To live deliberately or to conquer an island of despair:

a comparative analysis of the depictions of man’s relationship with nature in *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe* as grounded in the works’ protagonists

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Abstract

This essay researches how the literary personae H. D. Thoreau and Robinson Crusoe develop during and by their respective sojourns in nature as evinced in *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Thoreau and Crusoe come to spend time in nature for different reasons but since they both face similar challenges the two narratives are comparable.

The objective is to analyse how the protagonists view nature and what impact their closeness to nature has in terms of their expressed thoughts, actions and emotional life. The approach consists of a comparative and contrastive close reading of the narratives so as to disclose the most important moments, events and thoughts forwarded in the respective texts for later analysis. What is stated or implied in the narratives are thus interpreted as the genuine views and reactions of the protagonists and hence analysed as such. Moreover the close reading is informed by both psychoanalytical literary theory and ecocritical theory.

The approach is thematic and concentrates on several themes or challenges both Thoreau and Crusoe encounter during their habitation in nature. This division of the narratives makes it easier to isolate the moments and events that are the most relevant to the protagonists as regards their views of nature and their development while living in it.

During his stay at Walden Pond Thoreau does not just preoccupy himself with the practical challenges a life in nature poses but also to a large degree the philosophical questions those challenges raise in him. Thoreau comes to discover an interconnectedness between man and nature which depends on the willingness to simplify life, rid oneself of the act of consumerism and really devote oneself to attending to one’s surroundings. Crusoe, for his part, is terrified by the unknown environment and possible threats it poses to him but decides to survive and does so by making sure his basic needs of shelter and food as well as his dream of becoming a wealthy colonial master are met.

The aims of this study are to examine how the two protagonists view nature and how and in what ways their respective stays in nature change them. They both clearly develop throughout the narratives and return to civilization with greater inner abilities and strengths than before. Thoreau, for instance, keeps and deepens his feeling of interconnectedness with nature during his stay at Walden Pond while Crusoe’s perceived dislike of nature is mitigated when he understands how to make it useful to his cause. The time they spend in nature allows the protagonists to think about, and perhaps revise their attitudes towards it and find ways to incorporate nature, and what they have learned while living in it in their lives and mindsets.
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1. Introduction

Humankind created a world of its own as soon as the cavemen of pre-history began living together in groups or small communities. Since then the connection between man and nature has altered innumerable times probably without the majority of people really thinking about the relationship between the two. Historically nature in literature has often been viewed as a God given gift for man to conquer, a place to extract resources from or merely as background scenery to the plot. However, not everybody has neglected the values of nature in literature and given that literary texts are available for almost anybody to read they constitute a good source for analysing what impact the relationship between man and his environment has on the way we choose to live our lives. In this essay I will thus analyse two books which both have a protagonist who lives in nature for a while, one of his own volition and one involuntarily. In *Walden* Henry David Thoreau writes about his two year stay at Walden Pond and in *Robinson Crusoe* Daniel Defoe brings the reader the story of a man who is shipwrecked on a desert island for 28 years. The books are interesting to this essay since they both deal with man’s relationship to and dependency on nature. The disparities ought to make the comparison more interesting given that the protagonists interact with nature under seemingly dissimilar conditions and thus their relationships to and attitudes towards nature ought to differ greatly.

The main research context deals with how the two protagonists view nature and also how they change (or not) due to their habitation in nature. A life close to nature, especially in combination with some degree of solitude, provides whoever lives that way a good opportunity to go deeper into him-, or herself in order to learn who they really are and what they want from life. The fundamental presupposition for this essay is consequently that both the protagonists develop mentally, psychologically and emotionally during their respective sojourns in nature. What that development entails in the protagonist’s lives is the main focus in the analysis and I have decided to concentrate on the following two questions:

1. How do the protagonists in *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe* view nature? Is nature present to serve man or the other way around and should man conquer his environment or live in harmony with it?
2. Do the protagonists change in any way during their habitation in nature and if they do what impact does that transformation have on them in terms of their expressed thoughts, actions and emotional life?
These questions both deal with the impact man has on nature and vice versa. I think it is very important to approach these issues from as many different angles as possible in trying to find out more about such a wide concept as views of the relationship between man and nature. The link does not just consist of the concrete meeting of the two but rather a complex mix of a physical, psychological and emotional character. Everybody is connected to his or her environment and it is therefore important to look into all of those areas.

At the same time that this holistic approach is important it is essential to limit the subject so as to keep focus. I will therefore concentrate the analysis mainly on some features that are found in both *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe*. By comparing the protagonist’s actions, articulated thoughts and expressions as well as their expressed feelings on the matters they both have to deal with during their stays in nature I will be able to draw some conclusions concerning their respective views of nature and culture. Their experiences and especially how they reason when they are really close to nature ought to reveal how they regard nature and their relationship to it. As concerns the question of whether the protagonists change, I will also look at the overall depiction of the Thoreau persona and Robinson Crusoe.

1.1 Overview of the study
Following the introduction the key concepts of nature and culture, as well as two psychoanalytical terms, are explained as to account for what definitions are used in the text. In the short presentation of the previous research that follows, some of the most important secondary material important to this analysis of *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe* are introduced. Following the summary of the previous research is a presentation of the theories and method, which makes out the base of the essay. Psychoanalytic literary theory is introduced as well as Freudian based analysis of the characters. Finally the methods of close reading and comparative analysis are outlined.

After the introduction the authors are briefly presented to the reader. Their respective backgrounds and their similarities and dissimilarities are important when it comes to understanding their respective works. The protagonists are briefly introduced in the following section. By bringing up the authors in a section of their own the analysis can be entirely devoted to the protagonists of *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe* and thus make sure that the historical authors and literary personae are not being mixed up.

Subsequently, I deal exclusively with the protagonists in the analysis, so when Thoreau is mentioned it is the Thoreau persona who is intended. The same goes of course for the fictional Robinson Crusoe character. Otherwise, the analysis is divided into short sections which each
address a particular question or theme found in both books. This categorisation allows the analysis to concentrate on specific matters and thus make the comparison between the two protagonists easier to follow. Following the analysis comes the conclusion where I return to the research questions and try to answer them in line with what the analysis has shown.

1.2 Definitions
Terms such as culture and nature can be interpreted in many different ways. Eco-critic Scott Slovic once wrote that eco-criticism could entail either looking at any literary text from an ecological perspective or using any literary theory on books concerned with nature (Slovic 1). Since this essay will deal with Walden and Robinson Crusoe from the viewpoint of psychoanalytical literary theory I will use definitions that may differ from the ordinary eco-critical ones. The definitions of nature and culture that henceforth will be used in this essay are described briefly below. The same goes for the psychological terms the unconscious and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs which are important for the understanding of my analysis.

Culture: Culture is a difficult notion to define. Today the concept of culture is often interpreted in such a way as to put the expressed and unspoken rules of society as well as all other human expressions in a socio-historical context without having to apply any given school of analysis to it (Hawthorn 63). In this essay the meaning of culture will be somewhat narrowed down to describing the inherited thinking and sets of rules present in any and all societies of human beings (Williams 111). Culture is then considered to be the important glue that allows for civilizations to hold together while making easier the interaction between subjects, whether they be human or not.

Nature: Nature is another difficult word to pinpoint a specific meaning for. Within the field of eco-criticism the concept of nature includes humans as well as their environment (Barry 252). Eco-critic Alison Byerly views nature as the cyclical movement of a living ecosystem and opposes it to the more linear development of culture (Byerly 54). Tiiu Speek connects the two concepts as she writes that nature and culture are connected through geology, anthropology, geography, economy, biology and other areas (Speek 167). Nature can then be described as the environment in which we dwell. Mountains, animals and flowers as well as humans are parts of nature, whereas the rules set up by man constitute culture.
Maslow’s Hierachy of Needs:

This is one of the most influential theories on the workings of human motivation (Huitt). It is often pictured as a staircase where all the needs of one step need to be met before a person can reach the next level and thus develop in a healthy way, the way most people do. The first step, to exemplify, entails basic physiological needs such as food, whereas the last step deals with the abstract notion of self-transcendence (Huitt).

The Unconscious

According to Freud the human mind is divided into a conscious and an unconscious set of thoughts, ideas and reactions. The unconscious is where all unknown wishes and needs are stored. The thought, feelings and emotions stored in the unconscious affect us more than we think and play a significant role in our conscious behaviour and thoughts (allpsych.com/dictionary/u.html).

1.3 Previous research

The primary sources of this essay are Walden by Henry David Thoreau (1989) and Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe (2003). Secondary materials that deal with both books have been scarce. There are quite a lot of critical writings on them individually, however, the most useful of which are presented below.

In “Thoreau and Crusoe: The Construction of an American Myth and Style” M. Claire Kolbenschlag discusses the importance and role of money, work and solitude in Walden as well as Robinson Crusoe. She writes that the economic sides of colonisation are quite evident in the latter, which is shown throughout the whole novel. Robinson Crusoe regards himself as the emperor of the island and structures his environment in the wilderness to render him protection and above all control (Kolbenschlag 233). This makes him the owner so to speak of all that he encounters. Even when he rescues Friday from the cannibals he has to shape him in order to fit him into his system rather that appreciating this companion as his equal (Kolbenschlag 240).

The wild is regarded as dangerous by Crusoe which, according to the article by Kolbenschlag, stands in sharp contrast with the view forwarded by Thoreau in Walden: “Thoreau escapes to the woods, not from them.”(Kolbenschlag 241). Instead of fortifying himself, the protagonist in Walden seeks to understand and come as close to nature as he possibly can. Also in contrast to Crusoe Thoreau regards labour as something one should do
in moderation. Whilst Crusoe does his best to increase the quantity of growing grain and holding goats, Thoreau is happy to remark that his bean field was smaller the second year than the first.

Lawrence Buell, too, compares Thoreau and Defoe briefly in his book *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*. It is primarily the homesteading and bourgeois fear of what will happen if one has to manage without society’s structures and support that are focused on in the two narratives (Buell 149). Buell writes that one of the similarities in *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe* is that seemingly insignificant events turn out to be quite big and important to the protagonists (Buell 151). Otherwise Buell states that the two books differ considerably: Robinson Crusoe lives close to nature involuntary whereas Thoreau actively chooses his location in the woods. Crusoe emphasizes work when Thoreau prefers leisure and he also strongly dislikes solitude, which is sought out by Thoreau. In addition, Crusoe considers himself master of his island and everything and everybody inhabiting it. Thoreau on the other hand tries to live as close to what he considers the wild as he knows how, but at the same time appreciates the technical progresses of his day (Buell 149). The most important difference between *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe*, according to Buell, is the important role nature plays in Thoreau’s work (Buell 152f).

Kolbenschlag’s article and Buell’s short treatment are two of very few that deal with the Thoreau persona and Robinson Crusoe in relation to each other. Texts about the individual works and protagonists are numerous, however, and I have chosen a few of them that will be of help in answering the research questions in this essay. In “Thoreau’s Environmental Ethics in *Walden*” Philip Cafaro examines how Thoreau’s values and ethics towards the binary of nature versus civilization are evident in *Walden*. According to Cafaro Thoreau regards nature with the love of a naturalist and he sees a possibility to come close to the essentials of life so strong that he urgently requests the reader to go out and live according to his or her ethics (Cafaro 57). Cafaro also emphasizes Thoreau’s search for a higher level of understanding and perception of nature. Knowledge of other things (nature) is crucial in order to understand oneself and this closeness to nature brings also with it a more direct and clear way of reasoning (Cafaro 37). In short Thoreau shows the reader how to live happily together with nature rather than in opposition to it (Cafaro 17).

Cafaro gives the reader several examples of how Thoreau’s environmental ethics are palpable in *Walden*. The impact on the protagonist’s life posed by economy and labour together with the author’s views on food are dealt with. Cafaro writes that Thoreau did not advocate that
everybody should avoid putting monetary value on nature since that has never been possible (Cafaro 45). On the subject of labour he claims that Thoreau is a stern believer that most people, himself included, can and should learn to enjoy the process of working rather than the money labour provides. Taking pleasure in the work itself is then the correct way to reach happiness and contentment (Cafaro 31). Cafaro also observes Thoreau’s thoughts on the subject of nutrition and comes to the conclusion that Thoreau is promoting vegetarianism and the restraint of our appetites in a way that suggests that man should live ascetically as regards food (Cafaro 26).

In his article “Thoreau Among His Heroes” Ryan Patrick Hanley writes about Thoreau’s thoughts regarding man’s relationship to nature. Hanley emphasizes what he perceives as Thoreau’s belief that the wild and savage are part of any man, however civilized he regards himself to be. He states that Thoreau wished that we as humans should not strive to restrain those sides but rather welcome them (Hanley 63). According to Hanley Thoreau goes as far as to describe his fellow Concordians as blind to this fact since they are not able to see the heroic self-knowledge of the forest dwellers. The statement implies that Thoreau’s opinion is that the Concordians are so rooted in their society that they cannot appreciate the mental and physical freedom and self-knowledge that can follow upon living close to nature. Hanley is careful, however, to inform the reader that he does not think Thoreau wants all men to live as brute beasts but rather see to it that both sides, the civilized as well as the savage, get their due (Hanley 63).

Another critical reading of Walden is “Resolution at Walden” written by Sherman Paul and found in the Norton Critical Edition of Walden. This text, like Hanley’s, deals with Thoreau’s conceptions of nature and how he views the connections between society and nature in Walden. Paul writes that Thoreau meant for man to really make an effort to live in harmony with nature in order not to be an observer of life but rather a participant (Paul 352). Paul continues to describe how Thoreau used nature as a symbol for the spiritual quest he was on.

Turning to Defoe, the article “Expanding Empires, Expanding Selves: Colonialism, the Novel, and Robinson Crusoe” by Brett C. McInelly deals mainly with the way Robinson Crusoe tries to colonize the island and how the protagonist differentiates between the “savage” of the island and the “civilized” culture of England (McInelly 12). McInelly describes how Crusoe applies colonial politics to his new empire. The shipwrecked man learns, little by little, to view himself as the king and ruler over the island instead of despairing over his poor luck.
Another important point forwarded by McInelly concerns the religious and spiritual awakening Crusoe goes through while residing on the island. He writes that this too is a sign of the English colonialism of the time. Crusoe’s own expressed self-importance and the authority he has over the island and his companion Friday are examples of colonial ideals in action. According to the protagonist the English way is the only one worth while.

In his book *Defoe & Spiritual Autobiography* George A. Starr discusses the spiritual and religious journey the protagonist undertakes in *Robinson Crusoe*. Starr is careful to show how the wilderness on the island, as well as the workings of the weather, at times are used metaphorically as the opposite of the calmness gained from a strong religious faith. Also, Crusoe’s illness is interpreted by Starr as a sign of his need for religion.

Labour and its necessity are also dealt with by Starr. According to Starr hard labour should be seen as a means for Crusoe to reach the “correct” religious faith. In *Robinson Crusoe*, he concludes, religion is the one thing that can assure that the protagonist will reach providence (Starr 190). To exemplify this Starr mentions the part of the novel where Crusoe empties a sack of grain gone bad on the ground. Though Crusoe did not expect it, a few seeds grow and the protagonist has to work very hard for years on end in order to assure himself of a useful quantity to harvest.

1.4 Theory

Since both *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe* deal with the behaviour as well as the internal life of their protagonists, I will, to some extent, use psychoanalytical literary theory in exploring the questions that are at focus in this essay. In accordance with this theory any narrative should be regarded as the truth, the true account of what is happening, regardless of historical facts, since it presents the world of the characters not the authors. It is the narratives of both *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe* that are of interest in this essay, not their possible similarities with the authors’ lives and thoughts, and psychoanalytical literary theory is thus well suited.

The theoretical grounds in this essay will consist of a close reading that will be informed by psychoanalytical literary criticism. This theory still mainly uses Freudian categorisations and ways of describing the underlying mechanisms and symptoms provided by the unconscious and I will therefor begin by briefly explaining what concepts of Freud’s are important to know for the understanding of this essay.

The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, once stated that human culture, civilization, is dependant on two things: “the control of natural forces and […] the restriction of our instincts” (Ruth Williams 111). Today most modern psychoanalytic literary critics combine
these thoughts with the ones of Lacan and his likes. It is then not only the text nor the inner life of the protagonists or the author that are of importance but a combination of the two as well as the reactions of the reader. In classical psychoanalysis you need a person to analyse and a therapist who has the competence to deal with whatever comes up. Within the field of psychoanalytical literary criticism the modus operandi is somewhat different in that the critic has to use his or her understanding of any given subject in interpreting a text and come to conclusions about the underlying meaning without the help of a dialogue with the subject. Freud’s thoughts on the unconscious are especially useful in the interpretation of texts. Freud came to the conclusion that unconscious thoughts, feelings and emotions greatly affect the conscious actions of a person, or character, if we are talking about a narrative. The task for the literary critic is then to look closely at the narrative to try to find the key elements, either conscious or unconscious to the protagonist, which in turn can tell him or her a lot about the motivations of the character. The usual way of conveying such aspects is by looking for signs of repression (Green & LeBihan 147).

Repression is one of Freud’s defence mechanisms and the term alludes to an action (feeling, memory or emotion) that is moved from the conscious to the unconscious to protect the person (allpsych.com/dictionary/r.html). It is important to the psychoanalytical literary critic to interpret the elements of repression in a narrative since that is one of the most common, and in many ways telling mechanisms (Green & LeBihan 147).

Although it is important to know about Freud the theory behind this essay primarily builds on more modern psychoanalytical ideas, mainly that of Lacan. The importance of language and especially what it might disclose concerning cultural aspects of a text (i.e. accepted views on a specific question created by society) are important concepts in a Lacanian reading and they are thus interesting to this essay.

Jacques Lacan once stated that l’inconscience est structuré comme un lange, i.e. the unconscious is structured like a language (Con Davis 848). The quote implies that a narrative, like a person’s psyche, operates in the same manner as a language. It is in other words created, changeable and possible to interpret in different ways depending on who, why, where and how the interpretation is done. This argument build up to a circular discussion of the unconscious structure of language, which is structured like a language and so on (Con Davis 853). Language is in other words a means for us to understand and internalise our surroundings and in literature it is the way for the author to let the protagonist/s in his or her narrative convey messages to the reader, both conscious and unconscious ones.
Also according to Lacan words carry different meaning depending on what they signify and also due to the “cultural luggage” they carry (Green & LeBihan 171). To exemplify this one can look at the binary opposites of man and nature. In eighteen century literature, for instance, man does not just signify a human being but also order and harmony, whereas nature stands for disharmony, not just trees and flowers (Rozelle 106). The division depended on the idea in society that man was the infallible ruler of all things and nature therefore had to signify the opposite. The meaning words carry are conveyed to the reader, who unconsciously brings his or her own “luggage” (the concepts, attributes and abilities that the reader personally connects to a certain word or notion) and thus interprets the text as well as the underlying meaning whilst reading. The words in a text consequently tells the reader more than just what happens in the narrative and oftentimes more or at least other things than the author had in mind when writing. Language becomes metaphorical and discloses hidden agendas and views to the attentive reader.

According to Lacan it is equally important to analyse what is actually said in a text as it is to look at what is omitted (Ruth Williams 85). The absent text may or may not be of utmost importance to the meaning of the narrative and should consequently be interpreted. That is to say, in some instances it is important not only to look at what is actually said about an event or opinion in the text but also be attentive to instances when little or nothing is forwarded on a subject. The silence may sometimes tell the reader just as much or even more of the protagonist’s views than an expressed opinion would.

1.5 Method
The main method is a close reading of the two primary works, since: “[b]oth life and literature are made up by similitudes, so that things seen and things read equally invite interpretation” (Starr 22). I will compare what I find and analyse the result with the aid of the secondary sources, the most important of which have already been introduced. The approach is thematic in order to disclose the views of nature and its relationship to civilization forwarded by Thoreau and Robinson Crusoe. For this reason some common themes in the two books have been isolated. Hence the protagonists’ views of solitude, housing, food, economy, labour and religion will be brought up and compared. How the protagonists handle their respective sojourns in nature will constitute a good aid in disclosing their motivations and emotions toward nature, since the way they express themselves as regards civilized life can tell us a lot about how each character feels about his surroundings. Actions might not speak louder than words, but oftentimes these are more truthful, since we do not always think before we act.
The themes in the analysis, as mentioned above, also have another purpose in that they facilitate the comparison of the thoughts towards nature forwarded by the protagonists in Walden and Robinson Crusoe. The reason for the particular selection of themes presented above is that the notions are all mentioned and dealt with in both Walden and Robinson Crusoe.

2.1 The authors: Thoreau and Defoe

In order to be able to devote the analysis of this essay entirely to the Thoreau persona and Robinson Crusoe this short background section will give a very brief account of the lives of the authors, Henry David Thoreau and Daniel Defoe. It might prove helpful to the reader to know a little about the authors’ respective connection to nature and the similarities in their upbringing.

The author Thoreau lived in North America in a time that is characterized by big changes in the social, political and economical arenas. The abolitionist movement was at its heights late in his life, the Civil War lay in the near future and industrialization was changing the country rapidly and irrevocably (McKay et al. 892ff). During these days marked by technical development Thoreau went to live in the woods outside his hometown of Concord, Massachusetts, in order to write his book A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers. According to the eco-critic Ann Woodlief he chose to go outside town in order to find the freedom to write, to keep the economy of living to a minimum and to be able to observe and live in harmony with nature (Woodlief 4). When he built his little hut at Walden Pond the author already believed in the idea that man could get not only material use out of nature but also find spiritual values through careful observations of it. After all, he had become acquainted with the transcendental way of thinking several years earlier and had since fully embraced the idea of “plain living and high thinking” (Bengtsson 78). It seems quite simply as if the author Thoreau, with his assumed preconception that experiencing nature could help answer many of the important questions in life, went to Walden Pond in order to try to find some of those answers. One could say that Thoreau was in search of a deeper meaning in life. When looking through Walden it is quite evident to the reader that Thoreau was influenced by the Bhagavad-Gita and other eastern philosophical texts and philosophies which often emphasize the close relationship between man and his surroundings, a view that is shared by Lebeaux (Lebeaux 91f). He also stood, together with his friend Emerson, as one of the founding fathers of American Transcendentalism, whose credo is to view one’s connection
with nature as indispensable when it comes to the growth and health of the intellect, the aesthetic mindset and morality (Woodlief 1).

What ethics and values Defoe wanted his novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, to impose on the reader are not quite clear. Whether he was extreme in his writing or not, it is rather obvious that Crusoe is the emblematic and typical hero figure of his day, in that he meets many of the expectations of a colonial man of the Age of Enlightenment. By this I mean that he is forwarded as a strong and capable man who is no stranger to travel around the world and who manages to cope with whatever predicament he finds himself in (McKay et al. 572).

Defoe was a satirical dissident and political writer who seems to have liked to shock people as much as he enjoyed writing (Watt 166). Ian Watt concludes in his book that it was Defoe’s “restlessness” that made him somewhat intense at times though he apparently liked to interact and reason with other people. Like Defoe Thoreau was unwilling to blindly comply with what society was expecting of their members. Whereas Defoe wrote and distributed numerous political pamphlets, Thoreau refused to pay taxes and as a result of his famous one night stay in prison wrote the essay: “Resistance to Civil Government” which has since influenced several great minds (Rossi 246). However, Defoe had in opposition to Thoreau no inclination to re-create his own life in the destiny of his protagonist’s. He simply took a sensational real life story of the day and transformed it into an adventure saga filled with moral messages to the audience.

2.2 The textual personae: Thoreau and Robinson Crusoe

The Thoreau the reader encounters when studying *Walden* is rather similar to the author. He too lives in Concord, he has the same interests and scholarly learning and the same deep interest in nature. The similarities are no wonder since the author himself lived in a hut by Walden Pond for a while. There are a few subtle differences though. The literary person Thoreau does, for instance, not return to Concord more than a handful of times and he does not entertain friends as much as the author probably did.

Robinson Crusoe, on the other hand, is a fully fictional character although he is build upon the shipwrecked Alexander Selkirk. Crusoe impersonates the typical English colonial landowner of his day to which money; land and wealth are of greater importance than a connection to the environment. He is a hardworking settler who finds himself forced to invent a way of surviving on a desolate island without any training or wish to do so.
3. *Walden*, *Robinson Crusoe* and nature

The question of whether nature is to be viewed as something here to serve man or the other way around is interesting when examining two such different books as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Walden*. The protagonists clearly have different outlooks on the purpose of nature and the books’ representations of nature vary greatly. For a long time they both live very close to nature and bring with them not only their own preconceptions of nature but also the views forwarded by the societies in which they otherwise dwell. Owing to this it is important to emphasize that the definition of nature as an opposite to society, which is the explanation primarily used in this essay, might not always be the way the protagonists view it. In order to try to pinpoint what the Thoreau persona and Robinson Crusoe think of the function of nature it is important to begin by stating why they went to live in nature and what their presumptions of that habitation might have been. To do so the two protagonists’ individual thoughts about nature’s purpose, their views on solitude, housing, food and the intertwined concepts of economy, labour and religion will also be analysed.

3.1 The reason for living in nature

In one of the most frequently quoted paragraphs in *Walden* the Thoreau persona gives the following explanation as to why he left the town of Concord:

> 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 wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life. (Thoreau 90f)

Thoreau states that his primary goal in living alone in the woods is to come closer not only to nature but also to himself. Through isolation he is presenting himself with the opportunity to think his way through the options life has presented him with and to choose which way he wants to go. Deliberation is the keyword (Cafaro 2000, 25) and the opportunity to reflect on and consider life and its close connection to nature is probably a very important cause when it comes to Thoreau’s decision to leave the village of Concord for a while. Earlier in the book he also states that he went to Walden Pond to lower his living expenses but at the same time also to be able to go about his private business without too many distractions (Thoreau 19f). Without the diversions of a bourgeois environment and of having to uphold an ordinary job he
wishes to be able to discover the fundamental nature of his life. In other words, he goes to the
woods in search of a pure and sincere connection to nature, which he feels would allow him to
rid himself of some of the façade society forces him and everybody else living in it, to
conform to (Paul 351). He needs a place where he can explore his surrounding and inner
nature in peace, trying to live life as a participant rather than as an observer. So as
Kolbenschlaug writes he is escaping to the woods rather than from society (Kolbenschlaug
241) and the sojourn at Walden Pond can be interpreted as a simple way to come close to
nature as well as a spiritual quest for the protagonist. The stay presents Thoreau with the
opportunity to better himself by his own efforts (Cafaro 2000, 25) and his awareness and
curiosity as to where it may lead him makes him live in the woods.

Yet Thoreau is not leaving all society behind, he entertains guests and converses with
those he encounters throughout his stay at Walden. What he does is to simplify his existence
by removing what he regards as distractions so as to be able to live life to its full extent. His
search for a higher level of being and thinking has much in common with the eastern
philosophy that is referred to throughout the book as well as the rather ascetic transcendental
ideals forwarded by such texts. In living in his hut at Walden Pond Thoreau seizes an
opportunity to find his own connection to nature:

I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the
directions of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined,
he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours (Thoreau 323).

Whereas the Thoreau persona goes to live in the woods outside Concord by choice, the
situation for Robinson Crusoe is quite the opposite. Having suffered a shipwreck the
protagonist finds himself stranded on a wild and desolate island which he accordingly chooses
to call “The Island of Despair” (Defoe 57). Following his initial panic when he realizes that
he is all alone Crusoe immediately collects what he can from the foundered ship and then
starts to survey the island to locate fresh water, food and a place to sleep safely (Defoe 39ff).
In doing so he gains some level of control over his surroundings right away and is able to start
making the best of his situation. He forwards the image of the strong and self-sufficient
English hero who is stranded but somehow manages not only to survive for twenty-eight
years but also creates a civilized environment for himself (Watt 170f).

Crusoe has obviously no ulterior motives in coming to the island but once he finds himself
there he chooses to continue to live rather than just give in and perish, thus bringing up the
question of one’s own choice in creating one’s life instead of blaming destiny, which is also part of Thoreau’s motivation. In looking at the mere reasons for their stays in nature there is a clear division between the protagonists of Walden and Robinson Crusoe. Thoreau willingly goes to Walden Pond to find a stronger connection to non-human nature, whereas the profit-seeking Crusoe is forced to survive in the wild against his will, learning many lessons along the way. Thoreau seeks amongst all self-discovery while Crusoe aims at self-improvement (Kolbenschlag 237). They are nevertheless connected in their will to select their own options and attitudes towards life, thus making the protagonists of Walden and Robinson Crusoe somewhat equal in their mindset, although their causes and basic conditions differ greatly.

3.2 The importance of solitude
Seclusion and the feeling of loneliness, or freedom, that follow are important aspects in both Walden and Robinson Crusoe. The idea that solitude is the pre-eminant way of becoming one with nature has long been fixed in our psychological culture (O’Mara 419). Consequently both Thoreau and Crusoe forward ideas and thoughts concerning solitude and how they relate to it.

In Walden there is a whole chapter devoted to solitude. Thoreau is careful to tell the reader that although he lived out in the woods alone he was not lonely: “I have a great deal of company in my house; especially in the morning, when nobody calls” (Thoreau 137). Through this quote Thoreau lets us know that solitude is an essential part of his stay at Walden Pond. Although nobody comes to visit him in the mornings he does not feel alone but rather more a part of his surroundings then he would whilst entertaining. To take this a step further solitude does not just connect the protagonist to nature but also sharpens his senses and feelings towards nature:

I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, […] as made the fancied advantages of human neighbourhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again. (Thoreau 132)
By seeking solitude Thoreau is thus able to experience nature in much greater detail than before. He becomes better equipped to take notice of the essential matters nature may teach humanity and reaches a state of elevated thought and heightened senses. Thoreau connects this attentiveness to his presence in nature: “Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought” (Thoreau 321). Since closeness to nature is one of the goals of his stay in the woods, Thoreau seems to regard solitude as a necessary means by which he may reach a higher form of intimacy with nature. He does not just want to better himself but also to experience nature in a very concrete way (Horstmann 258). Through his vivid and detailed descriptions of what he encounters on his walks in the woods the reader understands that Thoreau is quite interested in what is happening in his new environment. In order to come close enough to entities like ants and flowers, to really ponder over them and their place in the ecosystem, Thoreau needs to be alone. With nobody around to disturb him, other than when he chooses, he is presenting himself with the opportunity to really see and imbibe the nature in which he dwells.

Crusoe’s view of solitude stands in contrast to that of Thoreau. Buell maintains that Crusoe hates the isolation, a feeling that is strengthened by the protagonist’s first impression of his new home (Buell 149). When Crusoe first contemplates being alone on the island he bemoans how “in this desolate manner I should end my life”. Soon, however, he comes to the conclusion that solitude is preferable to the company of savages and that God has saved him for a reason (Defoe 51). Isolation is consequently not seen as quite so bad, as by Buell, but rather as a sign of providence and a way for the protagonist to feel safe in his new environment. Instead of giving Crusoe the possibility of coming close to nature, as is the case with Thoreau, solitude guarantees him the opportunity to cultivate the wilderness without distractions. He does so by taming the wild through the act of building and thus in a way recreates civilization as he knows it. Crusoe’s seclusion can then represent man’s alienation from nature, whereas Thoreau’s solitude represents man becoming one with his surroundings (Kolbenschlag 241). Crusoe’s isolation has another side to it as well in that he embodies the ideal picture of the strong survivor who can turn even the most precarious situation around. The solitude grants him the opportunity not only to create a so-called civilized place for him to await his potential rescuers, which he would most probably not have had the interest to do otherwise, but also the chance to reconnect with himself and exercise some self-examination. In his day when Protestant values dictated many aspects of most Englishmen’s life, solitude was viewed as a very important prerequisite in order to reach the goal of self-improvement (Kolbenschlag 232). On the island he is removed from all the distractions of daily life and this
in combination with his experiences of illness and the shear power of nature (earthquakes and hurricanes) forces him to re-evaluate his attitudes in general (O’Mara 420). In other words, the solitude has similar effects on both Thoreau and Crusoe, even though the former is actively seeking a place in which to be able to be alone with his thoughts and the latter finds himself more or less forced into rethinking his relationship towards nature.

To Thoreau solitude is not the same as feeling lonely. Quite the opposite, in Walden he tells us that there is no need to feel alone since it is not the actual distance between two persons that matters but rather their mindsets. He gives the reader an example in which he explains that a farmer does not feel lonely while working the fields since he is performing a task. However, when he comes home and is free to do or think whatever he wishes he is inclined to feel lonesome (Thoreau 135). According to Thoreau we seek to socialize too much with others. When spending time with each other several times a day we tend to stop bringing anything new and fruitful into the discussions and thus impoverish the meetings. If we instead spend more time in solitude, thinking about and observing our surroundings, everybody would be the richer according to Thoreau (Thoreau 136).

Nevertheless Thoreau enjoys the company of the occasional visitors that come to his hut: “I think that I love society as much as most” (Thoreau 140), which is quite the reverse to the feelings Crusoe has about company. When after several years on the island he comes across a foot-print in the sand he is terrified and immediately feels insecure: “I stood like one thunder-struck, or as if I had seen an apparition; I listen’d, I look’d round me, I could hear nothing, nor see any thing […] When I came home to my castle […] I fled into it like one pursued” (Defoe 122). The notion of another human being residing on the island poses a clear threat to the kingdom Crusoe has created for himself. Instead of welcoming this break in his isolation Crusoe feels the need to defend “his” island against the anonymous person who has left the footprint. The security he feels in being alone thus disappears and during the rest of his stay on the island he is on his guard.

Both Thoreau and Crusoe consequently appreciate solitude, though in different ways or at least for different reasons. While Thoreau regards solitude as a means to connect with the surrounding nature and ponder spiritual and ethical matters, Crusoe considers it to be a necessity for his safety and the survival of his empire on the island. To Crusoe the opportunity to re-evaluate his relationship to nature and civilization is almost regarded as a side issue to his creating a kingdom, at least until he rediscovers his Protestant faith. Owing to the importance of the effects of solitude in the respective narratives neither of the protagonists seems to feel lonely but rather appreciative of the degree of isolation they experience.
3.3 Shelter

Comfort followed by safety and security are some of the most crucial needs that have got to be met in order for a person to successfully develop into a functional human being (Huitt). These needs are represented in the first two steps of Maslow’s ‘Hierarchy of Needs’. Without the feeling of security it would be close to impossible to lead a productive life and especially to evolve. Particularly when living away from others, as both Thoreau and Crusoe do, security is a necessity.

Thoreau expresses passionate thoughts about housing in the chapter called ‘Economy’. In a most engaging passage he writes that while the savages all have got their own places to stay, be it a wigwam or some other kind of simple abode, in civilized regions but fifty per cent of the inhabitants own their own housing (Thoreau 30). He continues by forwarding a rhetorical question to the reader concerning which way of life seems to be the best. The essence of his argument appears to be that people need not worry so much about buying large houses just to later fill them with unimportant appliances, as seen in the western world’s consumerism. Instead Thoreau suggests we should learn from the native populations and poor people who are content living in any kind of shelter and are not so tied down by earthly possessions. This is of course a simplified way of looking at how rich and poor people live; however, it is nonetheless an interesting one. Economy is evidently important to Thoreau when it comes to housing as well. On location next to Walden Pond he cuts and prepares timber for his little cottage and in addition buys a shanty which he transports to his chosen site and thus builds his modest hut (Thoreau 42f). Thoreau begins to live in his cottage already on July 4 but does not quite finish the chimney until he is feeling the need to light a fire in the autumn (Thoreau 45). He is in other words not very preoccupied with the grandeur of his lodge; his stated goal is rather to get a roof over his head so that he can commence his stay in the woods. The cottage in itself does not seem to be of much importance to the protagonist in Walden. However, staying in the woods means everything and Thoreau consequently treats his hut more as his nest or burrow than as a symbol of civilization.

While the dwelling is not of the utmost importance to Thoreau the scenario is quite the opposite for Crusoe. As soon as possible after having suffered the shipwreck Crusoe feels the need to make himself some temporary shelter (Defoe 44). He is clearly afraid of what may lurk in the thick and wild vegetation on the island, although he is not certain what it might be. Already the following day Crusoe starts to build his main housing on the island and is careful to make it safe, though he thinks the island to be desolate:
The entrance into this place I made to be not by a door, but by a short ladder, to go over the top, which ladder, when I was in, I lifted over after me, and so I was completely fenced in, and fortity’d, as I thought, from all the world, and consequently slept secure in the night, which otherwise I could not have done. (Defoe 49)

Crusoe is clearly afraid of what life on the island will entail and must, before being able to create a new life for himself, construct a safe place (Huitt). Even though he regards the island to be uninhabited the palisades that surround his tent-like abode grant him a heightened sense of security, which in turn is essential for the protagonist in order to manage the situation he is in psychologically and emotionally.

While Thoreau is content with a small hut to live in, Crusoe soon wants to expand his property. In a fertile valley on the inland of the island he builds a bower and calls it his country seat to go with his castle (the first habitation he built) and the enclosure where he kept his goats (Defoe 132). Later he also adds a cave to his realm and has thus created a kingdom of his own. The expansion from a single shelter to several places to stay is more than the result of colonial ideals. Crusoe uses the development of his property as a kind of therapeutic recreation which makes him satisfied with what he accomplishes on the island (Watt 153). After all, the protagonist does not know whether he will ever be rescued or not and the increase of things that testify to his ability to survive and make cultural marks such as enclosures in the wilderness ought to be rather satisfying to him. By engaging in interaction with what he does not feel connected to, in this case the wilderness of the island, a psychological space between the protagonist and the environment is opened up. That space in turn allows for a cultural relationship to be formed and thus makes the wild seem less strange and dangerous (Williams 111). In short Crusoe is recreating civilization with his extensive building (Buell 149). This in turn reveals, at least partly, Crusoe’s feelings as regards the relationship between civilization and the wilderness to the reader. In the mind of the protagonist the untamed island is there for him to civilize and one way of doing so is to build more quarters then he needs for shelter.

Kolbenschlag takes the discussion one step further by stating that Thoreau’s and Crusoe’s respective housing mirrors their own personalities and the way they view the world around them (Kolbenschlag 237). She writes that Thoreau’s open, unpretentious and welcoming hut signals his willingness to become more closely connected to his surroundings and his readiness to adapt to any and all changes in nature and his own inner life. Crusoe on the other hand is interpreted as an “imprisoned ego” in his own, fortified dwellings (Kolbenschlag 137).
His way of making sure that nobody can gain entrance to his shelters indicates his hostility and fear towards the unknown. By building strong forts Crusoe is in some way in control of his surroundings even though he does not know much about them. Of course, one has to keep in mind the differences between the two protagonists’ stays in the wild; however, it is interesting how much of their respective attitudes towards nature are hinted at through their descriptions and actions when it comes to seeking shelter.

3.4 Food for mind and body

Food is another of the most essential of our needs and one’s access to it is a very important problem to solve when trying to survive on one’s own. Thoreau continues to acquire some merchandise from the store all through his stay at Walden Pond. However, he is careful to tell the reader that he only buys a few products every week with which to sustain himself: “It was […] rye, and Indian meal without yeast, potatoes, rice, a very little salt pork, molasses, and salt, and my drink water.” (Thoreau 61) Thoreau’s interest in Eastern philosophy is quite evident in his relationship towards food. In Hinduism, which Thoreau was influenced by, asceticism as regards food is often seen as an essential part of any soul searching agenda (Cafaro 2002, 25). It is the inner not the outer qualities of life he seeks to improve on during his stay at Walden Pond. Therefore he does not need any lavish menu and at times even seems to despise eating and the feelings we as humans connect with it such as hunger and satisfaction: “[…] that which is eaten is not a viand to sustain our animal, or inspire our spiritual life, but food for the worms that possess us” (Thoreau 218).

Nutrition is a necessity though and Thoreau finds a clever way to incorporate food in his experience in the woods. Instead of just buying what little food he needs and leaving it at that he soon teaches himself to bake a simple kind of bread and tries to live on husbandry in that he starts to grow beans outside his cottage (Thoreau 54). In this way he has to physically involve himself in the production of food and thus in a way create food for thought at the same time. The bean field especially comes to bring him a more profound experience of nature than he would have had if he had not engaged himself the way he does. He also feasts on what nature has to offer and finds this a satisfying way of eating. Thoreau writes that the berries he discovers during his walks in the woods do not just feed his body but also his soul (Cafaro 27). In other words he finds a whole new value in food while living at Walden Pond. At the beginning of the narrative his comments on the subject of food are scarce and when they occur they are rather matter of fact. As the story progresses the comments grow evermore emotionally charged. Thoreau slowly begins to appreciate food as a part of his
experience in nature and as a result thereof food and the act of eating turn into a more positive element in his life.

As opposed to Thoreau’s initial views of food it is of the utmost importance to Robinson Crusoe. In order to survive Crusoe starts to hunt the wild animals on the island at once (Defoe 50). As soon as he has got enough food to sustain himself he starts the strenuous work of growing barley and rice from a savoured grain sack (Defoe 61f). He also begins collecting wild berries and fruit, produces luxury food such as raisins, captures baby goats which he puts in an enclosure and keeps sea fowls. In this way Crusoe is assuring himself plenty of food and is not dependant on one single source to get it and by mastering his environment and making it work for him he becomes more in charge of his own destiny (McInelly 6). However, he does not stop at that. After having ensured his survival Crusoe further develops his menu by learning how to bake bread and puddings (Defoe 98). The extensive workload he puts into collecting and minding his crops and domesticated animals as well as refining his food shows an interest in improving his diet and thus reveals to the reader that food is important to the protagonist more than as mere nutrition. What is really interesting when it comes to Crusoe and his relationship to food, though, is his willingness to put a lot of effort into producing luxury foods such as raisins. Naturally it is more convenient to store dry foods but Crusoe does not mention that kind of organized storage. He expresses joy at being able to indulge himself with treats. Food, or at least some kinds of it, has then turned into more of a reward for Crusoe’s efficiency on the island rather than a mere necessity to ensure life. On the desolate island food becomes the only entity by which Crusoe is able to actually measure his success as a survivor and as such it becomes invaluable to the protagonist.

3.5 The power of economy

Money and the thoughts conveyed on the subjects of wealth and the market are indeed interesting in both Walden and Robinson Crusoe. The opening, and longest, chapter in Walden is even called “Economy” and deals with the economy not only of monetary matters but also of many other topics connected to Thoreau’s stay in the woods. As is the case in most of Thoreau’s discussions what seems to be a simple matter of money often turns out to be something else. Sure, he gives us rigorous accounts of the cost of merchandise and building material (Thoreau 60f), which is difficult to interpret as anything other than what it is. Yet even in those paragraphs it is evident through his distanced way of writing that Thoreau does not particularly care about the costs; he seems simply to be writing them down in order to show the reader what it actually required from him economically to live by Walden Pond.
The tone is quite different when his discussions go beyond the matter of mere money as is the case when he talks about how students pay grand sums of money in order to learn a trade in higher education (Thoreau 50f) and the travesty of paying to travel (Thoreau 53). In discussions of this kind Thoreau states that money is a necessity for many reasons but emphasizes that it is not a goal in itself:

This spending of the best part of one’s life earning money in order to enjoy a questionable liberty during the least valuable part of it, reminds me of the English-man who went to India to make a fortune first, in order that he might return to England and live the life of a poet (Thoreau 54).

Money is not irrelevant to Thoreau; however, it is not important either. In the quote above he appears to turn directly to all those people who dedicate their lives to earning more money than they actually need and question if they are not missing out on something more essential because of their struggle to acquire a certain material standard. Simplicity is a keyword in *Walden* and it fits in nicely with Thoreau’s expressed views on economical matters (Paul 350). Life should be joyous, not a constant struggle to attain unnecessary money or objects: “Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of a soul” (Thoreau 329).

Also when it comes to the economic value of nature Thoreau advocates moderation. He realises that man will and must use nature but the key is to never let the monetary perspective be superior to the need to protect the environment (Cafaro 2002, 45). As long as we keep the other values of the wild, such as the aesthetic and the historical, in mind, Thoreau finds it is all right, according to Cafaro, to think of economical values without forgetting about nature. Thoreau does however advocate the importance of keeping nature as natural and undisturbed by man as possible throughout *Walden*. As a reader it is easy to pick up on Thoreau’s feelings as regards the beauty created by the environment itself. It can never be reimbursed by an artificial, planned alternative and is a necessity to the welfare of the human mind just as food is required for the wellbeing of the physical body. The historical value, in turn, consists of the connection to our rural past that nature so generously offers amongst other things. Thoreau comes to appreciate these values of nature more deeply throughout his sojourn at Walden Pond (Thoreau 14). The closer he comes to the environment the stronger his feelings of oneness with it become. He seems to grow more conscious rather than anxious about the economic values of nature. During his stay in the woods he develops a keen understanding of
the fact that the economic interest in natural resources is not likely to disappear and instead of fighting a losing battle he tries to find a way of extracting what nature has to offer without hurting it more than necessary. He still clearly advocates for the sake of preserving nature but does so by alluring the reader with human curiosity: “At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, […] We can never have enough of Nature.” (Thoreau 317-318) In other words Thoreau recognizes the need of an open-minded discussion concerning nature and its economic value which is a tell tale sign that he has devoted a great deal of thinking to the question. This in turn shows a will to understand the different takes on the issue, pro-technology and building as well as preserving nature, and discloses a development in the protagonist to the reader.

In direct opposition to Thoreau’s more idealistic relationship to nature we find, at least according to Buell, Robinson Crusoe. Buell points out that Crusoe is doing his very best to gather things and wealth despite being trapped on a desolate island without any real hope of ever being rescued (Buell 149). According to Buell Crusoe’s outlook on his environment and its economic value stands in stark contrast to Thoreau’s (Buell 151). True enough, Crusoe is the English 17th century colonist incarnate and as such quite interested in accumulating wealth. For instance, when he revisits the foundered ship to gather provisions he comes across some money and his reflections over the find says much about his attitude towards money:

I smil’d to my self at the sight of this money, O drug! said I aloud, what art thou good for? Thou art not worth to me, no not the taking off of the ground, one of those knifes is worth all this heap, I have no manner of use for thee, e’en remain where thou art, and go to the bottom as a creature whose life is not worth saving. However, upon second thoughts, I took it away (Defoe 47).

Crusoe recognizes the needlessness of bringing the money with him but still cannot leave it behind. It is quite interesting to notice that he remembers to bring his funds with him when he leaves the island (Defoe 218). After having spent twenty-eight years more or less alone on the island he seems to simply pick up where he left and immediately turn into the stereotypical, successful colonist of the day when rescued. It is rather curious that Crusoe seemingly has not developed any other sense of economic value whilst stranded than the ones he had from the start. He does not just rescue the money of the foundered ship but keeps it safe throughout almost three decades before being able to draw any benefit by it. This preoccupation with items he cannot use in any way to survive is strikingly odd but at the same time quite
revealing as regards Crusoe’s priorities; he sees himself as the king of the island and as such he needs his treasure (Defoe 47). Caring for the money may also be a way for him to keep up his hopes of being rescued, symbolizing his connection with the British Commonwealth. The want of development in the protagonist’s view of economical matters is obvious, however, and directly contrasts Thoreau’s standpoint.

Whereas the mere ownership of money grants Crusoe pleasure he soon becomes aware that he is dependant on nature in order to survive on the island and therefore cannot treat it too carelessly. He does nevertheless view nature as something he can, and will, use in his own interest (Kolbenschlag 238). Nature is there to provide him with food, shelter and other necessities and he soon refers to the whole island as his kingdom, implying ownership of everything and everyone dwelling thereon:

It would have made a Stoick [sic!] smile to have seen me and my little family sit down to dinner; there was my majesty the prince and lord of the whole island; I had the lives of all my subjects at my absolute command. I could hang, draw, give liberty, and take it away, and no rebels among all my subjects. (Defoe 118)

Crusoe has to dominate his environment in order to survive and keep up his self-image as master and colonial landowner and the most natural way of doing so is to follow his old patterns of behaviour and thus concentrate on wealth and building a capitalist empire (Defoe 190). The time Crusoe spends on the island can consequently be regarded as a colonial argument for promoting the expansion of trade (McInelly 1) since the protagonist’s main focus is to work in order to create a suitable basis for his empire even though he does not know that he will ever be rescued.

To further exemplify the vast difference between Thoreau and Crusoe it is worth mentioning again that Thoreau is quite content living as simply as possible, whereas Crusoe builds himself no less than three castles in his self-proclaimed empire. Thoreau regards property and money as bringing with it too many liabilities, while Crusoe defines himself by his assets. Closeness to a better understanding of nature is really all the wealth Thoreau is striving to achieve; he clearly concentrates on the intrinsic value of nature, while Crusoe conversely sees nature as the only means available on the island by which to accumulate wealth. To sum up, the main difference in the two protagonists’ view of the relationship between economy and nature is the way Thoreau is able to consider the issue from more than his preferred scenario while Crusoe is quite static in his view.
3.6 The importance of labour

To Thoreau hard labour is not an aim in itself. He emphasizes and explains his standpoint in an anecdote about an Indian who made baskets just because he knew how but did not think of to make his baskets worth buying to others (Thoreau 19). Ingenuity and the will to try anything once are abilities worth striving for, according to Thoreau, but fabrication with no other motivation than to produce is superfluous (Kolbenschlag 238). It is however far more important to him to find a connection and meaning in life than to struggle to acquire meaningless things just for their own sake. Some people might enjoy working but those who do not should have the opportunity not to toil away all their lives: “Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? Let every one mind his own business, and endeavour to be what he was made” (Thoreau 326). Kolbenschlag writes that Thoreau sees work as redeemed by man instead of the other way around, which is the antithesis of the way the subject of labour is dealt with by Crusoe (Kolbenschlag 236). It is important to keep in mind that Thoreau is not struggling to physically survive in the woods and is consequently able to choose the amount of hard labour he wants to submit to as opposed to Crusoe.

The latter of the two protagonists does little but work during his sojourn on the island. He has to struggle to propagate small amounts of rice and barley in order to assure himself of a large enough harvest. Crusoe also builds plenty of accommodations and manufacture utensils to fill them with and constantly finds new ways of creating work for himself. It is important to point out that although Crusoe produces much he does not condone excess and has a pronounced aim to everything he manufactures. The fact that Crusoe is involuntarily dwelling alone on an otherwise uninhabited island drives him to occupy himself; however, as Kolbenschlag points out, he also has to learn a lot of lessons the hard way (Kolbenschlag 238). For instance, he enlisted on the ship that later foundered outside the island in order to become rich quickly and now has to learn the lesson of the worth of labour (Watt 166). He has to work his way to a better sense of morality. The process is then not only interpreted as a way of making sure his livelihood is secured but also as a way for the Crusoe character to grow and develop. He needs to work in order to learn to trust his ability to survive and to feel his dominion over the environment.

Crusoe believes that nature will destroy him if he does not take his place as the undisputed leader of the island and colonizer. It is evident throughout the narrative that he is a man of religious faith and in agreement with Puritan values and the Calvinist doctrine that nature is created for the purpose of man’s well being (Kolbenschlag 235). In other words Labour is a
way for Crusoe to reach a higher level of self-assurance and also live in accordance with his religion, God helps those who help themselves (Starr 190f). At the same time it is important to remember that Crusoe is an adventurer and colonist first and foremost. When he builds his colony on the island he not only does so by producing actual buildings and items but also by using his newfound inner abilities in creating a political system with himself as the undisputed monarch (McInelly 14). His seemingly untiring and persistent dedication to labour and the developing of the island and himself makes him the perfect hero of his day in that he controls his own destiny. The amount of work he performs goes well together with the Christian necessity of hard labour in order come close to God and functions at the same time as a suitable pastime and therapy (Starr 185). Labour has in other words more than one meaning to Crusoe. It grants him food and shelter, but just as important are the higher moral values and personal development it brings with it. In the unusual situation he finds himself work helps bring stability and structure to his everyday life and thus normalize his stay on the island (Defoe 90ff). He has in other words decided, consciously or unconsciously, not to be a victim under the circumstances but rather take charge of the situation and manage to go on despite the obvious difficulties. By choosing to deal with his involuntary stay on the island in this manner Crusoe is able not only to survive for an astonishing twenty-eight years but also to prosper while doing so (Defoe 120). He achieves an inner strength through his struggle, which allows for him to continue doing well for himself once he leaves the island.

Thoreau also uses work for reasons other than mere survival. To Thoreau it is not the work in itself but the reflections and thoughts one can make while working that are of importance. There are two distinct examples of the protagonist’s attitude towards labour in Walden: namely, how he builds his hut and how he tends his bean field. As regards his cottage, Thoreau takes his time constructing it and does not quite finish until he has to build a chimney in late autumn (Thoreau 48). Instead of buying all his material he cuts down some pines which he prepares himself and uses that timber in addition to material that he retrieves from an old shanty. Thoreau builds his shelter very deliberately and follows his own credo of simplicity. The process of creating a hut that is supposed to be part of nature, using material from nature, is in itself a part of his experience at Walden Pond and is evidently quite important to Thoreau. The long time it takes to complete the construction work, from late March to late autumn, would suggest that Thoreau truly went into the process of building rather than as simple laziness. After all, some of his goals in living in the woods are to come close to the environment, as well as his inner, nature: “To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to
its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust.” (Walden 14) and how better to begin doing so than to adapt the building process of his shelter to the seasons and the insight they provide as to what is necessary in a house?

The other thing that provides the protagonist with hands-on work is his bean field: “I came to love my rows, my beans, though so many more than I wanted. They attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus” (Thoreau 155). The quote makes it quite apparent that Thoreau gets much more out of his allotment than food on the table. He compares his work with the beans to the Greek myth of Antaeus who was given extraordinary strength from contact with his mother, Gaia, the earth. Thoreau’s occupation with the growing process and the necessary work involved in cultivating crops makes him involved in nature in a very palpable way and he thinks a lot about the connections between everything in nature: “These beans have results which are not harvested by me. Do they not grow for wood-chucks partly?” (Thoreau 166). He also notices the similarities between himself and the beans in that they both have returned to a more natural, pure way of being through the absence of too strenuous cultivation, or as in his case the rules of society (Kolbenschlag 239). The allegory points to the fact that Thoreau is living a simple and in his mind more natural life at Walden Pond just as the beans are allowed to grow a bit wild and thus return to a more natural way of life.

The physical labour is otherwise not really Thoreau’s favourite part of husbandry. He states, however, that men think from their hands to their head and so he begins to grow beans in order to learn what he could not have learned otherwise (Paul 356). Nevertheless, work brings with it a chance to pause and notice things he has not been aware of earlier. “When I paused to lean on my hoe, these sounds and sights I heard and saw any where in the row, a part of the inexhaustible entertainment which the country offers” (Thoreau 159-160). Cafaro interprets this quote as Thoreau’s way of telling the reader that it is in the pauses in our work that we can see and appreciate the value of nature (Cafaro 2002, 30). In contrast to Crusoe’s never-ending workload Thoreau thus considers work as a necessity rather than a goal in itself. He recognizes that one has to work to put food on the table and a roof over one’s head, but it is the pauses that provide man with the equally important food for thought. Thoreau does convey a certain pride over his bean field even though he does not explicitly state that in the text. The field makes him feel a connection to nature so strong that he compares his own existence in the woods to that of the beans growing a bit wild and natural. Thoreau is very conscious of what he is doing both when he builds his hut and when he tends his beans. In doing so he reaches his goal of achieving a connection to the cottage as well as the bean field. At the same time he also experiences the feelings of joy and inner strength that come with
having accomplished something on one’s own. Although his main occupation at Walden Pond seems to be to explore and try to understand the surrounding nature, Thoreau also learns the value and inner rewards of performing some sort of labour. He does actually seem to come closer to nature while working in his bean field or carefully building his hut than he does as a mere spectator en route in the woods. So, while Thoreau considers labour to be a necessary evil beforehand he is able to draw significant benefits from it once he delves into it.

3.7 The significance of spirituality

One of the most legible of the themes and subjects found in both *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe* is that of religion and the spiritual quest both protagonists participate in. The topic of religion is to a large extent intertwined with the issues of labour and economy in the narratives, especially so in *Robinson Crusoe*. The topic can be at least partly explained by the close connection between religion and the rest of people’s lives when the text was written. Other reasons for religiosity’s predominance throughout the narratives are that the search for spirituality is one of the goals the protagonists strive to reach and their isolation grants them the opportunity to question their own personal beliefs and philosophy.

Already at the very beginning of his narrative Thoreau gravely proclaims that: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation” (Thoreau 8) and it is this state of mind that he wants to change during his habitation in the woods. He is clearly quite familiar with the subject of religion and tries to apply the different values and ways of life it entails to his life in the woods. He does for instance live ascetically as promoted by the Veda. Even an extra condiment on the dinner plate corrupts simplicity and is shunned by Thoreau (Thoreau 215). It is quite interesting how the protagonist mixes elements from classical Greek mythology with Christian values and Eastern philosophy together with his own experiences and revelations derived from nature in order to create his own spirituality. Thoreau seeks a higher pursuit in life during his stay at Walden Pond and to do so he has to come up with spirituality he can fully embrace rather than just conform to the religions others have created. Hanley argues that Thoreau regards the union of the celestial and brutish in one’s person as the only possible way to live life fully in accordance with nature and God (Hanley 73). During a walk in the woods Thoreau articulates his thoughts on the matter: “I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both” (Thoreau 210).

Thoreau is in other words seeking spirituality through closeness to nature and what he interprets as the natural, most original, way of living. There are numerous references to
Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and other Eastern philosophical texts throughout the narrative. To the reader though, perhaps the most interesting spiritual discussion is when Thoreau expounds his views on the link between man and nature. During his stay at Walden Pond he feels a certain connection to his surroundings, since he is determined to do so, and is thus successful in his quest. This search for a larger meaning, the meaning of life so to speak, is a common characteristic in most human societies and makes the reader feel empathy towards Thoreau and his task even though he may not come across as sympathetic all the time. Through his search for a deeper meaning in and connection to nature Thoreau touches upon subjects that are common to many people and as a result creates an interest in the reader to understand what he will conclude. Spirituality in *Walden* consequently becomes equally interesting to the protagonist and the reader.

In direct opposition to Thoreau’s views power is a keyword as regards Crusoe’s relation to his religion. According to Starr, Crusoe follows the typical Puritan model of sin, repentance and regeneration and is thus a fine example of how a good Christian Englishman can turn any situation around and still stand strong (Starr 4ff). Starr is right in that there is a clear pattern to Crusoe’s behaviour; however, there are hints in the text that reveal that the protagonist might not take religion too seriously after all. To begin with Crusoe does not pay much attention to religion as he makes a life for himself on the island. There are a few instances when he thanks God but on the whole they are scarce and do not seem especially important to the shipwrecked protagonist.

These utterances to God are probably examples of the common way of reacting to unforeseen events in his day and are scarce until he falls ill and experiences a terrible vision of a dark-clad man who descends from the skies and speaks to him: “Seeing all these things have not brought thee to repentance, now thou shalt die: At which words, I thought he lifted up the spear that was in his hand, to kill me” (Defoe 71). Crusoe is clearly affected by the sight and when the fever lets go its grip he begins to pray regularly and comes across a bible which he reads with great eagerness. He compares his journey to that of the biblical Job and states that he too is tested by God to see if his faith and trust in providence are strong enough. He feels that repentance is within reach and devotes several pages to rejoicing at his newfound religiosity (Defoe 77ff). The requirement of repentance is one of the most evident overarching themes in *Robinson Crusoe*. Crusoe’s journey begins when he disobeys his father and goes to sea and he then feels the need to repent in accordance with the Calvinistic doctrine. To gain repentance Crusoe turns to hard labour, which is the recommended action both in the bible and by religious dignitaries of the day (Starr 190f). The motivation of
receiving remission of his sins thus plays a significant part as regards the strenuous workload he carries out on the island. There are, however, instances when the reader is led to doubt the honesty in Crusoe’s intense adoration. One such incident occurs when Crusoe is finally leaving the island and he omits to thank God or in any way acknowledge His doing in the matter (Defoe 219). The episodes imply that Crusoe’s faith in providence and the will of God might not be as strong as he believes. He appears to believe in God only when he is in need of help or support in some way. When everything goes his way Crusoe concentrates on what he himself has done in order to succeed rather than acknowledging the presence of a higher authority. This observation is rather interesting as it can be interpreted as showing how Crusoe gains a stronger sense of self-reliance as time goes by on the island. In that case Crusoe’s views on religion come to stand in contrast to that of Thoreau as the latter becomes more connected to his spirituality during his sojourn in the woods.

So Crusoe is presumably not the most devoted Christian. Actually, one of the more imperative religious messages he brings the reader is the acceptance of religious freedom: “My man Friday was a Protestant, his father was a pagan and a cannibal, and the Spaniard was a Papist: However, I allo’d liberty of conscience throughout my dominions” (Defoe 190). It is thus only the person closest to Crusoe, his manservant Friday, whom the protagonist finds it worth the effort to covert to Christianity. Had Crusoe truly been dedicated to his religion he would have tried to convert everybody he encountered, as was the usual way of conduct when new land was colonized in the 17th Century. This turn from religion to a more self-sufficient approach to life, marks one of the most evident inner developments Crusoe goes through. The fact that he condones religious freedom suggests that he has acquired the ability to think about how his decisions as the ruler impact his subjects. This process of personal growth is interesting as it makes Crusoe a more sympathetic character than he initially comes across.

3.8 Further matters of essence to the protagonists

Besides the seven fundamental issues in Walden and Robinson Crusoe mentioned above there are a few additional themes that are worth pointing out. While the topics brought up in the analysis are found in both narratives there are two different attitudes towards nature which are immensely important to the protagonists: Thoreau’s simplicity and Crusoe’s hunger for domination.

Both protagonists evolve during their habitation in nature and what they learn is in many instances interesting not only to them but also to the reader since it makes the protagonists
more human and thus easier to identify with, which has been briefly addressed throughout the analysis. Thoreau structures his life at Walden Pond in accordance with the virtues he holds high: namely, independence, honesty, integrity, freedom and simplicity (Cafaro 2000, 37). It becomes clear to the reader quite early on in the narrative that it is important to Thoreau to keep life in the woods as uncomplicated as possible. By living under pure and modest conditions the protagonist tries to shed light on what is vital in life, to him. His theory seems to be that it is easier to find true connections and meaning in life if we as humans do not allow ourselves to be blinded by the objects in our immediate vicinity. The message is brilliantly forwarded by Thoreau: “Our life is fretted away by detail. […] Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb nail” (Thoreau 91). To facilitate that simplicity Thoreau endorses seeking a closer attachment and relationship with nature to clear one’s mind and become more disciplined in the search for answers. Or as Cafaro chooses to rephrase it: “take what you need, but only what you need” (Cafaro 2002, 29). Thoreau concludes that a life in simplicity can help you achieve your dreams through granting them a solid base: “If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them” (Thoreau 324).

In stark contrast to Thoreau’s will to understand his surroundings stands Crusoe’s need to execute his dominion over everything on the island in every way possible. Examples of that are numerous throughout the narrative: for instance when Crusoe describes how he prunes young trees so as to make them become beautiful rather than appreciating them in their natural shape (Defoe83). He seems to consider nature as something wild and dangerous which needs to be tamed and made useful to him in order to fill any purpose. Crusoe’s control does not end with the nature on the island but involves some of the people he interacts with such as Xury and Friday. Xury, to whom Crusoe promises eternal friendship, is sold (Defoe 54) and Friday is given a name, religion, language and master without Crusoe ever reflecting on who he is in himself (Defoe 207ff). Crusoe is in other words quite egotistic and self-righteous in his demand to have absolute control over his empire. Even though these traits may sound rather reprehensible they make out an important part of the protagonist’s ability, psychologically, to survive on a desert island for twenty-eight years and are thus important to address.
4. Conclusion

Nature and the protagonists’ relationship to it are predominant themes in both *Walden* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Thoreau and Crusoe lives in nature for dissimilar reasons and in different eras so it is perhaps not very surprising that their respective views on the purpose of nature differ quite a bit. Thoreau goes to live in the woods voluntarily in order to come closer to nature and live in accordance with it so as to find a purer, better way of living. He lives quasi-ascetically and devotes his time to philosophical experiments and reflections and it is no wonder that he regards nature as a treasure in itself which ought to be protected and revered by man. Through this search for closeness between man and nature Thoreau touches upon difficult and overarching questions such as the meaning of life. Since most people can recognize their own thoughts in Thoreau’s quest a certain level of empathy is created between the protagonist and the reader.

Robinson Crusoe on the other hand sees himself as the absolute emperor on his island and regards nature as his personal larder, lumberyard and hunting ground. He is stranded on the desolate island without any real hope of ever being rescued and uses his time there by building a new civilization to replace the one he has lost. Crusoe views nature as subordinate to culture and does his best to protect himself from the danger he perceives lurking in his surroundings.

Both protagonists develop and evolve during their habitations in nature. They have from the beginning different stated goals: Thoreau amongst all self-discovery and simplicity while Crusoe aims at self-improvement, which they in most respect meet. It would be close to impossible not to change from such life changing experiences as the protagonists go through. The important question here is what impact that transformation have on them in terms of personal development? There is no simple answer to that question but in order to isolate at least a few interesting notions we have to turn to the thoughts and ideas shared by Thoreau and Crusoe in their narratives and also to the way they cope with the situations they find themselves in.

Thoreau is the philosopher of the two. He seeks closeness to nature and a feeling of belonging and coherence. Throughout *Walden* he gives the reader advice on how to simplify his or her reality in order to live a more fulfilling and happy life. His discussions are often quite thought provoking and thus interesting to the reader who is invited to take part in the emotional, psychological and cognitive parts of Thoreau’s experience at Walden Pond. In doing so the reader becomes more of a participant than a mere observer of Thoreau's
philosophy which admittedly is one of the protagonist’s own goals in living in the woods. Thoreau also encourages the reader to halt his or her preoccupied life at times to notice the surroundings and allow him- or herself to ponder what he/ she is doing and how that influences him/ her, others and the environment in which he/ she dwell. The need for more circumspection in our daily lives clearly becomes evermore important both to Thoreau as the narrative evolve. He went to live in the woods since he wanted to learn more about himself and his connection to the environment, which he did. At the same time he also grew more conscious of the impact man’s interactions with nature has both on nature itself and on the mindset of the attentively alert human, willing to listen and learn not only from academic literature.

Robinson Crusoe is a stern believer in the importance of hard labour so as to accomplish anything. Although he is very attached to his housing it is not property that proves to be the most important reward, but rather an inner strength and belief that he can manage his situation whatever happens. Otherwise the tidings forwarded in Robinson Crusoe are often of a much more moral and religiously affected nature than the ones in Walden. Instead of actively challenging the reader to question his or her way of reasoning as does Thoreau, Crusoe is interesting since he refuses to give up even though he finds himself alone in a foreign place without any real hope of ever being rescued. Still the protagonist manages to create a good life for himself on the island and at the same time continues to try to better himself rather than yielding to savagery, which would have been quite understandable considering the extreme circumstances.

Crusoe does develop quite drastically during his stay on the island as regards his psychological and emotional life. In his case the transformation is perhaps the most evident when it comes to how he chooses to reign his kingdom. Early on in the narrative Crusoe comes across as rather egotistical and set in his ideal ways of creating wealth. However, after having dealt with illness, hard labour and solitude and allowed himself to feel and react to his situation on the island it is a more understanding king that emerges, although he is still quite authoritative by today’s standards. The development manifests itself amongst all through Crusoe’s strong sense of self-esteem as regards his rule over and decisions concerning the island and its inhabitants. He has thus evolved into a very self-sufficient and at least psychologically secure character.

And it is this, the security in one’s person that comes from the knowledge of one’s place in and connection to nature that is the main psychological benefit both Thoreau and Crusoe gain through their respective sojourns in nature.
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