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Enhancing an environmental mindset: The role of living *nature* metaphors in H. D. Thoreau's *Walden, or life in the woods*

Anna RE, Università IULM, Milan, Italy

This paper examines the use of living metaphors in two chapters of *Walden, Life in the Woods* (1854)—namely, "Solitude" and "The Ponds"—by H. D. Thoreau. In these chapters, the rhetorical figure makes a decisive contribution to defining fundamental conceptual structures for the perspective of life and of thought that Thoreau wants to present, producing creative frames that define the metaphorical value of the whole experience at Walden Pond. He uses metaphorical concepts associated with the environment to create *nature* metaphors with a specific purpose: to bring man closer to nature, and nature closer to man. The analysis refers to Prandi's (2017) theory on conceptual living metaphors; Prandi denies that living metaphorical expressions are extensions of conventional metaphorical structures, arguing instead that living metaphors are the result of conceptual conflict, as they are not supported by shared metaphorical concepts, but derive from complex and conflicting meanings. If living metaphors turn out to be a specific type of conceptual structure, their relationship to conventional metaphors needs to be reconsidered. This view enables an investigation into the use of living metaphor in *Walden*, where it is configured as a conceptual tool placed in service of the message Thoreau wishes to convey. Many creative metaphors in *Walden* are more than mere embellishment. They are conceptual structures that highlight conflictual meanings, bringing together conflicting concepts.

Keywords: Conflictual Metaphor; Environment; Living Metaphor; Thoreau; Walden

1. Introduction

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was fond of saying that he traveled extensively in Concord. He also lived many lives in that Massachusetts town. He was a teacher, botanist, editor, gardener, poet, naturalist, traveler and philosopher. He got involved in politics and worked in his father's pencil factory. He wrote frequently and experimented just as often: pages and pages of diary entries, the raw material for all his works.

Thoreau is a crucial figure in American nature writing: a keen observer of natural processes, with a rare ability to unite the poetic and scientific

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approaches. He was one of the first authors to speak of the need to preserve wilderness as a reserve of intellectual nourishment for civilized man. Through his reflections, Thoreau undoubtedly contributed to reworking the concept of wilderness, often used in a negative way. After *Walden*, the *topos* of contact with wild nature takes on more favorable, in some ways sublime connotations for the transcendental experience with nature. His idea of a relationship with nature was revolutionary for the time, mainly thanks to the contribution given by his more universally known text *Walden: Or Life in the Woods* (1854), which has become a classic of American literature. It was not until the 20th century, with the birth of the environmental movement and the emergence of ecological thought, that this ostensibly 'naïve' body of creative thought resonated with the world at large.

Walden represents a process of constant change that characterizes Thoreau's writing and thinking. Lawrence Buell states: "One of the reasons *Walden* is Thoreau's greatest book is that the transitional struggle of a lifetime is so fully reflected in it [. . .] it embeds much of the history of his thinking about the natural environment as it unfolded from his apprentice years to his full maturity" (Buell, 1995, p. 118). For this reason, we should think of *Walden* as both 'product' and 'process'. It took Thoreau almost a decade to complete the first draft, between revisions and the introduction of new experiences and reflections. Those years (1847 to 1854) were crucial in the author's life, a period during which Thoreau's interests evolved, from a "young transcendentalist literatus [to a] middle-aged ruralist for whom Virgil's *Georgics* were more compelling than his *Aeneid*, William Gilpin's literary prose about the picturesque qualities of the English landscape more readable than romantic poetry, and Darwin's Journal of Researches aboard HMS Beagle more significant than *Robinson Crusoe* or *Typee*" (Buell, 1995, p. 117). This lengthy draft process led Thoreau to organize the material on different levels, applying well-considered strategies so that the text itself is configured as a metaphor for life and rebirth achieved through direct contact with nature.

Thoreau used metaphorical concepts associated with the environment to create *nature* metaphors. These have a very specific purpose: to bring man closer to nature, and nature closer to man. They are also intended to propose new conceptual frames that feed on other, preexisting frames, expanding their meaning by introducing the reader to new interpretations and a novel understanding of our experiences. The core metaphorical concept of *Walden* is intended to inspire people to rethink their lifestyle, inviting to return to a primitive, wild and natural life. Metaphors are one of the tools Thoreau uses to bring a form of proto-environmentalism to life. It is no coincidence that he is considered a founder of environmental thought.

Building on Prandi's theory, in the present paper a linguistic analysis of *Walden* by H. D. Thoreau, is carried out which will verify how living metaphors "are the outcome of contingent interpretations of complex meanings of whole sentences," as well as how "the words do not receive a new meaning, but they are combined in such a way as to trigger a conceptual conflict" (Prandi, 2017, p. 23). If living metaphors come to be conceptual structures, their relation to conventional metaphors needs to be reconsidered. Moreover, their function in sentences becomes more significant, conveying new concepts that require interpretation. This view allows us to investigate the use of living metaphor in *Walden*, where it is configured as a conceptual tool placed in service of the message Thoreau wishes to convey.

2. Conventional versus living metaphor

Literary analyses on the use of metaphors in *Walden* were developed by many scholars (among them: Hamby, 1973; Houston, 1967; Mangrum, 2017; Tindol, 2011), since the figure is particularly loved and used by Thoreau. Linguistic analyses have not been so widely conducted. This paper has the aim to approach the volume from a new perspective, as well as to propose original, and support old, interpretations.

In order to conduct a linguistic analysis of the metaphors in *Walden*, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), inaugurated with *Metaphors we live by* comes to our aid, introducing the idea of conceptual metaphors that may unconsciously shape the way we think and act. In illustrating the "epistemological revolution" (Kuhn, 1962, p. ?) of the Lakoffian paradigm, scholars often reference obliteration of the prevailing 'decorative' concept ("decorative view," Deignan, 2005, p. 2), which—going back to Quintilian rhetoric—considered the metaphor a marginal fact of linguistic realization; a grammatical deviation from the norm that prevented linguistic study, relegating it to the rhetorical sphere. By focusing on the creative aspects of poetic metaphor, the 'decorative' conception does not justify the ubiquity and frequency of the phenomenon in common language as well.

While in this conception the purpose was to highlight the exceptionality and uniqueness of metaphors, in turn renouncing general descriptive ambitions, in CMT the aim is to identify the regularities of metaphorical use in an attempt to define mechanisms that restrict its systematic implementation. Metaphor, therefore, is not an arbitrary linguistic event delegated to individual creativity. It is subject to precise restrictions that regulate its creation. It is a conventional figure conveying shared meanings. In other words:

> Conventional metaphorical concepts are consistent conceptual structures belonging to a shared heritage that surfaces in everyday expression like any consistent and shared conceptual structure. When the verb "waste" is used with time, for instance, there is no conflict; the verb is polysemous and displays a distinct metaphorical sense consistent with the concept of time, backed by the shared metaphorical concept TIME IS MONEY. This metaphorical sense belongs to the coded lexical meaning no less than the source sense. The metaphor is in the history of the word—it looks backward. In order to understand it, the interpreter need only master a shared conceptual structure and a shared lexical system.
>
> (Prandi, 2017, p. 23)

Thus, conventional metaphors emerge as coded word meanings (Sweetser, 1990), idioms (Gibbs, 1994), and complex figurative expressions (Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Turner, 1989).

Within this context, according to Lakoff and Turner (1989) and Kövecses (2002, pp. 53-55) living metaphors are original elaborations of a shared heritage, they extend, elaborate, question or combine conventional metaphorical concepts and are the outcome of individual acts of creation. A significant example of creative metaphor would be the verse by Emily Bronte "And Winter pours its grief in snow" (Bronte, year, p. ??). As said above, this is the result of a personal act of creation, but it is almost impossible to associate it to a shared conceptual heritage. This has spurred debate among scholars regarding the role of the living metaphor and the possibility of highlighting its ability to independently produce meaning. So far two different criteria have been devised to re-evaluate the traditional idea of living metaphors: deliberateness (Steen, 2008, 2011) and conceptual conflict (Prandi, 1992, 2012, 2017).

Deliberate Metaphor Theory (DMT) addresses the properties of metaphor in linguistic use and discourse that have emerged over the past decades in a series of publications developing new ideas and interpreting existing research. According to DMT, a metaphor is potentially deliberate when the source domain of the metaphor is part of the referential meaning of the utterance in which it is used. According to Steen (2008, 2011), the main feature of living metaphors is that they are deliberate, intentional. This means that they are produced with the aim of inducing the recipient to see a given concept through the lens of an unknown model.

The conflict theorized by Prandi (2017) is based on a structural property of the complex meaning of linguistic expressions. In particular, a sentence has conflicting meaning if the connections between the atomic concepts

established by its grammatical relations do not reflect an autonomous and recognizable conceptual model. The meaning of the sentence *the wind sighs* (analyzed later in this paper) is inconsistent, because the subject refers to a non-human being that fails to fulfill the requirements necessary to make the expressed message consistent (Prandi, 2017). Prandi reinterprets this distinction between conventional and novel metaphor by adopting the terms "conventional figure" and "living figure": the former is used to refer to consistent conceptual structures; the latter denotes the result of contingent interpretations of complex meanings (Prandi, 2017, p. 23). Moreover, Prandi asserts that: "To reduce living metaphors to elaborations of shared concepts is to take a part for the whole. [. . .] the most revealing among living figures of the plane of content are not textual elaborations of consistent metaphorical concepts, but textual interpretations of conflictual complex meanings" (Prandi, 2017, p. 25). He denies that living metaphorical expressions are extensions of conventional metaphorical structures, arguing instead that living metaphors are the consequence of conceptual conflict, since "they are not supported by shared metaphorical concepts but derive from complex conflicting meanings" (Prandi, 2017, p. 25). He adds: "living figures are forms of valorization of linguistic means that push their use beyond instrumental functions toward creation. Like any other linguistic means, syntactic structures may be used either instrumentally or in such a way as to valorize them [. . .] the same syntactic scaffolding is valorized when it is used in a creative way—that is, when it connects atomic concepts in unpredictable ways" (Prandi, 2017, p. 26).

3. Method

The paper intends to illustrate the use of living metaphors in two chapters of *Walden*: (1) "Solitude," and (2) "The Ponds." In these chapters, the rhetorical figure makes a decisive contribution to defining fundamental conceptual structures for the perspective of life and of thought that Thoreau wants to present, producing creative frames that define the metaphorical value of the whole experience at Walden Pond. The aim is to support the idea (Prandi, 2017) that the living metaphor can be conceptual and conflictual, generate new frames and consistent metaphorical swarms. In short, it is able to represent the communion and interrelationship between human and non-human, animate and non-animate, that mirror the transcendentalist thought. The message is conveyed not only through the presentation of ideological references, but also through targeted linguistic choices that enhance that philosophy. The transcendental thought "sacralized nature as humankind's mystic counterpart, arguing [. . .] that physical nature could be decoded as a spiritually coherent system of signs" (Buell, 1995, p. 117), and theorized the organic origin of the universe: nature and spirit correspond, and this relationship can be grasped through contemplation and intuition.

Prandi's perspective (2017)—enhancing the conceptual creativity—is a stimulating addition to any investigation of *Walden*'s metaphors, which aim to represent a proto-ecological model of life and thought, and to shape new metaphorical concepts oriented toward protecting the natural environment.

When we read or hear unconventional, new, creative metaphorical expressions, we have to spend more energy to understand their intended meaning. First we must consider the expression's literal meaning, then build its metaphorical meaning on top of that. However, this operation opens us up to new ideas, expanding and modifying our conceptual structures of reference, as theorized by Prandi (2017), and revealed by Thoreau.

4. Living *nature* metaphors at work

In the chapter "Solitude," Thoreau describes a delightful evening in which he feels at one with nature: "This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself." (Thoreau, 1854, p. 90). The evening is cool and windy, but nevertheless bullfrogs and other nocturnal animals make it unusually attractive. Walking along the pond, enjoying these creatures, Thoreau believes that his solitude makes him a part of nature and allows him to achieve a sense of liberty. He praises the benefits of nature and his deep communion with it, maintaining that the only medicine he needs in life is a draught of morning air.

One of the actions Thoreau implements most often when creating metaphors is personification, which plays a decisive role among metaphors typically used in poetry. These are the metaphors "through which we understand other things as people" (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p. 72). Thoreau writes:

> The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature—of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter—such health, such cheer, they afford forever! and such sympathy have they ever with our race, that all Nature would be affected, and the sun's brightness fade, and *the winds would sigh humanely, and the clouds rain tears, and the woods shed their leaves and put on mourning in midsummer*, if any man should ever for a just cause grieve.
>
> (Thoreau, 1854, p. 96).

Let us consider one of the combinations that employs personification and verify how this creative figure works: the phrase "*The wind* [. . .] *would sigh"* is inconsistent because the role connected to the grammatical subject relationship is occupied by a referent—*the wind*—which does not meet the coherence requirements imposed on it by the relational content of the

predicate—*sigh*. Still, no words receive a distinct metaphorical meaning. They retain their meaning and combine atomic inconsistent concepts by challenging our shared conceptual frameworks: the *wind* cannot *sigh*, and *sighing* is not an activity associated with the *wind*.

We are faced with a conflict that can only be solved through an interpretative act that takes into account the given context. In such a condition, "metaphor is one way to cope with this puzzle—it looks forward" (Prandi, 2017, p. 23). That is, if we interpret "*The wind* [. . .] *would sigh*" as a metaphor, two possibilities open up: *sighing* can be interpreted as a state of the *wind*, which somehow *sighs*; or the *wind*—*sighing*—is interpreted as a living being. In both cases, we can speak of metaphorical interaction: two incompatible concepts—the inanimate and the living world—compete for determination of the same object: *the wind*. The metaphor enhances the conflict to transfer a concept—*the wind*—from its own conceptual area to a foreign area (Prandi, 2012, pp. 342-343). In our example, the transferred concept—*sigh*—receives an inconsistent argument, and the pressure hits the consistent tenor/source domain. This is the main characteristic of the living metaphor, which is therefore conceptual and conflictual (see Prandi, 2017, p. 26). The most creative and revealing metaphors are interpretations of conflicting sentence content, that is, of sentence meanings that combine atomic concepts into inconsistent relationships (Prandi, 2012, pp. 342-343). The result is similar even when we eschew personification: "Though it is now dark, *the wind* still blows and *roars* in the wood, the waves still dash, and some creatures lull the rest with their notes" (Thoreau, 1854, p. 90).

The concept *the wind roars* works as the metaphor mentioned above. Even in Thoreau's mind, the two metaphors share a similar function. Walden is the place where the boundaries between human and non-human are crossed. They both come to speak the same language, confusing and blending their own behaviors: "Walden is blue at one time and green at another, even from the same point of view. Lying between the earth and the heavens, it partakes of the color of both" (Thoreau, 1854, p. 121). Thus, it is consistent that *the wind roars* and that *the wind sighs.* A cognitivist might argue that personification is a conventional conceptual strategy. But there are unclear cases for which a decisive criterion is needed. It is the opposite orientation of the conceptual pressure (Prandi, 2017, pp. 188-189): the conventional metaphor adapts the fire to the tenor; the living metaphor uses fire to press on the tenor. Thoreau really wants to humanize nature. In other words, if you make the wind cry, you want to make it human.

Later in the chapter, Thoreau reflects that his closest neighbor is a mile away, but that he could also be in Asia or Africa, so great is his sense of loneliness. Still, he does not feel alone in his loneliness. He is not giving up on society, but

exchanging the "insignificant" society of humans for the superior society of nature: "an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant" (Thoreau, 1854, p. 90). Thoreau praises the benefits of nature and his deep communion with it.

What Thoreau means by "solitude" is not isolation, but rather self-communion and introspection. Loneliness is more state of mind than actual physical circumstance. For Thoreau, it mirrors a mystical state. Loneliness means being alone spiritually, facing the full range of nature's bounty without intermediaries. Once again, Thoreau uses personification in the metaphor to express this concept: *the friendship of the seasons*:

> Nothing can rightly compel a simple and brave man to a vulgar sadness. While I enjoy *the friendship of the seasons* I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me. The gentle rain which waters my beans and keeps me in the house today is not drear and melancholy, but good for me too. (Thoreau, 1854, p. 92)

We can explain the function of this metaphor through the same approach, but we can also note another feature typical of living metaphors here and elsewhere: it is difficult to think of a substitution of terms that would make the message understandable. Still, the figure allows Thoreau to express exactly what he wants: to describe the relationship between him and the natural elements, which are truly life companions.

Prandi (2017, p. 4) states that the criterion of substitution is empirically inadequate because many living metaphors do not admit substitution, as in the case expressed through the syntactic nucleus *the friendship of the seasons*. Substitution contains a conceptual error because it attributes a property to the metaphor—the availability of a functionally adequate substitute—that belongs to its linguistic meaning. We are faced with a conflict arising from the transgression of a lexical solidarity (Coseriu, 1971; Porzig, 1934). Lexical solidarities are specific restrictions that the lexicon of a language imposes on the use of a relational term, which are by definition located within the domain of coherence. When the conflict is lexical, the substitution of the verb is allowed. When it is ontological, it is not admitted (Prandi, 2007~~, p. 18~~). [PAGE NUMBERS ONLY ALLOWABLE FOR DIRECT QUOTATUIONS ENCLOSED IN "" OR APPEARING IN 40-PLUS WORD BLOCKS.]

Conflict clashes with coherence. *Friendship* is reserved for living beings, not due to any prohibition inherent in the English language and its lexical structures, but for reasons of conceptual legality. An inanimate concept like *the seasons* cannot have a consistent relationship with the concept of *friendship*.

For this reason, there is no word that would be consistent with the two terms under discussion. The functional foundation of substitution is lost (Prandi, 2007). Still a consistent interpretation of the conflicting expression can be imagined, but even when substitution is possible, its choice as an interpretive option blocks the elective function of living metaphors—i.e., interaction and projection (Black, 1954). Moreover, if living metaphors are substitutes, they do not behave as metaphors, that is, as tools for carrying out projection. When a concept is transferred to a foreign environment, it invites us to project onto the subject—in this case *friendship*—its network of consistent concepts (Prandi, 2007).

The concept of *friendship* with the non-human world is repeatedly proposed in *Walden* through the use of metaphor. It emerges as the semantic instrument of choice for fulfilling the task of interrelation between the human and non-human, as in this example:

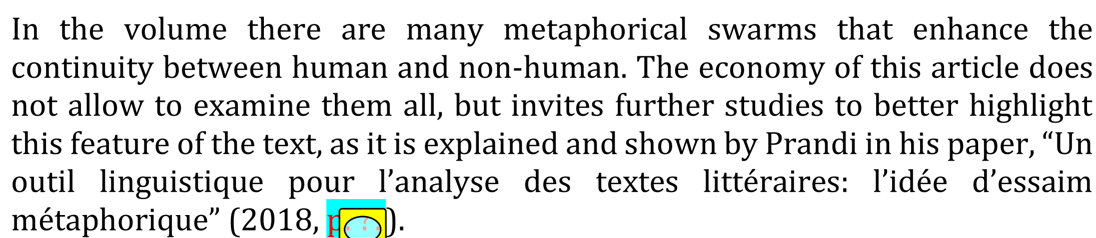
> *Every little pine needle* expanded and swelled with sympathy and *befriended me*. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of *something kindred to me*, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again.
>
> (Thoreau, 1854, p. 92)

The two sentences—*Every little pine needle* [. . .] *befriended me* and *Something kindred to me*—express a similar concept—*friendship*—opening up a metaphorical swarm (Prandi, 2012) that supports and justifies the new metaphorical concepts, that is the communion between the animate and non-animate, the human and non-human world. The fact that a metaphorical swarm is activated is another argument in favor of the lively and conflicting metaphor hypothesis: if nature is human, and the human being is natural, they can communicate, they share behaviors and features. Throughout the chapter, Thoreau consistently remarks the interconnection. He feels: “Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost [that] takes away my breath; yet, like the lake, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled” (Thoreau, 1854, p. 90). Later he writes: “The wildest animals [. . .] are Nature’s watchmen—links which connect the days of animated life” (Thoreau, 1854, p. 90). This connection is able to generate positive emotions: “There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still” (Thoreau, 1854, p. 91). Moreover, nature is gentle as a human being could be: “The gentle rain which waters my beans and keeps me in the house today is not drear and melancholy, but good for me too” (Thoreau, 1854, p. 92). Nature is also beneficial and friendly:

> In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me.
>
> (Thoreau, 1854, p. 90).

This happens because man is part of nature, as Thoreau states: “Why should I feel lonely? is not our planet in the Milky Way?” (Thoreau, 1854, p. 93). And man can behave like it: “I may be either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it” (Thoreau, 1854, p. 94).

In the volume there are many metaphorical swarms that enhance the continuity between human and non-human. The economy of this article does not allow to examine them all, but invites further studies to better highlight this feature of the text, as it is explained and shown by Prandi in his paper, “Un outil linguistique pour l’analyse des textes littéraires: l’idée d’essaim métaphorique” (2018, p. ?).



Later in the chapter, Thoreau introduces one of his core metaphorical concepts: the *leaf*, which deserves careful analysis in this context. Thoreau writes:

> Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? *Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself*? What is the pill which will keep us well, serene, contented? Not my or thy great-grandfather’s, but our great-grandmother Nature’s universal, vegetable, botanic medicines, by which she has kept herself young always, outlived so many old Parrs in her day, and fed her health with their decaying fatness.
>
> (Thoreau, 1854, p. 96)

Here again, the identification with the natural element is not used as a mere embellishment of the prose. Thoreau recognizes himself as a natural being, therefore the sentence: *Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself,* sounds inconsistent with respect to our shared conceptual system, but not with respect to Thoreau’s. He has often been accused of crafting redundant and baroque prose, but in reality the use of certain images is preparatory to his purpose: to create new conceptual frames and replicate them with the aim of making them appear inevitably natural, normal.

At the beginning of this process of educating the senses, as Root (2005) writes, Thoreau read Goethe in the original German. Thoreau noted that “[Goethe] was satisfied with giving an exact portrayal of things as they appeared to him and their effect upon him [. . .]. His object is to illustrate what he sees and for the

most part in the order in which he sees it" (Thoreau, 1854, pp. 262-63). Like Goethe, Thoreau was convinced that "the manifestation of a phenomenon is not detached from the observer—it is caught up and entangled in his individuality" (Goethe, 1988, p. 307). Thoreau emulated Goethe's accuracy and tried to describe the natural world, using living metaphors that led to new discoveries while remaining close to the phenomenon, the most important being that of the archetypal plant. In *Italian Journey: 1786-1788*, Goethe's (1970[1816]) explanation of his discovery of the principle of metamorphosis captured Thoreau's imagination. Goethe writes:

> While walking in the Public Gardens of Palermo it came to me in a flash that in the organ of the plant which we are accustomed to call the leaf lies the true Proteus who can hide or reveal himself in all vegetal forms. From first to last the plant is nothing but leaf (p. 366).

Goethe invented the metaphor of "Proteus"—the god of the sea who can take various different forms. This dovetails perfectly with Prandi's perspective: it is a living metaphor, because it finds no reference in our shared conceptual heritage. It also generates conflict: Proteus has nothing to do with the leaf. But such a metaphor is capable of creating new conceptual meaning. Goethe argues that leaves undergo a transformation, and what is called "stamens" or "calyxes" can usefully be seen as transformed leaves, a process which the image of Proteus helps language to reflect, being the prophetic sea god or the god of "elusive sea change," that suggests the constantly changing nature of the sea or the liquid quality of water. From this feature comes the adjective *protean*, which means "versatile," or "capable of assuming different forms" and conveys positive connotations of flexibility, versatility and adaptability.

In addition to changing shape, the figure of Proteus includes a fluid dimension of the god's origins in water and the leaf as a "being." An ancient conception of nature as animated by beings becomes part of the framework of metamorphosis through metaphor. The image of Proteus encourages us to see the living plant in a new way, not built as a machine, but as something that manifests inner principles. In *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, Goethe (1790) invites us to see the fruitfulness hidden within the leaf. This concept does not belong to a shared metaphorical heritage, so that it is the outcome of a personal creation and conflictual so that it can contribute and inspire new metaphorical interpretations. He writes: "[. . .] we will not fail to recognize the leaf form in seed vessels—regardless of their manifold formations, their particular purpose and context. Thus, for example, the pod may be viewed as a single folded leaf with its edges grown together, husks as consisting of leaves grown more over one another, and compound capsules may be understood as several leaves united round a central point with their inner sides open toward one

another and their edges joined [. . .]" (Goethe, 1988, p. 88). Seeing the leaf concealed within the other forms of a plant is partly empirical (carefully examining the plant in a particular sequence), and partly cognitive (capable of producing new metaphorical meaning).

The leaf will thus become a conceptual frame of reference for Thoreau, and literal and metaphorical leaves appear everywhere in his writing, as in the quote above. He was interested not only in how the leaf could provide the key to plant growth, but also in the way nature seemed interested in the leaf's shape: a metaphor for broader laws relating to all living beings (Root, 2005).

The chapter "The Ponds" focuses on natural elements Thoreau considers special. Back in the woods and resuming his solitary life, the author spends most of his time wandering the surrounding countryside. He climbs Fair-Haven Hill and enjoys ripe blueberries. Occasionally, after he has finished hoeing for the day, he would go fishing with an elderly fisherman who also loves the pond. On warm evenings, he drifts in his boat, playing his flute and watching the perch below him. Thus, Thoreau spends his days and nights, enjoying a sort of idyllic contentment and tranquility. He then turns to what may be considered the core of his happiness, Walden Pond, and gives a detailed description of it which comprises the greater part of the chapter. He also describes other bodies of water in the Concord area: Flint's Pond, Goose Pond, White Pond and Fair-Haven Bay.

But Walden Pond remains the author's primary focus. While it may be quite small, he notes, it is extraordinarily deep and pure, such that some people consider it bottomless. Depending on the point of view and the time of day, the water in the pond can appear blue, green or totally transparent. It makes the bather's body appear pure, rather than yellowish the way river water might.

Here Thoreau's message—to connect man with nature and nature with man—is more evident than ever. This happens through an enhancement of the natural element, which becomes precious, pure and divine. According to transcendentalist thought, nature is the means through which the divine is expressed to man: "the program Emerson outlined in *Nature* [. . .] sacralized nature as humankind's mystic counterpart, arguing (in 'Language') that physical nature could be decoded as a spiritually coherent system of signs" (Buell, 1995, p. 117). Moreover, transcendentalism enables American culture to be redeemed from European culture: true emancipation consisted precisely in the relationship with nature, in its positive sense.

Thoreau uses metaphors to express this awareness. We learn that the pond has "obtained a patent of Heaven to be the only Walden Pond in the world and distiller of celestial dews" (Thoreau, 1854, p. 123). It is "sky water" (Thoreau, 1854, p. 129), "God's Drop" (Thoreau, 1854, p. 133). The author explains

through the metaphor of the pond that his self is the expression of the divine mind and that his higher thoughts are of a divine nature, "deepened and clarified" (Thoreau, 1854, p. 132) by the mind of God.

At the beginning of his description of the pond, while discussing the color of Walden's water, the author states: "It may be simply the result of the prevailing blue mixed with the yellow of the sand. Such is the color of its iris" (Thoreau, 1854, p. 121). The eye metaphor is introduced with the term "iris," and is developed more fully when the author declares: "It is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature" (Thoreau, 1854, p. 121). It is the eye that perceives the divine. This metaphor is functional and very effective in conveying transcendentalism's core message, the divine nature of man: "The idea of a divinity latent within each person. [. . .] 'I have only one doctrine,' Emerson famously announced in his Journal: 'the infinitude of the private man'" (Buell, 2006, p. XXIII).

Viewed through the lens we used to enhance the conceptual value of the living metaphor, we may come to see that this is a weak living figure which features elaborations of a shared heritage. Indeed, we can infer substitution: *the eye of the earth* is the unconscious self of man that can meet the divine through nature. In this image-metaphor, the metaphorical transfer is established between two images, rather than between two conceptual domains. Once united, these images express an easy-to-understand conceptual meaning. But considering the core message of transcendentalism, we should ask ourselves if substitution guarantees correct conveyance of semantic meaning. The earth can't have an eye. The concept is inconsistent, but any substitution we propose limits the potential of the concept. The interpretation of "eye" remains wide open. In *Walden,* the personification of the lake is not limited to the eye metaphor. It is amplified, giving the entire lake human features:

> By this fluctuation the pond asserts its title to a shore, and thus the shore is shorn, and the trees cannot hold it by right of possession. These are *the lips of the lake, on which no beard grows. It licks its chaps from time to time.*
>
> (Thoreau, 1854, p. 125)

The lake has *eyes* and *lips*. This extension of the personification of the lake through the use not only of the eye, but also of other organs of the body, makes the substitution process more complex. It may also be inadequate since it limits interpretation. If the *eye of the earth* is the unconscious self, then what are the lips of Walden? It is clear that the substitution used in the first example does not work with the second. The *lips* cannot be associated with the idea of the self.

A final set of image-metaphors in the chapter are built around the idea of Walden Pond and neighboring ponds as precious stones. Here are some examples for Walden: "[The] water [of Walden] is of such crystalline purity that the body of the bather appears of an *alabaster whiteness*" (Thoreau, 1854, p. 122). "[Walden] is *a gem* of the first water which Concord wears in her coronet" (Thoreau, 1854, p. 123).

> In such a day, in September or October, Walden is a perfect forest mirror, *set round with stones* as precious to my eye as if fewer or rarer. Nothing so fair, so pure, and at the same time so large, as a lake, perchance, lies on the surface of the earth.
>
> (Thoreau, 1854, p. 123)

The same conceptual frame is used to describe the adjacent ponds:

> [. . .] *the gem of the woods*, is White Pond. Since the wood-cutters, and the railroad, and I myself have profaned Walden, perhaps the most attractive, if not the most beautiful, of all our lakes, *the gem of the woods*, is White Pond.
>
> (Thoreau, 1854, p. 135)

> White Pond and Walden are *great crystals* on the surface of the earth, Lakes of Light. If they were permanently congealed, and small enough to be clutched, they would, perchance, be carried off by slaves, like *precious stones*, to adorn the heads of emperors [. . .]. *They are too pure to have a market value*; they contain no muck. How much more beautiful than our lives, how much more transparent than our characters, are they! We never learned meanness of them.
>
> (Thoreau, 1854, pp. 136-137)

These living metaphors are more than mere embellishment; they serve as conceptual structures that highlight conflictual meanings, bringing together conflicting concepts. Here, the *pond* is referred to as a *gem*, in stark contrast with its liquid state. Conflictual metaphorical meanings have a very specific purpose in Thoreau's text: to document the potential of linguistic expressions. Furthermore, the complex network of inferences triggered by a living metaphor can generate a set of conflicting expressions consistent with it—the metaphoric swarm mentioned above—that is open to empirical investigation. In *Walden*, the pond is not only a *gem*, it is also a *precious stone,* a *crystal*, etc. (see Baym, 1966).

Once again creative metaphors carry conflicting messages—the liquid nature of lake water clashes with the solid nature of precious stones. The conflict is

solved on a semantic level: these figures introduce a proto-environmental message unprecedented for Thoreau's time. Nature (in this case the ponds) contains not only spiritual value, but economic value as well. The living metaphor is a very effective tool for the purpose of expressing the nascent environmental awareness in Thoreau.

5. Results and conclusion

The metaphors analyzed in the chapters "Solitude" and "The Ponds" support the thesis that living metaphors can be the voice for complex conceptual messages. They possess autonomy and conceptual relevance. Therefore, it is possible, useful, even desirable to propose a study of conceptual conflicts to be integrated into a cognitive approach to metaphors. The goal is to lead us toward a comprehensive and inclusive vision of both the complex universe of metaphors, and the empirical domains in which different typologies coexist.

Within *Walden*, Thoreau emphasizes the importance of making full use of one's time on earth. When he says:

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.
>
> (Thoreau, 1854, p. 65)

Thoreau argues that it would be a waste to die without having lived in true appreciation of nature. Metaphor is the tool that best embodies this sentiment because it is able to associate apparently inconsistent concepts. Thoreau writes: "I wanted to live deep suck out all the marrow of life" (Thoreau, 1854, p. 65). Just as *the marrow* is the nucleus where the nourishment of a bone is found, Thoreau wanted *to suck up* all the value of life by living as one with nature. The linguistic figure becomes a tool for creating and enhancing a message about the true meaning of life: that only through communion with nature can one live a true, authentic existence. Technically, communion arises from the fact that the metaphor works in both directions: it projects the human onto nature and nature onto man.

The living metaphor can therefore be considered an elective tool for inventing new conceptual frames that aim to naturalize the transcendentalist and/or proto-environmentalist message, which reconsiders the relation between what is human and non-human. In the metaphorical swarm that Thoreau creates these metaphors appear consistent.

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The Author

Anna Re (Email: anna.re@iulm.it) is Senior Researcher of English, Linguistics and Translation at IULM University, Milan. She graduated in Foreign Languages and Literature at IULM; she then obtained a Master's degree in English with an Emphasis on Literature and the Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno (USA) and a PhD in Comparative Literature at IULM. Her scientific activity is structured around two main strands: the translation of environmental literature (Translation Studies) and its linguistic analysis, and the study of various topics in the field of English Linguistics, with particular regard to textual linguistics (genre analysis). Among her publications: *Italian environmental literature: An anthology* (Italica Press, 2003), *Americana Verde* (Edizioni Ambiente, 2009), *English and the arts: A contemporary romance* (Aracne, 2019).

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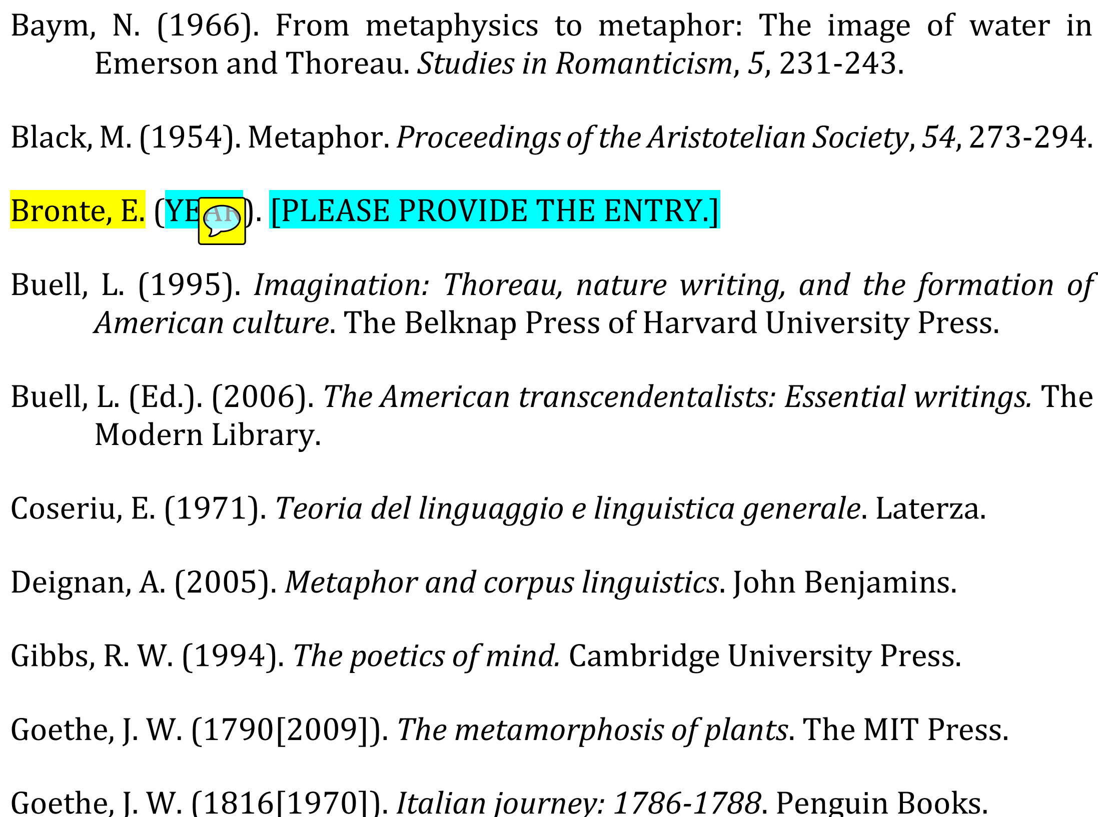

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