

The reality of the material life



Everyday people purchase thousands of objects and live in large houses and live the ideal material life, with material things, and lives based on what they own. However there are several people all over the world that have no homes and base their belongings on what they can carry with them. Lars Eighner was found homeless and through this, discovered his own lessons of life by scavenging and developing the understanding the difference between those who live through their possessions and those who do not.

Thoreau learned his way of life through his exploration of nature, and his examination of the material world, which is something that Eighner did as well. "On Dumpster Diving" by Eighner and "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For" by Thoreau, they discover life lessons, and they criticize the 'rat race millions' but not similarly, which can be explained because of the way they approach life. According to Eighner, there are lessons that he found from his experience of being homeless. One of them being "To take what [he] can use and let the rest go by" (Eighner 9).

What Eighner means by this is that the only things that are necessary in life are the objects that he can use and everything else is not worth taking. Referring to all the material things that everyone else has. He is criticizing those who take what they do not need because he believes that everyone should live by his ideas. However obviously aware that many do not, he makes the point that having too many possessions could take over someone's very substance, which is why he feels is important to let these possessions go if one cannot make use out of them.

Thoreau agrees when he says “ For a man is rich in proportion to the number of thing which can he can afford to let alone. ” (Thoreau 5). This shows a direct parallelism to Eighner's idea that there are several possessions that should be abandoned, which proves even more so that both writers have the same ideas. Even though Thoreau finds this out in a different way and through a different life. One of the many ideas that they have in common about abandoning material objects, shows a sign of wisdom.

However they way in which they stumble upon these realizations are very different. While Eighner lived a life among garbage and thought the same thing as Thoreau, Thoreau goes to say that “ But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to desperate things” (Thoreau 4). This goes against the way in which Eighner lives, through his scavenging and his desperate way of living homeless. It could be said that although Eighner lives the way he does, without possessions and only using what he must, he has to live this way when Thoreau does not.

Even though the way Eighner survives could be considered desperate, it is also the reason that he thinks the way Thoreau does about materialism. However Thoreau also says that “ What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines, or rather indicates his fate” (Thoreau 4) goes to prove that for a man to survive and to have a good life, he must also think highly of himself, because if one were to think badly of himself it would only affect his life negatively. It is better to have strong emotions and thoughts for yourself then it would be to own a millions things.

Thoreau's belief strikes deep within Eighner as well when he explains that "Once [he] was the sort of person who invests material objects with sentimental value. Now [he] no longer have those things, but [he] has sentiments yet" (Eighner 9). So it is shown it is based on what a person has inside of them rather than the list of things that they own that defines them as a person, and the people that are controlled by their belongings are what Eighner calls the "rat race millions".

Eighner first defines the people he calls the rat race millions as those, "who [have] confounded their selves with the objects they grasp" (Eighner 10). This exhibits his belief that the millions of people that lead the material life have damned themselves because of obsession of materialism. No matter how much these people get, they will never get enough and they need for more and more will soon suffocate them and make them live a life based on what they have in their wallets or in their homes.

Eighner thinks this because he lived around hundreds of college kids who would throw out perfectly good things and he looked down upon those who did so, even though some of those things kept him alive. On the other hand, Thoreau thinks that "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation" (Thoreau 4). That these 'rat race millions' are not all obsessed with themselves but rather just crying out for a way to fit in with society that is led by the amount of money in a person's wallet. There is a desperation within all men to live the quiet life in which

Thoreau does, and Thoreau lived this way after he returned his own call for help. The millions of people that lead the life that both Thoreau and Eighner left, have only settled for it, and believe that it is the only way to live. These two men are an example of the way that things of the mind, emotions, thoughts, believes, hopes, are much stronger and durable than material things in one's house. It is possible as shown by both Thoreau and Eighner that a person can let go of the lives they know, with the objects in their houses, and abandon all they don't need for a better life.