These are enervating thoughts, the thought of despair. They crowd back, unbidden when human life as it unrolls goes ill, when we lose control of our lives or the illusions of control, and it seems we are not moving towards any end but merely blown. Our life seemed cursed to be a wiggle merely, and a wandering without end. Even nature is hostile and poisonous as though it were impossible for our vulnerability to survive in these acrid stones. (138)

Dillard depicts the temper of modern man, his despair and doubts of nature which he looks at as being hostile. Nature, however, is not always hostile since human understanding of the wilderness is more a reflection of humans themselves and what they want to see rather than of the actual world itself. Dillard writes, “Now we are no longer primitive; now the whole world seems not-holy. We have drained the light from the boughs in the sacred grove and snuffed it in the high places and along the banks of sacred streams . . . we want to love where we want to live” (*Teaching a Stone to Talk* 80). Modern man lives with a number of illusions—illusions of endless progress, unlimited resources of the earth, the superiority of humans over nature and the supremacy of culture. These illusions are destructive and result in a state of environmental degradation which cannot be easily healed.

The narrator of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* strives to understand human conditions through the observation of the world around her, the creek, the woods along the creek and the creatures that inhabit them. Dillard declares, “We don’t know what is going on here” (16). The narrator needs time to explore the creek near her home, she sits and waits for muskrats and describes what she sees, and records the changes and her reactions. The opening pages of the book introduce the narrator’s subjects; violence, beauty, death and God. She demands “We must somehow take a wider view, look at the landscape, really see it, and describe what is going on here” (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 16). The creek seems to be a microcosm of the larger world and the narrator sees herself within this larger world. She is interested in the particulars she encounters but she wants to connect her encounters with images which are traditionally used to indicate universal truths and concepts.

Dillard's observations are based on biologist and naturalist writers. She uses a scientific method in studying phenomenon, yet she does not approve of science's principle that fact and value are unconnected. In every chapter, Dillard's pilgrim follows her scientific analysis with ethical and metaphysical questions about the phenomenon she observed.

The understanding of the world according to science may not be desirable by the narrator. She may only accept it when she feels her connection to the world in overwhelming moments where her self is reduced and she joins the world around her. Dillard calls her search for these moments "stalking," a kind of controlled unself-conscious awareness, "seeing that involves a letting go" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 41). Experiencing nature needs to drop off the self and awareness that we are only a part of a larger system (Berman 177). A diminishing of the ego is necessary for an individual to transcend the self. The death of the self enables one to escape self-boundaries that cause the despair and sense of alienation that pervaded most of modern literature. Death is therefore nourishment and it is salvation for human beings, "The death of the self of which the great writers speak is no violent act. It is merely the joining of the great heart of the earth in its roll" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 289).

Dillard thinks that she needs to drop her ego if she wants to truly see with the fresh eyes of an infant. However, to understand what she sees, she must give the shapes in front of her eyes the forms she learned from human culture which requires a self-conscious that unavoidably corrupts her true vision. As Fritzell says:

she wants, on the one hand, to see through and beyond her own

language, to see without words, so to speak; on the other hand, to recognize that human can only 'see' through language, that what she and(her readers) 'see' here is a function of her own (and their) compositions (231).

Dillard describes two kinds of seeing, the first is "very much a matter of verbalization" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 40) and the second "involves a letting go." The second "seeing" can be attained only when she can diminish her ego and, therefore, can experience more purely what is around her at the moment. Dillard tells us how one day she was sitting at a gas station drinking coffee and she forgot herself and the world became more real than the hollow of her own mind:

This is it, I think, this is it, right now, the present, this empty gas station, here. This western wind, this tang of the coffee on the tongue, and I am watching the mountain. And the second I verbalize this awareness in my brain, I cease to see the mountains or feel the puppy. I am opaque, so much black asphalt. But at the same second I know I've lost it, I also realize that the puppy is still squirming on his back under my hand. Nothing has changed for him It is ironic that the one thing that all religions recognize as separating us from our creator—our very self-conscious ---is also the one thing that divides us from our fellow creatures. It was a bitter birthday present from evolution, cutting us off at both ends (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 91).

The narrator should only live in the present without seizing it and physically sense

each moment's movement in order to experience her world in its true nature, continually changing, and she is only a transient part of it. She looks up the creek, at the water moving toward her:

This is the present, at last, I can pat the puppy any time. This is the now, this flickering, broken light, this air that the wind of the future presses down my throat, pumping me buoyant and giddy with praise

You don't run down the present, pursue it with baited hooks and nets. You wait for it, empty-handed, and you are filled. You'll have fish left over. The creek is the one great river. It is, by definition, Christmas, the incarnation. (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 116-117)

God is shown in the world, present and eternal. This is the junction of the material and spiritual, a resolution of sensual experience and sacred myth, and although it lasts for only a moment before the narrator moves to other inquiries about life, this is a vision. (Scheick 54).

Dillard creates then a vision of the world as opposed to that of modern writers which was characterized by despair and alienation. Her vision of a contradictory world of beauty and violence, life and death, created through metaphors and images from different scientific and religious traditions and the images she finds in her walks, seem considerably transcendental. Dillard creates a vision which reminds us of Thoreau and Emerson, the leading figures of American Transcendentalism of the nineteenth century. It is a vision which asserts hope in the modern world and restores spiritual and religious dimensions of our existence that

were seriously damaged in the modern age.

Dillard's second novel *The Maytrees*, published in 2007, is set in bohemian Provincetown, Massachusetts in the decades that followed the Second World War. The novel, which is a short one (nearly 200 pages), is an elevation of the human condition. Dillard exposes the potential of the human condition to adopt a self-reliant and ascetic life while displaying an intimate relationship with nature and the universe. She thinks that fiction may delve into the depths of human experience. The plot of her novel is uncomplicated. The story which begins after WWII tells of enduring love between Toby Maytree and his wife Lou Maytree. The novel consists of three parts. The first part concentrates on the breakup of Toby and Lou's relationship for Toby Maytree falls in love with Deary Hightoe. Part two focuses on Lou who lives alone while Toby lives with his second wife and part three shows Toby and Lou's reunion. Dillard's human condition, explored through Lou, is one that transcends the boundaries of the physical world. Dillard's transcendental philosophy is shown in the character of Lou. Dillard claims, "The Maytrees are a woman and a man both simplified and enlarged" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 309). Therefore, Lou could be, to use Emerson's phrase, the "transparent eyeball" in every woman. At the outset of the novel, Dillard introduces Lou as a transcendental figure, "her faces skin was transparent, lighted and clear like sky" (8). The metaphor of a transparent eyeball suggests a reference to the transcendentalism movement in the novel. *The Maytrees* is a contemporary investigation of transcendental thought in which Dillard places Emerson and Thoreau's values on Lou.

Toby, who is interested in poetry, unexpectedly falls in love with Main and leaves Lou. Lou is left alone with her child so she has to find a way to go on. Toby himself cannot understand love and his actions so he immerses himself in poetry. During the twenty years that Toby and Lou spend apart, Lou carries out her own search for consciousness in an effort to find meaning. Lou starts her transformation in her lonely life by adopting an Emersonian self-reliance. Lou accepts her status as a woman betrayed by her husband, creates a new existence and challenges social expectations of bitterness and melancholy. Her loneliness becomes an opportunity to practice self-reliance, “LOU HOPED SCANDALOUSLY to live her own life. A subnormal calling, since civilization means cities and cities mean social norms. She wanted only to hear herself think”. Lou’s self-reliance becomes more noticeable especially in a small community like Provincetown. As she gets older, her commitment to herself persists, “Most years she shook her wide, white head and refused aid—She’s impossible, they said, fond and sacred”(*The Maytrees* 115, 72).

In her self-reliance, Lou moves towards a more ascetic life. She shares Thoreau’s rejection of redundancy and exhibition of material wealth, choosing purposeful life instead. Trappings of society no longer worry her:

Lou had long since cut out fashion and all radio but the Red Sox. In the past few years, she had let go her ties to people she did not like, to ironing, to dining out in town, and to buying things not necessary and that themselves needed care. She ignored whatever did not interest her (*The Maytrees* 115).

Lou fears that humans will lose in the end as a result of their material preoccupations. When Lou devotes herself to a purposeful life apart from obligations to others, Lou has more freedom and time to think, “With those blows she opened her days like a piñata. A hundred freedoms fell on her. She hitched free years to her lifespan like a kite tail. Everyone envied her the time she had, not noticing that they had equal time” (*The Maytrees* 115). Lou sets out her rebirth with her own personal pilgrimage where she uses self-reliance to cause self-improvement. With all the time she acquires through her ascetic lifestyle, she finds herself committed to letting go of Toby and meditates about letting everything go:

She could climb the monument every day and work on herself as a task she had. She had nothing else to do. Within a month she figured that if she ceded that the world did not center on her, there was no injustice or betrayal. If she believed she was free and out of the tar pit, would she not thereby free herself from the tar pit?(*The Maytrees* 81)

Committed to herself, immersing herself in Nature provides her more freedom and reveals a life with many more possibilities.

Lou’s pilgrimage’s aim is to achieve illumination. Lou’s literal and metaphorical climb of a monument displays her ability to attain new viewpoints about the earth and universe. Lou looks to the sky as she climbs the monument and recognizes that both her quest for knowledge and the universe were boundless. This seems to echo Emerson who claims that the lack of limits connects us with God. By

taking herself to the highest point in town where her sight does not limit her awareness of the universe, her ego vanishes and Lou becomes identified with God.

Even though Lou reunites with Toby Maytree at the end of the novel, she keeps close to her spiritual connections as her sensual aspects of their relationship are gone. Toby is more at peace since the material and physical aspects of his life are eliminated. Dillard closes her novel by reminding us of the transience of life and its cyclic nature. Transcendentalist philosophy focuses not on the end and beginning of life, but on the idea of living to the fullest while alive. As Toby experiences his final moments, Lou contemplates what will happen to all of the knowledge he has learned over the course of his life while watching seagulls outside. She then considers her own memory, “the little she retained; all she had yet to think through in her time left. Replaceable gulls. For all she knew she had seen the same gulls over and over Would he remember, at least at first, to watch for its own blue seas’ palming the earth?” (*The Maytrees* 185) Dillard does not answer the question but creates a strong and permanent impression about the proper way to live where even if we lose someone very dear, we can survive, find renewal and learn from the universe with its boundless possibilities.

Dillard then, as I pointed out before, does not directly write about society on political or cultural levels but deals more with the individual as the core of community. By adopting the transcendental premises of self-reliance and ascetic life, Lou Maytree is able to get out of her despair and frustration, remaining optimistic about her life. Through the character of Lou, Dillard seems to elucidate her transcendental philosophy and the importance of reviving its principles for

creating a healthy society. According to Dillard, Emerson and Thoreau's self-reliance and ascetic life which Lou Maytree adopts should be restored and revived. Maytree could survive and live her life to the fullest. She demonstrates a transcendental model to be followed by women and men in order to achieve Dillard's transcendental vision of American and global community.

3.4 Conclusion

Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Annie Dillard's adoption of transcendental attitudes to society are undoubtedly not identical though the three writers all call for a reorganization of society according to transcendental principles that were ignored and underestimated in the modern age. Even if they have much in common in their transcendental attitudes, each presents their own view. Gary Snyder asserts the importance of the role of the writer in civic life but refuses to be involved in political and state issues. The role of the writer, for Snyder, is principally related to the effective use of language to change human values towards more humanity and idealism. Though Snyder has great doubts in any political system, he believes that the ideal political system is one that can strengthen the relationships between people to achieve prosperity and happiness for society. Snyder explicitly touches upon social issues and suggests ways to deal with them within a transcendental frame of reference. Like Snyder, Wendell Berry refused to join any political party or to adopt any political agenda. For Berry, fidelity to the land represents the core of his own vision of ideal society. This fidelity is crucial to urge people to serve society and refuse the damaging governmental policies. However, Berry rejects any

kind of violence and calls for nonviolent civil disobedience. Berry supports the Jeffersonian concept of an agricultural society in which we find honest workers leading simple and modest lives while developing peaceful relationships with other people. Berry dignifies farming and physical work by considering them the heart of human culture. Berry's own vision of society is thus based on Thoreauvian and Jeffersonian principles. Annie Dillard's treatment of society is not explicit in most of her works. She remains at a distance from her society and social and political events of her age. Her vision of society is based on the individual and not related to a specific community. It is a universal vision that goes beyond specific social policies. Dillard asserts the need to look for the simple and uncultivated in order to seek a way out of modern society's crisis.

CHAPTER FOUR

Religious and Spiritual Implications of the Revival of Transcendentalism

While Chapters Two and Three studies the ecological and social implications of Snyder, Berry, and Dillard's revival of Transcendentalism, the present chapter investigates the spiritual and religious implications of Transcendentalism as seen in the works of the aforementioned three writers. Snyder, Berry, and Dillard's writings show, in varying degrees, transcendental spiritual and religious ideals that call for a direct relationship between humans, God and nature in order to encourage people to form a new spiritual relationship with the environment which will keep the ecosystem's harmony and stability. While Snyder shows great interest in Buddhism and Dillard seems considerably Christian, Wendell Berry looks to be less immersed in formal religion.

4. 1 Gary Snyder

4. 1. 1 Buddhist Ideals as an Expression of Snyder's Transcendental

Spirituality

Reading Gary Snyder's poetry gave me the impression that the language is nearly devoid of the presence of God. One can feel no desire for a mystical union with some kind of absolute being isolated from daily existence. I could not really find a state of despair due to the absence of God. Snyder shows no loyalty to conventional western religious traditions. The religious references are either from the East, especially Buddhism or primitive rituals of Native American Indians that

still seem less important than the experience of outdoor living. Snyder presents poetry of caterpillar tractors, ice-cold snow water and white-tailed deer. With all its concrete images of the rugged natural world and fragments of the poet's personal experience, it seems hard to speak about a quest for transcendent values with this type of poetry. However, contemporary theology has a new point of view that places those matters in a new light. I agree with Paul Van Buren, who examines the efforts of many contemporary theologians, that "God" and "transcendence" can be understood in these worldly terms (155). For Snyder, there is no opposition between God and his search for transcendence on one hand and his preoccupation with day-to-day existence on the other.

Snyder's spiritual and religious vision, indeed, cannot be understood apart from Buddhism. As a Christian, Snyder had never been a strict devotee of Christianity or any other religion though he drew from different religions like Buddhism and Hinduism. He made use of these religions to form his own spiritual and transcendental view of the world. Like his predecessors such as Whitman, Thoreau, and Emerson, Snyder was fascinated by the East and was largely influenced by Buddhism, Hinduism and other Oriental philosophies and discovered in them new ways of life, expression and ways of spiritual enlightenment. Snyder lived most of the period between 1956 and 1968 in Japan. In Kyoto, he entered a Buddhist monastery and practiced Zen meditation. According to Zen Buddhism, one can achieve enlightenment by practicing meditation and developing spiritual discipline.

Zen is one of the schools of the Mahayana branch of Buddhism which minimizes philosophy and asserts direct experience. The Mahayana philosophy believes in active compassion which extends to all living beings; even grass should be guided to enlightenment by the Bodhisattva, the “enlightenment being.” For the enlightened mind, the universe is a state beyond all conflict. In “Four Changes,” an important essay in *Turtle Island*, Snyder echoes Emerson’s notion of the mystical and ecstatic nature of this relationship, “. . . at the heart of things is some kind of serene and ecstatic process which is beyond qualities and beyond birth – and – death” (102). Snyder asserts his belief that people do not need to conform to formal Christianity. Instead, they need to “take the great intellectual achievement of the Mahayana Buddhists and bring it back to a community style of life which is not necessarily monastic.” For Snyder:

[Zen] has a style that involves others. It brings a particular kind of focus and attention to work. It values work At the same time it has no external law for doing it. So you must go very deep into yourself to find the foundation of it . . . Zen is practice that is concerned with *liberation*, not with giving people some easy certainty. (*The Real Work* 16, 153)

I should point out here that Buddhism provided Snyder the opportunity to blend dual Western notions of the human mind and nature. For Snyder, both are interrelated and cannot be separated since they are not different entities. Snyder’s writing reveals an involvement in Buddhist spirituality to a considerable degree. Zen Buddhism greatly influenced Snyder’s attitudes to nature, culture and

language. One can notice Snyder's blending of meticulous observations of the natural world with an inner vision acquired principally through his practice of Zen Buddhism. Snyder's attraction to Buddhism clearly shows an agreement between his beliefs and interests and Buddhist teachings.

Like Whitman, Snyder does not look to British literary tradition as the sole source of learning but looks further to the Orient to find new ways of expression. Zen Buddhism asserts man's ability to gain extraordinary insight into both the world and into oneself. Although most of Snyder's poetry is physical, it has a spiritual and transcendental dimension which demonstrates the great influence Zen Buddhism had on him. To demonstrate this, I selected some poems from *Mountains and Rivers without End* and his other works. *Mountains and Rivers without End* draws upon the poet's personal experience, Buddhism, Native American myths, natural history and anthropology. As Patrick D. Murphy points out, Snyder tries to open "the reader's mind to the possibility of spiritual enlightenment" ("Mythic and Fantastic" 291). As to the title of this work, Robert Kern says that "mountains and rivers are us, and that we exist in a state of fundamental identity or interchangeability with the physical universe—an extension to the natural world, we might say of Whitman's radically democratic premise that 'every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you'" (Kern 131).

Let me examine the opening poem of Snyder's masterpiece *Mountains and Rivers without End*, "Endless Streams and Mountains", to provide some detailed analysis that will uncover its spiritual implications. The poem is based on a Chinese handscroll which might belong to the twelfth century. Snyder saw the handscroll in

the Cleveland Museum of the Arts. Scenes in the painting emphasized the human in the midst of nature while other scenes portray a landscape of hard-edged rock and water. The poem introduces the whole work. The poem is not concerned with Snyder's personal history but is seen as a "collaborative poem" where it "de-emphasizes individual entities and focused instead on relationships between them" (Smith 14). The first lines describe "a web of waters streaming over rocks" (3) that points to the interconnectivity of parts of nature and suggests a kind of meditation that calls readers to be in union with the rest of the world which is what happens whether we are conscious of it or not. The image of a boat at the outset of the poem "seeing this land from a boat on a lake / or a broad slow river / coasting by" (5-7) suggests the possibility of including different elements in a pattern of continuity.

The voyage is, then, a voyage of spiritual discovery. Many paths with different places and different people are portrayed; three on land and two more on a boat offshore. They are at work or doing recreation activities like fishing, hiking and riding. This gives us a strong sense of the interconnectedness of things. The poem describes how the water endlessly descends from mountains in "a frothy braided torrent / a cascading streambed" (30, 39). The poet tells us the names of some trees such as "chinquapin" and "liquidambar". Snyder, Anthony Hunt notes, "is now within the world he meditates on, and these painted trees become part of his actual experience" (64). Snyder shows the interdependent duality of mountains and, "The waters hold up the mountains, / The mountains go down in the water" (70-71). It is not essential for us to understand how waters hold up mountains or

know how they are closely interrelated. What matters most is that the words assert the significance of the “planetary water cycle, a major thematic strand to be found in *Mountains and Rivers without End* ” (Hunt 65). The last section of the poem invites the reader to “step back and gaze again at the land / it rises and subsides” (86-87). The whole scroll may now be taken in in a single glance. Snyder can see now the rise and fall of the land continually reshapes the earth. The poem ends with “walking on walking, / under foot earth turns. / Streams and mountains never stay the same” (104-105). The poet sees the mountains walking just like humans walk. If we look at the poem carefully, we can identify the Oriental mysticism that colours the whole poem. This adoption of Buddhism as a spiritual reference echoes a general tendency of the Transcendentalists to question the authority of Christian doctrine as they believed that the core of spirituality lies in the formation of human character rather than in religion.

“Bubbs Creek Haircut,” another poem from *Mountains and Rivers without End* written in 1960, was the first poem for both 1965 and 1970 editions but not in Snyder’s final 1996 edition. The speaker enters a barbershop in San Francisco and asks the barber to “clip it close as it will go” (7) because he is “is going to Sierra for a while” (9). The speaker seems prepared for a journey to the mountains. Buddhist philosophy dominates the poem from its title to the end. The idea of shaving one’s head before setting out a journey is derived from Buddhism. The barber asks, “Now why you want your hair cut back like that” (8). The haircut is similar to the shaving of Buddhist monks’ heads at the beginning of their training in imitation of Buddha. The speaker quickly brings the reader to a different land:

A half-iced over lake, twelve thousand feet

its sterile boulder bank

but filled with leaping trout:

reflections wobble in the

mingling circles always spreading out

the crazy web of wavelets makes sense

seen from high above.

a deva world of sorts—(71-78)

The speaker tells us that he has reached a world of spirits where the laws of the physical world no longer work and a web formed by spreading circles implies that there is a net of universal energy symbolized by water in Hindu mythology. Water stands for the continuous flow of energy and massiveness of the universal ocean where one may lose their individual consciousness (Murphy, "Mythic and Fantastic" 293). The poem moves to its conclusion:

all this comes after:

purity of the mountains and goodwills.

The diamond drill of racing icemelt waters

and bumming trucks and watching

buildings raze

The garbage acres burning at the Bay

The girl who was the skid-row

cripple's daughter— (150-157)

All what we have been told comes after the haircut and really happened. “Purity of the mountains and goodwills suggests a connection between his purification and the realization of inter-dependence of all things in life, the wilderness and the cities, man and artifacts, rock and water.” (“Murphy, Mythic and Fantastic, ” 294). Snyder calls for a spiritual perception of the world that rejects looking at each object as having its own identity apart from other objects in the world. For Snyder, the world is interconnected and ever-changing.

In “Finding the Space in the Heart,” another poem from *Mountains and Rivers without End*, the reader finds himself amid Nevada’s Black Rock Desert. This was a trip down from Canada that took place in the 1960s with two of his friends:

we came down from Canada
On the dry east side of the ranges. Grand Coulee, Blue
Mountains, lava flow caves,
the Alvord desert---pronghorn ranges---
and the glittering obsidian-paved
dirt track toward Vya (5-10).

At first, we feel that the journey has reached its end but we soon discover that we were being prepared for the moment when the speaker and his friends “follow a canyon and suddenly open to / silvery flats that curved over the edge” (13-14). The speaker says a few lines and then moves to the eighties “Fifteen years passed. In the eighties / With my lover I went where the roads end” (32-33). We discover an inscription on the stone “‘Stomp out greed’ / ‘The best things in life are

not things”(38-39). These are words that belonged to a sage “who has clearly felt ‘at home’ in this austere landscape”(Hunt 264). Soon, the speaker shows great interest in details of his environment “cutthroat trout spirit in slit--- / Columbian Mammoth bones” (34- 44). The poem ends “in the nineties desert night” as the poet gathers with his wife and old friends:

---my lover’s my wife---

old friends, old trucks, drawn around;

great acres of kids on bikes out there in darkness

.....

and tasting grasshoppers roasted in a pan.

.....

Singing sutras for the insects in the wilderness. (79-81, 84,88)

The speaker chooses to end his poem with a striking image of communion between the human and nonhuman. All of them, the speaker and his companions, taste roasted “grasshoppers” and sing “sutras.” They live a unique primitive experience in the wild life. In ending his poem (which is the last poem of *Mountains and Rivers without End*) with a Buddhist ritual through singing ‘sutras,’ Snyder re-asserts the Buddhist underpinnings of *Mountains and Rivers without End* and his adoption of Buddhism as his spiritual frame of reference. The last lines of the poem are “Walking on walking, / under foot earth turns/ Streams and mountains never stay the same” (92-93) which show, as Smith points out: “Walking, at last, has become a figure for collaboration with the universe, rather than aimless

wandering. In an impermanent universe, everything is ‘walking’ one form to another” (44).

The Buddhist idea of the oneness of human and nature may be illustrated in Snyder’s poem “By Frazier Creek Falls” from *Turtle Island*. “By Frazier Creek Falls” involves the reader in a wilderness experience. Sherman Paul writes, “I know of no one since Thoreau who has so thoroughly espoused the wild as Gary Snyder—and no one who is so much its poet” (58). The poet looks out and downwards from the edge of the falls; he sees half-forested, dry hills and a clear sky and observes the effect of the wind in the pines “rustling trembling limbs and twigs”(12). The poet stands thrilled, listening. He relates joyfully “This living flowing land is all there is, forever” (15). This is a Zen spiritual Buddhist way of seeing the world where there are no distinct boundaries as rivers, hills and trees flow into each other. “We are it/ it sings through us---(16-17),” Snyder emphasizes the interaction between man and nature; “people,” for Snyder, “are not separate from nature, that finally ‘we are it’” (Yamazato 247).

The opening poem of *Riprap* “Mid-August at Sourdough Lookout” also shows Zen’s influence on Snyder. To use Sherman Paul’s words, it “might be called a satori poem.” The poem shows the poet’s meditation on the relationship between nature and self. The poem is derived from Snyder’s experience working as a fire-lookout at Sourdough Mountain in Washington State during the summer of 1953. The first part of the poem portrays the landscape while the second portrays the “self” which is an integral part of that landscape. The poem merges the boundaries between the landscape and self:

Down valley a smoke haze
Three days heat, after five days rain
Pitch glows on the fir-cones
Across rocks and meadows.
Swarm of new flies.
I cannot remember things I once read
A few friends, but they are in cities.
Drinking cold snow-water from a tin cup
Looking down for miles
Through high still air. (1-10)

As Christopher Beach remarks, the speaker is not scared of the natural world but seems completely at peace with it; “His actions are simple: drinking water, gazing down from the mountains. In this way, his method resembles that of Zen Buddhist meditation in which insights can occur in the course of the most mundane activities” (188). The first stanza compares the poet with a hot summer day and later in the second stanza, the poet gains sudden illumination after “drinking cold snow-water from a tin cup” and is able to think sensibly and look “down for miles.” Thus, a clear vision for the far distance replaces the smoky haze, heat and swarm of flies. This visionary moment which transforms the poet is not only clearly related to Zen’s concept of sudden illumination but is also an Emersonian moment, a moment of visionary transcendence which sees the relationship between the human and the natural as a visionary, unmediated, transparent integration of self and universe (Paul 66).

Inspired by Buddhism, Snyder presents a paradigm of how man is reunited with nature or, as I say, how man is nature. Snyder then embodies the spirituality of transcendentalism as expounded by Emerson and Thoreau through his adoption of Buddhist philosophy.

4. 1. 2 The Poet as a Shaman

It is not only Buddhism that influenced Snyder's religious and spiritual consciousness. Another major influence on his perspective of life comes from Native American sources. Much of Snyder's knowledge about the traditions and legends of native Indians comes from first-hand acquaintance with the Indian tribes of the Pacific Northwest where he grew up. Snyder believes that the break in the relationship between human beings and nature is a deep spiritual fault of the age. The destruction of nature will inevitably lead to equivalent destruction in human consciousness.

Snyder was influenced by the Native Indian belief in shamans as communicators for the spiritual world. A shaman is briefly defined as "a sorcerer, medicine man, etc. who becomes an intermediary between the spirit world and the material. Shamans experience altered states of consciousness and soul travel" (Mather and Nichols 255). Gary Snyder sees the shaman as a mediator between human beings and nature as "The shaman speaks for wild animals, the spirits of plants, the spirits of mountains, of watersheds. He or she sings for them, they sing through him" (*The Old Ways* 12). Snyder, therefore, sees the shaman as a medium through which nature communicates with the tribe. According to the definition of a shaman mentioned before, he is also a medicine man so one of his duties is to

provide healing and on a spiritual level, this is one of the functions of poetry for Snyder, “Poetry within the civilized area of history is the fragmented attempt to recreate a ‘healing song’ aspect of the shaman’s practice” (*The Real Work* 175). My point here is that Snyder places poetry in the tradition of shamanism. In an interview, Snyder said that Shamanism is related to some of the oldest religious practices, myths, folktales and traditions of the planet that all people share. The folk motifs of Native America are dispersed throughout Europe and Asia:

We are all in the same boat, stemming from ten to thirteen thousand years back in the Pleistocene. We are all sharing the same information and the same religious disciplines. It is to the credit of some peoples, like the Native North Americans, that they kept it going longer, and I think they were right. We must all work to help them keep their lands and cultures together. (*The Real Work* 155,156)

Snyder considers himself a shaman poet. He says in his introduction to the *Myths & Texts*, “As a poet I hold the most archaic values on earth. They go back to the upper Palaeolithic: the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals, the power vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and rebirth, the love and ecstasy of the dance, the common work of the tribe” (vii). Of course, Snyder’s society does not consist of native Indians but civilized people living in an urban society. Snyder sees himself as a mediator between civilized urban people and nature. As a kind of shaman, he feels he is able to speak on behalf of plants, animals and other nonhuman beings as “the poet is a voice for the nonhuman, for the natural world,

actually a vehicle for another voice . . . saying there is a larger sphere out there; that the humans are indeed children of, sons and daughters of, and eternally in relationship with, the earth” (*The Real Work* 171-172).

Let me take “Piute Creek”, a poem from *Riprap*, as an embodiment of shamanism. The poem describes a moment of unity with nature which Snyder felt while working in Piute Creek Valley. The speaker tells us that what we need to begin meditating on nature and therefore, become one with it, is simply just to feel that we are just little part of the natural world.

All the junk that goes with being human
Drops away, hard rock wavers
Even the heavy present seems to fail
This bubble of a heart.
Words and books
Like a small creek off a high ledge
Gone in the dry air (12-18).

The speaker is in the midst of nature and feels as if he is undergoing a kind of purgation. His mind begins wandering and is unified with nature, momentarily ceasing to be human. Snyder feels that even the rocks look alive in this state of unity with nature. This new consciousness that Snyder had during meditation is equal to “the sense of natural entities as solid, static objects They are seen in their process, their activity that comprises all of nature as an interactive, dynamic web of energy transfers”(Murphy, *Understanding Gary Snyder* 50).The clarity of selfhood and attentiveness of mind produced by this process are products of the

mystification of the relationship between humans and the natural. This mystical union between the natural and humans called for by Emerson is achieved through intuition and faith. The speaker reaches a higher state of perception and enlightenment through nature.

Gary Snyder thus gives a new impetus to spirituality, motivating people to relive transcendentalist spirituality as a way out of their present despair and as a means of healing the self. Snyder presents his transcendental spirituality through Buddhist and Native Indian rituals. Buddhist concepts did much to enhance and sharpen his perception of the natural world and deepen his spiritual vision of it. In Buddhism, he finds spiritual practices a healing power for the sickness of modern man's psyche.

4.2. Wendell Berry

4.2.1 A New Vision of Christianity

In 2006, the Evangelical Protestant magazine *Christianity Today* declared that Berry, the Kentucky farmer and writer, “is inspiring new generations of Christians to care for the land.” It said that Berry “is attractive to Christians because he offers a vision of care for Creation that is tied up with the sacredness of life” (Stutterfield 62). Berry was praised by the same magazine for his call for ways of life that seemed to oppose modern materialistic culture. Such appeals to Berry may seem sensible but to claim that he was an inspiration for the formal church may be improper. Berry is often openly critical of Christianity which he thinks is involved in the violent exploitation of the earth and its inhabitants through industrialism and

capitalism to some extent. However, as Eugene Peterson writes, he personally learned much about the nature of Christian clericals from Wendell Berry. Peterson remarks that “the importance of place is a recurrent theme—place embraced and loved, understood and honored.” Every time “Berry writes the word ‘farm’ I substitute ‘parish’” says Peterson (63). Peterson’s thoughts were examined by D.G. Hart through a passage from Berry’s *A Continuous Harmony* in which Berry compares the work of the farmer to that of a teacher but his comments may also be applied to a preacher, “An urban discipline that in good health is closely analogous to healthy agriculture is teaching[preaching]. Like a good farmer, a good teacher[preacher] is the trustee of a vital and delicate organism: the life of the mind in his community” (136). Teaching here is similar to preaching while the teacher is a preacher for the community that is like a congregation (Hart 139).

In *The Unsettling of America*, Berry debates that Christianity is responsible for strengthening industry’s tendency to specialize. He writes, “At some point we began to assume that the life of the body would be the business of grocers and medical doctors, who need take no interest in spirit, whereas the life of spirit would be the business of the churches.” This division creates what Hart calls a “spiritual economy” based on severe competition. “If the soul is to live in this world only by denying the body, then its relation to worldly life becomes extremely simple and superficial.” The result is that religion has no worldly force. Berry warns that the failure to use the body in this world “for its own good and the good of the soul” (*The Unsettling of America* 104, 105) will cause a serious disorder. The point here

seems to be that whatever churches may learn from farmers, “the works of farmers bears no resemblance to that of contemporary pastors” (Hart 188).

If so, can we thus claim that Berry supports formal Christianity? I would say yes with some reservation because Berry creates his own vision of Christianity with implications that severely criticize some Christian principles. Berry’s form of Christianity resists the poison of industrialism. He rejects the separation between the physical and the spiritual as this dualism must be overcome in order to point the way towards the recovery of a form of religion that shares Berry’s concern for health and wholeness. Berry presents a new concept of health as opposed to its modern notion. He argues for a definition which is based on wholeness, “To be healthy is to be whole.” The ‘whole’ for Berry is not only physical but also spiritual. He emphasizes the close relationship between the body and the soul, health and holiness. The wholeness of the body, at the same time, cannot be realized apart from other bodies. “Our bodies,” Berry writes, “are not distinct from other bodies of other people on which they depend in a complexity of ways from biological to spiritual” (*The Unsettling of America* 103). Focusing solely on curing the body may lead to its destruction with wounds that cannot be cured.

Berry shows that the isolation of the body will inevitably lead to its destruction. The separation of the body from the soul leads to a competition between the soul and the body, a win or lose game where the spirit prospers at the expense of the body or vice versa. Spirituality produced out of such competition is termed an afterlife faith in which the soul thrives at the cost of the body. The soul’s relation to the world is, accordingly, too “simple and superficial” since it has no

“worldly purpose or force.” The body, in turn, diminishes and abuses the soul when it is indulged. “The dialogue of body and soul’ in our time” Berry writes, “is being carried on between those who despise the body for its resurrection and those diseased by bodily extravagance and lack of exercise, who nevertheless desire longevity above all things.” Such groups believe that they are in conflict with each other and ignore the fact that “they could not exist apart” (*The Unsettling of America* 105, 106).

Berry thinks, then, the condition of the body is not well. He asserts that “we are wasting our bodies exactly as we are wasting our land.” We misuse them; they are “fat, weak, joyless, sickly, ugly, the virtual prey of the manufacturers of medicine and cosmetics.” Our souls are no better. For modern men, our soul’s comfort comes from buying goods with no more need for “the exalted drama of grief and joy.” Berry feels sad that humans’ souls “feed on little shocks of greed, scandal and violence.” Berry’s reflection on spiritual health eventually leads to a criticism of the church. By isolating the body, “the life of the spirit for many Christians is reduced to a dull preoccupation with getting to heaven.” The body has no responsibility towards God’s Creation so the body may destroy the earth or other bodies while the soul is meant to be kept noble and uncontaminated. The body, then, serves as just a container for the soul. Such a spiritual Christianity, Berry believes, deforms the church. It is not only a mere defect “but a fracture that runs through the mentality of institutional religion like a geological fault.” To Berry, the concept of health is related to wholeness because once we achieve wholeness, our health flourishes. The divisions of unsettled American society or on

a broader scale the human society may be cured by restoring the connections between the body and the earth, the individual and society, and finally, the body and the soul. These damaged relationships cannot be treated in isolation. We should restore the “connections of the various parts—in this way restoring the ultimate simplicity of their union” (*The Unsettling of America* 108).

Berry goes further to say that such a separation between the body and soul indicates a separation between the body of Christianity and its soul. Berry writes in his collection of essays *In What Are People For* that the modern church pays no attention to “features of culture by which humankind connects itself to nature: economy or work, science or art.” To Berry, the church underestimates the value of work and there is no reference “to the heritage of the church architecture . . . [these] churches embody no awareness that work can be worship.” Instead, the modern church concentrates its energy and resources on the spiritual and does nothing to prevent the wide destruction caused to our world, nature and health. Berry accuses the church because it “has flown and chanted the slogans of empire” and “has assumed with the industrialists and militarists that technology determines history” (*Sex, Freedom, Economy, and Community* 113, 194).

Though Berry goes on to discuss his fears of the path that the church seems to follow on a practical level he still returns to speak about a defect in the theoretical framework under which church malpractices may happen. The defect is, namely, the divorce of body and soul. Most modern Christians evaluate only the spiritual aspect of creation and do not care for its physical part. The more they are attached to the spiritual, the more they feel closer to salvation. This “madness,”

according to Berry, “constitutes the normality of modern humanity and of modern Christianity” (*Sex, Freedom* 107). I myself cannot see this dualism as a religious or Christian feature. I may agree strongly with Berry that this is a deformation of religion which may unconsciously produce new trends in our modern culture that weaken the harmony between humans and the natural world. Berry argues that if we divide the world into two parts and consider only the spiritual part as good while ignoring the physical, man’s relation to creation becomes “arbitrary.” Consequently, we establish ourselves as judges which inevitably means that we will be “the destroyers of a world we did not make, and that we are bidden to understand as a divine gift” (*Sex, Freedom* 109).

Due to his doubt of formal Christianity, Berry suggests a new kind of salvation which goes beyond the one declared by the institutional church. Instead of the traditional sense of salvation which considers belonging to Christ as an important manifestation of wholeness, Berry envisions salvation as a quest of the lonely individual who goes to the wilderness to discover the truth. Berry acknowledges that his model of the quest is not purely Christian, as he describes it:

Seeking enlightenment or the Promised land or the way home, a man would go or be forced to go into the wilderness, measure himself against the Creation, recognizing finally his true place with it, and thus be saved both from pride and from despair. Seeing himself as a tiny member of a world he cannot apprehend or master or in any final sense possess, he cannot possibly think of himself as a god Returning from wilderness, he becomes a restorer of

order, a preserver. He sees the truth, recognizes his true heir, honors his forebears and his heritage, and gives his blessing to his successors. (*The Unsettling of America* 99)

Berry clearly has a unique vision of creation and human's place in it, a vision which formal churches lack. It is a vision that attempts to correct the deviation of the church which Berry accuses of isolating the body from the soul.

The point that Berry is making through his critique of the modern church is that by reading the Bible and conceiving salvation in a way which gives the physical equal importance to the spiritual and the afterlife, Berry can cure the dualism that burdens people. What is remarkable is the way this understanding of religious devoutness draws upon the realities of bodily life. The soul is certainly bound to the body but even more than this, "the soul is dependent on the means of grace administered by spiritual overseers in ways similar to the sort of interdependence that exists between eaters and farmers, and bodies and the land" (Hart 205). This is a different concept of the life of the spirit which, while relying on separation as a significant distinction between soul and body, recognizes the interdependence of the body, soul, and creation. The human spirit is not seen as an independent entity enlightened by the Divine Spirit that is independent of the body.

In reflections on health, Berry criticizes the attitude of modern man that believes human health may flourish in the absence of disease. To Berry, good health can only be realized when there is no separation between body and soul because they are connected. The soul can be healthy through a body that is correctly connected to creation. Accordingly, Berry calls for an understanding of

creation and a clear recognition of its Creator as steps towards a healthy spirit. Berry's acknowledgment of a Creator-haunted world is an essential part of revitalizing the relations between creatures and their maker.

4.2.2 An Agrarian Approach to Mysticism

In *The Long-Legged House* (1969), Berry reflects on the sense of place and refers to Henry County, Kentucky, the place where he was born, "I was so intricately dependent on this place that I did not begin in any meaningful sense to be a writer until I began to see the place clearly and for what it was" (141). To feel that we belong to a place is important to Berry but what is more important is to know that we are not the proprietors of the world and this is equal to a "startling reversal of our ordinary sense of things" which echoes Berry's main ambition "to be altogether at home here" (*The Long-Legged House* 143,150). As Scott Slovic points out, Berry describes "the subtle condition of being committed to a specific landscape by participating in it rather than simply owning and controlling it" (*Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* 127). This ambition allows humans to be in control of the place and belong to all its living beings. While other living beings instinctively live in place, humans, depending on their intelligence and decency, must choose to be in a place, "It is an ambition that I cannot hope to succeed in wholly, but I have to come to believe that it is the most worthy of all" (*The Long-Legged House* 150).

I argue for Berry's mysticism and spirituality which seem to challenge popular classifications of the term mysticism. A mystical person, William James notes, is a person with a special faculty that is open to powerful feelings that touch

the depths of truth “unplumbed by the discursive intellect” outside the reach of official religious authority (293). Such characterization needs to be challenged and corrected. Instead of being a particular type of experience or a state of consciousness, mysticism should be better understood as a way of life which is theoretically available to everyone. A mystic is a person who is conscientious about the presence of God in this life. Humans should give up the deistic assumption that removes God from our world and assume that supernatural efforts make us unscientific in terms of getting to God. What we want to learn, Norman Wirzba remarks, is that God’s place is not isolated somewhere in our experience. As we develop a meditative and mystical way of living, “we will discover that God is at the center of our being, at the heart of the whole creation as its animating pulsating life” (150). This mystical practice demands that humans learn to be entirely present in the places in which they live and to know and accept their rightful place as living beings in the order of the world. “Contemplation, then, cannot properly be a prostration before a power outside us; it is being present to ourselves in our world with acceptance and trust” (Williams 76). Since God is made apparent through the work of creation, our claim of being present with God is expressed in adjusting our life to be harmonious with God’s life-giving presence among us. Such a description of mysticism sees it not only as a process of experiencing extraordinary states of awareness but rather a journey towards God which may allow a negotiation between Berry’s belonging to place and his mystic pledge to be present at creation.

As I will argue, agricultural practices can play a fundamental role in reconstructing contemporary spirituality and mysticism in a way which seems far

from their traditional concepts but certainly rooted in creation, attuned to the life of God. Berry fully understands that human beings' destructive rebellion is the result of their denial of creatureliness. Berry writes:

There appears to be a law that when creatures have reached the level of consciousness, as men have, they must become conscious of the creation; they must learn how they fit into it and what its needs are and what it requires of them, or else pay a terrible penalty: the spirit of the creation will go out of them, and they will become destructive; the very earth will depart from them and go where they cannot follow. (*The Long-Legged House* 193)

When humans put themselves in the center of the world, they reshape the world and its living beings to fit human desires and aims. As such the membership of other beings in creation is inevitably harmed and creation starts to fall apart. We corrupt creation by adopting standards of behavior based on greed and pride towards the world. The beauty and goodness of creation is destroyed if we fail to live attentively and fitfully in the various webs of interdependence. This is embodied in Berry's poem "Six days of work are spent" from his collection *A Timbered Choir*:

The world is lost in loss
Of patience; the old curse
Returns, and is made worse
As newly justified.
In hopeless fret and fuss,
In rage at worldly plight

Creation is defied,
All order is unpropped,
All light and singing stopped. (18-26)

We are not qualified to be a member of the ecosystem if we insist on living uncontrolled by our responsibilities and limitations of living as a member of creation. “On agrarian, but also mystical view,” Wirzba points out, “there is no self-standing I. What we call *I* is always already communal, and relational, a creature formed and sustained through the dynamisms of soil and soul” (153).

Humans need to respect creation, prove to be “good” members of creation, and strengthen their connections with other members of creation that are superficial at present. Like other great spiritual writers who assert the need to constantly turn our minds and hearts towards a spiritual union with each other and with God, Berry also notices that we have been infected with our developed “habit of contention—against the world, against each other, against ourselves!” (*The Long-Legged House* 210). To give up this habit, we need a radical change in our beliefs and habits. We need to train ourselves not only to be interested in our ambitions but rather, to care for the ambitions of our community, humans and the natural world. In other words, we need to give up our belief in the profit and glory of our work because the quality of work should not be measured in relation to individual personal benefit but in relation to the level of communal health and happiness that work may achieve. To Berry, a farmer’s work should neither harm the earth nor the farmer himself. If people learn from creation, they will be able to consider the health of the land as the supreme value of their work. It is a marriage between

humans and place which Berry used as a title for his collection of poems *The Country of Marriage* as discussed before in Chapter Three. Belonging to a place requires dying to self and it is a sign of spiritual transformation and rebirth. To Berry, death is not an entrance to silence which seems to oppose reason and faith. However, he does not seek to oppose reason nor does he wish to destroy it. In my opinion, what Berry is searching for is to limit it and place it in a larger model of humans and creation formed by love. In “The intellect so ravenous to know,” another poem from his collection *A Timbered Choir*, Berry reflects on this theme:

The intellect so ravenous to know
And in its knowing hold the very light,
Disclosing what is so and what not so,
Must finally know the dark, which is its right
And liberty; its blind in what it sees.
Bend down, go in by this low door, despite
The thorn and briar that bar the way. (1-7)

Our human problem is not with intellect itself but with our desire to reduce creation to practical ends. What Berry opposes is the scientific spirit embodied in the modernist drive to control the world with the aid of technology in order to cover human weakness and our dependence on other living beings. This scientific and economic reduction leads to our intellect’s blindness. It is the loss of imagination that could have enabled us to see the sacredness of creation and the vast membership of which humans are just a part of. There is, thus, a violation of the wholeness and integrity of the world.

Humans' sinfulness is therefore not an abstraction. It is shown in watersheds poisoned by the use of pesticides, the removal of mountaintops for coal and the destruction of rural communities because of money and business. Berry urges people to bow in order to show readiness to learn the ways of interdependent living from creation. Of course, this requires humility on the part of humans which may be resisted if not rejected by humans as they look at it as utter humiliation. The contradiction that one can notice in this is that it was the search for glory which led to the humiliation of creation. In other words, the human desire to control the world led to its destruction. Humans need to act in a different way, a way which is more faithful to Christianity's instruction of keeping creation. Human pride has critically harmed creation so Berry wants humans to be qualified to practice humility. Berry concludes the poem:

O bent by fear and sorrow, now bend down,
Leave word and argument, be dark and still,
And come into the joy of healing shade.
Rest from your work. Be still and dark until
You grow as unopposing, unafraid
As the young trees, without thought or belief;
Until the shadow Sabbath light has made
Shudders, breaks open, shines in every lead. (27-34)

Thus, human can enter "the joy of healing shade" but the need to be still first. They need to plow the soil. Plowing the soil is much more than preparing the soil for planting, it is about the readiness of people to live honorably and sustainably in a

certain place. Berry always emphasizes the interdependence of culture and agriculture and even thinks there is no culture without agriculture. This is because looking after plants and tending animals is a central requirement to develop moral and spiritual assets which create a healthy home. True farmers give up their ego and tend to their plants in a way that serves the process of fertility and growth. They became, thus, aligned with creation and to be in alignment with creation requires humans to relinquish their personal ambitions so that they can enter into presence of God. Humans need to abandon their otherworldly aspirations. In “the Wild Greese,” Berry says:

And we pray, not
for we pray, not
quite in heart, and in eye
clear. What we need is here. (16-20)

Berry does not intend to deny the idea of heaven but wants people to feel that God is not separate from the world and is present in our midst. To Berry, dreams of heaven seem to imply a disparagement with creation and a desire to escape created life and its limitation.

To say that God is present in everything in the world does not mean, however, that God can be identified with any kind of creation. God is transcendent as Thomas Carlson indicates, “through his incomprehensible immanence” (213). This divine incomprehensibility must be parallel with human incomprehensibility if we consider Christian beliefs which tell us that man is made in the image of God and that creation is but the concrete manifestation of God’s love. This marks our

human ignorance of the order of creation which is not temporary but a permanent ignorance that has been an essential part of humanity. Humans forget this truth and therefore reflect those limitations in how they perceive the world. If this ignorance is associated with power, it will result in greater destruction. What should humans do then to deal with this destructive ignorance? They need to, in short, recognize their ignorance and by doing so, call for humility and self-control.

If the mystic searches for a divine model of life to adopt within his own, Berry's model can be learned from the soil's fertility. Through the growth and decay of things, humans can clearly see the continuity of life. If humans play an active role in the processes of growth and fertility through a sustainable manner while strengthening local communities, they improve creation and so contribute to God's continuing creative work. In his poem "Enriching the earth," Berry writes about planting cover and grass:

.... And yet to serve the earth
Not knowing what I serve, gives a wideness
And a delight to the air, and my days
Do not wholly pass. It is the mind's service,
For when the will fails so do the hands
And when one lives at the expense of life.
After death, willing or not, the body serves,
Entering the earth. And so what was heaviest
And most mute is at last raised up into song. (8-17)

We need to understand, then, that the soil is a miracle. It is the place in which life constantly dies and emerges as new life. The soil is therefore a place of resurrection.

Can we be at peace with each other, with God and with creation? Berry may not give a clear answer but does recommend love's labor, a love characterized by modesty, mercy, thrift and gratitude. We need to know how to get ourselves and our aspirations out of the way so that an intelligible, "gracious givingness of God can shine throughout creation in us" (Wirzba 165). A new concept of mysticism is, thus, presented by Berry. It requires more than submission to God. It is agrarian life which shows that human submission is genuine only when humans commit themselves to the health and vivacity of creation. God is not in a holy place far away from us but near us in the soil, in the neighbourhood. God encounters us in work and everyday life with grace that goes beyond our understanding and misbehaviour as shown in the following lines from "A gracious Sabbath stood here while they stood" from The Sabbath Poems:

For we are all fallen like the trees, our peace

Broken, and so we must

Love where we cannot trust,

Trust where we cannot know,

And must await the way-ward coming grace

That joins living and dead,

Taking us where we would not go---

Into the boundless dark

When what was made has been unmade

The maker comes to his work. (11-20)

Berry, then, does not seem to be involved in formal religion. In fact, we even feel a sense of rebellion against Christianity in his writings. Instead, Berry presents a unique spiritual transcendental vision of the relation between humans and creation, a vision which goes beyond some traditional attitude of Christianity and does not look at God as isolated from humans but present everywhere.

4.3. Annie Dillard

To explore Annie Dillard's spiritual and religious implications of her writing, I choose three of her works, namely *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974), *Holy the Firm* (1977) and *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (1982), that use nature as a yardstick for spiritual insight. These three works are saturated with religious thought, yearning, and experience.

4.3.1 The Modern Mystic

In her book *Annie Dillard*, Linda L Smith's writes that *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* "appears to be a book about the natural world" but "in reality it is about God and his relationship to man" (16). In my view, what characterizes Annie Dillard's writing about her surroundings in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* is the continuous vacillation between her detailed, fresh depiction of the natural world and her speculative and mystical inclinations. This vacillation between material and spiritual vision is what establishes a close affinity between her works and nineteenth-century American Transcendentalism.

Dillard's mystical vision can be shown in chapter two of her book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, a meditation on "seeing." Seeing is a matter of verbalization to a great extent, says Dillard. Verbalization can call the seen object into attention which, therefore, can be seen. Otherwise, it would remain unseen, "Seeing is of course very much a matter of verbalization. Unless I call my attention to what passes before my eyes I simply won't see it" (40). Dillard thinks that the secret of seeing is "a pearl of great price" (43) and feels she is ready if only she could find someone to teach her the art of doing so, to go through deserts in a quest for knowing. Dillard looks for a mystical, spiritual vision through which she can see the light. She speaks of two kinds of "seeing," literal and figurative "seeing." I focus on figurative seeing which is more complicated than the literal. This seeing requires us to look with inner eyes and go beyond outward appearances to see what is hidden. This kind of seeing requires us to be mystics. It is the kind of seeing which "involves a letting go. When I see this way I sway transfixed and emptied" (41). This is a state of mind that allows the mind's "muddy river" to "flow unheeded" and to stare at "the realm of the real where subjects and objects act and rest purely, without utterance" (43) that is not tainted by cultural distortion inherent in language. These are moments of "truly" seeing and are described by Dillard as an experience of transcendence; "Something broke and something opened. I filled up like a new wineskin. I breathed an air like light; I saw a light like water. I was the lip of a fountain the creek filled for ever; I was ether, the leaf in the zephyr; I was flesh-flake, feather, bone" (41). Dillard says, "The vision comes and goes,

mostly goes, but I live for it, for the moment when the mountains open and a new light roars in space through the crack, and the mountains slam” (43).

Dillard’s experience seems very similar to that of Emerson’s when his egotism disappears and he feels that he becomes a “transparent eye-ball”(Emerson, *Nature* 10). In her book *The Space Between: Literary Epiphany in the Work of Annie Dillard*, Sandra Johnson discusses those illuminating moments. She says that modern poets work at creating such illuminated moments for the reader while earlier poets intended only to convey that the vision happened. A literary epiphany allows the reader to share the experienced moment while a vision is just described by the writer and recognized by the reader as the reader is unable to experience the vision physically (Johnson 8). Dillard thus adopts this nineteenth-century transcendental tradition but adds a modern sense to it by seeking to create illuminated moments in the reader and going beyond mere description. W.T. Stace notes that what creates a mystical experience is the feeling of union with the environment and this union may happen in two ways. The first way which Stace calls “extrovertive” vision or the vision of nature is achieved when the mystic undergoes a unifying vision of reality and feels unified with the surroundings but keeps personal awareness. The second type of mystical experience happens when the person feels a “unitary consciousness and awareness.” The person’s consciousness is unified with God or universal consciousness. This is labeled by Stace as an “introvertive” vision. Stace’s definition of “mystical experience” is different from Johnson’s in that it is not just a mere sudden and powerful moment

that brings a new consciousness as unitary consciousness is a different experience from transient types of illumination (85-86).

A question that may arise is what kind of vision does Dillard show? It may be unitary consciousness or a unifying vision of reality as her vision involves different kinds of illumination. Dillard seems to have written about both illuminative and unitive experiences. She has unmistakable connections with Thoreau and Emerson but she is truly a modern mystic. Her experiences, undoubtedly, are induced from conventional mystic concepts but her experience of illumination and unification is different from that of her ancestors. Dillard seems modern not only in her literary techniques but even in her mysticism.

Let me discuss Dillard's mystical experience in *Teaching a Stone to Talk*. The whole book looks to be about meeting the divine, its silence and mystic visions more than nature or human beings. Her voice in these meditations seems to be that of a visionary poet. One of her meditations is called "Lenses" in which she describes a childhood love for examining pond water via a microscope. This process leads to a meditation on the rest of the world so the lens becomes a metaphor for transcendent experience, a vision in which the self, time and space are unified. The opening page of the essay speaks about the difficulty of looking through microscopes and binoculars. The instruments of modern science are used in a mystic way and presented at the same time as instruments of science and visions. In an essay "Teaching a Stone to Talk", Dillard says that she was "reading comparative cosmology" and this particular scientific approach to the world suggests that her investigation assumes a certain understanding of God and the

spiritual world that can be attained through the physical. In other words, Dillard's approach presumes that there is an agreement between physical objects and reality in the spiritual world. A study of the world, therefore, may bring to light evidence of God in keeping with observations like Emerson's that "a fact is an Epiphany of God" and Thoreau's appeal "Let us not underrate the value of a fact; it will one day flower in truth" (*Natural History* 71). The speaker speaks of the difficulty she had in looking through the microscope while she was a child due to its complexity. "You are supposed to keep both eyes open as you look through its single eyepiece" (94). She looks through the lens with one eye and has to move the slide to the right in order to see what is happening on the left. However, the speaker could overcome these contradictions. This story of childhood "ignorance" can symbolize the effects of modern science on the universe. While scientists are fascinated with nature, their technology disturbs and destroys it.

The speaker's eyeball echoes Emerson's "transparent eyeball" through which he sees himself as "a part or parcel of God." The speaker implies that science affects the environment and inevitably, the self. The damage that might occur to the environment will affect the self. The issue is finally related to mystical feelings as human beings are unified with nature. She says excitedly, "How I loved that deep, wet world where the colored algae waved in the water and the rotifers swam!" (*Teaching a Stone to Talk* 97).

The next section begins unexpectedly with the story of the swan, "this is a story about swans. It is not even a story; It is a description of swans" (97). Readers are made aware that they have left the microscope and the speaker's childhood

world for the world of adulthood and binoculars. This transition is made known when the speaker says, “I used to haunt the place [Daleville Pond] because I loved it; I still do” (97). The speaker then moves from the small world to a vast one. Instead of examining a tiny drop of water, she now looks through her binoculars at the sky. The speaker sees a pair of swans and follows them as they fly above the pond in harmony and in clockwise ellipses, “ I watched them change from white swans in front of the mountain to black swans in front of the sky. In clockwise ellipses they flew”Immediately after she mentions “ellipses,” the speaker says, “As I rotated on my heels to keep the black frame of the lenses around them, I lost all sense of space” (98).The familiar world is scattered before her eyes, “If I lowered the binoculars I was always amazed to learn in which direction I faced—dazed, the way you emerge from a movie and try to reconstruct it, bit by bit” (*Teaching a Stone to Talk* 98). At this point, the speaker seems to go beyond the familiar world in order to present her spiritual vision which unfolds in the last paragraph of the essay. The sky over Daleville pond and the drop of water are the same, unseparated, just like the speaker’s childhood and adulthood. This is the unifying vision of time and space that the speaker experiences. When the speaker talks of the “Lenses” she feels lost;the implication is multifaceted because it does not only refer to her loss of “all sense of place” but also to the recurring view that one must lose oneself in order to reach heaven. Intrinsic in the unifying vision is that the sense of separation disappears. She is lost in the sense that her observations of the natural world enabled her to go beyond it and be unified with it. In the last

paragraph, Dillard displays her full vision and, as Sandra Johnson remarks, the moment is created not told:

I was lost. The reeds in front of me, swaying and out of focus in the binoculars' circular fields, were translucent. The reeds were strands of color passing light like cells in water. They were those yellow and green and brown strands of pond algae I had watched so long in a light-soaked field. My eyes burned; I was watching algae wave in a shrinking drop; they crossed each other and parted wetly. And suddenly into the field swam two whistling swans. Two tiny whistling swans, infinitesimal, beating their tiny wet wings, perfectly formed. (*Teaching a Stone to Talk* 98)

In keeping with Emerson and Thoreau's vision that all facts are equal in their importance, "Lenses" reveals the possibility of using the scientific method as a legitimate path along with the mystic way. Annie Dillard seems to provide us hope of connecting with the divine in this material age. Dillard makes the mystical experience accessible in its modern complexity. It is not just a sense of a presence but an experience of the whole.

4.3.2 A Christian Perspective

Dillard is highly attracted to theology. She lives in nature and studies science to be prepared for her religious vision. What distinguishes Dillard's Christian perspective from that of other nature writers is her dissatisfaction with the notion that "God is in the thing, and eternally present here if nowhere else" (Dillard, *Holy the Firm* 42) as adopted by some nature writers like Wendell Berry. This view

seems similar to pantheism to a great extent and from this perspective, “Christ is redundant and all things are one”(*Holy the Firm* 42). In her central mystical moment contained in the second section of *Holy the Firm*, Dillard is walking home from a country store with communion wine for the church. She feels enlightened and sees Christ as he “lifts from the water. Water beads on his shoulders. I see the water in balls as heavy as planets, a billion beads of water as weighty as worlds, and he lifts them up on his back as he rises”(40). The biblical allusions embodied in this imagery are scattered throughout the book to evoke the book’s opening when Dillard wakes up, looks across Puget Sound, and greets the morning, “I wake in a god Someone is kissing me—already I open my eyes. The god lifts from the water. His head tills the bay.” (*Holy the Firm* 7).

Having a transcendentalist perspective of the world, Dillard seems to oppose the concept of Immanence which suggests that the spiritual world pervades the ordinary and the divine is not seen apart from the material world. However, she cannot quite accept the view that “emanating from God, and linked to him by Christ, the work is infinitely other than God.” While eminence admits representation of Christ which permits the salvation of “the souls of men,” it neglects the other elements of nature and considers them “irrelevant and nonparticipant”(*Holy the Firm* 41,42). Due to Dillard’s reluctance to accept views which deny the sanctity of the natural world, she accommodates a view from “Esoteric Christianity” where there is a matter called “holy the firm” which is in touch with the lowest of material reality, “the earth,” and the absolute. The absolute and ordinary aspects of nature are not separated, “Matter and spirit are of a piece

but distinguishable; God has a stake guaranteed in the entire world” (*Holy the Firm* 43). As Reimer points out, Dillard’s “theology is always dialectical. ”The dialectical tension is between “the material and the spiritual, the natural and the transcendent . . . the beauty and the horror within the natural world”(182).

Holy the Firm revolves around two incidents of burning, the first burning is of a moth and the second is the burning of Julie Norwich’s face, a seven-year-old child who survives a plane crash but is badly burned and her face is severely damaged. The moth, attracted to a candle, soon burns but its body becomes a wick and feeds the flame, “She burned for two hours without changing, without bending or leaning--- only glowing within . . . like a hollow saint, like a flame-faced virgin gone to God.” As for Julie, a child of seven years, Dillard addresses her, “That skinlessness, that black shroud of flesh in strips on your skull, is your veil” (*Holy the Firm* 10, 45). Dillard is profoundly worried about Julie Norwich’s great suffering and questions the Christian response to the suffering of innocent people. She inquires if God is responsible for this tragedy and desperately asks, “Do we really need more victims to remind us that we’re all victims.” She remembers that humans are “sojourners in a land we did not make, a land with no meaning of itself and no meaning we can make for it alone.” Dillard suggests that God cannot be present in a world in which an innocent child such as Julie is damaged. The burning of both the moth and child is used by Dillard to symbolize grace that emanates from the divine and the life of a nun to whom Dillard compares herself in her job as a writer. To the glowing moth and Julie “I will be the nun for you. I am now” (*Holy the Firm* 36, 37, 46). The narrator, Julie and the moth become unified.

In this state of mind, Dillard is unwilling to buy the communion wine but she walks home anyway. As she goes up the hill, the landscape starts “to utter its infinite particulars.” Soon, the particulars are alive: “mountains are raw nerves . . . the trees, the grass . . . is living petals of mind.” Finally, she walks faster and faster and identifies with other elements of nature, “I am moth; I am light. I am prayer and I can hardly see” (*Holy the Firm* 39, 38). In this moment, she experiences a vision of seeing Christ baptized. She is identified with the whole. The book’s final section tries to find a place for a merciful God in a violent world. She provides an answer to her inquiries about God in the first two sections. To Dillard, God is just and should not be asked by human beings for explanations because He is the Creator. All humans are travelers on earth. Dillard’s book seems like a prayer which lights “the kingdom of God for the people to see” (*Holy the Firm* 43). Accepting God as the basis of all things allows Dillard to believe in the unity of all things.

In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Dillard walks and stalks in order to be able to see in more than one sense. She ceremonially prepares herself for she must be innocent and informed. Innocence for Dillard is “the spirit’s unself-conscious state at any moment of pure devotion to any object.” Like her ancestors, the transcendentalists, Dillard highly values the state of innocence which is why she identifies stalking and seeing rituals with childhood. “Only children keep their eyes open” (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 94, 104), writes Dillard. Dillard’s evocation of childhood seems to be a microcosm of Tinker Creek. “If I seek the senses and skill of children . . . I do so only, solely, and entirely that I might look well at the creek.”

Dillard's longing for God makes her compare her will banging against rock with that of a child beating on a door, calling "Come on out!... I know you're there" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 117, 230).

Dillard asserts the existence of God the Creator throughout the book and always tries to imagine the Creator's nature. Dillard can imagine two sides of the creator; "For if God is in one sense the igniter, a fireball that spins over the ground of continents, God is also in another sense the destroyer, lightning, blind power, impartial as the atmosphere" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 103). Unlike Emerson who believes in the perfection of creation, Dillard, Margaret Reimer says, disagrees because "her delight and wonder quickly change into horror and disgust and then back again to delight, her experiences lead her to see both the unity and the diversity, the order and the chaos, the uplifting and the destructive" (183). Dillard's conclusion is that we cannot know God. God is hidden from us and leaves the quester with many questions. Humans cannot know whether God has a plan for the world or cares about human sin. "Creation itself was the fall" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 242), says Dillard and in seeing evil in this fallen world, Dillard adopts an extremely orthodox Christian view but she does not share the Christian belief that the only hope of escaping the chaos and horror of this world can be found outside the created world. In other words, Dillard does not see a "hope of redemption" that "comes from outside and gives hope for a better world." She can only 'wait and stalk' and continue to wonder" (Reimer 191).

In his book *Nature's Kindred Spirit*, James McClintock dedicates a chapter to Annie Dillard. McClintock says that Dillard seems Emersonian in the way she

prepares herself for vision. She exercises her “understanding” and disciplines her experiences with nature through scientific ideas. While she says she is not a scientist and rightly so, the chapters of her book are full of references to wide scientific reading. Those references are of two dichotomous categories. One suggests that nature is deterministic, a world where a giant water bug sucks out the entrails of a frog which leaves her terrified. The other category of scientific references concentrates on indeterministic nature as described by twentieth-century physics (100-101). In the chapter “Stalking,” Dillard comments on the “Principle of Indeterminacy” and quotes Sir Arthur Eddington statement’s that the Principle of Indeterminacy “leaves us with no clear distinction between the Natural and the Supernatural”(*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 229). Dillard’s preparations for seeing, then, are based on a broad range of scientific reading which is mostly specific to the phenomenon she observes. In Emersonian fashion, Dillard “disciplines” her “Understanding” to prepare for visions. Through attaining vision, Dillard will be able to “look spring in the eye”(*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 138) and perform the most important and difficult task of learning the neighborhood. In Dillard’s chapters, the speaker is a solitary person, provoked to intellectual speculation to wonder about and assert realities that withstand contemporary threats of hopelessness and frustration. Dillard strikes a balance between fear and hope and between horror and celebration through the rituals of seeing and stalking. “In such rituals,” McClintock says, “she has awakened not only to mystery in nature but to mystery beyond nature. Her Christian obsessions and ritual practice culminate in prayer without cessation” (108).

Dillard seems modern in her mysticism and tries to show the possibility of adopting scientific ways besides the mystic way. Her theology is constantly dialectical and the strength of her vision arises from her ability to keep the contradictions in a single vision.

4. 4 Conclusion:

Each of the three writers, namely Snyder, Berry and Dillard, displays a significant spiritual and religious aspect in his/her works. All writers seemed to have reacted against urbanization and the material spirit of the age by adopting spiritual and religious visions. They revived the transcendental values of Emerson and Thoreau but added a modern dimension to them. Gary Snyder adopts Buddhist ideals to express his spiritual, transcendental vision. He shows no loyalty to Christianity or any other religion but finds in religions of the East such as Buddhism and Hinduism new ways of spiritual enlightenment. Snyder also discovered in Native American Indian traditions the notion of shamanism which constitutes a central part of Snyder's spiritual vision. Wendell Berry resists modern age materialism by presenting an original understanding of Christianity that differs from conventional Christianity. Berry refuses to separate the physical and the material as is done in formal Christianity as he considers it the main cause of the deterioration of new civilization. Berry, the farmer, also calls for a reconstruction of modern spirituality through agricultural practices. Annie Dillard seems to be different from both. She is a Christian and her major works are dominated by her incessant search for God. She disagrees with Berry's Immanence which, in Dillard's view, marginalizes the existence of Christ. Dillard's mystical, spiritual

vision is Christian but her use of scientific methods gives her spirituality a scientific dimension.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Transcendentalism dominated the American cultural and literary scene during the mid-nineteenth century and was formalized with the publication of Emerson's book *Nature* in 1832. The principles of the movement put in place by its founding fathers R. W. Emerson and H. D. Thoreau reshaped the entire culture of American society and imbued it with an idealist spirit. Amongst these ideals were the use of an intuitive mind to understand higher values and to have direct communication with God through nature, a new understanding of Christianity, faith in the individual's potential to reorganize society and a new perspective on the relationship between humans and the natural world. These ideals that constituted the core of the Transcendental Movement declined after 1860 when society was thrust into new scientific and materialistic philosophies that left no space for idealist thought.

What I explored in my study is the transcendental approach to life as adopted by Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Annie Dillard. These writers revived and gave new life to transcendentalist premises and expressed them in what was known as 'environmental literature' in the twentieth century. It is considered the best embodiment of transcendental thought. Throughout my study, I focused on the transcendental ideals of each writer and showed how those ideas were manipulated to deal with contemporary issues in both American society and the world on three levels, namely ecological, social, religious and spiritual.

My investigation and analysis of the writers in this study show each writer's particular vision of life and the similarities and differences between them. I have shown that each writer presents his own transcendental perspective and they are not fully identical, either to their nineteenth century predecessors or to each other. Let me first summarize the conclusions I came to from my analysis of Gary Snyder on ecological, social and spiritual levels.

On an ecological level, Snyder emphasizes the need for both the deep ecology school and social ecology school in saving the environment from the destruction of civilization. Prevention of destruction for Snyder is both social and individual, that is, he supports social change that creates harmony between humans and the natural world and he also supports change in the individual's consciousness to be aware of threats to the environment. Snyder drew much from Buddhism to develop his ecological vision. His concept of the interdependence and equality of all living and non-living beings in the universe is principally derived from Buddhism. Snyder's attitude towards the binary opposition of the wilderness and civilization seems to support the former to a considerable extent but this is not to say that Snyder rejects urban life. Snyder seems to be more revolutionary and radical in his ecological vision as compared to Berry and Dillard.

On a social level, Snyder insists on the role of the writer in social life. As a result of his transcendental mentality, Snyder shows loyalty to the individual more than to society. Snyder's utopian vision of the world displays a bioregionalist perspective. To Snyder, political boundaries are artificial and should be removed to provide more variety to life and a better chance for human society to develop and

thrive. Snyder thinks that civilization underestimates “the other” which is the natural world. The democratic process should include all living and non-living beings. The failure to perceive the political interdependence between the human and nonhuman threatens the survival of both communities on earth. Unlike Berry and Dillard, Snyder explicitly addresses the socio-political implications of the age in some poems. Snyder asserts the necessity of reconciliation for what modern society considers as contrasts like race, culture and religion.

On a spiritual and religious level, Snyder saw Buddhism as a manifestation of his transcendental spirituality. Snyder never showed loyalty to formal Christianity and in the tradition of the transcendentalists, he was conspicuously influenced by the religions of the East particularly Buddhism where he found new spiritual life and spiritual enlightenment. Buddhism had a considerable impact in forming Snyder’s spiritual vision but it was not the sole influence. The Native Indians also had a significant influence on Snyder. He adopted the concept of the shaman in Indian culture and saw the shaman as a mediator between humans and the natural world. Snyder then connected poetry to the tradition of shamanism and this made him a shaman poet who was the mediator between civilized people and nature. Snyder’s transcendental spirituality is first used to cure the self and then to help people out of their state of despair.

Wendell Berry’s ecological vision mediates between culture and nature, the civilization and the wild. Unlike Snyder, Berry does not tend to the primitive but rather to the simplicity of farm life. He identifies with the mountain farm lands of Kentucky rather than the wilderness. Berry does not show hostility towards humans

as portrayed by Snyder and radical ecologists. However, like Snyder, he considers manual labor as part of his ecological commitment. Berry emphasizes the importance of place and presents an arresting reversal of the relationship between man and place. He says we are belongings of the world and not its owners. Berry tried to surpass the traditional contradiction between the farmer and the wilderness by reconciling them. He calls for a moral agriculture that transforms the farmer from an enemy of the wilderness to its guardian as he shows in his “mad farmer” poems.

Berry’s transcendental vision of society is based on his belief that the ideal American society is an agricultural one. It is a community of honest farmers and citizens whose individual freedom is preserved where their true citizenship lies in fidelity to the land. Berry’s ideal agrarian republic rejects any violence. This republic should preserve the land and culture related to it where patriotism is not a matter of loving one’s own nation but loving the land and protecting its beauty and productivity. Berry took part in social protests as an act of civil disobedience. Berry’s depiction of the world is one of microcosmic analogies based on human unity with the land, and consequently, with his wife and his creator.

On a religious and spiritual level, Berry stands in line with Emerson and other transcendentalists who were critical of Christianity. Berry rejects the separation between the soul and the body because they are interrelated. Overcoming the dualism between the physical and the spiritual may pave the way for the restoration of a form of Christianity that shares Berry’s concern for health and wholeness. There should be no conflict between the soul and the body as such

a conflict is destructive. Berry emphasizes his belief in the analogy between physical and spiritual life. For Berry, they are distinct but they are also interconnected and spiritual life cannot exist apart from physical life. Berry also thinks that agricultural practices may have an important role to play in restructuring contemporary spirituality and mysticism. As a mystic, Berry learned about his model of life from the soil's fertility. Humans can improve on creation and contribute to God's everlasting creative work if they play an effective role in the process of growth and fertility.

Annie Dillard is remarkably interested in ecological systems. She suggests a new way of seeing which may elevate the elements of the natural world into wholeness leading, therefore, to a new vision of the world. Her way of seeing requires humans to be close to nature and to see in their mind, not in the traditional sense. What distinguishes Dillard's vision is her fluctuation between the beauty of the natural world on one hand and its horror on the other. Dillard realizes that this contradiction is the rule of the wild and, therefore, accepts it. The power of Dillard's vision lies in retaining contradictions in a single vision.

As for Dillard's social concerns, there is no direct reference to society in her major works. Dillard's vision of the contradictory world of beauty and violence, life and death, is created through metaphors and images from science and religion, affirming hope in the modern world. In her novel *The Maytrees*, Dillard presents the transcendental ideal of self-reliance and ascetic life to climb out of despair and sustain hope as seen in the heroine. The heroine represents a transcendental model

to be imitated by both women and men in order to achieve Dillard's transcendental vision of society, local and universal.

Dillard always fluctuates between the material and the spiritual and this feature brings her close to Transcendentalist writers. Dillard is a modern mystic. She uses a scientific approach in her mystical vision that gives hope for a connection between the divine and the material age. Dillard adds to the transcendental tradition a modern sense through the creation of illuminated moments in readers that surpasses mere description. In seeing evil in creation, Dillard adopts an Orthodox Christian perspective but does not agree with the Christian belief that redemption can only be found beyond the created world. Throughout her works, Dillard is always in search of God and to her, God is just and does not have to explain his actions because he is the Creator.

Snyder, Berry and Dillard, then, challenge the general tendency to materialism which characterizes the global society in the second half of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first century. Snyder, Berry and Dillard challenge the general tendency towards materialism which has characterized global society during the second half of the twentieth century and first years of the twenty-first century. Their revival of transcendental values is, indeed, a great contribution in warning against the danger of adopting current ways of thinking which seem hostile to any kind of idealistic thought. These ways and patterns of thinking have drastically widened the gap between humanity and the natural world and deformed the pure and noble human values that transcendentalism called for in the mid nineteenth century. The different influences

of transcendentalism such as self-reliance, nonconformity and the connection between people, nature and God still exist today but need to be brought to the fore and this is exactly what Snyder, Berry and Dillard did through their writing. This study has deeply explored the transcendental implications of the three writers and presented them to readers as ways, patterns and lifestyles which may motivate them to rebuild the social structure of society and reorganize humanity's relation with the natural world. The question that I and others may raise about the future of transcendentalism is whether transcendental ideas will have a place in the coming decades in an increasingly materialistic and technological world? I can confidently say yes simply because the call of transcendentalism is for "care and respect for nature." Nature is the source of everything in the world so humanity needs to protect it to ensure its survival. Without a healthy nature, there is no hope and survival is endangered.

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