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THOREAU AND GIBRAN'S DEFENSE  
OF UNCONVENTIONAL THOUGHT  
IN *WALDEN* AND *THE PROPHET*

by  
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A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Henry David Thoreau and Kahlil Gibran wanted to give their readers a broader, more optimistic view of the world by showing that society is not infallible and its rules are not impervious to change. They saw that many people are trapped in unsatisfying modes of life because they hold the pessimistic belief that the laws of civilization are unalterable. Many cannot see beyond the limits of social norms that are peculiar to a specific time and place. What Thoreau and Gibran wanted to communicate to their readers is that there are many ways to live and that the way most people live at a certain point in time should not be seen as sacrosanct. *Walden* and *The Prophet* are an affirmation of Thoreau and Gibran's belief that there is a fuller life beyond the institutions, laws, fashions and vocations of civilization.

In their own lives Thoreau and Gibran were non-conformists who were sceptical of conventional mores. Furthermore, they were ardent spokesmen for freedom of thought. Both authors wished their writing to be an accurate expression of the ideal of self-realization which they defended throughout their lives. The first two chapters of the thesis discuss Thoreau and Gibran's nonconformance and their defence of freedom of thought in their lives and their writing.

Chapters three and four are dedicated to presenting the methods that Thoreau and Gibran use in *Walden* and *The Prophet* to undercut conventional mores and encourage their readers to experiment with new ideas. The precise terminology of Mikhail Bakhtin provides a useful tool for the analysis of the nonconformist elements in *Walden* and *The Prophet*. Therefore, the two books are discussed with the aid of specific critical terms taken from Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* and *Rabelais and His World*.

The last chapter of the thesis provides a brief overview of the style and themes of each author. Despite the many similarities between the themes and approach of Thoreau's *Walden* and Gibran's *The Prophet*, each author has a unique way of communicating his message of self-reliance.

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TO MY PARENTS,  
MY BROTHER, GEORGE, AND SISTER, NATALIE

## INTRODUCTION

Self-realization is a recurring theme in Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) and Kahlil Gibran's (1883-1931) writing. Self-realization can be defined as a conscious and deliberate attempt to choose one's own way of living. Above all, it is an attempt to free oneself from stereotyped or conventional modes of thinking. Thoreau and Gibran realized that the pathway to self-realization is rarely a smooth one; it is often complicated by social opposition and ostracism. Their own attempts at self-realization placed them in opposition to conventional ways of thinking and earned them the epithet of "eccentrics." However, both authors remained persistent nonconformists who chose to live according to their ideals despite social opposition. In view of Thoreau and Gibran's nonconformist lifestyles, it is not surprising that independent thinking is a central theme in much of their writing. The theme of independent thinking is especially evident in Thoreau's *Walden* and Gibran's *The Prophet*.

The principal message in *Walden* (1854) and *The Prophet* (1923) is that living in accordance with one's ideals is the greatest act of freedom. "All that is worthwhile is a free spirit. And this means as many different things as there are human beings," Gibran told his biographer, Barbara Young (38). Thoreau, who, like Gibran, was a tireless believer in every human being's right to freedom, wrote in his journal: "As to conforming outwardly, and living your own life inwardly, I have not a very high opinion of that course" (*The Heart of Thoreau's Journal* 54). Both authors believed that to be fully satisfied with life an individual must take every opportunity to think independently and to express his or her unique character.

So strongly did Thoreau and Gibran believe in their ideals of personal freedom that they did their best to live their own lives in accordance with the messages they presented in *Walden* and *The Prophet*. "I hate writing that is untrue to a man's life: there's nothing in it," Gibran wrote in a letter to his friend and benefactress, Mary Haskell (*Beloved Prophet* 94). In a letter to his sister, Helen, in 1840, Thoreau expressed the same sentiment that "an honest book's the noblest work of man" (Paul 18). "The theme is nothing ; the life is everything," he wrote on another occasion to explain his insistence that his own writing be true to his life (Salt 115). Gibran tried as much as possible to bring *The Prophet* to life by acting out the ideals he presented in the pages of *The Prophet* (Hawi 116). "In *The Prophet*, I have imprisoned certain ideals and it is my desire to live those ideals," he wrote to Mary Haskell. Thoreau was no less devoted to his message of living up to the ideals he presented in his writing. He scorned the literary professor who would write a treatise on preparing huckleberries while his huckleberries were being cooked by the servants in the kitchen (Salt 113). "A writer who does not speak out of a full experience uses torpid words, wooden or lifeless words, such words as "humanitary," which have a paralysis in their tails," said Thoreau (*The Heart of Thoreau's Journal* 143). To write a theoretical treatise was to write a half-truth, and neither Thoreau nor Gibran was interested in such an endeavour.

"If you must call me something, say I am a life-ist!" Gibran told Barbara Young (17). Gibran himself did not explain the meaning of the word "life-ist," but it is possible to deduce what he meant by the term through a study of his life and his works. In most of his works Gibran challenges accepted norms of behavior on the one hand and on the other hand, defends every person's right to choose his own life. After an examination of his life it becomes evident that what he did in his writing he also did in

his life, namely defying accepted norms by refusing to engage in trade (the traditional vocation of Lebanese immigrants in Gibran's Boston) and choosing the vocation which afforded him the greatest satisfaction: writing. Once the connection between Gibran's life and the themes of his writing becomes obvious, it is easy to understand what he meant by being a life-ist. To Gibran a life-ist is someone who lives according to his or her ideals, who consciously chooses a vocation which he or she loves and who is constantly in a process of spiritual growth and renewal. One person who closely fits Gibran's definition of a life-ist is Henry David Thoreau. In his journals, speeches, publications and unconventional mode of life, Thoreau was a consistent life-ist. At the age of forty-one, Thoreau wrote the following advice in his journal: "Find out as soon as possible what are the best things in your composition, and then shape the rest to fit them. The former will be the midrib and veins of the leaf" (*The Heart of Thoreau's Journal* 317). Thoreau and Gibran's writings and lifestyles were enactments of Thoreau's advice in that simple statement: they had early on discovered the best things in their composition and built their lives and their writings around them. Chapter one is dedicated to presenting Gibran and Thoreau's gradual progress from "eccentric" childhood to youth of nonconformity, and finally to their chosen vocations as what Gibran called "life-ists" who would not settle for less than a total reevaluation of what it is to live successfully.

# CHAPTER I

## FROM NONCONFORMISTS TO LIFE-ISTS

Henry David Thoreau and Kahlil Gibran were born in different time periods and in very different circumstances. Thoreau was born in Concord in the state of Massachusetts in 1817. He was the third child in a family of four children. His father, John Thoreau, was a successful pencil-manufacturer of French extraction; his mother, Cynthia (nee Dunbar) was the owner of "the town's most popular boardinghouse" (Schneider 2). Thoreau's childhood appears to have been a happy one. His elder brother, John, was also his best friend, and he was on good terms with his parents and his two sisters, Helen and Sophia. Although the family was not wealthy, they were able to send their two sons, John and Henry, to Concord's best school, and in 1833 Henry, who proved to be a better pupil than his brother, was sent to Harvard (Schneider 3). On the whole, Concord, in the years of Thoreau's childhood and youth, was a peaceful place where there was little poverty and few discrepancies between social classes (Harding 3). It was also the home of an active anti-slavery movement ( of which Henry Thoreau's mother and his aunt Maria were fervent members ) and an important stopover on the underground railroad.

Gibran Khalil Gibran was born in 1883, thousands of miles away from the United States, and in a social environment very different from that of Concord. At the time of Gibran's birth in the remote mountain town of Bsharri in north Lebanon, Lebanon was still under the yoke of the Turkish Empire. Conditions were hard and many Lebanese suffered from exploitation, heavy taxes, and the corruption of the feudal government

and the clergy (*A Third Treasury of Kahlil Gibran* 199). Gibran's family was no exception. His father made a meagre income as a shepherd and a collector of the goat-tax in Bsharri. Despite the difficult conditions, Gibran's father, who had little education and may have had an addiction to drink, did little to improve the income of his family (Hawi 83). In 1894, wishing to escape the difficult conditions in Lebanon, Gibran's mother Kamila, her two sons, Peter and Khalil, and two daughters, Marianna and Sultana, sailed for Boston. Whether Gibran's father was serving a prison term at the time, or simply refused to leave his homeland, is unclear, but the fact remains that he did not accompany his family to the United States (Hawi 84-85).

Despite differences in outward circumstances, the young Gibran and the young Thoreau shared a similar tendency towards solitude and nonconformance. People who knew Gibran as a young child in Bsharri described him as "eccentric," and remembered that he would often sit alone and draw portraits in charcoal, an activity his father did not approve, and for which he often punished the boy (Hawi 84). Neighbors referred to an especially memorable incident when the young Gibran occasioned a violent outburst of rage from his father by drawing a caricature of a wealthy and influential man in Bsharri (Hawi 84).

Gibran's eccentricity and independent thinking became even more pronounced when he returned from Boston to study at Al-Hikmah school in Beirut. At Al-Hikmah, Gibran did not follow the regular curriculum of the school but rather chose his own course of study, which consisted of ancient and modern Arabic literature, French language and literature and the Bible (Hawi 86-87). His classmate, Yussuf Huwayik, described Gibran at this period as being "lonely, obstinate, and strange in appearance, wearing his hair long and untrimmed" (Hawi 87). Gibran's independence of thought



became even more noticeable when, in 1908, he joined the Academie Lucien in Paris to study painting, but came into conflict with his teachers for deviating from the methods of painting advocated by the academy. Since he could not be contented with merely imitating the work of his teachers, Gibran finally left the academy and opened a studio together with his friend and old classmate from Al-Hikmah, Yusuf Huwayik (Hawi 97). To compensate for the lack of formal instruction, the two friends took to visiting art exhibitions and museums (Hawi 97).

Like Gibran, the young Thoreau was a lover of solitude and was considered an anomaly by many of his peers and their parents (Harding 18). When Thoreau entered Harvard he still retained some of his childhood love of solitude and innate shyness; his Harvard classmates remembered him as reticent and somewhat aloof (Sattelmeyer 3). Although young Thoreau's nonconformance was outwardly less striking than Gibran's, his tendency for independent thinking was no less pronounced. The earliest sprigs of Thoreau's characteristic nonconformity began to surface when he was only a seventeen-year-old sophomore at Harvard. In one of his first sophomore essays, Thoreau wrote: "The majority of mankind are too easily induced to follow any course which accords with the opinion of the world" (Paul 28). In the same year, he wrote another essay differentiating between what he called The Superior and The Common Man. Thoreau defined the Common Man as someone who does not question the ways of the world and lives in blind conformity to the norms of society. The Superior Man, on the other hand, is someone who chooses his own way of life and builds himself a new world (Paul 30). In yet another essay written during his sophomore year, Thoreau expressed a belief that truth should not be sacrificed to social etiquette (Paul 29). In 1836, when Thoreau was in his junior year at Harvard, he decided to leave the university for a term and get a

job in order to help his parents with university expenses. He applied for a teaching position in Canton, Massachusetts, and by chance, Orestes Brownson, an unorthodox thinker and theologian, was a member of the committee which interviewed Thoreau for the job (Sattelmeyer 19). For a number of months, Thoreau worked at the school and boarded with Brownson, who introduced him to the essentials of the German language and to some transcendental German works on metaphysics and philosophy which were unavailable in English at the time (Sattelmeyer 19-20). In fact, Brownson may have been the catalyst in converting Thoreau's mental nonconformance into an outward nonconformance similar to Gibran's. The first sign of Thoreau's outward nonconformance appeared in 1837, when Thoreau, a fresh graduate from Harvard, left his teaching position at the Center School in Concord because he opposed the policy of corporal punishment, even though it was a standard procedure practiced at most schools in Thoreau's day (Schneider 4). At approximately the same time, he further asserted his independence by changing his name from David Henry to Henry David Thoreau (Schneider 5).

As Thoreau grew older, he was even less inclined to conform to society. In 1837 Thoreau first came into contact with Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was impressed by the young man's free thinking and affinity with transcendental ideas. Emerson records his enthusiasm for the younger transcendentalist in his journal: "I delight much in my young friend, who seems to have as free and erect a mind as any I've met" (Harding 64). Thoreau's self-reliance was in perfect agreement with Emerson's transcendental belief that "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist" (Emerson 33) and that "Men are conservatives when they are least vigorous, or when they are most luxurious" (Emerson 350). Thoreau was cheered and encouraged by Emerson's approval of his

nonconformance, especially since many of the more conservative Concordians reproached him for not making better use of his time (Harding 177 ). His own family was distressed by his odd behavior, and his aunt Maria was probably expressing a common attitude when she said, " I wish he could find something better to do than walking off every now and then" (Paul 17). However, as time passed, the relationship between Thoreau and Emerson cooled. Emerson was increasingly disappointed with what he saw as Thoreau's lack of ambition (Paul 18); he lamented that Thoreau did not make better use of his talents because "with his energy and practical ability he seemed born for great enterprise" (Neufeldt 40). Thoreau, on the other hand, was disillusioned with Emerson's conformity to the status quo and his fondness for high society and the fine manners of the drawing room (Christy 195). Ironically, the tendency for independent thinking and nonconformity, which Emerson had initially found so admirable in Thoreau, were the same qualities for which he criticized him in later life. Eventually, as a result of his strict adherence to his own ideals, Thoreau found himself in conflict both with the conservatives of Concord and with his former mentor, Emerson.

The act of nonconformance which led to Gibran's conflict with the Lebanese community in Boston was his choice of vocation. While his brother, Peter, chose the usual vocation of Lebanese immigrants in America, trade, Gibran chose a literary career. The inclination towards a literary career had showed itself early in Gibran's life. While studying at the Quincy School in Boston's Chinatown, Gibran Khalil Gibran or Kahlil Gibran, as he was called by his American teachers, developed an interest in English literature (Naimy 28). Later, as a student at Al-Hikmah School in Beirut, he had himself chosen a curriculum consisting chiefly of Arabic and French literature. He

also started a school magazine to which he contributed his own poems, prose articles and drawings (Hawi 87). However, while the young Gibran was developing his literary talents in Lebanon, an unexpected tragedy was awaiting him in the United States. It was when he was on his way back to Boston that Gibran received the devastating news that his sister Sultana had died of tuberculosis and his brother Peter was ill with the same disease. Shortly after Gibran returned to Boston his brother died; then followed the death of Gibran's mother. The tragedies of 1901 left a deep impression on Gibran's mind and may account for the urgency with which he worked to publish his message to the world. What had started as a playful attempt at writing became a search for meaning and an overpowering urge to communicate. Following the death of his relatives Gibran lived with his remaining sister, Mariana. Instead of taking over his brother's store, he chose to continue painting and writing, despite the fact that he got very little income for his painstaking work. Mariana did her best to support her brother by working as a seamstress to supplement his small income. As a result of his refusal to engage in trade, Gibran was much criticised by the Lebanese community in Boston, who thought it shameful that he should be dependent on his sister's earnings (Hawi 90). Regardless of the financial difficulties and the scorn of the Lebanese community, Gibran continued to work hard at his manuscripts. Although he never abandoned his childhood love of drawing, his drawings and paintings became increasingly linked with the ideas he expressed in his writing. Perhaps, like William Blake, to whom he has so often been compared, Gibran saw his drawings as a means rather than an end. In other words, the drawings were part of the message he sought to communicate to his audience.

Just as Gibran had loosened the boundary between his writing and his artwork by making them thematically interrelated, he gradually came to loosen the boundary between what he wrote and how he lived. "If you must call me something, say I am a life-ist!" he told his biographer, Barbara Young, later in life (Young 17). It is in this respect that he comes closest to Thoreau who had said, "The theme is nothing, the life is everything" (Salt 115). As a life-ist Gibran was more than a poet or a writer, he was an artist who had made his art and his life into one reality. Gibran had spent many long years struggling with social opposition. He persevered in his chosen vocation despite the stinging criticism of his community. In his writings he did the same thing that he did in his life: waged a battle against conformity, rigid traditions and institutions which denied human freedom. By the time he had written his most famous book, *The Prophet*, he had merged his life and his writing to the fullest extent.

Choosing a vocation was as much a turning point in Thoreau's life as it was in Gibran's. His first choice of a vocation was teaching, but after his initial disappointing experience at the Center School, Thoreau went to work in his father's pencil-manufacturing business. As a pencil-manufacturer he was very successful, and in a short time improved his father's products by inventing a new way of mixing graphite (Salt 18). However, Thoreau's experience as a pencil-manufacturer left him feeling more dissatisfied than ever and in 1839 Henry Thoreau and his brother, John, opened a school of their own. Whether it was in teaching or pencil-making, Thoreau never failed to exhibit his creativity. The school that Henry and John opened was unlike any other at the time, not only because the brothers did not resort to corporal punishment but also because they were among the first educators in American history to use the hands-on approach, "learning by doing" (Harding 82). Yet, neither teaching nor pencil-

making allowed Thoreau enough scope for his creativity, and he was unhappy with both. The man who had been known as a quiet and unobtrusive boy and a retiring college student, was gradually reaching an awareness that any traditional vocation, be it business, teaching, the clergy, law or medicine, entails a certain loss of freedom. In answer to a Harvard questionnaire (issued by the university to get information on its alumni) Thoreau wrote: "I am a Schoolmaster, a Private Tutor, a Surveyor, a Gardener, a Farmer, a Painter (I mean a House Painter) a Carpenter, a Mason, a Day Labourer, a Pencil-maker, a Glass-paper-maker, a Writer, and sometimes a Poetaster" (Salt 55). He concluded that he would be obliged if his more successful school fellows did not come to him with their charitable sentiments, but should they themselves ever feel in need of help, pecuniary or otherwise, he was ready to be of service (Salt 55). Thoreau had realized that the choice of vocation, which had seemed so important to him as a fresh graduate and continued to be the major concern of most of his contemporaries, was nothing less than a certain mutilation, a voluntary forcing of all the faculties into one narrow and limited direction. The different kinds of vocations were like different sized cogs in a machine. The aim of all the vocations was, ultimately, to keep the social and economic system running smoothly for the benefit of the few and at the expense of the many. In answer to Emerson's comment that all the branches of knowledge were taught at Harvard, Thoreau said, "Yes, indeed, all the branches and none of the roots" (Harding 51). If the vocations such as the clergy, business, and teaching, which were taught at Harvard, were aimed chiefly towards financial success and climbing up the branches of society, Thoreau was not interested. What did interest him was the roots. In his journal he wrote: "So superficial these men and their doings, it is life on a leaf or a chip which has nothing but air or water beneath.

I love to see a man with a tap root though it make him difficult to transplant”

(*Thoreau: People, Principles and Politics* 72). The roots signified a firm basis beneath what Thoreau saw as superficialities: financial success and a strict adherence to one vocation. The man with a taproot was, simply, the nonconformist, the Superior Man whom he had described as a sophomore at Harvard.

Though they came from different backgrounds and took different routes, Thoreau and Gibran arrived at the same destination at last. Both began as youthful nonconformists who were dissatisfied with the condition of their societies. They developed into writers who voiced their criticism of society in similar ways. Finally, they became life-ists, who, after examining the various vocations and finding them unsatisfactory, chose to make living their true vocation. It is not surprising that Emerson mistook Thoreau’s nonconformance for lack of ambition. To understand Thoreau and Gibran’s ambition, it is necessary to disregard the conventional definition of ambition which lays a strong emphasis on improving social status and increasing financial gain. Emerson himself, despite his creativity, never totally divorced himself from certain aspects of conventional morality. For Emerson, the word *ambition* carried all the usual connotations of power and wealth (Paul 175). Emerson was, after all, the man who resolved the problem of why certain individuals control most of the wealth of society by saying, “ But that is a natural result of personal force and love, that they should possess and dispense the goods of the world (Emerson 270). In his essay, “Nominalist and Realist,” Emerson says, “Money, which represents the prose of life, and which is hardly spoken of in parlours without an apology, is, in its effects and laws, as beautiful as roses” ( Emerson 328 ). In *The Prophet* and *Walden*, Gibran and

Thoreau were to counter Emerson's conventional definition of success with their own life-ist definition of what it was to be successful.



## CHAPTER II

### A CALL FOR SELF-REALIZATION

For Thoreau and Gibran self-realization is the basis of success. To be successful it is essential to live according to one's own ideals, not according to the ideals of society, and to choose one's own vocation in life. "Let a man step to the music which he hears, however measured" said Thoreau in his journal ( *The Heart of Thoreau's Journal* 70 ). A successful person is above all an independent thinker, someone who looks at society with a critical eye and is able to transcend its narrow boundaries. To live perpetually in awe of social standards and social definitions of success is not to be truly successful. Gibran believed that true success was accompanied by a spiritual awakening. In "The Tempest" Gibran's hermit, Yusif El- Fakhri, says that spiritual awakening is the most important thing in life ( *A Treasury of Kahlil Gibran* 29). The spiritual awakening is the moment when an individual realizes that to be fully alive he or she has to break away from convention and to follow his or her own ideals. According to Gibran, living in blind conformity to custom and perpetuating conformity were among the greatest of sins because they implied stunting spiritual growth and moving away from self-realization. In *Sand and Foam*, he says:

If there is such a thing as sin, some of us commit it backward  
following our forefathers' footsteps;  
And some of us commit it forward by overruling our children (Bushrui 73)

Thoreau shared Gibran's belief that to be successful and to appreciate life in its entirety, an individual should not think in terms of etiquette and tradition. "The creature of institutions, bigoted and conservatist, can say nothing hearty," Thoreau wrote. "He

cannot meet life with life, but only with words" (*The Heart of Thoreau's Journal* 86). Self-realization is a search for more life: new experiences, fresh solutions to problems, a broader outlook and a wider understanding. "There is nothing on this planet but a struggle for life," Gibran wrote. "Every physical or mental movement, every wave of the sea and every thought or dream is a struggle for more Life" (*Beloved Prophet* 209-210). Society, Thoreau and Gibran believed, is not a fair judge of success and neither wealth nor social status are accurate measurements of success. The only judge of an individual's success is the individual him or herself and the only indicator of success is freedom of thought.

Throughout their lives Thoreau and Gibran were staunch spokesmen for human freedom and opponents of all forms of servitude. Thoreau was an active member of the anti-slavery movement and a spirited defender of the abolitionist, John Brown. In a series of public speeches, he came to the defense of John Brown at a time when Brown was being tried for an armed attack on a caravan transporting runaway slaves back to the South. Although Brown was denounced by most white people at the time and later hanged by the authorities, Thoreau hailed him as a hero and a martyr. Gibran was no less a defender of freedom, especially during difficult times. He was among the few Lebanese immigrants in America who worked hard to help his people in Lebanon during the First World War. With a handful of other Lebanese and Syrian expatriates he organized the League of Liberation, and the Relief Committee which raised funds to relieve starvation in war-torn Lebanon and Syria. However, the slavery that Thoreau and Gibran opposed was not merely the slavery of black people in America or the servitude of the Lebanese under Turkish rule. They opposed collaboration with any

law or institution which does not foster an atmosphere of freedom. "Slavery," said Gibran, "possesses various names, but one reality" (*The Secrets of the Heart* 31).

The type of slavery which Thoreau and Gibran criticize most often in their writings is the mindless conformity of the masses to tradition, fashion, and stagnant institutions. "Newspapers, magazines, colleges, and all forms of government and religion express the superficial activity of a few, the mass either conforming or not attending" wrote Thoreau in his journal (*Thoreau: People, Principles and Politics* 149). Although *Walden* and *The Prophet* are in many ways the most complete accounts of Thoreau and Gibran's opinions on society and human freedom, it is worthwhile to mention their treatment of the subject in other works, in their private letters and, in the case of Thoreau, in his journal, to get a more comprehensive view of their perspective.

Indeed, Thoreau and Gibran's criticism of society was not limited to *Walden* and *The Prophet*; in fact, a lot of what they wrote before and after *Walden* and *The Prophet* was also a criticism of society. Much of their criticism was directed at conformity, which they considered to be a major cause of human suffering in ancient civilizations, and a continuing source of misery in modern times. It should be noted, however, that Thoreau and Gibran distinguished an uneasy conformity to morally unjust laws, from a willing cooperation with morally just laws. The first implied a degradation and a lack of initiative, the second moral uprightness and freedom of thought. In an early work, "Khalil the Heretic," Gibran significantly gave the name Khalil to the main protagonist who defies the authorities of his native town and incites the people to go against their corrupt leaders. Khalil cries with the voice of Kahlil Gibran:

With the strength of our arms we lifted the columns of the temple, and upon our backs we carried the mortar to build the great walls and the impregnable pyramids for the sake of glory. Until when shall we continue building such magnificent palaces and living in

wretched huts? Until when shall we continue filling the bins of the rich while sustaining life on dry morsels? (*A Treasury of Kahlil Gibran* 293)

Thus, Thoreau and Gibran agreed that what is commonly described as “making a living” is too often nothing less than mass slavery, sustained for the trivial interests of a few egotistical individuals. “How much of the industry of the poor, traced to the end, is found thus to be subserving some rich man’s foolish enterprise,” says Thoreau in his journal (Meltzer 74). The stimulus behind most of the trade and labor in society is greed, which in turn is born out of pride and the love of power. The unfortunate result is that society is based on corrupt institutions which contribute to the benefit of the few through the suffering of the majority. In “Society”, Kahlil Gibran says: “The sufferings of the multitudes are as the agonies of gnawing pain, and in the mouth of society there are many decayed and ailing teeth” (*A Treasury of Kahlil Gibran* 237). The “decayed and ailing” teeth are age-old institutions created for the sake of pride which for thousands of years furthered human suffering. “Let us have institutions framed not out of our rottenness but out of our soundness,” says Thoreau (*Thoreau: People, Principles and Politics* 157).

Thoreau and Gibran realized that corrupt institutions are not the only cause of suffering, however. Though they are “rotten,” the institutions themselves would be of little concern had it not been for the blind conformity of millions to such institutions. What perpetuates greed, pride and love of power is a calculated system of mind-control, a conditioned docility and an in-built fear of independent thinking in the masses. The millions conform to “rotten” institutions because they are brought up to believe that there are no alternatives. They live mean, unsatisfying lives because they are afraid that should they ask for more, the authorities will deny them what little they already have. In an allegorical tale entitled “The Lion’s Daughter,” Gibran portrays the

conforming masses as four slaves fanning an old queen who is asleep on her throne. While the queen sleeps, the slaves mock her and shower her with curses, but when her crown falls they are terrified and quickly replace it. "How rarely I meet with a man who can be free, even in thought!" exclaimed Thoreau. "We live according to rule. Some men are bed-ridden; all world ridden" (*Thoreau: People, Principles and Politics* 141). In "Civil Disobedience" Thoreau further undercuts the conformity of the masses: "The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies " (*Thoreau: People, Principles and Politics* 39).

Although fear and lack of independent thought are an important cause of conformity, they are not the only cause. To ensure mass conformity, the ruling classes condition the populace towards accepting set modes of life by lauding those at the top as the epitomes of success. They convince the masses that the "elite" are superior and their mode of life is what everyone should be striving for. Thus, the populace accepts the notions that everything associated with the elite is the ultimate aim of life. In an allegorical tale from *The Forerunner*, "The King-Hermit," Gibran's narrator meets the former king of his land, who had left his kingdom and become a hermit in the forest. The narrator, astounded at the king's decision to leave a life of power and luxury, asks him why he had decided to be a hermit, and the king says: " . . . I left my palace with but my garment, for I would no longer be a ruler over those who assume my vices and attribute to me their virtues" (*The Voice of Kahlil Gibran* 10). To "assume" the vices of the ruling classes, individuals have to adopt the mentality of the ruling classes. Once this is done vices and virtues have no real moral value. What is virtuous becomes simply whatever is done by the elite and vices are anything that the elite disapproves of. The result is a society which is fully conditioned for immoral and unoriginal action.

Thoreau divided people into two "species": the minority are the thinking and independent individuals, while the majority are the creatures of society, who live on the surface, spend their lives amassing wealth, and are forever interested in the latest news and the latest fashions (*The Heart of Thoreau's Journal* 132). The people most likely to "assume the vices" of the ruling class are those most fully conditioned and assimilated into the system. They become passionate supporters of the system because they have adopted its ideology; it is no longer something foreign and imposed but rather so firmly grafted into their minds that they are likely to view any criticism of it as a personal insult.

By presenting their criticism of society Thoreau and Gibran were not advocating a new system, since no matter what name or slogan it came under, any kind of system was too liable to serve those in power and enslave the majority. In "Al-Asifah" Gibran condemns all civilizations, saying that the difference between civilization in the East and civilization in the West is like the difference between the tiger and the lion (*A Third Treasury of Kahlil Gibran* 111). Perhaps Gibran had arrived at his conclusion through his own experiences of life in both the East and the West. Thoreau, who was a less extensive traveller than Gibran, arrived at the same conclusion largely as a result of his reading of travel books. In his book, *Thoreau as World Traveller*, John Aldrich Christie shows that Thoreau was a voracious reader of travel books, averaging more than ten travel books a year over a period of many years (46). One result of Thoreau's reading was his realization that custom ruled everywhere: the fashionable lady in Boston was no less a slave of custom than the Chinese woman with fashionably deformed feet or the traditionally disfigured African Flathead (Christie 222). Conformity is neither new nor limited to a particular form of government. Although it

appears in many shapes, it is always distinguished by a mutilation of the mind because a person who is a thorough conformist surrenders original thought in favor of social acceptance. Furthermore, a conformist often prefers to cooperate with morally unjust precepts rather than contradict the values of society. "The majority of men of the North, and of the South and East and West, are not men of principle," Thoreau wrote in his journal (*Thoreau: People, Principles and Politics* 116).

Thoreau and Gibran believed that to improve human life it was necessary to break the chain of conformity which made of people an easy prey to any kind of tyranny. Human beings must stop feeling that they are powerless to effect change, and deny their allegiance to any human law which conflicts with righteousness. "For to agree with the wrongdoer is infamy, and to hearken to that which is false is treachery," says Gibran (*The Voice of the Master* 68). In his novella, *The Broken Wings*, Gibran states that "He who does not rebel against oppression is doing himself injustice" (*The Voice of Kahlil Gibran* 135). Oppression in Thoreau and Gibran's terms includes any precept which opposes what is morally just. In his journal and in "Civil Disobedience" Thoreau places morality above law: "It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right," he states (*Thoreau: People, Principles and Politics* 38).

Thoreau and Gibran believed that the most important kind of reform was the reform of the individual. The individual must be inspired with self-confidence and encouraged to have opinions of his own. Once people have enough faith in their own opinions and a feeling that they are able to effect change, they will be able to break through conformity and lead the life that they choose for themselves. Gibran frequently expressed outrage at the idea that Jesus was portrayed as being meek and lowly. To portray meekness as the principal characteristic of Jesus was to present meekness as an



ideal of conduct. It was yet another way of conditioning people to accept conformity and servitude. Gibran believed that Jesus was the greatest of rebels; he was a "storm" and a "sword" in history because he came to liberate people from their blind conformity and give them faith in themselves (Hawi 182). "Jesus," says Gibran, "was the most powerful personality in history" (*Beloved Prophet* 363). While faith or optimism is the herald of change for the better, pessimism is a sure indicator of stagnation. In his parable, "The Scarecrow," Gibran portrays a pessimistic philosopher as a scarecrow who is so useless to society that he is not effectual even as a scarecrow since the crows take advantage of his weakness and build nests under his hat. Pessimism leads to a standstill, Gibran believed. If every person in a society holds the pessimistic belief that he or she is unable to improve his or her condition, then no improvements will occur. "If I am nothing, and you are nothing, here are two nothings together. And what have you? What has the whole world if everybody considers himself nothing?" Gibran wrote to Mary Haskell (*Beloved Prophet* 349). To succeed, he believed it was necessary to have faith in oneself and continually aspire towards living a fuller life. Many of Gibran's characters: Jesus, the Madgod, the Madman, Yuhannah Al-Majnun, Khalil the heretic, Yousif El-Fakhri and others are powerful nonconformists whose aim is to reach a fuller, more satisfying life. Thoreau shared Gibran's belief that living according to one's ideals and striving for a fuller life was the aim of existence. "If a low use is to be served, one man will do nearly or quite as well as another; if a high one, individual excellence is to be regarded," Thoreau wrote (*The Heart of Thoreau's Journal* 63). Like Gibran, Thoreau believed that by breeding conformity and discouraging individual thought, institutions were dehumanizing people. "The habit of looking at men in the gross makes their individual lives have less human interest for us," he stated (*The Heart*



of *Thoreau's Journal* 87). Both Thoreau and Gibran believed that aspiration was the most important ingredient for success. "You must prevail of your own force, as a plant springs and grows by its own vitality," Thoreau said (*Thoreau: People, Principles and Politics* 146). In another journal entry he wrote: "Faith, indeed, is all the reform that is needed; it is itself a reform" (*Thoreau: People, Principles and Politics* 23). For Gibran, God was aspiration. "My God," he writes, "my aim and fulfilment: I am Thy yesterday and Thou art my tomorrow. I am Thy root in the earth and Thou art my flower in the sky, and together we grow before the face of the sun" (Hawi 195).

Although Thoreau and Gibran's earlier works contain many of the ideas they presented in *Walden* and *The Prophet*, *The Prophet* and *Walden* are the most complete records of their life-ist viewpoint. Whether *The Prophet* is considered Gibran's best work or not is a matter of debate, but it is certainly true that it took the longest time to compose. The same is true of Thoreau's *Walden*, which was written over a period of ten years and was not published until it had gone through seven drafts. The aim of the following chapters is to show how the two authors used *Walden* and *The Prophet* to promote the theme of self-realization which was so much a part of their lives and their work.

## CHAPTER III

### NONAUTHORITATIVE DISCOURSE

Some critics have seen *Walden* and *The Prophet* as didactic texts which seek to replace the prevailing ideology of civilization with their own authoritative ideas. In her article, "Carnival Rhetoric and Extra-Vagance in Thoreau's *Walden*," Malini Schueller uses the terminology of the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin to defend her hypothesis that Thoreau tears down conventional or authoritative mores; however, she goes on to argue that he replaces them with his own authoritative code of ethics. Bakhtin's terminology provides a useful tool for analyzing the nonconformist message in *Walden*. Thoreau did, ofcourse, wage an attack on authoritative ideas, yet, did he really aim to replace one set of fixed and rigid authoritative mores with another? By maintaining that Thoreau was aiming to "institutionalize a counter-ideology" Malini Schueller is overlooking the theme of individuality and personal freedom which is so much a part of *Walden*.

In his book, *Kahlil Gibran*, Khalil Hawi mentions that Gibran's work is didactic or authoritative in its approach (249). Certainly, *The Prophet* is written in the form of a sermon and appears to be giving strict, schoolmasterish rules of conduct to the reader; however, to determine whether or not Gibran intends to be didactic in *The Prophet*, it is necessary to take a closer look at the content of The Prophet's speech. My thesis in this chapter is that both Thoreau and Gibran were zealous defenders of individuality in both their lives and their works and their main objective in *Walden* and *The Prophet* was to "awaken" their readers to a greater sense of personal freedom. With the

help of critical terms drawn from Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, I aim to show that Thoreau and Gibran were consistent defenders of experimentation, a constant search for new ideas and interpretations of the world.

Considering the predominance of the life-ist element in the lives and works of Thoreau and Gibran, it is unlikely that they would dedicate their most detailed and representative works, *Walden* and *The Prophet*, to sanctioning the ideology of one, authoritative voice. In chapter one I tried to show that throughout their lives Thoreau and Gibran were life-ists. In other words, they were men who lived according to their own ideals despite social opposition. In chapter two I point out that Thoreau and Gibran were active members of organizations which furthered human freedom, as well as public speakers whose main subject was that of freedom. What's more, chapter two revealed the frequent references to the subject of freedom and individuality throughout the works of Thoreau and Gibran. In *Walden* and *The Prophet* the two authors take the idea of personal freedom even further. Their aim is to diminish the authority of any convention, tradition, or habitual way of thinking and acting.

One way in which Thoreau and Gibran diminish any kind of seemingly unchallengeable authority is by destroying what Bahktin called the "habitual matrices" of ideas. What are the "habitual matrices" of ideas? According to Bakhtin the habitual matrices of ideas are the arrangements in which ideas are traditionally or conventionally linked together. For example, old age is traditionally linked with wisdom and experience, wealth is traditionally linked with prestige, the government is traditionally linked with authority and so on. Although some of the connections between ideas are logical and justified others are random or mistaken, and are continually perpetuated simply because they have become habitual. "Amid the good things of this here-and-

now world are also to be found false connections that distort the authentic nature of things, false associations established and reinforced by tradition and sanctioned by religious and official ideology," says Bakhtin (*The Dialogic Imagination* 169). To destroy the "habitual matrices" of ideas it is necessary to study the traditional connections between ideas, to take them apart, and experiment with new combinations.

Experimentation is at the core of *Walden* and *The Prophet*. At the beginning of *Walden* Thoreau urges his readers to "try their lives with a thousand simple tests" (13). He is anxious to experiment himself; however he is equally anxious that his readers become experimenters in their own way. When discussing the subject of experimentation, Thoreau often uses the pronoun "we" meaning that he himself is included among those who need to free themselves from conventional ideas. Therefore, he has a dual aim in *Walden*: to experiment with "habitual matrices" himself, and to encourage others to experiment in any way they see fit. His message is consistently a life-ist message. He sees that there are countless combinations of ideas; therefore it is foolish to consider any one way of thinking and living as infallible. "This is the only way, we say; but there are as many ways as there can be drawn radii from one center," Thoreau tells his readers (14).

Gibran is equally preoccupied with breaking down "habitual matrices" in *The Prophet*. The Prophet says that he "hunted" for the "larger selves" of humanity but he adds that "the hunter was also the hunted" (91). In other words, the Prophet, like Thoreau is an experimenter who was looking for self-fulfilment and testing his own ideas. Although the Prophet finds some truths which he communicates to the audience, he is quick to point out that what he has found is not conclusive nor final. At the end of his sermon he says that he wants to be remembered as a beginning not as an end (92).

He does not want his sayings to be close-ended and inflexible. On the contrary he advises his audience not to consider any idea to be final and unchallengable: "Say not, 'I have found the truth,' but rather, 'I have found a truth,'" he tells his audience (55). When speaking of teaching, the Prophet again refutes the authoritativeness of any doctrine. "For the vision of one man lends not its wings to another man," he says (57). In the final section of *The Prophet*, "The Farewell," the Prophet says that he would rather give a promise than pretend to have answered all the questions of the people and fulfilled their needs (83). The promise that the Prophet gives is simply hope and encouragement. He urges the people to believe in themselves because they have potentials which even they themselves are not aware of (91-92). The concluding lines of *The Prophet* are in agreement with Gibran's nonauthoritative belief that one cannot actually teach anything. After delivering his sermon the Prophet says,

But you do not see, nor do you hear, and  
it is well.  
The veil that clouds your eyes shall be lifted by the hands that wove it,  
And the clay that fills your ears shall be pierced by the fingers that kneaded it  
(93)

Hence, the implication of the Prophet's words is that every person should be an independent experimenter. Self-fulfilment is something that cannot be achieved by adopting the notions of society, or passively listening to the teaching of others. Indeed, there is an interesting similarity between the conclusion of *The Prophet* and the conclusion of *Walden*. Like the Prophet, Thoreau closes his address to the reader with the belief that self-realization can only be achieved by individual effort. Furthermore, he hints that experimentation or independent thought is something that does not come with time only. It requires a conscious endeavour on the part of every individual. The final paragraph of *Walden* summarizes Thoreau's life-ist ideals throughout the book:

I do not say that John or Johnathan will realize all this; but such is the

character of that morrow which mere lapse of time can never make to dawn. The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star (320).

When Thoreau says that the sun is only a morning star he is hinting at the countless number of stars that can be seen at night. During the daytime when the sun is bright the other stars cannot be seen. The sun for Thoreau represents any authoritative idea or any habitual way of thinking. An authoritative idea like the sun usually obscures any other “stars” which represent alternative ways of thinking. The overwhelming brightness of the sun implies the overpowering strength of traditional or habitual convictions. Some are so taken with authoritative ways of thinking that they are blinded to any other possible ways of thinking. To see the countless number of “stars” or in other words, to be an independent thinker, one must free oneself from the influence of the “sun” or the habitual matrices of ideas. Like Gibran, Thoreau considered it his task in *Walden* to “awaken” his readers to new ways of thinking. However, neither Thoreau nor Gibran wanted to provide their readers with yet another source of authoritative ideas.

More importantly, *Walden* and *The Prophet* are intended to awaken hopes of a more fulfilling life. Through the example of their own lives, Thoreau and Gibran attempted to show that though it may be difficult to live according to one’s ideals, it is not impossible. In *Walden* and *The Prophet*, they strove to empower the reader by constant encouragement and an optimistic outlook. The assertive quality of many of their statements make Thoreau’s *Walden* and Gibran’s *The Prophet* psychologically powerful statements of hope. The importance of using assertive and optimistic messages of hope cannot be underestimated, especially in view of some recent findings in the field of psychology on the power of hope as a stimulant for improving one’s chances of achieving set goals. In his book, *The Psychology of Hope*, C.R. Snyder

presents one recent theory on hope. He writes that people who rated high on the scale of optimism or in other words were “higher in hope,” were found to be more likely to achieve their goals than those lower in hope, so a person’s degree of hope is a good indicator of whether he or she will succeed in any undertaking (24). Although Thoreau and Gibran’s *Walden* and *The Prophet* resemble their other works in their criticism of conformity, they are distinguished by their continual emphasis on hope and renewal. What Thoreau and Gibran sought in *Walden* and *The Prophet* was to awaken their readers to a fuller reality than the narrow one afforded by civilization. The main message in the two books is best summarized by the words of the Apostle Paul in the Bible: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).

In *The Prophet* and *Walden* Thoreau and Gibran continually emphasize their belief that the potential for improvement is latent in every human being, and that therefore, they do not claim to be teaching the readers anything new, but only giving them more faith in themselves. “People of Orphalese,” says the Prophet, “of what can I speak save that which is even now moving within your souls?” (10). In the last section of *The Prophet*, “The Farewell,” the Prophet says, “Wise men have come to you to give you of their wisdom. I came to take of your wisdom” (88). Thoreau shares Gibran’s method of drawing on the latent wisdom of every human being: “What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines or rather indicates his fate,” he states (11). In the chapter entitled “Sounds” Thoreau further expresses his life-ist belief that the only true law that any person should follow is the law of his or her nature. “Follow your genius closely enough and it will not fail to show you a fresh prospect every hour,” he says (112). Thoreau believed that no one is old or experienced enough to teach others how to live.



In *Walden* he says that at the age of thirty he feels that he is still too young and too inexperienced to give such advice; however, he has listened to the advice of his elders and found that they too are inexperienced. "Here is life," Thoreau says, "an experiment to a great extent untried by me; but it does not avail me that they have tried it" (12).

Instead of advice Thoreau wanted to give readers encouragement and faith in themselves. "I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor," Thoreau wrote in the chapter entitled "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For" (91). *Walden* is an invitation for every reader to live out hidden potentials, to discard conventional ways of living and to experiment with life. "Nature and human life are as various as our several constitutions," Thoreau says. "Who shall say what prospect life offers to another?" (14).

In the section on Teaching in *The Prophet*, Gibran echoes Thoreau's belief that the best advice is simply encouragement and faith in people's own hidden capabilities:

The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind (56).

Thus, although they often criticized human institutions, Gibran and Thoreau had a tremendous faith in humanity's potential for improvement. In a letter to Mary Haskell Gibran says, "The greatest teaching of Christ was the Kingdom of Heaven, and that is within you. Is a man that has the Kingdom of Heaven within him poor?" (*Beloved Prophet* 349). Gibran's chief objection to many doctrines was that they emphasized human weakness and not human strength. "To measure you by your smallest deed is to reckon the power of the ocean by the frailty of its foam," he says in *The Prophet*.

Thoreau, like Gibran, was appalled by the tendency to exaggerate human weakness and overlook human strength. "One would say that even the prophets and



redeemers had rather consoled the fears than confirmed the hopes of man," Thoreau states. Thoreau agreed with Gibran that human nature should not be represented as being weak and grovelling, because within every human being is a vast reservoir of capabilities and untapped riches. "Every man is the lord of a realm beside which the earthly empire of the Czar is but a petty state, a hammock left by the ice," Thoreau wrote in *Walden* (308). Human beings are equal in their potential for greatness because they belong to what Gibran called the vast man. The vast man is the reservoir of humanity's capacity for greatness. "It is in the vast man that you are vast, And in beholding him that I beheld you and loved you," Gibran says (*The Prophet* 85). Like Gibran, Thoreau saw the vast man beneath the careworn, timid and overworked exterior of men and women. In the first chapter of *Walden*, "Economy," Thoreau urges his readers not to waste the better part of their nature by devoting their lives to ideals which they do not honestly agree with. He compares "Negro Slavery" to the slavery of people to public opinion. Slavery is not only a regrettable social phenomenon, Thoreau observed, it is a state of mind (11). Therefore, it is not so important to abolish the unjust law of "Negro Slavery" as it is to abolish the tendency to view any law with slavish compliance. In the section entitled "Freedom" in *The Prophet*, Gibran voices an opinion similar to Thoreau's, "And what is it but fragments of your own self you would discard that you may become free?" (48).

In their two books Gibran and Thoreau speak against weariness, desperation and fear. *Walden* is a hopeful message aimed at "the mass of men who are discontented, and idly complaining of the hardness of their lot or of the times, when they might improve them" (19). Similarly, *The Prophet* is aimed at encouraging those who "creep" and "crawl" and "dig holes into darkness for safety" (91). Gibran and Thoreau firmly

believed that weariness is not caused by difficult circumstances; it is the result of a wrong way of thinking. "You have been told also that life is darkness, and in your weariness you echo what was said by the weary," says Gibran (26). However, life itself is not weary. Weariness is in the mind and it is caused by not having faith in oneself. "However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are," Thoreau says in the conclusion of *Walden* (314). Gibran agreed that most of the difficult circumstances in a person's life are directly linked with that person's way of thinking. "And if it is a care you would cast off, that care was chosen by you rather than imposed upon you," he says (49). The "mass of men" who lead lives of resignation are in fact living in "confirmed desperation," said Thoreau (11). To live in confirmed desperation is to live without the realization that change is possible. Thoreau and Gibran held that human beings are capable of living at many different levels of consciousness. Gibran's vast man is equivalent to the highest stage of consciousness. Unfortunately, few people realize their potential to be vast men. They live in a state of half-consciousness and are not at one with themselves. Speaking on Good and Evil, Gibran says, "In your longing for your giant self lies your goodness: and that longing is in all of you" (66). Thoreau voices the same belief in *Walden* and urges that every reader become an explorer of his or her own mind, "a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds" of thought (308). Thoreau and Gibran strived to show that to escape desperation, people must raise their level of consciousness and be at peace with themselves.

In both *The Prophet* and *Walden* is a continual emphasis on awakening from the sleep of stereotyped thought. "The commonest sense," says Thoreau, "is the sense of men asleep, which they express by snoring" (312). In *The Prophet*, Almitra, the

seeress, describes the Prophet as “wakeful” and says that he is the one who has listened to “the weeping and the laughter” of the people in their “sleep” (10). “Sleep,” or unconsciousness and lack of thought, are often associated with what the people say, but the Prophet speaks in “the over-wakefulness of noontide” (27). To be awake is to aspire for self-realization. Gibran equates self-realization with goodness even though he does not equate lack of self-realization with evil. The person who is “asleep” to greater thoughts is simply misguided and a sluggard (66).

“Moral reform,” says Thoreau, “is the effort to throw off sleep” (91). Thoreau, like Gibran, believed that people are not evil when they are not living up to their ideals but merely limited. What they lack is the hopeful outlook which lends a brighter tint even to the most difficult circumstances. They also lack creativity and the stimulus to improve their lives. On the other hand, those who are “awake” are able to differentiate between right and wrong more clearly because they are more finely in tune with reality and are not easily swayed by public opinion. Furthermore, they conform to laws which are more just and benevolent than those of society (309). Finally, those who are awake are constantly cheered by “an infinite expectation of the dawn”, a continuous hope for better prospects which makes life more of an adventure and less of a “confirmed desperation” (91). *Walden* and *The Prophet* were written to awaken readers from their habitual surrender to a fixed and limited mode of thinking. Gibran describes Almustapha, the Prophet, as being “a dawn unto his own day” (3). Thoreau compares himself to chanticleer: “As I have said,” Thoreau states, “I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up” (85). In both cases, the ultimate aim is to

awaken readers to the fact that change for the better is possible and close at hand and all that is required is a little faith in oneself.

*Walden* and *The Prophet* are intended to be an invitation to experiment in life and a starting point on the road to self-realization. They encourage readers to have more self-confidence in themselves and to substitute their life of inertia and confirmed desperation with one of resolution and self-fulfillment. After his sermon is over, the Prophet states that some of his words may appear vague and incomprehensible to some; however, that is not to be lamented since all he ever sought to do was to provide a beginning, a spark of inspiration. As for the rest, it can only be accomplished by the individual him or herself. "Vague and nebulous is the beginning of all things, but not their end, And I fain would have you remember me as a beginning," he says (*The Prophet* 92). Thoreau too intended his book to be no more than a beginning and an invitation to experiment with life. He did not want his readers to head for the woods and build a cabin next to a lake. Instead he wanted them to understand that by enlarging their viewpoint and believing in their own ability to succeed, they would undoubtedly attain their goals. Speaking of his life at Walden Pond Thoreau says: "I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours" (310).

The message of Gibran's Prophet in the final section of *The Prophet*, "The Farewell," is no less hopeful:

This would I have you remember in remembering me:  
That which seems most feeble and bewildered in you is the strongest and most determined  
Is it not your breath that has erected and hardened the structure of your bones?  
And is it not a dream which none of you remember having dreamt, that builded your city and fashioned all there is in it? (92).

Thoreau and Gibran realized that many people live in despair because they are unsatisfied with their lives and because they believe that there is only one way to live. It is to the despairing and unsatisfied section of society that Thoreau and Gibran addressed their books. They sought to convince their readers that there are as many ways to live as there are thoughts and no one is obliged to be the slave of any human law or institution.

What Thoreau and Gibran attempted to do in *Walden* and *The Prophet* is challenge what Bakhtin called the “authoritative discourse” with the “internally persuasive word.”.

The “authoritative discourse” according to Bakhtin is the language and belief system of politics, tradition, religion and fashion (*The Dialogic Imagination* 342). The “authoritative discourse” is usually characterized by monoglossia, one voice or one way of thinking and interpreting the world. The “internally persuasive word,” on the other hand, implies the unique thoughts and convictions of every individual. Unlike the “authoritative discourse” the “internally persuasive word” is not supported by tradition or habit, in other words, it is not bolstered by authority. It is characterized by heteroglossia, many different voices or many different ways of interpreting the world. While the authoritative discourse is rigid and crystalized, the internally persuasive word is fluid (346). Since the internally persuasive word is nonauthoritative it allows the free play of ideas, therefore to speak in the language of the internally persuasive word is to be an experimenter and to accept many different ways of thinking. What Thoreau and Gibran encouraged in *Walden* and *The Prophet* is more independence of thought and more interaction among ideas. They desired to do away with the awe inspired by any kind of “authoritative discourse” and prove that no thought can claim absolute authority. The best thoughts according to Thoreau and Gibran are characterized by

hazy outlines; they are not final. Gibran suggests that a crystal is mist in decay implying that to be in tune with reality a person has to revise his or her thoughts constantly in order to adapt them to a given situation (92). A crystal denotes a thought which is out of touch with life because it does not have the element of renewal and change which is a part of life. Thoreau gives a more detailed conception of Gibran's ideal of flexible thoughts:

In view of the future or possible, we should live quite laxly and undefined in front, our outlines dim and misty on that side; as our shadows reveal an insensible perspiration towards the sun. The volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement (311).

The image of mist versus crystal is used by both Thoreau and Gibran to show the difference between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive word. The Prophet compares himself to the mist and he compares his nonauthoritative ideas to morning dew in a field ( 84 ). In earlier works, Gibran had compared Jesus to a storm. The difference between the doctrine of Jesus and the doctrine of Almustapha, the Prophet, is also the difference between authoritative and nonauthoritative ideas. The metaphor of the storm implies forcefulness on the part of Jesus and submission on the part of his audience. The metaphor of the dew, on the other hand, implies mildness.

Almustapha's doctrine is not a finished product; it is a product in the making.

Almustapha, like Thoreau does not present his readers with final answers, instead he provides them with a starting point from which to launch their own experimental views. Thus, *Walden* and *The Prophet* can be compared to a workshop in which their authors present their readers with the tools to carry out their experiments. "Dew," "mist" and "perspiration towards the sun" are all images which convey the idea of the internally persuasive word, which is malleable and nonauthoritative.

To illustrate their independence from all forms of “authoritative discourse”

Thoreau and Gibran often use the metaphor of “wandering.” By using the metaphor of wandering they are implying that their thoughts are not intended to be seen as fixed.

Wandering implies taking many different pathways of thought, moving forward, examining one’s tracks, and travelling without a certain destination in mind. Malini Schueller points out that Thoreau uses the word *extra-vagant* to describe his language (35). “Thoreau’s separation of the word emphasises both its Latin origins: *extra* (outside) and *vagari* ( to wander ),” says Schueller. “It is a language that will wander outside the bounds of socially instituted ways of thought. Wandering, rambling, and walking were metaphors Thoreau used to suggest the freedom of thought from final formulations” (35). Gibran uses the metaphor of wandering in a similar way when he says,

We wanderers, ever seeking the lonelier way, begin no day where we have ended another day; and no sunrise finds us where the sunset left us.  
Even while the earth sleeps we travel ( 82 ).

The lonelier way is a metaphor for mental independence. By saying that wanderers do not begin a new day where they have ended another day, Gibran implies that an independent thinker is forever looking for new thoughts and searching for fresh solutions to problems. The sleeping earth is a metaphor for the unthinking masses of society. Unlike the wanderer, the sleeping masses are limited to a certain locality, a certain traditional and authoritative way of thinking which prevents them from discovering alternative ways of thought.

The speakers of *Walden* and *The Prophet* are more than wanderers; however, they are outsiders to the civilized world. On the very first page of *Walden*, Thoreau makes a point of telling his readers that at the time of writing *Walden* he lived alone in the



woods in a cabin built by himself, a mile away from the nearest neighbor. Although Gibran did not actually live in the wilderness like Thoreau, he intentionally places his narrator, Almustapha The Prophet, in a natural setting instead of in the city. The Prophet lives in the wilderness on the outskirts of society, eats berries among the hills and sleeps in the portico of a temple. Although the people of the city invite him to eat of their food and sleep in their houses he refuses to do so (89). In his refusal lies an indication of his stubborn independence of mind and his determination to find alternatives to the prevailing way of living. "The life which men praise and regard as successful is but one kind," says Thoreau. "Why should we exaggerate any one kind at the expense of the others?" (22). For both Thoreau and the Prophet, living in nature is a deliberate experiment, a representation of independent thinking and a statement of self-realization. Thoreau says that by leaving the company of men and going to Walden Pond, he was hoping to discover for his own sake what the real aims of life should be:

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 (91).

Thoreau and Gibran intentionally place their narrators outside the boundaries of civilization in order to "objectify" the authoritative discourse of society. In Bakhtin's terminology, to objectify the thoughts of someone else means to set them apart as specimens for study. Thoreau and Gibran's narrators are experimenters and the subject of their experiment is the authoritative discourse of civilization. The most important way in which the two authors objectify the intractable notions of civilization is by studying them from a different context: nature.



This does not mean that they were primitivists urging their readers to revert to an earlier stage in civilization. On the contrary, they believed that people should not be victims of a romantic attachment to past ways of life. By moving outside the boundaries of civilization Thoreau and Gibran are breaking the “habitual matrices” of ideas. In his study of Rabelais, M.M. Bakhtin showed how Rabelais broke the “habitual matrices” of ideas by making seemingly serious and pompous subjects into objects of laughter. In *The Dialogic Imagination* Bakhtin says that laughter, comedy, parody, carnivals and festivals such as the Mardi Gras, paved the way for the novel because they challenged “authoritative discourse.” Laughter belittles the seriousness and the importance of habitual and traditional ways of thought. Anything which can be laughed at is diminished in size and importance; it is no longer unchallengeable or authoritative. However, Bakhtin believed that the place of parody in modern writing is insignificant (71). Parody has been replaced by heteroglossia or the struggle for more interpretations and many diverse ways of thinking. The carnival world in the novel, Bakhtin believed, is a democratic world whose aim is to “expose” all kinds of sterile conventionality and break up stereotypes (*The Dialogic Imagination* 162). By placing their narrators in nature, Thoreau and Gibran are decentralizing and thereby diminishing the importance of conventional beliefs. Nature becomes a carnival world in which the stereotypes of culture can be turned inside out.

## CHAPTER IV

### CARNIVAL IN *WALDEN* AND *THE PROPHET*

Before entering upon a specific discussion of Thoreau and Gibran's use of carnival, it is worthwhile to pause and take a closer look at the term "carnival" itself: what is it and how does it undercut authoritative mores?

In the abstract, carnival represents any unofficial, nonconformist world view which challenges mainstream thought. In his essay "Epic and Novel" Bakhtin explains that the conformity of people to authoritative ways of thinking is the result of fear, awe and piety (*The Dialogic Imagination* 23). Because authoritative mores are associated with such powerful emotions they cannot be seen objectively. They become elevated and distanced from everyday life. According to Bakhtin, the purpose of carnival is to create an atmosphere of fearlessness which would allow a limitless experimentation with ideas (*The Dialogic Imagination* 24). Historically, Medieval and Renaissance carnival created this atmosphere of fearlessness by making authoritative mores into objects of laughter. "Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it," says Bakhtin in "Epic and Novel" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 23). Once they are no longer fearful or sacrosanct, authoritative mores can be taken down and studied. They can be detached from their conventional associations and placed in new contexts (*Bakhtinian Thought* 64). Bakhtin considers Medieval and Renaissance carnival to be the first step towards the democratization

of language and society. As a result of carnival, words, discourses, languages and cultures undergo a process of "dialogization." "A word, discourse, language or culture undergoes 'dialogization' when it becomes relativized, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 427). As a result of the carnival world view: "The temporal model of the world changes radically: it becomes a world where there is no first word, (no ideal word), and the final word has not yet been spoken" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 30).

So far what has been presented is a general definition of carnival. The remainder of the chapter aims to present a detailed study of how Thoreau and Gibran use carnival in *Walden* and *The Prophet* to undercut conventional ways of living and to communicate the theme of self-realization. As mentioned in chapter two, much of Thoreau and Gibran's writing prior to *Walden* and *The Prophet* was a criticism of blind conformity to authoritative culture because it implied a stunting of individual self-realization. *Walden* and *The Prophet* are a defense of every human being's right to voluntarily choose his or her own path in life. Throughout the two books Thoreau and Gibran use a combination of techniques in order to encourage their readers to think and act for themselves. All the techniques are tinged with the spirit of carnival and work together in order to diminish the influence of the authoritative discourse on the readers' minds.

One of the techniques has already been dealt with at length in chapter three; however, it is necessary to mention it again in view of its connection with the notion of carnival. The technique involves the use of hopeful and assertive statements in order to inspire readers with more self-confidence. The use of encouraging statements serves the same purpose as laughter in Medieval and Renaissance carnival. Laughter, Bakhtin

believed, leads to a state of empowerment by dispelling feelings of inferiority and powerlessness in the face of authoritative ideas. The aim of laughter during the Medieval and Renaissance carnivals and popular festivals was to free the mind from fear and awe and allow an individual to see the world of authoritative discourse from a new perspective. Likewise, the aim of hopeful and encouraging statements in *Walden* and *The Prophet* is to give readers enough faith in their own thoughts to challenge authoritative ideas. Just as carnival laughter gave Medieval and Renaissance folk enough confidence to invert and rearrange the "habitual matrices" of ideas, Thoreau and Gibran's encouraging statements in *Walden* and *The Prophet* are intended to give readers enough confidence in their own thinking to look objectively at the authoritative discourse and substitute their own "internally persuasive words" for the strict and fixed mores of civilization.

Another carnival technique is the use of nature to represent the "internally persuasive word." In chapter three I tried to prove that Thoreau and Gibran were not attempting to replace one rigid set of authoritative mores with another. To do so would be to contradict the theme of self-realization which lies at the core of *Walden* and *The Prophet*. In this chapter, I intend to take the idea even further by suggesting that Thoreau and Gibran were attempting to substitute for the narrow, doctrinaire ideas of civilization a free and open-ended, carnivalesque celebration of life and human possibilities. Before entering into a discussion of how nature represents the carnival world, however, it is necessary to further clarify the distinction that Bakhtin makes between the carnival point of view and its antithesis, the authoritative discourse.

Bakhtin's most extensive discussion of carnival appears in his book, *Rabelais and His World*. In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin makes an important distinction between

what he calls the 'grotesque body' and the 'classical body' (*Bakhtinian Thought* 67). The "grotesque body" is the carnival body; it represents all the forces of repressed popular culture. The "classical body," on the other hand, represents the authoritative discourse. The difference between the grotesque body and the classical body can also be interpreted as the struggle between two currents of thought. The "grotesque body" represents all that is unfinished, fluid and open-ended. It is characterized by open orifices and on-going metabolic processes. The "classical body," on the other hand, is similar to a finished statue. Unlike the "grotesque body," which is a biological workshop in a constant state of becoming, the "classical body" is perfect and therefore fixed and unchangeable. The distinction Bakhtin makes between the grotesque body and the classical body is important because it symbolizes the distinction between the carnival perspective, which is down-to-earth, alive, and changeable and the perspective of the "authoritative discourse," (mainstream culture, politics, economy and religion) which is rigid, pompous and partial. Like the "grotesque body," carnival is open-ended and in a continual process of becoming. It is a celebration of a continuous "dialogization" where competing definitions for different terms are given equal weight and there is no attempt to give absolute answers to any questions. The carnival world is a tolerant, neutral world in which all ideas are acceptable and in which no single way of thinking or doing is given more authority than another.

Although Thoreau and Gibran attacked mainstream politics and economy in works written prior to *Walden* and *The Prophet*, as well as in *Walden* and *The Prophet*, they did not represent nature as a utopia in which all the problems of humanity would be solved. In fact, both authors ridiculed the notion that any one person could create a perfect world which would suit every human being's intellectual, moral and emotional

predisposition. In a work written before *The Prophet*, *The Madman*, Gibran parodied the notion of a perfect utopia. He presented his readers with a “perfect world” which proves to be a dull, monotonous world where everything from material possessions to morals is carefully measured, weighed and calculated (Hawi 227). Two things are conspicuously absent from the “perfect world”; the first is a simple enjoyment of life, the second is freedom of thought. In *Walden* Thoreau admits that he has little patience with reformers who consider it their duty to perfect the world: “I believe that what saddens the reformer is not his sympathy with his fellows in distress, but, though he be the holiest son of God, is his private ail. Let this be righted, let the spring come to him, the morning rise over his couch, and he will forsake his generous companions without apology” (80). At the end of the chapter entitled “Visitors” Thoreau calls reformers “the greatest bores of all” and states that these were the men who worried him most (152). A few lines later Thoreau substitutes the word “men harriers” for reformers, suggesting that the reformers with their fixed ideas are more likely to molest rather than help people. He makes it clear that he dissociates himself from their ranks and would rather socialize with children “come a-berrying, railroad men taking a Sunday morning walk in clean shirts, fishermen and hunters, poets and philosophers; in short, all the honest pilgrims, who came out to the woods for freedom’s sake” (152).

If Thoreau and Gibran were not attempting to reform the world or present a return to nature as the perfect remedy for society’s problems, what exactly were they doing in *Walden* and *The Prophet*? The answer is they were trying to change their readers’ vision of the world. Both authors believed that society’s vision of the world was limited by a blind adherence to habit, etiquette, the economic system, indoctrinated religion and politics, all of which can be included under the general heading: the

authoritarian discourse. Authoritarian discourse presents people with a version of reality which is not necessarily accurate or comprehensive but which is nevertheless presented as "the truth." The result is that people in society act, speak and think not in their own language but in the language of the authoritarian discourse. Their spontaneity of thought and more generally, their natural response to the environment around them is limited by their conformance to authoritarian values. The belief that people's responses to the environment are limited by the authoritarian discourse is not confined to Thoreau and Gibran. Emerson and the Transcendentalists in general shared a similar belief; furthermore, in recent years the same belief has been reiterated by several modern schools of psychotherapy. In his article, "Transcendentalism and Psychotherapy: Another Look at Emerson" William E. Bridges makes an interesting correlation between the Transcendentalists' opinion on the subject and that of the Gestalt therapists today: "Like the modern-day Gestalt therapists, who have demonstrated so startlingly modern man's inability to respond to experience as a natural and total organism, Emerson spoke of our difficulties in knowing and saying what we feel as signs of a tragic loss of human power" (162). The psychoanalyst Eric Fromm explains that our inability to know and say what we feel is the result of social (authoritarian) conditioning. The average person, Fromm states, "is aware of reality only to the degree to which his social functioning makes it necessary" (Fromm 108). Anything which is not sanctioned by the authoritarian discourse becomes part of the unconscious mind. "We come, then, to the conclusion that consciousness and unconsciousness are socially conditioned," says Fromm. "I am aware of all my feelings and thoughts which are permitted to penetrate the threefold filter (of socially conditioned) language, logic, and taboos (social character). Experiences which are not



filtered through remain outside of awareness, that is, they remain unconscious” (Fromm 104).

Thoreau and Gibran’s main objective in *Walden* and *The Prophet* was to encourage people to break out of the confines of authoritative thinking and adopt a more comprehensive and spontaneous outlook. They were encouraging what Bridges calls “Self-recovery.” Bridges defines “Self-recovery” in the following way: “Self-recovery is not the recovery of a thing - a self- although it is difficult not to speak of it in these terms. Rather it is the re-opening of the lines of inner communication so that the person can once again respond authentically and openly to life around him” (162). An open response to the environment is similar to the response which Bakhtin called “carnival.” The carnival response is open because it is not looking for final solutions or generalizations; it is actually a continual process of active interaction with the environment. Twentieth century psychologists George Kelly and Rudolph Steiner take a position which is identical to that of Thoreau and Gibran. According to Steiner in order to reach spiritual awareness it is necessary to bypass conventional or authoritative mores (Meadow 107). Steiner says that there is “no opposition between spiritual development and contemporary man’s move toward social freedom and scientific discovery. All these have their basis in independent thinking” (107).

Actually, the carnival world in *The Prophet* and *Walden* is intended to encourage independent thinking in a number of ways. One of the things Thoreau and Gibran were trying to do is show that all is not well and the authoritative discourse is not “the truth.” “It is true,” says Thoreau in *Walden*, “we are such poor navigators that our thoughts, for the most part, stand off and on upon a harborless coast, are conversant only with the bights and bays of poesy, or steer for the public ports of entry, and go into the dry



docks of science, where they merely refit for this world, and no natural currents concur to individualize them" (280-281). What Thoreau and Gibran wanted to do is help their readers leave the stagnant and shallow waters of the authoritative discourse and become brave navigators in the open sea of thought. Therefore, the world which they present in *Walden* and *The Prophet* constantly challenges the authoritative discourse. It is a carnival world where the authoritative discourse is subjected to inversions, parody and open criticism. The very logic of the authoritative discourse is countered by paradoxes, oxymorons, "silences" and "gaps" in the text, and with a kind of "organic" non-authoritarian logic. In her article, "Transcendentalism: the Metaphysics of the Theme" Elizabeth A. Meese says that an "organic" logic is modelled on the "fluidity" of natural phenomena (14). It is characterized by an abrupt move from the description of natural phenomena to meditations on the nature of the human soul so that the human world and the natural world are blended into one entire whole where the same rules apply (15). Both Thoreau and Gibran use "organic-logic" as well as similes, metaphors and symbols to draw analogies between a free-spirited, carnevalesque natural world and a rigid and sealed-off world of authoritative discourse. They also use what Bakhtin called "dialogization" to contest the definitions of the authoritative discourse for such terms as: law, housing, clothes and work. However, since all the definitions are drawn out of a carnival understanding of life both authors emphasize that they are not intended to be seen as fixed. All they suggest is one way of going beyond authoritative mores, stressing the fact that there are countless ways. As Gibran says in *The Prophet*:

Vague and nebulous is the beginning of  
all things, but not their end,  
And I fain would have you remember me  
as a beginning ( 92 ).

Thoreau stresses the same idea in *Walden*:

I would not have anyone adopt *my* mode of living on any account; for besides that before he has fairly learned it I may have found another for myself, I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful and to find out and pursue *his own* way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbour's instead (73).

In the section entitled "Children" in *The Prophet*, Gibran says that parents should give children love and freedom of thought:

You may give them your love but not  
your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not  
their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of to-  
morrow, which you cannot visit, not even  
in your dreams (17).

Gibran's insistence that parents give children freedom of thought reveals his belief in individuality and self-realization. By saying that children's souls "dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit even in your dreams," he is implying that no human being has the ability to look into another's consciousness and understand fully his or her needs. Therefore, the greatest service that a human being can render others is give them his love and his faith without restricting their freedom of thought. Speaking on the subject of marriage, Gibran voices the same belief:

Love one another, but make not a bond  
of love:  
Let it rather be a moving sea between  
the shores of your souls (15).

The same idea appears again in the section on teaching where Gibran says that a teacher can only give "of his faith and his lovingness" (56). Gibran's belief in freedom of thought rests on the conviction that the world is too vast and intricate to be girdled by a set of fixed, authoritative ideas. The human mind itself is too complicated and variegated to be weighed on scales or measured with a sounding line (54). He

compares the self to a sea which is "boundless and measureless" and the soul to a wanderer who wanders on all paths and a lotus "of countless petals" (54-55). It is significant that after delivering his sermon, Gibran's prophet tells the audience that they "do not see nor do they hear, and it is well" (93). If he had intended his sermon to be a straightforward list of authoritative rules for living, the audience would not have had much difficulty in "seeing and hearing" his meaning. However, the message that the Prophet has for the audience is much less straightforward. It is a challenge and he himself admits that he wants it to be "vague and nebulous" (92). He wants his audience to be an audience of thinkers and experimenters. You are the only ones who can remove the "clay" in your ears and the "clouds" above your eyes, he tells them (93). Gibran's *The Prophet* is a text which challenges the reader to search for meaning and new interpretations because a thoughtful approach to life is something that cannot be taught by a list of "dos and do nots."

*Walden*, like *The Prophet*, is not a book of "easy reading." "Will you be a reader, a student merely, or a seer?" Thoreau asks in *Walden*. "Read your fate, see what is before you, and walk into futurity" (111). In "*Walden and the 'Curse' of Trade*" Micheal T. Gilmore says that "easy reading" is the equivalent of noninvolvement which is in no way different from bowing to social reality ( *Henry David Thoreau: Modern Critical Views* 234 ). Gilmore suggests that Thoreau wanted reading *Walden* to be "figuratively identical with being at *Walden*" (235). It should be remembered that *Walden* was written by a life-ist and a nonconformist, who stated that what he required of every writer was a "simple and sincere account of his own life" (*Walden* 7). In *Walden*, as Gilmore suggests, he encourages others to be life-ists, yet although the account he gives of his life is sincere, it is not intended to be simple. Henry

Golemba's "Unreading Thoreau" is an interesting analysis of the ways in which Thoreau intentionally presents his readers with inconclusive statements and "red herrings." Golemba says that Thoreau was determined to "unmake assertions," to speak in the wild and every-varying style of the natural world and leave "empty spaces" here and there to puzzle the reader. "As Thoreau expresses in his earliest Walden journal," says Golemba, "the reader can help free the text from literal meaning in order to achieve a universal language using the ineffability of words to suggest 'the inexpressible meaning that is in all things' (398).

The carnival world in both *The Prophet* and *Walden* is a world where human institutions are not given much importance. The word "law" takes on a totally new aspect in the carnival world of *The Prophet*." In the section on "Laws" Gibran attacks the tendency to view human laws, and by implication, any kind of authoritative discourse, as the epitome of truth. He says that those who are blind conformists view life as a "rock" and man-made laws as a chisel with which they carve "their own likeness" on the rock (44). The image of the "rock" is similar to the image of Bakhtin's "classical body." Both imply a static, inanimate object which has no ability to grow and change and has no interaction with the world around it. The minds of the conformists who chisel on the rock have all the characteristics of the rock itself. They, too, are fixed and static. Furthermore, their unwavering belief that the laws are perfect and unchangeable prevents them from interacting with the world around them so that they are never able to discover any alternative ways of living. Gibran implies that the laws are only perfect and authoritative to those whose vision is limited. Upon a closer examination, the "rock" and the "classical body" appear to be anything but perfect. In fact they are worse than dead entities because they were never alive. Gibran's

assessment of the laws is a telling indication of his opinion on the authoritative discourse in general:

You delight in laying down laws,  
 Yet you delight more in breaking them.  
 Like children playing by the ocean who  
 build sand-towers with constancy and then  
 destroy them with laughter.  
 But while you build your sand-towers the  
 ocean brings more sand to the shore,  
 And when you destroy them the ocean  
 Laughs with you.  
 Verily the ocean laughs always with the  
 innocent (44).

Gibran destroys the authority of the law and the law-makers by placing them in a carnival world where the laws are "sand-towers" and the law-makers are "children" who build sand-towers "with constancy" only to break them the next instant. Life is portrayed as a moving ocean which constantly brings more sand to the shore. The juxtaposition between Life as a moving ocean and laws (and all other authoritative mores) as sand-towers hints at several recurring ideas in *The Prophet*.

Life as the moving ocean is a carnival world which is vast, ever-changing, alive and full of potentialities. Although it is personified as a friendly and laughing human being, it is a storehouse of great and potentially destructive energies which can knock down the sand-towers at any moment. Significantly, the ocean laughs when human beings destroy their laws, and those who destroy the laws are paradoxically described as being "innocent." Being a vast, limitless carnival world the ocean and Gibran's notion of life which it represents, is hostile to any attempts to limit life by dissecting it and attempting to squeeze it into narrow and limited categories. Therefore, it laughs when the laws and thereby the narrow authoritarian notions they represent are broken. The breaking of the laws represents the breaking of links between the "habitual matrices" of

ideas. Once the “habitual matrices” of ideas are broken, ideas are liberated into the huge ocean of the carnival world, and come to resemble it in its inconclusiveness and open-endedness. The breakers of the laws are “innocent” because their crime is not serious. Human laws, Gibran suggests, are sand-towers, temporary, limited and insignificant; therefore why should the breaking of partial, man-made laws be a serious crime?

What Gibran tries to do in *The Prophet* is draw conservative readers out of their belief that Life is a rock and authoritative mores are unchallengeable. In order to do this he creates a carnival world which represents his understanding of life. The carnival world in *The Prophet* is often embodied by images taken from nature; however, the carnival world as a whole cannot be designated by these images alone. Rather, it is an entire atmosphere, or to put it more clearly, an entire approach to life. The carnival approach to life is nonauthoritarian, fun-loving and lenient. In order to fully understand what is meant by the carnival approach it is necessary to visualize Medieval and Renaissance carnivals as Bakhtin saw them. These carnivals were unrestrained, boisterous and creative in their inversions of authoritative culture. They were times when fear and respect of authority were laid aside in favor of a pure enjoyment of life, and an unbounded experimentation with ideas.

Thoreau shared Gibran’s opinion that human institutions are narrow and insignificant in comparison with the vastness and variety of nature: “You may melt your metals and cast them into the most beautiful moulds you can; they will never excite me like the forms which this molten earth flows out into. And not only it, but the institutions upon it are plastic like clay in the hands of a potter” (*Walden* 297). The image of the “molten earth” is similar to Gibran’s image of the moving ocean. Both

denote a potential for change, mystery and power. Both can equally stand for the open-endedness and freedom of a carnival approach to life. By contrast, the "moulds" are similar to "rocks" and to the stiff authoritarian discourse. Even though Thoreau admits that the moulds can be beautiful, he disregards them in favor of the moving and changing beauty of nature and carnival. The image of "plastic institutions" carries a shrewd double meaning. Plastic institutions may refer to different classes of organisms and natural environments which are in a constant state of evolution. In this case, the term "plastic" is a positive attribute. However, "plastic institutions" may equally describe the authoritative discourse in which case the adjective "plastic" is meant to mock the authoritative discourse's attempts to appear unchallengable. In the chapter entitled "The Bean Field" Thoreau again shows how trivial human institutions are in view of the greatness of nature. He describes the bustle and excitement of villagers celebrating Independence Day only to undercut the whole event, and the authoritarian thinking it represents with the words: "This was one of the *great* days; though the sky had from my clearing only the same everlastingly great look that it wears daily, and I saw no difference in it" (158). By italicizing the first "great" Thoreau is warning the reader that the word is not to be taken literally. The greatness of the day is especially belittled by the fact that the sky wears a look of everlasting greatness daily, and is not in the least affected by all the commotion in the human world. Once again the authoritarian discourse is presented as being limited in comparison with nature and the carnivalesque way of thinking it represents. Greatness is limited to a single day in the human world of authoritarian ideas while in the carnival world it is a daily phenomenon. "We are wont to forget that the sun looks on our cultivated fields and on the prairies and forests without distinction," Thoreau says a few pages later (163).



Here again the authoritative discourse represented by the “cultivated fields” is levelled down to the level of any other alternative way of thinking represented by the “prairies” and “forests.” On a more literal level, Thoreau is saying that human beings should not delude themselves with the belief that their species is especially favored by nature. They are only one species among many others, all of which are equally esteemed in the natural world. Furthermore, Thoreau is expressing the belief that it is foolish to consider human institutions with an unwavering reverence. The authoritarian discourse is still in its infancy. It represents a crude and superficial understanding of life. “Our notions of law and harmony are commonly confined to those instances which we detect; but the harmony which results from a far greater number of seemingly conflicting, but really concurring laws, which we have not detected, is still more wonderful,” writes Thoreau in *Walden* (279 ).

In a process that Bakhtin calls dialogization, Thoreau and Gibran provide alternative definitions for such concepts as housing, clothes, and work. The definitions that they provide for these concepts have their source in the carnival representation of nature where the human world is blended with the natural world. The two authors place the logic of the natural world, represented by animals, plants and natural phenomena in opposition to the logic of the authoritative discourse.

Speaking on houses, both Thoreau and Gibran agreed that the conventional notion of a house has moved very far away from the original meaning of “house.” They lament the fact that houses have become more like prisons which limit a person’s interaction with the wider world and people have lost sight of the immediate purpose of a house which is to serve as a shelter merely. Houses have come to be associated with luxury and love of appearances. Therefore, the aim of people in society is not to secure



a suitable shelter but to secure a house which is larger and more luxurious than their neighbors'. Addressing the people of Orphalese, the Prophet says:

And tell me, people of Orphalese, what  
have you in these houses? And what is it  
you guard with fastened doors? (32)

The question is posed to the reader as well as to the audience of the Prophet. Gibran is asking readers to reconsider the value of the house itself, and, indirectly, the materialistic outlook which is encouraged by the authoritative discourse. The Prophet is implying that what the people have in their houses is neither peace, nor good memories, nor beauty, but only "lust for comfort which "makes a mock" of "sound senses" (33). Gibran's attack on the definition of a house according to the authoritarian discourse is based on the fact that it places more emphasis on catering to low desires such as the lust for comfort, avarice, and pride, than to higher intellectual and moral qualities. The authoritarian discourse limits a person's vision of the world by preoccupying him or her with a petty desire for material comfort and more expensive possessions. Comfort becomes "a tamer, and with a hook and scourge makes puppets" of "larger desires" (32). The word "tamer" is very important. It implies domestication. Thus, Gibran is saying that the limited materialistic outlook of the authoritarian discourse is domesticating people's minds and minds which are tame are also docile, obedient, and confined to a narrow perspective. Gibran's Prophet says:

Would that I could gather your houses  
into my hand, and like a sower scatter them  
in forest and meadow (31).

By scattering the houses in nature Gibran is expressing his desire to liberate people from the narrow confines of authoritarian thinking. He wishes that they could visit one another "with the fragrance of the earth" in their garments (31). The fragrance of the

earth is a symbol of all the qualities which are represented by the earth. Once again, it should be noted that the earth and all the natural imagery in *Walden* and *The Prophet*, stands for the carnival way of thinking which resembles nature in its fluidity, wildness and comprehensiveness. The connection between natural imagery and mental attitudes or thought processes is made evident in the following lines:

Your house is your larger body.  
It grows in the sun and sleeps in the  
stillness of the night; and it is not dreamless.  
Does not your house dream? and dreaming,  
leave the city for grove or hill-top? (31)

Therefore, the house is an extended metaphor for a living, dreaming human being. In its dreams it leaves the city and goes into nature. There is another indication that the city (and the authoritative discourse that it symbolizes) is a place of confinement which the unconscious, dreaming mind is eager to forsake. Later on the authoritative discourse is portrayed by an "anchor" and "a glistening film that covers a wound" (33). While the anchor conveys a limitation of thought, the film that covers a wound carries the sinister implication of mutilation. It is a mental mutilation which leads to fear of open spaces and an open approach to life. Gibran's *Prophet* tells the people that it was the fear of their forefathers that gathered them too near together and led them to separate their "hearths" from their "fields" (32). He says that it is the same fear which makes them "fold their wings" and "bend their heads" so that they would not strike the "ceiling" (33). The fear confines them to such an extent that they are afraid to breathe "lest the walls should crack and fall down" (33). All of these images together convey the stifling effect that the authoritative discourse has on people's minds. However, Gibran's final metaphor in the section on houses shows that the authoritative discourse does more than limit and mutilate a person's mind. It leads to the total torpor of the

mind; it is a "tomb" made by "the dead for the living"(33). Gibran's carnival world is designed to replace the "anchor" with a "mast" (33). The "mast" is a metonymy which denotes a ship and therefore adventure and the open sea. He wishes to replace the "glistening film which covers a wound" with an "eyelid that guards the eye" (33). Thus, the unnatural, mutilated and painful thinking of the authoritative discourse is replaced with one which is natural and beneficent. In the final comparison between authoritative and carnival thinking Gibran once again makes use of natural imagery:

For that which is boundless in you abides  
in the mansion of the sky, whose door is  
the morning mist, and whose windows are  
the songs and silences of night (34).

Thoreau's attitude on houses is identical with that of Gibran. He sees unnecessarily large and over-adorned houses as a burden and an indication of the limited, materialistic concerns encouraged by the authoritative discourse. "This town is said to have the largest houses for oxen, cows, and horses hereabouts, and it is not behindhand in its public buildings; but there are very few halls for free worship or free speech in this county," Thoreau states (*Walden* 59). Here, Thoreau is mocking the authoritative discourse by saying that the pride of the town consists in its having the largest houses for oxen, cows and horses. These huge barns are only a little larger than the town's public buildings. Thoreau's satirical statement puts the huge barns and their occupants on the same level with the huge public buildings and the public that occupies them. "It should not be by their architecture, but why not even by their power of abstract thought, that nations should seek to commemorate themselves?" Thoreau says in the next sentence (59). The word "even" is a rhetorical device which is intended to alert readers to the ridiculousness of an authoritative discourse which neglects abstract thought in favor of building bigger barns. "And when the farmer has got his house, he

may not be the richer but the poorer for it, and it be the house that has got him," Thoreau declares (36). As in Gibran's *The Prophet*, the house comes to represent restrictive conventional thinking, so that the farmer who gets his house becomes a slave caught in the trap of the authoritative discourse. "While civilization has been improving our houses, it has not equally improved the men who inhabit them," says Thoreau (37). By building his own house at Walden Pond Thoreau wants to upset the authoritative definition for a house and return to the definition of a house as a shelter. He wants his house to be almost as simple as an Indian's or an Arab's tent. "Or what if I were to allow-would it not be a singular allowance? - that our furniture should be more complex than the Arab's, in proportion as we are morally and intellectually his superiors!" he exclaims (39). The connection between the house and moral and intellectual qualities is explicit. Like Gibran, Thoreau requires that his readers rethink the notion of a house and what it represents. He does not want them to take houses or any other notions for granted, because this would imply mental passivity and unconsciousness. After describing how he built his own house Thoreau says:

It would be worth the while to build still more deliberately than I did, considering, for instance, what foundation a door, a window, a cellar, a garret, have in the nature of a man, and perchance never raising any superstructure until we found a better reason for it than our temporal necessities even (48).

Building deliberately becomes a metaphor for thinking deliberately. What Thoreau is attempting to do is encourage his readers to be critics, to stop accepting things as they are, and look for the real significance in every proposition of the authoritative discourse. He wants every part of a human being's life to be a natural outgrowth of freedom of thought. When people become conscious of their environment and their own thoughts their houses will be a natural extension of themselves. Gibran had

represented this natural extension with the image of an eyelid which covers an eye.

Thoreau represents it with "the tenement of a shellfish" (43). Both images imply that a house should be no more than a natural shelter, not too complicated or intricate and by no means a burden on the spirit. In an image which is very similar to that of Gibran's, Thoreau compares the breadth of the carnival perspective with an open sky; the authoritarian discourse is compared to a cave showing that like a cave it is narrow and dark:

It would be well, perhaps, if we were to spend more of our days and nights without any obstruction between us and the celestial bodies. If the poet did not speak so much from under a roof, or the saint dwell there so long. Birds do not sing in caves, nor do doves cherish their innocence in dovecots (31).

In their discussion on clothes, Thoreau and Gibran again attack the authoritative discourse. Speaking about clothes, the Prophet says:

Your clothes conceal much of your beauty,  
yet they hide not the unbeautiful.  
And though you seek in garments the  
freedom of privacy you may find in them  
a harness and a chain (35).

The beauty that is concealed by the garments is much more than physical beauty. It is also intellectual beauty. Gibran says that by wearing clothes people are looking for privacy but the clothes prove to be a harness and a chain because they are an outward manifestation of mental conformity. There is no privacy or freedom in them because they are imposed on people by the authoritative discourse. Gibran cites the naive opinion of some people who say that clothes are no more than a protection against the elements (35). He implies that they are much more. Although he does not deny that clothes serve the necessary function of protection against the elements, he asserts that

they are also linked with the “shame” people feel in exposing their bodies (35). Gibran states that shame is a mental construct generated by the authoritarian discourse:

Forget not that modesty is for a shield  
against the eye of the unclean.  
And when the unclean shall be no more,  
what were modesty but a fetter and a fouling of the mind? (36)

In the final part of the section on clothes Gibran once again draws the readers’ attention to the fact that there is a wider world outside the narrow world of the authoritative discourse. He does this by linking the human world with the natural world. The natural world represents a broader horizon and other ways of thinking and living:

And forget not that the earth delights to  
feel your bare feet and the winds long to  
play with your hair (36).

Like Gibran, Thoreau sees an indication of mental conformance in people’s attitude to clothes. He is equally sceptical of the idea that clothes are only worn as protection against the elements. “As for Clothing, to come at once to the practical part of the question, perhaps we are led oftener by the love of novelty and a regard for the opinions of men, in procuring it, than by a true utility” (24). Kings and Queens, Thoreau states, never wear a set of clothes more than once; therefore, they are “no better than wooden horses to hang the clean clothes on” (25). Here the highest representatives of the authoritarian discourse, the rulers or the Kings and Queens, are divested of all intellectual qualities, they become merely “wooden horses” useful for nothing else than hanging clothes on. Moreover, Thoreau shows that people living in accordance with convention are much more concerned with the state of their clothes than with the state of their conscience (25). Far from trying to be independent thinkers

they are anxious to conform to society in every detail. This is what keeps them forever concerned with following the fashions and looking respectable in front of others. What is it to be respectable? Thoreau asks his readers. He implies that the only thing that is deemed respectable by the authoritative discourse is conformity to its every dictate:

“Often if an accident happens to a gentleman’s legs, they can be mended; but if a similar accident happens to the legs of his pantaloons, there is no help for it; for he considers not what is truly respectable, but what is respected” (25). Thoreau mocks the conformist opinion of the lady-traveller, Madame Pfeiffer, who said that once she reached Asiatic Russia she realized that she was in a civilized country “where people are judged of by their clothes” (26). Thoreau belittles the concern with fashion even further by showing how incongruous it is in view of the natural world:

Our moulting season, like that of fowls, must be a crisis in our lives. The loon retires to solitary ponds to spend it. Thus also the snake casts its slough, and the caterpillar its wormy coat, by an internal industry and expansion; for clothes are but our outmost cuticle and mortal coil (27).

Thoreau and Gibran repeatedly criticize the authoritative discourse for stunting the development of independent thinking in individuals. In their discussion of institutions and laws, houses and clothes, the two authors are continuously revolving around the subject of self-realization. Their stress on self-realization is also evident in their discussion of work.

In *Walden* and *The Prophet* every individual’s work must express his or her unique character. In the section on “Work” in *The Prophet*, Gibran says that all work is worthwhile as long as it is accompanied by love. “Work,” says the Prophet, “is love made visible,” (28). Work must be an expression of the complete personality. It must carry the impress of the unique spirit of an individual. To do good work it is necessary



to be honestly involved in it "to charge" it with "a breath of your own spirit" (27). "For if you bake bread with indifference, you bake a bitter bread that feeds but half a man's hunger," says the Prophet (28). The Prophet is implying that human beings hunger for something other than food and physical satisfaction. Half of their hunger is intellectual, spiritual and emotional. An interesting similarity exists between Gibran's definition of satisfying work and that given by some modern schools of psychology. "Simply being at work rather than not appears to be good for mental health," writes Micheal Argyle in *The Psychology of Happiness* (29). However, although almost all work is more satisfying than idleness, the work which was found to be most satisfying is distinguished by autonomy, skill, variety and task identity (46). In other words, it is the sort of work which feeds a person's emotional, spiritual and intellectual hunger. Gibran says that as long as individuals are themselves unconscious of the needs of their non-physical half their life will be "darkness" (26). And the darkness can only be dispelled, says Gibran, by "knowledge" (26). What kind of knowledge does Gibran want his readers to have? Perhaps the foremost knowledge is a knowledge of themselves, of their true thoughts and desires. The second type of knowledge may be the knowledge that there is a world outside the authoritative discourse.

Work is among the most frequently discussed subjects in *Walden*. Thoreau says that the work of his neighbors resembles the incredible and painful ways in which Indian Bramins consciously do penance (8). However, one significant difference is that his neighbors' penance is unconscious. Although they inflict pain on themselves, their conformance to the authoritative discourse makes them believe that there is no other way and that such work is inescapable. "But men labor under a mistake. The better part of a man is soon ploughed into the soil for compost," says Thoreau (9). Like



Gibran, Thoreau realized that to be truly satisfying work must feed more than the physical side of a person's hunger. His own experiment at Walden Pond was a radical expression of this belief. William Gleason in "Re-Creating *Walden*: Thoreau's Economy of Work and Play" says that *Walden* is Thoreau's attempt to redefine the relationship between work, play, leisure and self-culture in an increasingly industrial society (674). According to Michael Newbury, the author of "Healthful Employment: Hawthorne, Thoreau and Middle-Class Fitness," Thoreau's "small-scale and independent" farming was already a thing of the past at the time when *Walden* was written, since independent farming had already been replaced by large-scale, commercial farming (703). Therefore, Thoreau's outdated farming, his endorsement of manual labor, and his insistence on building his own house, are all a part of a flamboyant revolt against the commercial spirit which feeds only half of man's hunger. Bob Pepperman Taylor writes the following commentary on Thoreau's relationship with the economic notions of his society:

Thoreau is, indeed, at war with the political economy of the age, and his weapon in *Walden* is nature. Only with the aid of such a weapon will democratic citizens be able to maintain their moral and material independence against a political economy that endeavors to seduce them, as the *Churchman* reviewer so frankly admits, with the increasing, artificial, and never-ending desire for wealth" (*America's Bachelor Uncle* 91).

The carnival attitude to life in *Walden* and *The Prophet* is an attempt to rescue the consciousness of individuals in society from being divided by the authoritative culture. Thoreau and Gibran saw that conformity to any form of authoritarian discourse has a destructive effect on an individual's personality so that a great portion of the intellectual and spiritual capabilities remain unutilized and sublimated. Bakhtin's carnival represents a constant search for the "surplus" or potential in human nature which can never be contained by any system and always manages to elude any attempts

at classification. In his essay "Epic and Novel" Bakhtin states his belief in the irreducibility of the individual:

An individual cannot be completely incarnated into the flesh of existing sociohistorical categories. There is no mere form that would be able to incarnate once and forever all his human possibilities and needs, no form in which he could exhaust himself down to the last word, like the tragic or epic hero; no form that he could fill to the very brim, and yet at the same time not splash over the brim (Dentith 63).

The irreducibility of the individual is the basis of carnival since carnival gains its legitimacy from the belief that there is always more to be discovered about human nature. Therefore, carnival is an especially useful term for describing Thoreau and Gibran's constant attempt to break through the confines of authoritarian thinking.

Two ways in which Thoreau and Gibran break through the confines of authoritarian thinking have already been mentioned. The first is their use of optimistic and encouraging statements to raise individuals' sense of self-worth. The second is the use of dialogization to give alternative definitions for common concepts such as law, house, clothes and work while simultaneously challenging readers with an intentionally puzzling text in order to encourage them to give their own definitions for the concepts. One final carnival technique needs to be mentioned. This is a technique which involves destroying dichotomies between seemingly conflicting terms. The authoritative discourse of Western society is based to a large extent on Aristotelian logic which states that if A is A then A cannot be B (Fromm 101). Thoreau and Gibran continuously challenge Aristotelian logic by showing that A can be A and B at the same time. One way they do this is by destroying dichotomies between terms such as human world/natural world, heart/head, passion/intellect and many others. As Thoreau says: "We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander" (*Walden* 305). Therefore, the aim of paradoxical logic as well as of

all the other inversions and challenges and comparisons with the natural world is to replace strict authoritarian thinking with a more lenient carnivalesque approach to life.

Thoreau realized that the authoritative discourse draws a sharp separating line between the human and the natural world. There is a strong tendency to view the natural world either as separate from the civilized world, as something to be exploited merely, or as "scenery," a "picturesque backdrop" for human history and poetry (Burbick 20). Thoreau seeks to destroy this dichotomy between humanity and nature. In the "Spring" chapter he compares the branching of streams with the branching of blood vessels in the human body, and a mass of softened sand with the point of a finger (295). Speaking of the foliage on the river bank he says: "The overhanging leaf sees here its prototype. *Internally*, whether in the globe or animal body, it is a moist thick *lobe*, a word especially applicable to the liver and lungs and the *leaves* of fat. . . ." (294). Thoreau's stress on the words "lobe" and "leaves" is intended to strengthen the connection between the human and natural. The lobe refers to the lobe of vegetable matter while hinting at the lobe of the human ear. Similarly, the leaves are actual leaves as well as leaves of tissue within the human liver and lungs and fat deposits. "Is not the hand a spreading *palm* leaf with its lobes and veins?" Thoreau asks (296). He further compares the nose to a "congealed drop" or a "stalactite" and the ear to a "lichen" on the side of the head (296). Moreover, the human body reminds Thoreau of the wet sand on the river bank: "What is man but a mass of thawing clay?" he asks (295). In the end, all the images of an intertwined human and natural world can be described as carnival images. Carnival favors unification of dichotomies while the authoritarian discourse favors a rigid separation. By drawing similarities between human body parts and vegetable matter Thoreau is implying that the human and natural

world are so closely related that they cannot be separated. Thoreau's welding of the natural and the human world does not stop at a mere comparison between the physical similarities in plant and human tissue. He goes further to show that many qualities like intelligence and bravery which are conventionally associated only with humans are equally manifested by animals. In the chapter entitled "Brute Neighbors" Thoreau describes his unusual game of tactics with a loon who proves to be a "cunning" adversary. "It is surprising," says Thoreau, "how quickly he made up his mind and put his resolve into execution" (228). In the same chapter, Thoreau describes a time when he was a witness to a ferocious battle between red and black ants. The ants are described as having all the qualities one would associate with human soldiers. "I was myself excited somewhat even as if they had been men. The more you think of it, the less difference" (224). On another occasion he describes the intelligent eyes of young partridges: "The remarkably adult yet innocent expression of their open and serene eyes is very memorable. All intelligence seems reflected in them" (221). The natural world and the human world are completely intertwined in *Walden*. In the chapter "Higher Laws" Thoreau says that the hare when in pain cries like a child. "I warn you, mothers," he continues, "that my sympathies do not always make the usual *phil-anthropic* distinctions" (207). Thus, Thoreau's imagery is intended to show that there is a deep connection between the human and the animal world. They are both part of an entire whole which is life and life cannot be segmented into neat dichotomies.

In *The Prophet*, Gibran makes a similar attempt to unify the human and the natural world under the general title of life. In *The Prophet* life is often symbolized by water: the ocean, the river and the stream. The river and the stream are representations of

individual human lives while the ocean is the all-encompassing repository of life.

Addressing the sea, the Prophet says:

And you, vast sea, sleepless mother,  
Who alone are peace and freedom to the  
river and the stream,  
Only another winding will this stream  
make, only another murmur in this glade,  
And then shall I come to you, a bound-  
less drop to a boundless ocean (6).

Other than a stream, an individual human life is also portrayed as a drop which is part of a vast ocean of life. Paradoxically, the drop is portrayed as "boundless". This image cannot be understood unless one takes into consideration Gibran's idea that life is one indivisible whole. Although he or she may feel separate from the environment, an individual is actually animated by the same life force that animates all living creatures on the planet. In his sermon "Giving" the Prophet says that no one should compliment himself on being able to give: "For in truth it is life that gives unto life- while you who deem yourself a giver are but a witness" (22). Similarly, parents are not the ones who give their children life but are only the means through which children are brought into the world; therefore, they should not believe that they own their children because their children can only belong to life. "Your children are not your children," says the Prophet, "They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself" (17). "In reality 'there are no graves,' for what is real is 'a flame spirit' which is 'life in quest of life' or rather of more life" (Hawi 227). To conclude, Gibran unites human life with all other life on the planet and thus removes the dichotomy that the authoritarian discourse draws between human life and the life of animals and plants.

Other than attempting to erase the dichotomy that the authoritative discourse draws between humanity and the natural environment, Thoreau and Gibran seek to

erase the dichotomies that are commonly drawn to separate the heart and the head, the passion and the intellect, in the human personality. Although he constantly praises the spiritual aspect of human nature Thoreau records an incident in "Higher Laws" when he was seized with a savage and irresistible urge to capture and eat a woodchuck raw. "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" (204). In his sermon "Reason and Passion" Gibran's Prophet says that reason and passion are often in conflict in human consciousness (50). Passion is frowned upon by the authoritative discourse while reason is elevated. The Prophet says that he wishes he could be a "peacemaker" by reuniting the two qualities; however, he cannot do this because only individuals themselves can reunite the two by being "lovers of all [their] elements" (50). The Prophet says that it is necessary to treat reason and passion equally like "two loved guests" in one's house or else a person risks losing the respect of both (51). He is implying that if either reason or passion is suppressed the entire personality will be in a state of disorder:

Your reason and your passion are the  
rudder and sails of your seafaring soul.  
If either your sails or your rudder be  
broken, you can but toss and drift, or else  
be held at a standstill in mid-seas (51).

Finally, despite their constant encouragement of independent thinking, Thoreau and Gibran did not want people to be coldly analytical. What they sought is a reunification of the head and the heart. Their view that it is necessary to love one's work has already been mentioned. More than work, however, they believed that it is necessary to love other people. Thoreau ridicules the artificial philanthropy of those who pride themselves on giving a tenth part of their income to charity. "You boast of

spending a tenth part of your income on charity; maybe you should spend the nine tenths also, and have done with it" (78). Therefore, Thoreau's idea of philanthropy does not agree with the conventional idea that philanthropy consists of giving away some of one's money or possessions. Thoreau's opinion is shared by Gibran who says, "You give but little when you give of your possessions. / It is when you give of yourself that you truly give" (19). Both authors see real philanthropy as a natural outgrowth of a balanced personality. It should be a kindness which is unpretentious and unconscious and which carries with it a person's "whole heart and soul and life" (*Walden* 75). Neither Thoreau nor Gibran detracts from the virtue of giving. The Prophet praises everyone who gives, whether he or she gives with pleasure or with pain; however, he believes that the best people are those who give naturally without thinking of it as a virtue or seeking joy through giving. "They give as in yonder valley the myrtle breathes its fragrance into space" (20). Thoreau's opinion on philanthropy is identical with Gibran's. "I want the flower and fruit of a man; that some fragrance be wafted over from him to me, and some ripeness flavor our intercourse. His goodness must not be a partial and transitory act, but a constant superfluity which costs him nothing and of which he is unconscious" (79).

In *Walden* and *The Prophet* Thoreau and Gibran overturn common authoritarian notions on many subjects. They present readers with an inconclusive text in order to encourage thinking in the place of an easy acceptance of ideas. In addition, they rely on constant comparisons with natural phenomena to show that there is a greater, more spacious world beyond the narrow confines of the authoritarian discourse. The natural world in *Walden* and *The Prophet* is a carnival world intended to challenge the strict

definitions of the authoritative discourse with wider, more comprehensive definitions, yet it is also a world where no definitions can assume the weight of absolute truths.



## CHAPTER V

### *WALDEN AND THE PROPHET: STYLISTIC AND THEMATIC DIFFERENCES*

Although *Walden* and *The Prophet* are thematically similar in many respects, there are some notable stylistic and thematic differences between the two books. The aim of the following chapter is to highlight some of those differences.

*The Prophet* is written in a style which Professor Khalil Hawi calls a "prose poem" (Hawi 272). Among the characteristics of Gibran's prose poem are free verse and the frequent use of aphorisms. Here are three examples of aphorisms taken from *The Prophet*:

Your friend is your needs answered ( 58 ).  
Much of your pain is self-chosen ( 52 ).  
When love beckons to you, follow him,  
Though his ways are hard and steep ( 11 ).

Gibran's inclination towards writing which makes frequent use of aphorisms is shared by Thoreau, Emerson and many other Transcendentalists. A distinguishing feature of aphorisms is that they convey a complete message even when they are taken out of their context. Another technique which recurs frequently in *The Prophet* is the use of questions such as the one below:

And how shall you rise beyond your  
days and nights unless you break the chains  
which you at the dawn of your under-  
standing have fastened around your noon hour? ( 48 )

The questions are intended to challenge conventional interpretations of the world and force readers to reevaluate authoritative mores. Gibran's use of metaphors serves the same purpose as questions in as much as it encourages the active participation of the

reader while simultaneously hinting at the limitations of the authoritative discourse. Two examples of metaphors which are frequently used in *The Prophet* appear in the question above: "noon-hour" which refers to a state of mental alertness and "dawn" which refers to an incomplete state of awareness. Mental alertness is also represented by the metaphor "wakefulness" and unconsciousness by the metaphor "sleep." Yet another frequently used technique in *The Prophet* is anaphora. Here is an example from the section "On Work":

And all urge is blind save when there is  
Knowledge,  
And all knowledge is vain save when  
there is work,  
And all work is empty save when there  
is love (26).

The most frequently occurring example of anaphora in *The Prophet* is the use of the word "and" in successive sentences. Other examples include the repetition of phrases such as "it is," "when you," "have you," "what of" and "you are good when." Anaphora is a technique which is characteristic of Biblical prose poetry. Professor Khalil Hawi points out that the style of *The Prophet*, in general, is similar to that of seventeenth century Bibles in Arabic (270). The tone, the rhythm, the sentence construction, the use of natural and sacramental imagery all link *The Prophet* to seventeenth century Biblical writing in Arabic (270). In fact, some of the Prophet's expressions are taken directly from the Bible: "You have been told. . . but I say unto you, "Verily I say unto you" and others (Naimy 191).

Despite the fact that the Prophet uses the authoritative style of the Bible he does not want his readers to be passive receivers of truth but fellow creators. Mikhail Naimy and

many other authors have shown that Gibran was a great admirer of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Perhaps one reason why Gibran liked Zarathustra is because Zarathustra is a fervent nonconformist who seeks others who resemble him in his nonconformity.

"Companions the creator seeketh, not corpses-and not herds of believers either," says Zarathustra. "Fellow-creators the creator seeketh-those who crave new values on new tables" (Naimy 122). Gibran's Prophet, like Zarathustra, is seeking fellow creators. "Wise men," he says, "have come to give you of their wisdom. I came to take of your wisdom" (87). Later the Prophet says he has built a "tower in the sky" of the people's "longings" and if his hands should meet theirs "in another dream" he and they together will build "another tower in the sky" (95). It is significant that he portrays the people as active participants in the building of "the tower". "The tower" is a metaphor for the text of *The Prophet* which cannot be understood without the active participation of the readers.

Another distinguishing characteristic of *The Prophet* is its laconic style. Gibran often hints at a broader meaning without stating it explicitly. One way he does this is by using "silences" or "gaps" in the text in order to encourage the reader to be an active participant in completing the text and giving it a more individual meaning. The Prophet himself is described as "a seeker of silences" (7). The sermons of the Prophet do not express a complete or literal meaning, since, as Gibran says:

These things he said in words. But much  
in his heart remained unsaid. For he him-  
self could not speak his deeper secret (7).

In the section "Talking" Gibran voices the belief that the greatest truths are not revealed in words. "And there are those who have the truth within them, but they tell it not in words,"

he says, "In the bosom of such as these the spirit dwells in rhythmic silence" (61). The silent spirit can also be understood as the carnival spirit of the earth which does not give out absolute truths. Unlike the authoritative discourse which tries to express truths in words, the carnival spirit remains silent, alluding to the vast, inexpressible and open-ended nature of truth.

The style of *Walden* is less uniform than that of *The Prophet*. *Walden* includes humor, irony, satire, aphorisms, symbolism, puns, mystic meditations, the use of myth, pure natural descriptions, autobiographical and factual statements, poetry, and quotations from the Bible, Hindu scripture, classical works, and travel books. It should not be forgotten that *Walden* was woven out of many years of journal writing. Therefore, it contains many different ideas and moods in the same way that Thoreau's journals contain a variety of subjects, ideas and moods. However, this alone does not explain the great variety of styles in *Walden*. To understand why Thoreau used so many different styles it is necessary to return to the theme of carnival. The use of many different styles is an expression of Thoreau's belief that life has countless meanings, most of which are missed by the authoritative discourse. It is also a deliberate attempt to challenge the reader. As Thoreau himself says in *Walden*: "I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be *extra-vagant* enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truths of which I have been convinced" (311).

Unlike *The Prophet*, *Walden* is written in the first person and is to a great extent a record of Thoreau's experiences. Furthermore, although the majority of statements in *Walden* are meant to have universal applications, many statements are addressed to a

specific audience in a specific location and time. At the very beginning of *Walden* Thoreau addresses his readers with the following words:

I would fain say something, not so much concerning the Chinese and Sandwich Islanders as you who read these pages, who are said to live in New England; something about your condition, especially your outward condition or circumstances in this world, in this town, what it is, whether it is necessary that it be as bad as it is, whether it cannot be improved as well as not (7).

Another way in which *Walden* differs from *The Prophet* is in its use of humor.

Richard J. Schneider in his book, *Henry David Thoreau*, says that comedy is the “honey” with which Thoreau alleviates the intensity of his sarcasm (49). Schneider also believes that Thoreau’s humor is aimed at making readers see life a little less seriously (50). Therefore, humor can be seen as yet another carnival technique. Thoreau often plays games with the reader by stating what seems to be as absolute truth only to contradict it the next moment. For example, in the chapter “Higher Laws” he pretends to attack the “slimy beastly life” of the body and speaks of the “harp” which plays the music of virtue (213). The reader is almost persuaded to take his statements at face value when Thoreau shocks him or her out of an easy acceptance with the words: “Many an irksome noise, go a long way off, is heard as music, a proud sweet satire on the meanness of our lives” (213). Similarly, he appears to be attacking a coarse indulgence in food (the hunter who has a “taste for mud-turtles” and the lady who loves “jelly made of a calf’s foot”) while simultaneously asserting that he himself has “grown more coarse and indifferent” over the years (212-213). Later he presents an elevated discussion on chastity which is the “flowering of man” and its “fruits”: “Genius, Heroism and Holiness, and the like.” No

sooner does he convince the reader of the absolute value of these qualities than he says: "We are so degraded that we cannot speak simply of the necessary functions of human nature" (214-215). To make sure that the puritanical reader did not miss the true meaning of "necessary functions" he lists them: "to eat, drink, cohabit, void excrement and urine, and the like" (216). In Thoreau's carnival world the narrator is part of the comedy. "Once," says Thoreau, "I was surprised to see a cat walking along the stony shore of the pond, for they rarely wander so far from home. The surprise was mutual." There is a hint that Thoreau's position at the pond is just as unusual as the cat's because both belong to domestic species that "rarely wander so far from home." Later he compares the *extra-vagance* of his language with the *extra-vagance* of "the cow which kicks over the pail, leaps over the cowyard fence, and runs after her calf in milking time" (311).

The narrator of *Walden* often veils his true meaning by using symbol or allegory. The two most most conspicuous allegories in *Walden* are the allegory of the hound, the bay horse and the turtle dove and the allegory of the artist of Kuroo. Thoreau says that he "long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle-dove" and is still on their trail (20). He says that he has met one or two travellers who seem to have heard or seen the lost animals and are as anxious to find them "as if they had lost them themselves" (20). The allegory is never fully explained but it is very likely as Henry Golemba suggests in "Unreading Thoreau" that Thoreau is providing his readers with a "metaphor of desire" (399). "The passage seems autobiographical and specific," says Golemba, "yet it is simultaneously a universal and abstract intimation of that generalized sense of a revelation always imminent but never quite realized, a discovery always promised but never quite grasped by the words which

have pointed toward it" (399). Perhaps, Thoreau is stimulating in his readers a desire to search for meaning while simultaneously asserting that it is virtually impossible to arrive at any absolute meaning. The second parable is the parable of the artist of Kuroo (313).

When Thoreau speaks of the artist of Kuroo in *Walden* he may very well be speaking of himself. The artist of Kuroo was determined to make a perfect staff and for many long years he worked at making his staff with the greatest faith and an unwavering singleness of purpose. Though his friends did not have faith in his work and deserted him, he continued to work with love and his work became his life. When he had finished, dynasties had passed and his friends were long dead but he discovered that what he had made was not a staff at all but a new world in which the rules of the conventional world did not apply. Thoreau, like the artist of Kuroo, had created a new world by uniting his ideals, his work and his nonconformist life at Walden Pond in *Walden*. By writing *Walden*, he too created a world in which the rules of the conventional world do not apply. However, unlike the perfect world of the artist of Kuroo, the world of *Walden* is not perfect. It is a carnival world in which all truths are "volatile" truths which "continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement" (311).

The symbols in *Walden* are too numerous to be discussed in the limited scope of this chapter; however, two major symbols have to be brought to the forefront: the symbol of spring and the symbol of Walden Pond. By ending *Walden* with the "Spring" chapter Thoreau wants to show that there is hope still and our lives need not seem sadly unalterable. The symbol of the pond is more complicated than the symbol of spring. The pond is often described as an eye and a mirror. "As a mirror, it reflects symbolically the

interrelation between the material and spiritual worlds" (Schneider 62). The pond is a physical, material entity which nevertheless reflects the sky which is less material and stands for the spiritual world. Thoreau's implication is that human nature is like the pond in that it is both physical and spiritual at the same time. The pond as an eye is also a window to the soul of nature against which it is possible to measure one's own nature (Schneider 63).

Having illustrated some of the stylistic differences between *Walden* and *The Prophet* it is now necessary to give a quick overview of the thematic differences between the two books. Perhaps the most noticeable difference lies in the way each author deals with the subject of economy. In *The Prophet*, Gibran provides a brief discussion of the subject under the heading: "On Buying and Selling." In the section "On Buying and Selling" Gibran says that trade can only become just and impartial if it is motivated by love instead of greed. Merchants should always "invoke" the "master spirit of the earth" to come and "sanctify the scales." (37). Again, this idea can be explained further if it is seen in terms of carnival. The notion of trade Gibran presents in *The Prophet* is modeled on nature. "To you the earth yields her fruit," says Gibran, "and you shall not want if you but know how to fill your hands" (37). The implication is that the earth is rich in natural resources which, if used wisely, would not lead people to hunger. The natural world is presented as being perfectly balanced and regulated. Human nature, however, constantly tends towards excesses of all kinds and the subsequent result is injustice. The injustice of trade as it is practiced according to the authoritative discourse, is therefore, a result of the immaturity and instability of human nature. In his discussion of trade, Gibran frees trade from its



conventionally financial association; furthermore, trade is no longer restricted to the human world and is shown as being a part of the natural world. It comes to stand for nothing more than exchange, the ultimate aim of which is not profit but survival.

In *Walden*, the subject of economy is handled much more thoroughly than in *The Prophet*. Apart from being the subject of the first chapter, economy is the one of the most frequently discussed topics in *Walden*. Thoreau saw that economy permeated every aspect of life in Concord and had far-reaching effects on the minds and personalities of his neighbors. Therefore, to attain his goal of encouraging readers to be independent thinkers and life-ists, Thoreau had, first of all, to tackle the subject of economy. This is something he does in a variety of ways. By relating his own experiment at Walden Pond, Thoreau tries to prove to his readers that life need not be as complicated as they make it, since many of the objects they work day and night to obtain, are no more than superfluities.

Ultimately, Thoreau's refusal of many common commodities and luxuries is not the gesture of a stoic or a mystic, but a deliberate rejection of a market economy which encourages unnecessary material luxury. Thoreau was acutely aware of the fact that material luxury is obtained at a heavy price; therefore, he attempted to alert his readers to the dangers involved in supporting an economy which has wealth as a supreme motive.

"We do not ride upon the railroad; it rides upon us," he says. "Did you ever think what those sleepers are that underlie the railroad? Each one is a man, an Irishman or a Yankee man" (93). Thoreau realized that a free market does not necessarily produce a free individual and that division of labor does little to encourage independence of thought. To undercut the idea of division of labor he intentionally builds his own house, grows and

cooks his own food. He presents his readers with an economy of living which is starkly different from political economy. "Even the *poor* student studies and is taught only *political* economy, while the economy of living which is synonymous with philosophy is not even sincerely professed in our colleges," says Thoreau. The trademark of Thoreau's economy of living is independence of thought. *Walden*, as Thoreau says at the beginning of the book, is addressed to *poor* students who may be experts in political economy but who nevertheless, fail to see beyond its narrow confines.

Although Thoreau and Gibran agree that the potential for improvement is latent in every human being; each author has a different understanding of how human beings can attain moral uprightness. In *The Prophet*, Gibran voices his belief that each generation carries the human race closer to the ideal or what he calls "the god-self". According to Gibran, the human race as a whole is at the same stage of moral evolution. "But your god-self dwells not alone in your being," he says (39). "Much in you is still man, and much in you is not yet man..." (39). Human beings walk towards the god-self in a "procession" (40). Some may be "faster and surer of foot, yet [remove] not the stumbling stone" (41). The "stumbling stone" refers to the primitive stage which is a part of every person's nature even though it may be more perceptible in some than in others. Gibran describes the immoral and the upright as two threads, one black and one white, which are tightly woven into one cloth (42). "And when the black thread breaks, the weaver shall look into the whole cloth, and he shall examine the loom also," says Gibran (42). Consequently, moral evolution in *The Prophet* is not the result of individual effort; it touches all individuals equally. Moreover, time is an essential factor in the process of evolution.

Thoreau did not share Gibran's belief that every generation is a step closer to moral uprightness. He shows that there is little difference between the myriads who built the pyramids while living on garlic and the modern mason "who finishes the cornice of the palace [and] returns at night perchance to a hut not so good as a wigwam" (37). Thoreau believed that despite the many advances in technology, the basic mentality of the majority of people had changed very little. "For the improvements of the ages have had but little influence on the essential laws of man's existence: as our skeletons, probably, are not to be distinguished from those of our ancestors" (15). People are still blind conformists and the slaves of fashion and tradition. In the very last paragraph of *Walden* Thoreau says that "the mere lapse of time" can never raise people's consciousness. Therefore, he does not believe like Gibran that human beings are naturally evolving towards the better. The only sort of moral development Thoreau believed in is initiated by an individual's desire for change. "What a man thinks of himself, that is what determines or rather, indicates, his fate," he says (11).

Much more can be said on the style and the themes of *Walden* and *The Prophet*. The information in this chapter gives only the rough outlines of the attributes of each book. However, it is intended to show how two authors in uniquely different ways encouraged people to think and to reevaluate the authoritative discourse. Did Gibran read Thoreau? There is no way to prove whether he did or did not. Gibran lived in the United States and had a great love of literature so it is possible that he was influenced either directly or indirectly by Thoreau and the Transcendentalists. In the end, however, it does not really matter whether Gibran read Thoreau because as Harold Bloom says in *The Anxiety of*

*Influence:* “No poem has sources and no poem merely alludes to another” (43). Poetic influence, according to Harold Bloom, is an inevitable occurrence but does not detract from any poet’s originality since by reshaping an idea and giving it a new flavor a poet makes it his own. “Internalization,” says Harold Bloom, “Is the poet’s way of separation” (120). Bloom would argue that, since Thoreau is part of American culture and Gibran lived in America, then Gibran was influenced by Thoreau whether he read him or not.

## CONCLUSION

Thoreau and Gibran were emotionally as well as intellectually committed to the ideals they expressed in their writings. The two authors could easily have said with Friedrich Nietzsche, "I have at all times written my writings with my whole heart and soul: I do not know what purely intellectual problems are" (qtd. in Nietzsche 12). In his Introduction to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, R.J. Hollingdale states that Nietzsche was committed to his ideals in the same way as other men are committed to their wives and children (Nietzsche 12). The same could be said of Thoreau and Gibran. Like Nietzsche, they lived what they wrote. In both their lives and their writing, Thoreau and Gibran were ardent defenders of freedom of thought and nonconformists who encouraged others to stop being ordinary and become extraordinary.

Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) and Gibran's *The Prophet* (1923) resemble Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885), in its attack on stale traditions and commonplace beliefs. Like Nietzsche, Thoreau and Gibran believed that to be truly satisfied with one's life, it is necessary to be a nonconformist, to deconstruct conventional beliefs and come up with fresh solutions and highly individualistic interpretations of the world. Thoreau and Gibran would have agreed with Nietzsche that an individual's worst enemy is himself (Nietzsche 90). At the onset of *Walden* Thoreau says that he is chiefly addressing those who are dissatisfied, and wants to "say something" about their "outward condition or circumstances in this world" ( 7 ). In *Walden* he makes it clear that one's outward condition is chiefly the result of one's way of thinking.

He urges his readers to “meet” their life and “live” it instead of “shunning” it and calling it “hard names” (*Walden* 314). “The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise,” Thoreau says in the conclusion of *Walden* (314). Similarly, in “The Farewell,” Gibran’s Prophet urges the people to “stop [digging] holes into darkness for safety” (91). He tells the people that when they themselves, are ready, they will be able to “see” and to “hear” (87). The vision of life which he gives them is one in which there are limitless possibilities; however, in order to see the many possibilities it is important to free oneself from the veil of conventional beliefs, to be mentally “alert” or “awake.”

Thoreau and Gibran believed that most people are not sufficiently “alert”. People are the products of their society. The way individuals behave and interact with the world around them, and the way they see themselves and others, is a result of social conditioning. Moreover, most people are so thoroughly programmed by their society that they have little individuality left. They think, speak and behave almost exactly like everybody else in their social environment, and their ability to respond to the many varied stimuli in the world around them is greatly restricted. Modern Gestalt therapists have confirmed Thoreau and Gibran’s opinion that an adherence to any habitual or established way of thinking limits a person’s response to the environment. Erich Fromm and other psychoanalysts stated that all predetermined notions act as a filter, so that a person who holds these notions is only able to see a small portion of reality. Like the Gestalt therapists, Thoreau and Gibran encouraged their readers to adopt an open response to the environment by ridding themselves of stereotyped ways of thought. A person with an open response to the environment avoids generalizations

whenever possible and is not afraid of changing his or her opinion. Furthermore, a person who has an open response is someone who is constantly growing and changing.

According to Thoreau and Gibran nothing enhances the quality of life as much as an open response, or what Thoreau calls being “alert.” Both authors use the word “awake” to describe the open response. “To be awake is to be alive,” says Thoreau in *Walden* (91). Later on, in the chapter entitled “Sounds,” Thoreau says, “No method nor discipline can supersede the necessity of being forever on the alert” (111). Thus, being “awake” or “alert” become synonyms for being fully conscious. In *The Prophet*, Almustapha, the Prophet, is described as being “wakeful” in contrast to the people of Orphalese, who are “asleep”. To “awaken” their readers from a complacent satisfaction with commonplace beliefs, Thoreau and Gibran deconstruct many conventional beliefs in *Walden* and *The Prophet*.

In the two books, fixed authoritative ideas become relativized. Thoreau and Gibran destroy conventional associations of ideas, or what Bakhtin calls the “habitual matrices” of ideas, and challenge Aristotelian logic. Furthermore, they make extensive use of a technique that Bakhtin calls “dialogization,” through which the fixed, static monologue of the authoritative discourse is challenged by the on-going dialogue of the “internally persuasive word.” Unlike the authoritative discourse, which is standardized, the internally persuasive word refers to every human being’s unique way of thinking. Thoreau and Gibran would have argued that no way of thinking or doing has the right to be authoritative because there are no absolute truths. Truths are created not discovered.

I chose to apply Bakhtin’s term “carnival” to describe the world which Thoreau and Gibran create in *Walden* and *The Prophet*. Here, I am indebted to Malini Schueller,

the author of "Carnival Rhetoric and Extra-vagance in Thoreau's *Walden*" from whom I have borrowed the idea of studying *Walden* in the light of what Bakhtin calls "carnival." The carnival world is a world which can be symbolized by the word "mist". Thoreau and Gibran both use "mist" and images such as the changing seasons and moving water to represent a way of thinking which is not fixed but rather fluid and open-ended. The "carnival" world is a world where no action is ever completed and no dialogue ended. It is a world where there is no first word and no last word.

It should be noted that Bakhtin uses the word "carnival" in a historical sense and in a more general sense. When used in reference to a specific historical period, "carnival" alludes to the popular festivals or carnivals of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Bakhtin also uses the term "carnival" to describe the grotesque, the blasphemous and scatological elements in the works of Renaissance writers. Although Bakhtin's discussion of "carnival" in the works of Renaissance writers centers on Rabelais, "carnival" can also be found in Chaucer, Boccaccio and many other writers of the period. In his *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin shows that Rabelais uses the grotesque, the blasphemous, and the scatological in order to oppose the authoritarian discourse. The same technique can be seen in Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale" and "The Reeve's Tale." Many critics have considered "The Miller's Tale" to be a parody of the elevated, conventionally-chivalric Knight's Tale. Bakhtin would have probably agreed that "The Knight's Tale" is a representation of conventional thinking or the "authoritative discourse" while "The Miller's Tale" shows the nonauthoritative, disruptive forces of "carnival". The grotesque and scatological forms of "carnival" survive into modern times, in the writings of the Surrealists, and in many of the Magic Realists and Postmodernists. Furthermore, aspects of grotesque "carnival" can be seen



in the works of some modern sculptors and painters, especially the Dadaists and Surrealists. An example of grotesque “carnival” sculpture is the work of the French sculptor, Marcel Duchamp: The Fountain.

However, Bakhtin did not reserve the word “carnival” solely to describe the grotesque, the scatological and the clownish. He used the term to refer to any literature which is chiefly aimed at deconstructing conventional ways of thinking. He admitted that in many of the writers of the late nineteenth and the twentieth century, the grotesque and the clownish has been replaced by “dialogization.” Through “dialogization” the author creates a text in which there is no single authoritative voice. Instead, the text gives many different and often conflicting interpretations of the world. In *Walden* and *The Prophet*, Thoreau and Gibran use “dialogization” to deconstruct the common definitions for such terms as law, houses, clothes, and work. In the end, however, they do not give their readers any final definition, because it is not in the nature of “carnival” to give final definitions.

Although Thoreau and Gibran shared Nietzsche’s hatred of meekness and conformity, they did not share his nausea at mankind. Both *The Prophet* and *Walden* are remarkable for their optimistic outlook and their constant emphasis on mankind’s vast potentials for improvement. “I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor,” says Thoreau in *Walden* (91). Thoreau and Gibran lamented that many doctrines emphasize human weakness instead of human strength. In *The Prophet* and *Walden*, the two authors celebrate the positive aspects of life and of human nature. “To measure you by your smallest deed is to reckon the power of the ocean by the frailty of its foam,” Gibran tells his readers. (*The Prophet* 86).

An important characteristic of *Walden* and *The Prophet* is the constant emphasis on the bright side of life. There is no brooding pessimism, no reference to the ugly or the hopeless in either of the books. Although Thoreau and Gibran attacked many conventional beliefs, they were not nihilists. On the contrary, the motive behind their attack on convention was their belief that it hindered people from experiencing the full beauty and variety of life. They were firm believers that life is as beautiful as we make it, and it has the potential to be very beautiful. In *The Prophet*, Gibran says, "People of Orphalese, beauty is life when life unveils her holy face. / But you are life and you are the veil" (76).

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