

## Fiche

When it is a question of inner self, expression and construction of our identity, (of our true self) are linked. When it comes to knowing who we really are, in order to express ourselves, we need to build up our personality which is something hard to do. It means that we have to be honest with ourselves and to accept the fact that only by deconstructing the person we thought we were can we find out who we really are and then, only after, express our true potential. The expression indeed reveals as much as it engenders an identity.

### Withdrawing into ourselves: our "self" as an island

People tend to withdraw into themselves for fear of confronting their self, who they are, to the outside world. This is what happens in *the Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams. Laura, a crippled girl, finds refuge in her collection, of glass animals especially in her unicorn. These glass animals represent a shelter for her, a cocoon in which she feels safe, far away from the real world where she does not feel at ease. It is like her own island, an oasis of freedom where she can be **her true self**; but once she gets out of this world, meeting the boy of her dreams, she experiences new emotions, new emotions that make her react differently, that make her do things she thought she would be unable to do. She discovers new facets of herself but this opening onto reality, self-abandon turns out to be vain, and she seems to lose her bearings, to lose herself as if she had been betrayed by her own emotions.

Through these characters, the reader experiences similar situations because the simple fact of reading is already a way to be on our own, alone on an island. Reading such adventures leads us to discover new aspects about who we are. Reading of these adventures can give us keys which enable us to **open up our inner selves**.

### American Transcendentalism

For many artists, **emotion is the breeding ground** and the material thanks to which an artwork, a personality and an identity can be constructed. The range of emotions go from anger, resentment, wrath, fear, despair to indifference, bliss or enthusiasm, they define who we are. Thus, the expression and the exploitation of emotions characterize different trends in art and literature, like Romanticism. The Romantic Movement was characterized by its emphasis on emotion and individualism as well as the glorification of the past and of nature, preferring the medieval to the classical. The painting by Caspar Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* in 1818, encompasses all the aspects of a Romantic era; that is to say loneliness, contemplation, abandonment, the confrontation between Man and Nature and a profound melancholy that we can feel as a spectator.

Most of the time, the Romantic aspect is indeed linked to the relation between Man and Nature and it is a way of seeing the world through the **author's eye**, that is to say understanding the world according to the perception and personality of the author or poet. As Elizabeth Bishop wrote in the poem entitled "The Sandpiper", the world can be seen through a grain of sand. This idea was first theorized by William Blake in his poem entitled "The Auguries of Innocence" found in the Pickering Manuscript. The poet starts with "To see a World in a Grain of Sand..." This means that the world can be perceived in every aspect of Nature even the tiniest one and that we can find the true meaning of life in any part of the world. Each ocean starts with a drop of water so we all have a role to play in the equilibrium of the world.

Romanticism is perfectly epitomized in the poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" by William Wordsworth in which the poet sees himself, in his imagination as a wanderer, like a cloud floating over the world. His emotions give a full overview of how he perceives what is surrounding him. We are the witness to the myriad of emotions that submerge him when he sees the daffodils swaying in the breeze: here, all the elements of nature are in keeping with the poet's senses to create a huge harmony. This harmony is also well expressed in the poem "Love Philosophy" by Percy Bysshe Shelley. It is a short but powerful poem in which the voice compares love to Nature, as a way to celebrate the mixing and melting of Nature altogether. This echoes the fusion we can have with our true love, with our soulmate. Shelley thus creates a huge cosmogony and a real osmosis between all the elements, water, fire, air and earth to make it sound universal like love.

Unfortunately, love can also be associated with grief and mourning in a sad and sorrowful reunion between Eros (love) and Thanatos (Death) which is the case of Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee". The young lovers, somewhat like Romeo and Juliet, seem to be cursed because the young girl dies and her lover is furious with the angels, believing that they had stolen his love away from him. As he cannot live without her he decides to die next to her in her coffin. He aims to show the immortality and the eternity of their love that transcends death.

Passion can make people lose their minds as shown by Emily Brontë in *Wuthering Heights*. She used Gothic elements to create a gloomy and uncanny atmosphere that mirrors the mysterious and insane love story between the two main characters.

The figure of a tormented, passionate, insane, unstable and romantic poet finding through his work a way to sublimate his **exacerbated feelings** is also a very important aspect of the Romantic persona. We can find all these feelings and even more in the poems by John Keats, especially "*La Belle Dame sans merci*". This poem, reflected in a painting by Waterhouse, a Pre-Raphaelite painter, highlights a passionate but also destructive relationship between two persons who seem to destroy one another, to take out their mutual energies as if this "dame" was like a vampire sucking out the energy of the other person. John Keats and all his

questionings and introspections are well portrayed in the movie *Bright Star* by Jane Campion. She drew a very interesting parallel between the poet's true and passionate love life and the feelings he refers to in his collections of poems and odes. The poem constantly goes back and forth between the immanence of reality and a certain transcendence as if the turmoil of the outside world was echoed in what the poet might be feeling.

The people's state of mind echoes and mirrors the world's changes and Nature's evolution. This is what is expressed in The American Transcendentalism that tries to bind people and Nature together, creating a certain symphony between them as being part of the same family: humanity. This is what Henry David Thoreau describes in his book *Walden*.

## Men and their bond to Nature and their nature

Thoreau relates what he did for two years that is to say to live in a cabin in the middle of the woods, far away from civilization. In his own words, "He went into the woods in a Spartan-like way of life to suck the marrow out of life". What he advocates in his philosophy is that we have to get an empiric vision of the world and, to do so, we need to be in contact with Nature in order to be in contact with ourselves away from materialism, capitalism or the consumer society. This world is too corrupted and prevents us from knowing who we are. Being immersed in Nature with the quintessential basics of life, living in a self-sufficient way are the best solutions to connect ourselves to the world around us. It enables us not only to listen but to hear not only to look but to see deeply in order to get nurtured.