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of R. W. Emerson and Emily
Dickinson

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Příroda a humanita v dílech R. W. Emersona a Emily Dickinsonové

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Práce pojedná a tématech přírody a humanity v dílech R. W. Emersona a Emily Dickinsonové ve vztahu k transcendentalismu. Porovná pojetí obou zmíněných osobností s přihlédnutím k dobovému kontextu.

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala pod vedením vedoucího bakalářské práce prof. PhDr. Bohuslava Mánka samostatně a uvedla jsem všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

V Hradci Králové, dne...

Poděkování

Děkuji prof. PhDr. Bohuslavu Mánkovi za odborné vedení, poskytování rad a pomoci při zpracování mé bakalářské práce.

Annotation

ZVĚŘINOVÁ, Věra. *Nature and humanity in the writings of R.W.Emerson and E.Dickinson*. Faculty of education, University of Hradec Králové, 2016. 49 p.
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This bachelor thesis is concerned with the analysis of the lives and especially works of two American writers, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Emily Dickinson, and their mutual comparison. The first part of this thesis introduces the concept of transcendentalism, which plays a key role in their work, as well as briefly describes the lives of both authors, who were closely linked to this movement and deeply influenced by its thoughts. The main part focuses on the analysis of four major topics presented in their writings, which are all connected in a way to nature and humanity, namely: nature in relation to Divinity and humans, society and the individual, their approach to religion and time and its connection to eternity and immortality. Simultaneously, it compares their opinions, life stances and beliefs in greater detail.

Key words: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emily Dickinson, transcendentalism, literature

Anotace

ZVĚŘINOVÁ, Věra. *Příroda a humanita v dílech Ralph Waldo Emersona a Emily Dickinsonové*. Hradec Králové: Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Hradec Králové, 2016. 49 s. Bakalářská práce.

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou životů a především tvorby dvou amerických spisovatelů, Ralph Waldo Emersona a Emily Dickinsonové, a jejich vzájemným porovnáním. První část představuje pojem transcendentalismu, který hraje v jejich dílech klíčovou roli, a ve stručnosti popisuje životy obou autorů, kteří byli s tímto hnutím úzce spojeni a zásadně ovlivněni jeho myšlenkami. Hlavní část se soustředí na rozbor čtyř významných témat spojených s přírodou a humanitou, která ve svých dílech představují, jmenovitě: příroda ve vztahu k božství a lidstvu, společnost a jednatel, jejich přístup k náboženství a pojem času ve vztahu k věčnosti a nesmrtelnosti. Práce zároveň detailně porovnává jejich názory, životní postoje a přesvědčení.

Klíčová slova: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emily Dickinson, transcendentalismus, literatura

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Prohlášení

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1 INTRODUCTION

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Emily Dickinson were both significant writers of great importance. Living in the relatively newly established United States and influenced by the transcendental movement of the 19th century, they played an important role in shaping the American ideals. They both had their own views of life, which sometimes differed but also in many other ways resembled. This thesis is concerned with the comparison of these two authors' views and thoughts on several topics connected to nature and humanity and other themes linked to life in general, such as Divinity, religion, society and the individual, time, eternity and immortality.

The first part of the thesis introduces the transcendental movement, short biographies of the two authors and a brief comparison of their lives. The second part focuses on the main subject of the thesis, which is an analysis of how they present the themes in their writings with proper examples and a comparison between them.

The first mentions about transcendentalism came to me last year when I was on Erasmus in Norway where we learned about these authors in a literature class. I immediately became interested in Emerson's philosophy, as in the recent years I felt very similar notions in many ways. Alongside Emerson, we also studied more profoundly Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. All these writers seemed very interesting to me, especially Emily Dickinson because of her original style of writing. Even though I was not very keen on poetry until then, the poems we read in class made me interested in knowing more about her as well as this whole generation of writers. Therefore, I chose to compare the views of Emerson and Dickinson and by doing so enhance my knowledge about the whole issue.

There is an immense amount of texts and documents available on the topics of transcendentalism and the two authors, but there are not so many which would actually compare these two in any way. Therefore, it comes to me as a challenge to do this task and improve my reading, searching and processing abilities.

2 THE AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTALISM

“It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.”¹

Ralph Waldo Emerson

In 1836, a group of several American intellectuals started meeting in the area of Boston to talk about contemporary issues. These people included Frederic Henry Hodge, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and others. These thinkers were expressing and interchanging their thoughts, ideals as well as spiritual ideas and discussing the unsatisfactory state of the new American society together with the situation in Europe. After a few years, the number of its members increased, and they became known among the public as the Transcendental Club. With its emergence, a philosophical and literary movement called transcendentalism appeared in the United States of America. It soon became popular and even today it keeps being one of the most influential ideals of our time.

Transcendentalism appeared soon after the Romantic movement, which ruled in Germany, England and France at that time. It was influenced not only by the Romantic writers (such as W. Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge or J. W. Goethe) and the ideas of the American intellectuals, but also by several Asian religions such as Hinduism or Buddhism, as well as Greek philosophers such as Plato. Probably the most influential person of this movement was Ralph Waldo Emerson with his arguably most famous work “Nature” from 1836. In it, he emphasizes the importance of harmony of humans with nature and the importance of self-reliance. This essay is considered as the bedrock of transcendentalism and had a huge impact on the following years, authors interested in it and the American nation as a whole.

¹ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 180. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

2.1 Transcendental values

Transcendentalism represents an idealistic system of thoughts which has its basic values in independence, self-reliance and self-confidence. The words “Trust Thyself” well represent its core belief. According to it, all people should rely on their own intuition in every moment rather than on their reasoning or on the powers of others. Their belief was that every individual is good in his or her deepest core and that the corrupting element in the world is the general society, authorities and institutions. Transcendentalists also believed that there was one general truth for all people, which is ultimately the universe, and once they connected with their true self they realized that it is a mutual higher power into which they all belonged. This thought is expressed in the following statement from “The Over-Soul” by Emerson:

“Within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal one.”²

In that way, Emerson believes that each person is capable of living happily and freely.

2.2 Importance

The importance of the transcendental ideas to the United States has been significant; not only for the first moments of the newly established country itself but up to now as well. At the time of the meetings of the Transcendental Club, the Americans were still maintaining the Puritan values and the sense of authority was seen as something controlling people’s lives. The transcendentalists had a completely opposite opinion. They were against organized religion and behaving according to others, as well as slavery or gender inequality. They contributed greatly to help shift the way of thinking of many Americans at that time.

Moreover, the country became independent and the inhabitants found out that there was no common culture or traditions as in other countries. The United States was of a very recent origin and there were no important events which would identify

² EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 204. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

them as a nation. There was no common character or past; they all had different ideas and views of how to live a daily life. They were all immigrants from different parts of the world and there were only a few things which tied them all together. Therefore, it was important to find a kind of a mutual way to connect all of them together. The emergence of transcendentalism had a huge impact on the society and enabled the inhabitants to recognize themselves more as a nation and find a deeper connection to nature and each other.

3 RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the most important and influential American essayists and philosophers, was at the center of this movement. He was born on 25th May 1803 into a nation on the edge of great changes. Just a short generation before that, it had freed itself politically and economically from England.³ His father passed away when Emerson was eight, so he was raised mainly by his mother and other intellectual women, particularly his aunt Mary Moody Emerson, who had a huge impact on him. She encouraged him to read a lot, think deeply, and always stay close to nature and God.⁴ He attended the Harvard University, where he started writing a journal about his thoughts and beliefs. He was a well-read man, especially keen on Plato's works as well as texts from the East.

After graduating, he worked for some time as a teacher, but he felt it was not what he was supposed to do. In 1826 he became a preacher. During one of his sermons in Concord, he met Ellen Louisa Tucker, with whom he got married in 1829. Already at this time he was a successful and well-respected man with financial security. However, in less than two years Ellen died of tuberculosis, leaving Emerson heartbroken but determined to continue in his philosophical pursue.

Soon after that, he decided to travel to Europe, where Romanticism was flourishing. This movement was a reaction to the rationality and formalism of the

³ BEARDSLEY, David A. *Emerson: The Ideal in America* [film]. © 24 March 2007. The Ralph Waldo Emerson Institute. Available from: <http://www.cultureunplugged.com/play/2881/Emerson--The-Ideal-in-America>

⁴ Ibid.

18th century and stressed emotion and intuition as the essence of knowledge, together with a profound curiosity about nature from both scientific and spiritual perspectives.⁵ He travelled throughout Italy, France and England. In England he met William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle, who all influenced him greatly and with whom he interchanged his views of life.

As he returned to America, he was already full of new perceptions from the European writers and thinkers. He began writing a book and arranging to give lectures. This period marks the beginning of his transformation into the American founding thinker.⁶ In 1835, he married Lydia Jackson and the next year his son Waldo was born. In the same year, he published anonymously his most famous and influential work called “Nature”. Its main theme was the relationship of man, nature and God. With its publication he became a well-known and respected person, giving educational lectures across the country.

In 1837, Emerson met Henry David Thoreau, who ultimately became his life-long friend. Thoreau was another person deeply influenced by Emerson’s beliefs and as a result of that, he decided to spend two years all alone in a remote cottage surrounded by nature. Other people influenced by his ideals were for instance Herman Melville, Walt Whitman or Nathaniel Hawthorne. In 1841, one of his most significant essays was published, called “Self-Reliance”. In it, he underlines the importance of the individual and maintains that every human being is divine in their essence as each one of them carries their own universe within.

The next year, his 6-year-old son Waldo died suddenly. This event moved him deeply and inspired him to write the poem “Threnody” and the essay “Experience”. Among his other notable works there are for instance “The American Scholar”, “The Over-Soul”, “The Poet” or his famous speech called “Divinity School Address”. He died on 27th April 1882.

⁵ BEARDSLEY, David A. *Emerson: The Ideal in America* [film]. © 24 March 2007. The Ralph Waldo Emerson Institute. Available from: <http://www.cultureunplugged.com/play/2881/Emerson--The-Ideal-in-America>

⁶ Ibid.

Emerson was against the standards of authorities, religious groups and institutions which were preventing individuals from thinking and acting by themselves. He thought that these social structures were based on old traditions while people should live in a new and original way. He was praising individuality and uniqueness of people who should always rely just on themselves and their own intuition and what they personally thought was right. He was fond of conversations as a medium to develop thoughts and learn new things from others. He thought each person was divine as everyone was ultimately one universal soul. He was rejecting any kind of inequality and oppression of people and spoke out about it. In all these ways, he contributed greatly in shaping the American as well as human ideals.

4 EMILY DICKINSON

Emily Dickinson is regarded by many as one of the greatest American poets, particularly known for her unique style of poetry and secluded lifestyle. Even though she does not really belong into the transcendental movement, she was very interested in Emerson's philosophy.⁷ Because of her privacy, there are still several obscurities and mysteries about her life.

She was born on 10th December 1830 in Amherst, Massachusetts, and already as a child she was very intelligent and conscientious.⁸ Her father was a lawyer, and her family was in general fairly affluent and well-established. She had a strong attachment to her family, especially to her sister Lavinia and her older brother Austin, who were both as soulmates to her. Even though her family was Calvinist, she stayed largely independent concerning religion.⁹ Many of her poems were influenced by it, though, as she often wrote about God or being excluded from religion.

She attended Amherst Academy, where she received a thorough education of languages, history, English literature and natural sciences. After that, she attended

⁷ GROCHOLSKI, Krystyna. On Emily Dickinson and Transcendentalism. *American Transcendentalism Web* [online]. [cit. 2016-01-21]. Available from: <http://transcendentalism-legacy.tamu.edu/roots/legacy/dickinson/>

⁸ PETTINGER, Tejvan. Biography Emily Dickinson. *Biography online* [online]. Oxford, 26 June 2006. [cit. 2016-01-21]. Available from: http://www.biographyonline.net/poets/emily_dickinson.html

⁹ Ibid.

Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, which was a university for women, but left after a year, which was probably because of the fact that it would force her to become a missionary,¹⁰ or because of her frequent illnesses.¹¹

She lived in solitude for most of her life, maintaining relationships with her friends mostly through letters. After the age of thirty, she started wearing only simple white dresses and living in an even bigger isolation. She was an honest and intelligent woman with high-minded morals and strong wit. She liked playing the piano, singing and reading. She was particularly inspired and influenced by English authors such as John Keats, William Shakespeare or Charles Dickens. As so many others, she was also influenced by Emerson, whose spiritual ideas helped her in developing her own opinions beyond her Calvinist background.¹²

Her style of poetry is unique and original in its own way and can be sometimes difficult to read and understand. In her poems she used various punctuations as well as a frequent usage of dashes, capital letters or inserted pauses. By doing so, she wanted to give emphasis to her thoughts or to express more accurately what she wanted to say, but at the same time it can be vague. She wrote mostly short four-lined stanzas which in most cases rhymed in the second and the fourth line and often used a lot of metaphors, personifications and allegories. Thanks to all these, it can be easier for Dickinson to show the expression and meaning she wanted to manifest and in some cases it can also help the reader to follow the flow of the poem.

She was an immensely prolific poet, producing over 1700 poems during her lifetime. Among her most famous poems there are for instance “A Bird came down the Walk”, “I’m Nobody! Who are you?”, “Because I could not stop for Death”, and many others.

¹⁰ YOUNG, Veronica. *Voices & Visions; Emily Dickinson* [film]. New York Center for Visual History Production, © 1988. Available from: <https://www.learner.org/catalog/extras/vvspot/Dickinson.html>

¹¹ PETTINGER, Tejvan. Biography Emily Dickinson. *Biography online* [online]. Oxford, 26 June 2006. [cit. 2016-01-21]. Available from: http://www.biographyonline.net/poets/emily_dickinson.html

¹² Ibid.

After her death on 15th May 1886, her sister Lavinia found the manuscripts of Emily's poems in her room. Several years later, the majority of them were published, but many were changed and edited in order to appear more coherent, structured and suited for the public. Her first volume of poems was published as late as 1890. It was not until 1955 that a complete collection of her poems was finally provided to the world in their original form.¹³

5 COMPARISON OF THEIR LIVES

In order to have a better understanding of their incoming influence, their situation and choices of themes in their writings, I shall outline the main differences and similarities between their lives.

The childhood of both writers differed greatly. Dickinson was brought up under a firm hand of her strict father, whom she held in respect and took as an authority. This certainly influenced her later life, and it is probably one of the reasons for her reservedness and introversion, which reflected so much in her poetry. Because of her solitary lifestyle she did not meet many people throughout her life; as already mentioned, she kept in touch with her friends mostly by letters. Most likely she never even had any intimate relationship. Also, she had to face deaths of several of her friends during her lifetime. These reasons must have contributed to the fact that she wrote so often about negative topics, such as isolation, limitation of an individual or death.

On the other hand, Emerson had a relatively comfortable childhood, growing up next to six siblings as well as several intelligent women and attending the best schools available. This must have contributed greatly in shaping his optimistic view of life. However, he also had to undergo through several losses, such as the death of his first wife and later of his son Waldo, but he managed to overcome these events and to keep pursuing his positive attitude towards life.

¹³ YOUNG, Veronica. *Voices & Visions; Emily Dickinson* [film]. New York Center for Visual History Production, © 1988. Available from: <https://www.learner.org/catalog/extras/vvspot/Dickinson.html>

They were both very fond of nature from an early age, which became a major theme of many of their writings. Dickinson even studied botany and grew plants at home. While in nature, they both preferred being there in solitude.

Both of them distanced themselves from religious institutions. Even though Dickinson's family were Calvinists, she soon questioned the faith, stopped attending the church and developed her own beliefs. Similarly, Emerson became a preacher in his twenties but soon realized it did not fulfil his beliefs. Their distancing from a particular religion enabled them to maintain an individual stance and to keep exploring their ideals further.

They were both keeping a diary, which was helping them to shape and settle their convictions. They were both interested in the meaning of life and wanted to express their ideas through writing – in Emerson's case openly and publically, in Dickinson's privately.

Also, they were both fond of reading other philosophical works which would inspire them and shape their opinions. While Dickinson enjoyed mainly English Romantic authors and some American transcendentalists, Emerson was keen on the Greek philosophers and the Eastern religious texts.

6 COMPARISON OF THEIR VIEWS

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Emily Dickinson both have their own sources of inspiration, visions and views of the world which they present in their writings. As with many other writers and thinkers, their topics are mostly concerned with the matters of nature, life, death, God, religion, etc. Some of their ideas differ, but more often they come to be very similar in several ways. In this part, I shall compare their views on those mutual topics, starting off by the concept of nature and its relation to God.

6.1 Nature in relation to Divinity and humans

6.1.1 Emerson

Talking about the topic of nature, Emerson's opinions on this matter can be best found while reading his first essay "Nature". As Emerson states in its introduction, the universe is composed of two entities: Nature (the world around us and things in space) and the Soul (which has also often been called the Self, Divinity, God, spirit or the universe). It is clear from his work that he has a very broad view of nature and closely links it with Divinity, which, according to him, is always present and accessible to all human beings.

Emerson stresses the importance of the relationship between human beings and their connection and harmony with nature, and promotes the idea that nature has the power to make us divine. By keeping close to it, people should try to understand nature and learn from it. He even states that he feels more fulfilled in the wilderness than walking through streets or villages. Throughout the essay, he mentions many of the natural teachers, such as flowers, animals, mountains, water, the sun and the moon, the stars, the woods, the fields, rainbow, orchards, morning and twilight, sunrise and sunset...¹⁴ which all serve as means to enable the connection with everybody's inner Self. These, as well as other natural phenomena, also provide

¹⁴ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 37, 38, 43, 44. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

“sincerest lessons, day by day”,¹⁵ which means we are constantly challenged by them and learn through them.

At the same time, nature makes people lose their negative thoughts, as it can be seen in the following experience of his while being outdoors: “Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, – all mean egotism vanishes.”¹⁶ Even if a person is depressed or sad, nature always has the power to bring him joy; “in the presence of nature a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows.”¹⁷ The cause of this nature’s positive effect is its spiritual element, which is always present in nature as well as in humans, since “every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact”.¹⁸ Being in nature also helps people return to “reason and faith”.¹⁹ He also states that “nature never wears a mean appearance”²⁰, meaning that nature is always beautiful and benevolent; if people do not see it that way, it is only their false assumption which reflects in the surroundings, as nature always stays as perfect as it is and the way it should be. Furthermore, nature is beautiful regardless of the time, date or season, as “each moment of the year has its own beauty.”²¹

Emerson maintains that people in nature realize that they are in fact one with nature: “I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.”²² In that way, the eye merges with everything that it sees, so that the inner and the outer are one. He feels transparent and unified with nature and, at the same time, like a “part of God”, which suggests the possibility of the divine unity. “Nature always wears the colours

¹⁵ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 55. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 39

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 38

¹⁸ CORVERS, Janneke. *The Embrace of Human and Nature*. [bachelor thesis]. Utrecht University, 11 July 2012, [cit. 2016-01-25]

¹⁹ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 37. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 37

²¹ Ibid. p. 42

²² Ibid. p. 39

of the spirit;”²³ this sentence is another proof that whatever inner state we have in ourselves, it is also projected to the world.

This unified state with nature and God cannot even be compared to the relationships among human beings, as in this state, “the name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental.”²⁴ He also thinks that, while in this mutual harmony, one is inspired to make better decisions or to get more original ideas, while feeling he is not the little person he thought to be but something much vaster and more intelligent. Emerson also mentions how nature helps bring people to better and more useful thoughts simply by its presence; “The waving of the boughs in the storm [...] is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right.”²⁵ The fact that this happens during the storm may also be significant, implying that these rare occurrences like storms might have even a bigger impact on the human mind.

Emerson claims that the greatest delight of nature is that it wants to embrace humans and reach for them: “The fields and woods [...] nod to me, and I to them.”²⁶ In a similar way, he says that “Nature stretcheth out her arms to embrace man”²⁷, assuming that just as humanity wants to reach nature, nature also wants to reach them. However, by the continuation of the statement “only let his thoughts be of equal greatness,”²⁸ Emerson implies that people first have to become free of the basic human thinking and change their thoughts to noble ones instead. By achieving to reach nature, a person becomes inevitably “in some degree, himself divine.”²⁹

“If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore.”³⁰ Emerson states that the beauty of nature is not appreciated enough by humans, who see it only superficially in spite of its persisting beauty. On

²³ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 39. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 39

²⁵ Ibid. p. 39

²⁶ Ibid. p. 39

²⁷ Ibid. p. 46

²⁸ Ibid. p. 46

²⁹ Ibid. p. 68

³⁰ Ibid. p. 37

the other hand, he mentions that for children it is natural to see its liveliness; “The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child.”³¹ This statement suggests that children are connected to nature much more than adults, perhaps because of their purity as well as their much more recent arrival to this world. According to his words, “their mind [is] whole [and] the eye is as yet unconquered”³², it is clear that he points to their innocence, honesty and a more profound connectedness with the universe. People should be more like children in this sense to experience the “simplicity of childhood”³³ and learn from them while in their presence.

He also points to nature’s mysterious aspect in the following statement: “Neither does the wisest man extort her secret, and lose his curiosity by finding out all her perfection.”³⁴ Emerson suggests that nature is a constant teacher and that even the greatest minds can always find something new to explore in it and can permanently learn from it. Broadly speaking, it implies that nobody can ever realize how it actually works.

6.1.2 Dickinson compared

Unlike Emerson, the majority of Dickinson’s ideas expressed in her poetry are not as straightforward and clear, and her general view of things is much vaguer. In many cases they even contradict each other, so that it is often difficult to understand the meaning, whose interpretation can vary according to each reader’s understanding. Shira Wolosky argues that her poems need to be analyzed very thoroughly, since different implications and indications are often found later; therefore, it is almost impossible to summarize her viewpoint on any topic and it is very difficult to cite her quotes as evidence.³⁵ Grabher expresses a similar opinion, arguing that it is not possible to define her by her opinions or convictions, but rather by the things she

³¹ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 38. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

³² Ibid. p.177

³³ Ibid. p. 37

³⁴ Ibid. p. 37

³⁵ MARTIN, Wendy (ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Emily Dickinson*. 1st publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cambridge companions to literature. p.130. ISBN 05-210-0118-8.

cares about in her poems.³⁶ Emerson's ideas sometimes contradict too, but in his case it is not as ambiguous.

Such as Emerson, she has very profound ideas on nature and also perceives Divinity manifested in it. However, according to Wolosky, she did not achieve this divine state to such a degree as him.³⁷ Similarly to Emerson, nature symbolizes for her a place of beauty and energy as well as a portrayal of the Divine. It is there that she found most of her inspiration for her poems and according to Reynolds, nature was precious to her and she loved it dearly.³⁸ However, in her view, it is not always as bright as in Emerson's interpretation. In some of her poems it is clear that she perceives nature as something darkened by gloom and mystery (for instance "What mystery pervades a well!", "An awful tempest mashed the air" or "Will there really be a morning?"), while in others it seems bright and beautiful ("Nature is what we see —" or "The moon was but a chin of gold") and similar to Emerson's view. She sees nature both benevolent and warm-hearted where the landscapes are appreciated for their beauty and brightness, but other times it seems confusing, incomprehensible and even harmful, where she explores more profoundly the meaning of life and the universe. Similarly to Emerson, she is fascinated by nature and often turns to it for joy. However, she often seems to flee there in order to get away from society rather than for experiencing the connectedness with it. Nevertheless, writing about nature helped her express her hidden thoughts.³⁹ As she was a very sensitive person, she was interested in detailed perception, closely noticing the colours and scents around her as well as the different forms of the material world, which are symbols of Divinity for her.⁴⁰ This matches Emerson's opinion, since he believes that every natural form has

³⁶ GUDRUN GRABHER, Roland Hagenbüchle. *The Emily Dickinson handbook*. 1st pbk. ed. Boston, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004. p.221. ISBN 155849488X.

³⁷ WOLOSKY, Shira, MARTIN, Wendy (ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Emily Dickinson*. 1st publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cambridge companions to literature. p. 135. ISBN 05-210-0118-8.

³⁸ REYNOLDS, David S., MARTIN, Wendy (ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Emily Dickinson*. 1st publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cambridge companions to literature. p. 173. ISBN 05-210-0118-8.

³⁹ ROY, Amitabh. Emily Dickinson as a poet of nature and love, *International journal of English language, literature and humanities* [online]. June 2015. [cit. 2016-01-28]. Available from: <http://ijellh.com/emily-dickinson-poet-nature-love/>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

its spiritual essence. Her poems are full of imagery and metaphors and force the reader to open their mind and look for the meaning and deeper significances.

One of the many poems where the theme of nature is expressed is for instance her poem “Nature is what we see —“:

““Nature” is what we see —
The Hill—the Afternoon —
Squirrel—Eclipse—the Bumble bee —
Nay—Nature is Heaven —
Nature is what we hear —
The Bobolink—the Sea —
Thunder—the Cricket —
Nay—Nature is Harmony —
Nature is what we know —
Yet have no art to say —
So impotent Our Wisdom is
To her Simplicity”⁴¹

Similarly to Emerson’s view, Dickinson here is highlighting the positive effect and beauty of nature. She mentions some of the natural objects, such as “the hill, squirrel, eclipse, bobolink” etc. and defines nature as something what we see, hear and know. However, the lines with the negations “nay” seem to indicate that in reality, we do not understand it enough and cannot describe it well enough. It seems to say that we only see it, but do not realize how heavenly it is, we hear its sounds but do not perceive them enough to realize its harmony. As it is visible from the last two lines, Dickinson agrees with Emerson that the human knowledge does not meet at the slightest bit the vast magnificence of nature. The word “impotent” seems to underline this human inability to achieve it, indicating that humanity still has a lot to learn from it. Even though nature is simple, we cannot fully understand it, which is an idea that corresponds to Emerson. (Another poem which praises simplicity is for instance

⁴¹ DICKINSON, Emily and Thomas Herbert JOHNSON. *Final harvest: Emily Dickinson's poems*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997. p.168. ISBN 0316184152.

“How happy is the little stone”.) Through the words “Yet have no art to say –“, Dickinson appears to demonstrate that people cannot express nature even in an artistic way, which is a paradox since she is doing precisely that; expressing nature through art.⁴² By the statement “Nature is heaven”, Dickinson agrees in this poem with Emerson that nature is indeed divine.

Dickinson also wrote many poems about animals and encounters with them, for instance in “A Bird came down the Walk” or “A narrow Fellow in the Grass”, which are often personified as being the “people” of nature. Emerson also mentions animals several times in his writings, but does not focus on them to such a high degree as Dickinson. He turns to them as to natural teachers who can help us connect with the Divine, while Dickinson examines them in greater detail and looks for relations between the human and the natural world. Also, contrarily to Emerson, in some of her poems she feels fear or hatred towards certain animals, such as the snake or the rat.⁴³ That further proves that, unlike Emerson, she did not always see beauty in nature.

Her opinion on the natural world can be retrieved also from the poem “A Bird came down the Walk”. The speaker talks about a bird which he observed, but when he wanted to get in contact with it, it flew away:

“(…)

Like one in danger, Cautious
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home—

⁴² CORVERS, Janneke. *The Embrace of Human and Nature*. [bachelor thesis]. Utrecht University, 11 July 2012, [cit. 2016-01-30]

⁴³ HELEN VENDLER. *Dickinson: selected poems and commentaries*. 1st Harvard University Press pbk. ed. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012. p. 463. ISBN 0674066383.

(...)”⁴⁴

These lines present us with a scene of the speaker offering the bird a crumb, however the bird turns and flies away. It seems that the bird feels threatened by him as he is sneaking into its natural habitat. The bird’s refusal of taking the crumb from the person shows the impossibility of a mutual relationship between the human world and the natural world.⁴⁵ It looks as if nature was separated from humans, not wanting to interact with them. This idea is opposite to Emerson’s belief since he thinks nature wants to be in every-day contact with people. (A similar approach to nature, which is seen as a different world from the one of mankind, can be found for instance in her poem “What mystery pervades a well!”)

The relationship between nature and humanity can also be seen in her poem “Nature, the gentlest mother”, which celebrates nature’s tenderness,⁴⁶ and seems to show a contradicting opinion about humans in comparison with the previous poem. It is visible in the following stanza from the beginning of the poem:

“Nature, the gentlest mother,
Impatient of no child,
The feeblest or the waywardest, -
Her admonition mild”⁴⁷

Through the poem, Dickinson demonstrates how nature, personified as the “mother”, is peaceful and loves all her creations, which are personified as her “children”. She also suggests that nature does not differentiate among people and, no matter how weak or strong they are, it is gentle to everybody. However, the second stanza seems to show that the human world is separated from the natural world again by the continuing stanza;

⁴⁴ DICKINSON, Emily and Thomas Herbert JOHNSON. *Final harvest: Emily Dickinson's poems*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997. p.69. ISBN 0316184152.

⁴⁵ ROY, Amitabh. Emily Dickinson as a poet of nature and love, *International journal of English language, literature and humanities* [online]. June 2015. [cit. 2016-01-28]. Available from: <http://ijellh.com/emily-dickinson-poet-nature-love/>

⁴⁶ LEITER, Sharon. *Critical companion to Emily Dickinson: a literary reference to her life and work*. New York, NY: Facts on File, c2007. p.206. ISBN 9780816054480.

⁴⁷ DICKINSON, Emily and Thomas Herbert JOHNSON. *Final harvest: Emily Dickinson's poems*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997. p.195. ISBN 0316184152.

“In forest and the hill
By traveller is heard,
Restraining rampant squirrel
Or too impetuous bird.”

The “traveller” is a person walking in nature, portrayed here as an intruder. He is “restraining” the surrounding animals in the wild and somehow disturbing the natural world again. Thus, as nature represents a place of love and virtue, humans, on the other hand, seem not to be worthy of it and not really belong to its world. Emerson believes in the purity of nature as well, but, in comparison, thinks that it is not separate from humanity. He also does not perceive humans as intruders to nature but rather parts of it that can enjoy its beauty and should seek unity with it.

The possibility of unity with nature, which can lead to the connectedness with the Divine, as suggested by Emerson, can be also seen in Dickinson’s poem “Escaping backward to perceive”;

“Escaping backward to perceive
The Sea upon our place —
Escaping forward, to confront
His glittering Embrace —

Retreating up, a Billow’s height
Retreating blinded down
Our undermining feet to meet
Instructs to the Divine.”⁴⁸

In this poem, Dickinson is referring to the constant movement of an individual towards and from the embrace of nature.⁴⁹ According to Diehl, she often writes about

⁴⁸ DICKINSON, Emily and R FRANKLIN. *The poems of Emily Dickinson*. Variorum ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 408. ISBN 067467622X.

⁴⁹ CORVERS, Janneke. *The Embrace of Human and Nature*. [bachelor thesis]. Utrecht University, 11 July 2012, [cit. 2016-02-15]

the struggle between an individual consciousness and the external world,⁵⁰ which might be the case in this poem, as she seems to be escaping and facing it at the same time. Dickinson's interpretation of her idea of merging with the surrounding nature is much vaguer than that of Emerson. His statement "I am nothing; I see all", suggests the state of becoming one with the surrounding area, thus with nature, and through that becoming one with God. In comparison, the speaker in Dickinson's poem is on one hand "escaping" from the Sea's embrace while at the same time she comes to "confront" it. This, together with the last line, seems to indicate that Dickinson is more cautious of the possibility of the divine relationship between humans and nature than Emerson. The "feet" might further point out to the finite human character as opposed to the infinite space of the natural world, which might prevent a person from uniting with nature.⁵¹ Similarly, according to White, her doubts about Emerson's belief that the natural and human souls are one can be found in her poem "Some things that fly there be —", where the human mind and nature are completely separated.⁵²

Contrarily to Emerson, Dickinson is at times doubtful about whether nature and its components are really benevolent or divine. According to Diehl, she often sees nature as capricious or cruel, which prevents her from seeing the beauty of life.⁵³ This approach can be well seen in her following poem:

"The wind drew off
Like hungry dogs
Defeated of a bone —
Through fissures in
Volcanic cloud
The yellow lightning shone —

⁵⁰ DIEHL, Joanne Feit. *Dickinson and the Romantic imagination*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1981. p.34. ISBN 0691064784.

⁵¹ CORVERS, Janneke. *The Embrace of Human and Nature*. [bachelor thesis]. Utrecht University, 11 July 2012, [cit. 2016-02-15]

⁵² WHITE, Fred D., MARTIN, Wendy (ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Emily Dickinson*. 1st publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cambridge companions to literature. p. 103. ISBN 05-210-0118-8.

⁵³ DIEHL, Joanne Feit. *Dickinson and the Romantic imagination*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1981. p.165. ISBN 0691064784.

The trees held up
Their mangled limbs
Like animals in pain —
When Nature falls upon herself
Beware an Austrian.”⁵⁴

The demonstration of the “wind” in this poem shows the speaker’s attitude towards it as something fierce and violent, which is further implied by the expressions as “hungry dogs defeated of a bone” in the next two lines. The same attitude is manifested towards the “lightening”, which is visible by the impact it had on the trees, which were “in pain”. The following phrase “When Nature falls upon herself” implies the potential harshness and cruelty of nature itself. The same thoughts are expressed for instance in her poem “The sky is low, the clouds are mean”, where she maintains that nature is “sometimes caught without her diadem”. This approach does not correspond to Emerson’s idea, as for him, nature is beautiful in every moment and “even the corpse has its own beauty.”⁵⁵

6.2 Society and the individual

6.2.1 Emerson

Emerson was a firm believer of the inner power and abilities of every individual. His opinion on this topic can be well found for instance in his work “Self-Reliance”, in which he states the importance of following one’s own instincts and convictions without following those of others. The very first quote from the work which points out to its core idea is “Ne te quaesiveris extra”, which can be translated as “Do not seek yourself outside yourself”. Through this quote, Emerson points to his belief that every individual has to look deep within in order to be his real self and that it is not possible to achieve it by constantly focusing on external events. Similarly,

⁵⁴ DICKINSON, Emily and R FRANKLIN. *The poems of Emily Dickinson*. Variorum ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 1703. ISBN 067467622X.

⁵⁵ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 42. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

through the statement “The man who renounces himself comes to himself”⁵⁶, Emerson maintains that an important step in finding who a person truly is, is to abandon the identity he thought of as himself, as that were only his false thoughts. The true self is something much vaster, the universal spirit.

According to him, the ultimate truth lies within each person and everyone can learn about the world from himself, as well as learn about himself from the world. He believes that everything is interconnected and that there is only one truth for all people. “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men - that is genius.”⁵⁷ Emerson urges people to speak truly and according to their own immediate convictions at all times, and at the same time understand that there is only one truth to which everybody is connected. He also believes that telling the truth is vital regardless the outcome or the obvious contradiction in a person’s opinion; “Speak what you think now in hard words and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said today.”⁵⁸ The misunderstandings which might arise from such words are not, according to Emerson, of importance, as only like that can we grow and recognize ourselves better. He maintains that “The force of character is cumulative”⁵⁹, which means that all the good deeds a person does and says, as well as his good intentions, will pile up on the person and make him stronger in his core.

Contrarily, he thinks that society as a whole can greatly limit the power and freedom of each individual. “There is a time in every man’s education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide.”⁶⁰ Here, Emerson alludes to the question of society versus an individual. He expresses his belief that by being jealous of somebody, a person is ignoring his true self, his own convictions and powers. In the same way, imitating someone means not honouring one’s own inner abilities. He thinks that every person has its own special place in the

⁵⁶ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 109. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 175

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 183

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 184

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 176

universe and should accept it as it is, without wanting to be someone else. “What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think.”⁶¹ He thinks we should be persistently aiming to be ourselves, no matter what society tells us or what expectations it might have from us.

“No man can come near me but through my act,”⁶² proves Emerson’s belief in every individual’s power in every situation. To “come near me” is another way of saying that he remains intact of all the convictions of society. It implies that no matter the malicious intentions society might have towards him, an individual can always stand for his own beliefs and keep his freedom of expression.

As already mentioned, Emerson sees society as an obstacle in an individual’s development. He considers it as a group of people defining the acceptable norm of living, doing, thinking and believing. When being in society, it is much more difficult for a person to be himself because of the society’s corrupted element. “A man must consider what a blind-man’s-bluff is this game of conformity.” He states that society is in general based on conformity, thus behaving in the same way according to its laws, rules and customs. By the statement “Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind,”⁶³ Emerson expresses his belief in the opposite, saying that people should be independent and creative, praise the new and be original in their own way. Through the inner alignment with the universal spirit, these qualities will come to them much more easily.

Emerson also maintains that withdrawing oneself from society and dwelling in solitude is an important step to recognize one’s own individuality; “To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society.”⁶⁴

Another obstacle in an individual’s development can be his own convictions; “As men’s prayers are a disease of the will, so are their creeds a disease of the

⁶¹ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 180. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

⁶² Ibid. p. 192

⁶³ Ibid. p. 178

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 37

intellect.”⁶⁵ This quote implies that no man should be willing to pray for or rely on something unknown to help him, as by doing that, he is underrating his own will which every individual possesses. At the same time, the “creeds” are people’s own beliefs which they do not break or change, no matter the rightness of the situation. He highlights the importance of staying objective and true to what is, without corrupting the intellect by a set of principles.

He further maintains that no individual should support others financially, such as through charities or simply by giving money to poor people; “Then again, do not tell me [...] of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations.”⁶⁶ According to him, an individual should help himself rather than overly care about the situation of others. The real help comes from the individual himself only.

6.2.2 Dickinson compared

As already mentioned, Emily Dickinson was a very solitary person who went out of her house rarely. She spent her time mostly alone with her family, helping with the daily tasks and writing poems.⁶⁷ Such as Emerson, she was interested in the individual self and the power which lies within each person. However, she often concentrated on more negative topics of death, isolation, misery or suffering (for instance in her poems “I heard a Fly buzz — when I died —“, “The last Night that She lived”, “Because I could not stop for Death”, “Pain — has an Element of Blank”, “I Felt a Funeral, in my Brain”, and many others). Also, the speakers sometimes feel limited, for instance in the poem ““Heaven"— is what I cannot reach!” where the speaker expresses his or her inability to reach paradise.

She keeps being contradictory concerning this topic. According to White, Dickinson’s speakers are free to explore but at the same time limited and mortal. At the same time, he maintains that this doubtful state of her speakers’ finite nature is the

⁶⁵ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 196. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 180

⁶⁷ MARTIN, Wendy (ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Emily Dickinson*. 1st publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cambridge companions to literature. p.1. ISBN 05-210-0118-8.

state in which they feel most secure.⁶⁸ This view contradicts that of Emerson since he has a clear and much more optimistic vision of individuals, with an infinite power within them.

One of her poems which talks about her view of individuality in comparison to society and its character is for instance “I’m Nobody! Who Are You?”

“I’m Nobody! Who are you?
Are you — Nobody — too?
Then there’s a pair of us!
Don’t tell! they’d advertise — you know!

How dreary — to be — Somebody!
How public — like a Frog —
To tell one’s name — the livelong June —
To an admiring Bog!”⁶⁹

Already by the tone of this poem it is clear that the speaker is praising self-acceptance instead of following the crowd, which is also Emerson’s belief. The speaker claims to be “Nobody”, which implies that she does not belong to society, neither is recognized by it. However, by the next two lines, she is expressing her joy when finding out the reader is also at the margin of society as herself. In the following line, she is even forbidding him to announce that fact publically and keep their mutual connection a secret, as otherwise they would become “advertised”, which would result in being like the rest of society. From the phrase “How dreary — to be — Somebody”, it is obvious that she likes this state of being unknown, and that being “Somebody” is actually depressing. These Somebodies are ultimately criticized for being like “frogs” that croak to “an admiring Bog”. Domhnall argues that this need to be recognized is expressed as something demeaning the person which brings

⁶⁸ WHITE, Fred D., MARTIN, Wendy (ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Emily Dickinson*. 1st publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cambridge companions to literature. p. 95. ISBN 05-210-0118-8.

⁶⁹ DICKINSON, Emily and Thomas Herbert JOHNSON. *Final harvest: Emily Dickinson's poems*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997. p.47. ISBN 0316184152.

him to the lower state of animals on whose appreciation he is dependent.⁷⁰ The “bog” represents the crowd of people who watches them and allows them to become public figures. At the same time, she is mocking famous people and the arrogance and undeserved respect within society. Emerson has a very similar approach to society and the individual. Although he does not elaborate to such a high degree on fame in particular, he does agree that individuals should endeavor to be themselves and not fall for the false images after which society forces them to behave. Dickinson’s view merges with the one of Emerson, saying that being special and original in your own way is far better than following the socially acceptable norms or wanting to be recognized by others.

Another poem that reflects the individual can be found in the poem “Growth of Man like Growth of Nature”;

“(…)

Each—its difficult Ideal
Must achieve—Itself
Through the solitary prowess
Of a Silent Life

(…)”⁷¹

In this excerpt, Dickinson maintains that every person should concentrate on himself and strive to follow his own ideals. In the same way, White argues that, in Dickinson’s view, the responsibility for the fate of each individual rests only upon him or her, not any divine element.⁷² These thoughts match those of Emerson since he was a very strong supporter of individuality and believes in self-reliance rather than in relying on God or any other force. At the same time, Dickinson urges that it is

⁷⁰ DOMHNALL, Mitchell, MARTIN, Wendy (ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Emily Dickinson*. 1st publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cambridge companions to literature. p. 198. ISBN 05-210-0118-8.

⁷¹ DICKINSON, Emily and Thomas Herbert JOHNSON. *Final harvest: Emily Dickinson's poems*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997. p. 187. ISBN 0316184152.

⁷² WHITE, Fred D., MARTIN, Wendy (ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Emily Dickinson*. 1st publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cambridge companions to literature. p. 91. ISBN 05-210-0118-8.

important to do this while dwelling in “Silent Life”. Grabher argues that being in solitude is vital for her in order to search for the true self.⁷³ To compare with Emerson, he also believes that being in solitude helps the individual greatly to find his real self as well as to achieve his goals.

One of her poems which is concerned with society and openness towards others is “The Soul selects her own Society”;

“The Soul selects her own Society —
Then — shuts the Door —
To her divine Majority —
Present no more —

(...)”⁷⁴

This first stanza of the poem presents the reader with Dickinson’s belief that the “Soul” is careful about choosing which people it will let in and to whom it will “shut the Door”. There is an emphasis on the act of rejection since it is described in all the last three lines, which implies the large distance she kept from other people. Emerson has a similar view on society, however, he has a more positive attitude as he believes in the mutual interconnection among all beings, which is obvious for instance in his statement “I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all”.

6.3 Religion

6.3.1 Emerson

As already mentioned, Emerson was one of the most prominent figures in shaping the American way of thinking concerning religion. Before developing his own religious thoughts, he had a career as a Unitarian minister. However, inside he did not feel that was the way he wanted to go through and rather than religion, he was aiming towards spirituality. His own inspiration came largely from the spiritual

⁷³ GUDRUN GRABHER, Roland Hagenbüchle. *The Emily Dickinson handbook*. 1st pbk. ed. Boston, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004. p.230. ISBN 155849488X.

⁷⁴ DICKINSON, Emily and Thomas Herbert JOHNSON. *Final harvest: Emily Dickinson's poems*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997. p.55. ISBN 0316184152.

notions of the East, such as Buddhism or Hinduism. Forming these notions in his own way, they served as a huge inspiration to many people as well as spiritual movements throughout the country.

He was against organized religions, especially their traditional doctrines and rules which the believers were expected to follow. According to him, these strict principles and duties greatly limit the individual's conceptualization of the world, since all these belief structures are recognized by them as the absolute truth and thus do not make space for different viewpoints. At the same time, he was against the religious authorities, who were considering themselves to be somewhat higher than the others. Porte maintains that even the Bible did not represent an authority for him.⁷⁵ However, he did agree that all religions have the same essence, their most important element, the same truth underlying all their traditional concepts. At the same time, he was not fond of the religious practices such as going to church in order to pray to God.

According to Porte, Emerson maintains that God is present at every moment in everyone⁷⁶, therefore it is possible for a human being to become God. However, those people have to remain true with good intentions; "If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God."⁷⁷ If a person seeks unity with the Divine, he or she ought to go to nature in order to connect with it. Then, he will "blend with the light of rising and of setting suns, with the flying cloud, the singing bird, and the breath of flowers".⁷⁸ Ultimately, he believes that becoming one with God makes people illimitable.

"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

⁷⁵ PORTE, Joel a Sandra MORRIS (eds.). *The Cambridge companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 1st publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Cambridge companions to literature. p.103. ISBN 0-521-49946-1.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p.103

⁷⁷ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 109. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 118

religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?”⁷⁹ Through these lines, Emerson seems to suggest that the older generations had a more profound understanding of God in their own way, while nowadays people do not seek this deep understanding, even if they might think they already have it. Lothstein argues that, by contrast, people’s lives in the present are only derivative and seen through the eyes of older generations, without being in a close connection with God and nature themselves.⁸⁰ It suggests that the contemporary generation has become more separate from God and nature, and it should rather open up and seek its own original connection with God instead of following what others think.

6.3.2 Dickinson compared

Religious themes occur frequently in Dickinson’s poems as well. She grew up in a Calvinist community, which is a branch of Protestantism. Calvinism believes that all people are sinful in their essence and only those who declare their faith in Jesus Christ will reach heaven.⁸¹ However, Dickinson refused this belief and stayed largely independent from religious ideologies, developing her own independent thoughts about it. According to Reynolds, she ventures beyond the Christian doctrine and expresses both secular and sacred ideas.⁸² Wolosky argues that she never became completely free of the Calvinist context, but she is often rebellious towards it. Similarly to Reynolds, Wolosky also maintains that Dickinson was experiencing a constant pressure inside of her, which can be seen from her poems which express both her devotion to religion and at the same time her conflict with it.⁸³

Dickinson’s view of conventional faith can be seen in her poem “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—“;

⁷⁹ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 35. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

⁸⁰ LOTHSTEIN, Arthur S a Michael BRODRICK. *New morning: Emerson in the twenty-first century*. Albany: State University of New York Press, c2008. p.143. ISBN 079147528X.

⁸¹ PETTINGER, Tejvan. Biography Emily Dickinson. *Biography online* [online]. Oxford, 26 June 2006. [cit. 2016-02-28]. Available from: http://www.biographyonline.net/poets/emily_dickinson.html

⁸² REYNOLDS, David S., MARTIN, Wendy (ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Emily Dickinson*. 1st publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cambridge companions to literature. p.171. ISBN 05-210-0118-8.

⁸³ WOLOSKY, Shira, MARTIN, Wendy (ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Emily Dickinson*. 1st publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cambridge companions to literature. p.132. ISBN 05-210-0118-8.

“Some keep the Sabbath going to Church —
I keep it, staying at Home —
With a Bobolink for a Chorister —
And an Orchard, for a Dome —

(...)

God preaches, a noted Clergyman —
And the sermon is never long,
So instead of getting to Heaven, at least —
I'm going, all along.”⁸⁴

This poem shows her belief that people do not need to go to church and attend sermons in order to worship God. Thus, she refuses the strict religious doctrines which restrict the worshipper's freedom of its practicing. Contrarily, she chooses to do it her own way at home or in nature. At the beginning, she states that while some people go to church on Sundays to praise God, she stays at home surrounded by nature, which is the true place of worship for her. She draws a parallel between the natural objects and the ones from the church, so that the birds become her choir and the orchard forms the worshipping place. The very last lines seem to indicate that she is not trying to “get” to heaven as those who pray for it in the church, but rather she is on a constant journey to the Divine. This approach resembles greatly that of Emerson as he does not believe in organized religion for the very same reason: it is limiting and restricting the individual. Emerson also believes one can get in touch with God through nature without having to follow religious practices.

Another poem which expresses her view on God is for instance “I know that He exists”:

“I know that He exists.
Somewhere — in Silence —

⁸⁴ DICKINSON, Emily and Thomas Herbert JOHNSON. *Final harvest: Emily Dickinson's poems*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997. p.66. ISBN 0316184152.

He has hid his rare life
From our gross eyes.

(...)⁸⁵

This excerpt from the poem shows her firm belief in the existence of God. She specifies him as being somewhere “in Silence” and “hid”, therefore invisible and difficult to reach. The next two lines point to the obvious difference between God and humans; God’s life is “rare” while the human eyes are “gross”, which clearly shows the human inferiority. Emerson, in comparison, believes firmly that God exists as well and is present all the time for humans as soon as they become one with nature.

However, White claims that she can explore heaven but it is never a place of escape.⁸⁶ A poem which denies this possibility of her coming to heaven is for instance ““Heaven” — is what I cannot reach!”

““Heaven” — is what I cannot reach!

The Apple on the Tree—
Provided it do hopeless — hang —
That — “Heaven” is — to Me!

The Color, on the Cruising Cloud —
The interdicted Land —
Behind the Hill — the House behind —
There — Paradise — is found!

Her teasing Purples — Afternoons —
The credulous — decoy —

⁸⁵ DICKINSON, Emily and Thomas Herbert JOHNSON. *Final harvest: Emily Dickinson's poems*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997. p.71. ISBN 0316184152.

⁸⁶ WHITE, Fred D., MARTIN, Wendy (ed.). *The Cambridge companion to Emily Dickinson*. 1st publ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cambridge companions to literature. p.95. ISBN 05-210-0118-8.

Enamored — of the Conjuror —
That spurned us — Yesterday!”⁸⁷

This poem reflects Dickinson’s wish to reach heaven, but she is unable to do so. At the beginning, she describes heaven and expresses her regret that getting there is hopeless for her. In the second stanza, she describes the place where it lies, behind the “Cruising Cloud”, the “Hill” and the “House”. She says that the paradise is found there, in the “interdicted Land”, thus impossible for her to get to. She expresses heaven’s beauty and how it teased her the previous day with its “decoy” of the lovely afternoon. There is a lot of imagery used to induce the beautiful picture of nature. However, heaven keeps being unreachable. This notion contradicts the one of Emerson since he believes that heaven is always accessible to every human being.

6.4 Time, eternity and immortality

6.4.1 Emerson

For Emerson, the topics concerning time represent an important subject to discover as well. According to him, people can become immortal once they understand the truth about life and themselves. He states in “Nature” that: “Whilst we behold unveiled the nature of Justice and Truth, we learn the difference between the absolute and the conditional or relative. We apprehend the absolute. As it were, for the first time, we exist. We become immortal, for we learn that time and space are relations of matter; that with a perception of truth or a virtuous will they have no affinity.”⁸⁸ According to this statement, Emerson regards the universe comprised of two entities: the absolute (the Divine) and the conditional (the material things). If we are able to understand the absolute, we “exist”; this implies that our true essence lies in the absolute. Emerson believes that through this alignment with our true essence, with the universe within us, we become immortal.

⁸⁷ DICKINSON, Emily and R FRANKLIN. *The poems of Emily Dickinson*. Variorum ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 137. ISBN 067467622X.

⁸⁸ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 69. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

He further specifies the topics of matter and spirit; “The foundations of man are not in matter, but in spirit. But the element of spirit is eternity.”⁸⁹ For Emerson, the spirit, which is found within every person, is everlasting. This eternal time that flows into those who focus on the present moment is one with God.

According to him, there are many things which can make a person experience timelessness; not only being unified with nature but also moments “of insight, of fine personal relation, a smile, a glance.”⁹⁰ With these impulses, Emerson believes that the human mind is able to “rend the thin rinds of the visible and finite, and come out into eternity.”⁹¹

However, this divine eternity is only possible for those who focus on the present moment. He believes that there is only one moment; the present moment, in which everything unfolds. “Whenever a mind is simple and receives a divine wisdom, old things pass away,- means, teachers, texts, temples fall; it lives now, and absorbs past and future into the present hour.”⁹² Through this statement from the work “Self-reliance”, Emerson says that when a person “receives a divine wisdom”, thus is connected to his deepest essence, he is no longer concerned with the past nor the future; he is simply present in the moment. He then makes a comparison with human beings and roses in nature; “These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God today.”⁹³ This sentence shows that the flowers, which represent all natural phenomena, do not focus on or submit to time and live simply with the flow of life, without any other interpretation of itself. “There is no time to them. There is simply the rose, it is perfect in every moment of its existence.”⁹⁴

⁸⁹ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 77. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

⁹⁰ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo and Edward Waldo EMERSON. *The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: with a biographical introduction and notes*. Centenary ed. Cambridge [Mass.]: Riverside Press, c1903-1921, p. 1483

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 460

⁹² EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 188. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

⁹³ Ibid. p. 189

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 189

However, this is different for humans: “But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or [...] stands on tiptoe to foresee the future.”⁹⁵ Unlike other natural phenomena, humans do not live in accordance with the spiritual time but focus on the past and future, which prevents them from being in the moment. Regrets, memories, as well as the anticipation of what is going to happen, all obstruct the doors to what is happening now. Thus, he believes that their happiness depends on the extent to which they are able to concentrate on the present moment, which will enable them to experience eternity. “He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time.”⁹⁶

O’Keefe maintains that, for Emerson, the time quality is much more important than its quantity.⁹⁷ “Let the measure of time be spiritual, not mechanical.”⁹⁸ Emerson urges to think of time in the means of what needs to be done rather than thinking according to the clock. This state of complete presence not only enables one to experience eternity, but it also makes people more efficient and effective.

6.4.2 Dickinson compared

Life after death is a frequent theme in Dickinson’s poetry, but references to time and infinity can also be found since these topics are interconnected. However, her opinions on this topic seem to differ and are not as straightforward as those of Emerson. From some of her poems it seems that on one hand, she wishes to reach the state of immortality, while on the other hand she is not certain if it is possible and at the same time she is afraid of it. For instance, she expresses her fear of eternity in “Time feels so vast that were it not”, where the speaker agrees that eternity exists but seems to be afraid of reaching this “vast time”. In the poem “They say that time

⁹⁵ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo, ZIFF, Larzer (ed.). *Selected essays*. HARMONDSWORTH: Penguin Books, 1982, p. 189. ISBN 0-14-039013-8.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 189

⁹⁷ O’KEEFE, Richard R. *Mythic archetypes in Ralph Waldo Emerson: a Blakean reading*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, c1995. p.177. ISBN 0873385187.

⁹⁸ EMERSON, Ralph Waldo and Edward Waldo EMERSON. *The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: with a biographical introduction and notes*. Centenary ed. Cambridge [Mass.]: Riverside Press, c1903-1921, p. 1482

assuages”, she is convinced that time never heals wounds from suffering, which suggests she did not have such a positive vision as Emerson.

Among poems addressing immortality there is for instance “Because I could not stop for Death”, in which the speaker is on a journey with “Death” itself. It shows her belief of the possibility of immortality. A similar approach to this can be seen in her poem “The Soul’s Superior Instants” where the speaker talks about rare moments of eternity that happen in solitude and during which a person feels immortal and his or her soul reaches “too remote a Height”;

“(…)

Eternity’s disclosure
To favorites — a few —
Of the Colossal substance
Of Immortality”⁹⁹

This final stanza of the poem well expresses Dickinson’s belief in the possibility of eternal and immortal experiences. At the same time, it shows obvious similarities of opinions to the transcendental movement. She also demonstrates that this state does not happen on a regular basis but only to a few people. A similar approach can be seen in her poem “There is a solitude of space”;

“There is a solitude of space
A solitude of sea
A solitude of death, but these
Society shall be
Compared with that profounder site
That polar privacy

⁹⁹ DICKINSON, Emily and Thomas Herbert JOHNSON. *Final harvest: Emily Dickinson's poems*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997. p.57. ISBN 0316184152.

A soul admitted to itself —
Finite infinity.”¹⁰⁰

It shows her conviction that there is a “Finite infinity” once a soul is “admitted to itself”. The word “finite” could be a paradox here; becoming infinite from the inside in our seemingly “finite” life. It seems to imply that if people become aware of their real self, they can experience eternity, which matches Emerson’s opinion.

Concerning the concept of time, perhaps one of the most straightforward poems showing her opinion on this topic is “Forever — is composed of Nows”;

“Forever — is composed of Nows —
’Tis not a different time —
Except for Infiniteness —
And Latitude of Home —

From this — experienced Here —
Remove the Dates — to These —
Let Months dissolve in further Months —
And Years — exhale in Years —

(...)”¹⁰¹

Already from the first two lines it is obvious that Dickinson has the same vision of the present moment as Emerson does. Stating that “forever” is always “now”, thus always the present moment, implies that the future and the past are only abstract concepts, which again exist only in the human mind. The second stanza further explains that the present moment is actually eternal, as “months dissolve in months” and “years exhale in years”. Therefore, the idea of this spiritual time is known and acknowledged by both Dickinson and Emerson.

¹⁰⁰ DICKINSON, Emily and Thomas Herbert JOHNSON. *Final harvest: Emily Dickinson's poems*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997. p. 312. ISBN 0316184152.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p. 158

7 CONCLUSION

The comparison of the opinions of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Emily Dickinson shows many conspicuous resemblances; however, their views vary in some aspects as well. Firstly, though, it is important to notice the obvious difference of their writing methods, as Emerson wrote mostly essays while Dickinson poems, from which it is more difficult to understand the intended message. Moreover, the ideas expressed through poetry do not necessarily have to match the author's viewpoint. Both of them are not always persistent in what they say, which could be attributed to the fact that they both had insights into the universal realm and went with the changing flow of nature. In the case of Dickinson, however, her uncertainty and contradictory opinions in her poems are much more visible.

While Emerson writes his ideas mostly in long sentences, Dickinson expresses herself in very short phrasing and likes to play with words and invoke imagery. Emerson writes for the most part about his experience and the universal connectedness of everything, whereas Dickinson focuses more on her inner life and expresses more vivid descriptions in greater detail.

Both Emerson and Dickinson are fascinated by the natural world and both perceive Divinity in it. They both had insights into the state of connectedness with God, but while some speakers of Dickinson are portrayed in the state of a continuous search for this connection or even unable to reach it, Emerson believed and lived by his own ideals fully, which enabled him to teach and promote them more easily to others. For both authors, nature represents a place of joy and beauty. However, Dickinson occasionally expresses doubts about the positive element in nature, describing its savage character. On the other hand, Emerson believes that nature is beautiful in every moment and the bad perception of it is created only because of the reflected human mental state. For both of them, nature also represents a wise teacher for all humanity, full of secrets that no mind can ever understand. While Emerson firmly perceives human beings as a part of the natural world, Dickinson sometimes views them as intruders who do not really belong into it.

Both authors view society as a limiting factor in an individual person's development. At the same time, they both promote self-reliance, self-acceptance and personal uniqueness, rejecting authorities, common rules and norms. While Emerson believes in the infinite power within every person in every moment, Dickinson is more skeptical about it, often picturing people as doubtful and with limited powers. Both authors favour contemplation about finding oneself in silence, preferably in nature. Emerson is in general more open towards other people and life, while Dickinson is much more reserved and private, careful about the chosen circle of people she lets in her life.

In the same way, they are both against organized religions and the doctrines their believers are expected to follow. They both stay independent from religious ideologies and believe that dwelling in nature is sufficient, and even much more effective than going to churches, in order to get in touch with God. Furthermore, Emerson sees the merging with God simply by becoming one with the surrounding area. For Dickinson, this state is more difficult, sometimes even impossible to achieve.

Both Emerson and Dickinson believe that the past and the future are only thought-up concepts of the human mind and that the present moment is all there ever is. They both had breakthroughs into eternity and believed that it can be achieved by becoming fully aware of the present moment, and in this way become aware of the real self.

Even though Emerson sees nature and humanity more optimistically than Dickinson, most of their opinions bear a striking resemblance to each other. It is not certain whether they ever actually met, but that did not prevent Dickinson from reading his essays and let them influence and shape her own thoughts. Thus, while Emerson highlights the harmonious unity with the natural world, Dickinson is more cautious about it because of her volatile nature.

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