ABSTRACT

Beginning with Hannah Arendt's definition of “an escape movement from the world into the man” as described in “The Human Condition”, this thesis analyses *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau. The motivations, strategies and intentions are examined which carried Thoreau through the complex and idiosyncratic treatise about the individual’s emancipation from society. An understanding is developed as to what the reasonable limits of such a break from society might be, taking the ambitions and ambiguities of the text into consideration.

To illustrate what we might call a “a sentiment of exile within the vocabulary of its time”, of which *Walden* is an exemplary expression; this thesis develops an analysis of the reasons that Thoreau presents to justify the need to disobey society as a necessary means to achieve self-knowledge. The notions of reading, literature and knowledge that Thoreau stood for will be indentified and examined, as well as placing emphasis on the difficulty that the book suggests in drawing a clear line between “reasons” and “inclinations”.