



The Sage of Concord: Weaving Transcendental Thoughts

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Ralph Waldo Emerson, the proverbial sage of Concord, claimed that he was not “an original thinker” but only “clothed thoughts” that were “in the air.” Trying to explain the complex relation between humans and the outside world, he singled out man’s relation to his own self as the crux of the problem. His dualistic vision of the world, juxtaposing nature and the human soul and matter and spirit, is related to what he perceived as the human need to realize a connection to the “real” self. In the Emersonian vision of the world, nature is “omnipotent” insofar as through natural phenomena the human individual can give birth to brilliant ideas. The aim of this article is to highlight Emerson’s Transcendentalist vision of nature and the human relation to it.

Keywords: Transcendentalism, humans, “man,” nature, soul, matter.

Emerson and Transcendentalism

“A rare, extravagant spirit,” as Donald Yannella called him (1), Ralph Waldo Emerson is generally recognized as the father of American Transcendental thought, who undoubtedly brought a “greening” to American life. Being one of the central figures in the culture and literary history of the young nation that the United States of America undoubtedly was in his day, Emerson stepped onto the scene as the spokesperson of a new spirit and a new age. Claiming that he primarily “domesticated” what was in the air, especially after he had resigned his post as a minister, which was part of his family tradition, he addressed the wide masses not from his pulpit but from a public platform. Although a number of his paternal ancestors had been ministers and had delivered sermons from the pulpit of the Congregational Church in Concord, Massachusetts, “for all but thirty-two years since 1635, and these several decades included the ministry of his step-grandfather,” as a young minister Emerson tended to focus more on the works of contemporary European writers such as Coleridge or Goethe and consequently, by the end of 1832, to the unpleasant surprise and disagreement of his family, he stepped down from his pulpit altogether (Yannella 1).

A time of uneasiness and questioning began as young Emerson experienced a lot of internal turmoil seeking answers to crucial questions. He questioned established dogmas and the values of the system, tried to explain his individualist attitude to the universe, as well as the connection between nature, soul, and matter. He raised his voice against the formal logic of the previous century “since he believed it not merely to confine but to distort” (Matthiessen 3). Emerson believed in the equality of all souls and insisted that it was not man’s separation from man but isolation that needed to precede true society. In his understanding, that isolation was highly spiritual, or in other words, it was a form of elevation, as he would state later in his famous essay “Self-Reliance.” He truly believed in the human potential to partake in the divine superabundance (Matthiessen 8).

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Significantly, the misunderstanding between Calvinists and Unitarians was at its climax at the time when Emerson was in the process of forging his own vision of religion and spirituality. As critics have pointed out, one of the major points of disagreement lay in the understanding of man in relation to himself, as well as to divinity, and Emerson presented, in the vein of his fellow Transcendentalists Ellery Channing and Henry Ware, the Unitarian vision which included “character development or self-culture” (Hodge 12). Emerson, (re)creating his religious beliefs and sentiments, heavily opposed the Calvinist idea of human depravity and highlighted the Unitarian glorification of Christ. He questioned formalism and institutionalized religion, stating that “[w]henver the pulpit is usurped by a formalist, then the worshipper is defrauded and disconsolate” (Emerson, “The Divinity School Address” 291). According to Floyd Stovall, the main influences on Emerson’s thought undoubtedly included New England Puritanism and seventeenth-century English thought, Platonism and Neoplatonism, European Romanticism, and Orientalism (51). Although Emerson drew from “all philosophies” and followed the Platonic tradition, according to modern criticism, his thought was primarily fashioned in the Romantic vein, as it was shaped in New England at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Stovall 51). Some critics, such as Marie Dugard, consider him a monist who rejected the past “as a dead letter” and thought that truth could not be obtained through “the rational faculties but only by intuition,” while H. D. Gray maintains that Emerson believed that the laws of nature were laws of the mind, and within the laws of nature he differentiated “the law of permanence, the law of correspondence (of nature with spirit), universality, progress, and the moral law, which [he saw as underlying] the rest” (qtd. in Stovall 58 – 59).

Emerson, Influences, Nature, and “Man Thinking”

The bulk of Emerson’s most significant writings was published in two volumes: *Essays, First Series* (1841) and *Essays, Second Series* (1844). He became a popular public lecturer and a proponent of an idealism that was founded to a large extent on Kant’s ideas as well as on certain post-Kantian philosophical notions. During the 1830s and 1840s, which followed the establishment and flourishing of American Transcendentalism, Emerson made serious connections with distinguished figures from the field of culture and literature, such as Henry David Thoreau and Margaret Fuller.¹ Emerson was introduced to Fuller’s translation of Goethe’s *Torquatto Tasso*, they collaborated and discussed various (Transcendentalist) issues as well as her masterpiece *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1843, 1845). Hodge points out that if she influenced “the arc of Nature by drawing its conclusion to more explicitly immanent issues,” Fuller also “challenged Emerson to assume a role fraught with just the sort of problems that compromise, or worse, consume writers” (49).

Emerson proclaimed optimism and belief in the power of man. He truly believed in the divinity of every human being and cherished the thought of man’s capability to flourish and develop his potential, to highlight his individuality. Transcendentalists rejected the rituals of formal religion and looked down on Calvin’s doctrine of predestination. They embraced “omnipotent” Nature as an organic entity, “a corporeal, material Nature corresponding in all aspects to the world of Spirit, a universe suffused by the Deity” (Yannella 11). Emerson claimed in *Nature*² that his time was in many ways *retrospective*, a time marked by “biographies, histories and criticism” and asked the question of why people should “grope among the dry bones of the past” since they could still feel the sunshine and be aware of the new lands, ideas, and other people. Nature never has “a mean appearance” and never serves as “a toy” for a wise spirit. As such

¹ According to Charles Capper, Margaret Fuller’s Romantic thought was profoundly affected by Transcendentalist visions of antebellum democracy, though “not the conventional ones of possessive individualism and majority rule but of universally equal individual rights and purposive self-fashioning” (25).

² “*Nature* was a small volume of ninety-five pages, bound in brown cloth. The title page did not bear the name of the author but carried this epigraph: ‘Nature is but an image or imitation of wisdom, the last thing of the soul; nature being a thing which doth only do, but not know.’ PLOTINUS” (Allen 275–76). The booklet attracted a lot of attention and its reception included both praise and criticism. As we know from its critical reception, many of Emerson’s distinguished contemporaries, such as Samuel Osgood and Bronson Alcott, highlighted and praised the merits of the book (Allen 282). However, there were those such as Francis Bowen, who found many flaws in *Nature*, calling it illogical and perplexing (Allen 275–76).

things can be genuinely seen by only a few, the rest would be capable of only superficial observation and would inevitably fail to “adjust” their “inward and outward” senses to each other (Emerson, *Nature* 242).

According to Emerson, in its divine relation to man nature has manifold importance, being at the same time the material, the process, and the result; it receives man cordially into its grand dominion. Therefore, it is expected of man to unite with the works of nature. The man of his day does not offer himself to nature completely, but only with his half-power, and the consequence makes his mind “imbruted” and his being a “selfish savage” (Emerson, “Nature” 268). Emerson discussed the relation of matter to spirit, envisaging a hierarchy in the uses of nature, making it highly efficient by his masterful use of the language “not of philosophy but of poetry,” thus presenting “the spiral evolution” as the natural process in which “all living things are climbing a ladder to the divine” (Allen 276). Nature enables man to satisfy his physical needs; however, on a larger scale, it enables him to deeply feel and comprehend the meaning of beauty with its manifold manifestations. By using “the transparent eye-ball” metaphor in the text, Emerson wanted to surprise and impress his readers, focusing their attention on his potential to “see” things from the innermost as well as outermost spheres, thus transforming and “empowering” himself by the currents of the Universal Being.³ According to Allen, by the end of his chapter in *Nature* entitled “Discipline,” Emerson appears to be closer to Plotinian than Goethean ideas, envisaging “the human form . . . the highest in organization in nature, and all others only degradation of it” and thus being connected with the Plotinian myth of man’s creating “all the animals of the world out of himself” (279). According to Emerson, a thing that is termed to be finite can by no means be perfect; whenever it approaches the realm of perfection it inevitably enters the domain of spirituality while leaving the realm of substantiality. By stating that nature is ideal to him “so long as [he] cannot try the accuracy of [his] senses,” his ideas become even more closely related to those of representatives of the Scottish Enlightenment such as Dugald Stewart and Thomas Brown, as well as the rhetoricians Hugh Blair and Lord Kames (Allen 279).

Emerson was introduced to Goethe through translated works in 1827 and it is from this distinguished German that he came to know how to “appreciate natural processes,” as well as to comprehend “an organic aesthetics of fluid form” (Myerson 72). Given the fact that Emerson became familiar with Goethe’s specific “science of morphology,” his *Metamorphosis of Plants*, and his vision of nature as a “harmonious whole,” as well as the belief that the plant organs should be considered primarily as “metamorphosed variations of a primal leaf ‘type’,” he appreciated Goethe highly and ascribed to him, in *Representative Men* (1850), “the leading idea of modern botany” (Myerson 124).⁴

It is known that Emerson made a significant effort to “come to terms” with Goethe after he had come into contact with Carlyle, who was himself a great admirer of the well-known German (Allen 462). Emerson bought a pocket edition of Goethe’s works in German and did his best to read them. In the chapter titled “Goethe; or, the Writer,” Emerson states that the task of the writer, or the secretary, is to report the activities of the “miraculous spirit of life,” with his duty seen as the reception of facts into the mind and afterwards the selection of “eminent and characteristic experiences”:

³ Some critics criticized the metaphor, and certain caricatures appeared in order to ridicule Emerson’s “mysticism.” Here is the famous passage from Emerson’s text:

Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental. . . . I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. (“Nature” 243).

⁴ The roots of *Representative Men* can be traced back to a series of lectures of the same name that Emerson delivered in the United States and England during a short period in the mid-1840s and in 1848 (Myerson, 36). It consists of seven chapters (“Uses of Great Men; “Plato”; “Swedenborg”; “Montaigne”; “Shakespeare”; “Napoleon”; “Goethe”). These exceptional individuals were defined in a more minute way according to their character or profession. Thus, Plato was named “The Philosopher,” Swedenborg, “The Mystic,” Montaigne, “The Skeptic,” Napoleon, “The Man of the World,” and Goethe, “The Writer.” They were not presented as perfect heroes: attention was drawn to their great potential and strength, but Emerson was also pointed out their faults. In this way he evidently demonstrated “the inevitable failure of the ideal in the real world of men” (Myerson 38).

In nature, this self-registration is incessant, and the narrative is the print of the seal. It neither exceeds nor comes short of the fact. But nature strives upward; and, in man, the report is something more than print of the seal. . . . The man cooperates. He loves to communicate; . . . some men are born with exalted powers for this second creation. Men are born to write. ("Goethe")

Calling Goethe the philosopher of multiplicity, capable of dealing with a variety of facts and sciences, and pointing out that he lived in a small town and that his homeland was not one of the most powerful countries on the world map during his lifetime, Emerson states that still "there is no trace of provincial limitation in his muse"; on the contrary, this outstanding German had come into this world with a free and controlling genius. Emerson names the Helena, the second part of *Faust*, "a philosophy of literature set in poetry" ("Goethe"). It is the superior intelligence that Emerson finds to be praiseworthy and the wonder of the book.

Emerson undoubtedly recognized the exceptional importance of Goethe's thought, although, as Perry Miller has put it, his Journal "is full of a long struggle" with the distinguished German "the fascination of whom he could not resist, the revolutionary modernity of whose thought he fully appreciated, but the coldness of whose Olympian egotism dismayed him, and the laxness of whose morals repeatedly scandalized him" (*The American Transcendentalists* 152).

In the American journalism of the day, Goethe was predominantly seen as the man who had introduced immorality, and many intellectuals "looked down" on the very idea of Germany (Miller, *The Raven and the Whale* 31). Some journals, such as *American Review*, were rooted in conservatism, which implied looking down on not only certain German writers, such as Goethe, but also on Carlyle, Emerson, and other New England Transcendentalists (Miller, *The Raven and the Whale* 123). Among those who had a highly unfavourable view of both German literature and American Transcendentalism, members of the Knickerbocker group stood out, with Lewis Gaylord Clark pointing out that "Emerson was no Christian" (Miller, *The Raven and the Whale* 32).

However, the young Transcendentalists were impressed by Goethe, or to be more precise, he was "irresistible" to them because he "embodied their loftiest notions of 'Genius'" (Miller, *The American Transcendentalists* 153). Margaret Fuller was one of those, who stated that "he [Goethe] comprehends every feeling I have ever had so perfectly, expresses it so beautifully" (qtd. in Marshall 57). She was interested in the translation of some of his works, such as *Torquato Tasso*, and was charmed by his *Elective Affinities* and *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (Marshall 57 – 58):

Of Goethe, as of other natures where the intellect is too much developed in proportion to the moral nature, it is so difficult to speak without seeming narrow, blind, and impertinent. For such men see all that others *live*, and if you feel a want of a faculty in them, it is hard to say they have it not, best next moment they puzzle you by giving some indication of it. Yet they are not, nay, *know not*; they only discern. The difference is that between sight and life, prescience and being, wisdom and love. This with Goethe. Naturally of a deep mind and shallow heart, he felt the sway of the affections enough to appreciate their workings in other men, but never enough to receive their inmost regenerating influence (qtd. in Miller, *The American Transcendentalists* 155).

On the other hand, Emerson's mystical musings are usually linked to his reading of the works of the Neoplatonists, primarily Plotinus, as translated by Thomas Taylor (Allen 174). It is through Neoplatonism, many critics claim, that Emerson found an appropriate solution for "original sin," accepted the Plotinian "Fall," and found in it a "central theme for his long preaching" (Allen 271). "The Over-Soul" is usually considered to be his most significant essay written in a "Neoplatonist" vein (Allen 375). In the essay Emerson refuses to leave the material world in order to step into a completely spiritual one and therefore differs from Neoplatonists, primarily Plotinus, who was intimidated by the fact that his body was not spirit, and is more inclined to refer to external beauty in the manner of Michelangelo (Allen 280):

Plotinus thought that from the One all things flow, or emanate. The first emanation from the One is Mind (nous), or Universal Intelligence, which provides a rational foundation for the

world. A World Soul emanates from the One, and from the World Soul human soul. Below the World soul lies the realism of nature, existing in time but reflecting the eternal idea of the One. Both the World Soul and the human soul are eternal, but habitation in a physical body is a “fall.” The soul gives the body vitality. (Allen 375)

Emerson was exposed to multiple influences during his life. Eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment Common Sense realism appealed to him to a certain extent and his vision of “moral sentiment” was drawn from Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiment* (1759) (Allen 52). Emerson, in the senior year of his studies, was highly interested in the course on moral philosophy held by Professor Levi Frisbie. It was in these classes that he had an opportunity to read and become acquainted with works such as William Paley’s *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* or Dugald Stewart’s *Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man* (Allen 54). As a young minister, as Myerson has put it, Emerson claimed that not only are there “discoveries in morals” but it is possible to speak of a “science of morals” which progresses, a “moral science” rooted in Common Sense realism (Myerson 110). Young Emerson and his contemporaries were well acquainted with Scottish Enlightenment philosophers, such as Dugald Stewart and Thomas Reid, mainly through the Harvard curriculum. They tried to discuss and present empirically how the mind functions in order to understand truth:

Each person, they believed, possesses a timeless and universal moral sense that can be cultivated. Implicit in their teaching was introspection, which, combined with the idealist teachings of German philosophers and theologians, reached a young American audience anxious to find a moral basis to challenge what they perceived to be stagnant institutions and corrosive social problems. (Myerson 72)

Claiming that a person is metamorphosed into many things: the planter is transformed into the farmer “instead of Man of the farm,” the tradesman’s soul is “influenced” by dollars while the priest “becomes a form; the attorney, a statute book; the mechanic, a machine; the sailor, a rope of a ship,” Emerson highlights his opinion on the scholar in such conditions, naming him the delegated intellect who can be recognized in the right state as “Man Thinking” while “in the degenerate state, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of another man’s thinking (Emerson, “The American Scholar” 272). The Man Thinking is one who is fascinated and overwhelmed by what he reads, he can express his thoughts and ideas, not just repeating existing ones. Therefore, the Man Thinking is not an expert in an area of knowledge but is every man who is capable of using his mind. Discussing influences on the human mind, Emerson explains the relevance of those that come primarily from nature, as well as from books, being “the best type of influence of the past” and action (“The American Scholar” 274). Books should inspire; if books are used properly, their importance proves to be enormous, otherwise, their use can have the opposite effect. In other words, instead of a “Man Thinking,” the scholar may become nothing more than a bookworm.

According to Emerson, the main attribute of the scholar is integrity of mind, which presents an “extension of the Divine Mind” (Allen 301). However, he warns, each period must write its own books. Naming the scholar, the world’s “heart and eye,” Emerson prescribes for him significant and substantial duties; thus, he is expected “to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances” (“The American Scholar” 278). Emerson called for a new system of education, a new era in American culture which could be achieved through serious reform. He wholeheartedly suggested that educators should enable a nation’s deliverance. As Megan Marshall claims, this should imply teaching not merely numbers and facts, but primarily how to “convert life into truth, or to show the meaning of events” or, in other words, educators are expected to teach self-trust and allow students to improve the power of their minds and reveal their strength (81).

The scholar is expected to comprise within himself both the past and the future and become a spring of knowledge, a “bringer of hope,” the one who has to “reinforce man against himself” (Emerson, “The Method of Nature” 51). Emerson lamented the fact that Americans had followed in the footsteps of foreign models and had been inspired by the muses of Europe, stating that it was high time to step

forward independently. Not only did he state his reasons for literary nationalism, but also envisioned American literature as being able to “shake off the yoke” of the past times, the past influences and traditions, and be free from outdated perspectives and “dead forms” (“The American Scholar” 283). Emerson was deeply concerned with the organic⁵ life cycles, as well as the fact that in various institutions certain once-upon-a-time forms were worshipped. He objects to such a practice and, consequently, envisions the following:

We will walk on our own feet, we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. Then shall man be no longer a name for pity, for doubt, and for sensual indulgence. . . . A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men. (“The American Scholar” 283)

The new age demands new needs and a new man; wherever the new man appears there occurs a revolution since “the old is for slaves,” explains Emerson in “The Divinity School Address” (293). The new man proves to be a wonderworker, the one “amid miracles” and who does not need models, not even the greatest of all, bearing in mind that the one who imitates inevitably enters the domain of mediocrity (Emerson, “The Divinity School Address” 294). Imitation can by no means surpass its model, claims the author, proceeding with his argument by stating that something that was created by an inventor is natural to him, consequently “in him it has a charm” (“The Divinity School Address” 294). In a similar vein, Emerson states in his most influential essay, “Self-Reliance,” that anyone who considers himself a “true man” must be a nonconformist, since imitation can be considered a “suicide”; thus, a man should never imitate but insist on himself (“Self-Reliance” 298). He must be himself and not a part of a mob; a great man can manage, even in a crowd, to maintain the independence of his solitude. Individuals must be true to their own conscience, go alone, and follow their path since isolation is needed before true society can exist. However, the isolation he was thinking of is spiritual in its essence: it is a kind of elevation, rather than mechanical isolation.

Emerson’s emphasis on individualism⁶ corresponds significantly with the modern era of democracy in his homeland. Individuals must trust themselves, their own thoughts and emotions, and accept the place that divine Providence has provided for them. They should know their worth, since every “true man” is “a cause, a country, and an age” (“Self-Reliance” 303). The modern mind functions in such a manner that it believes that the nation exists for the individual, for the protection and cherishing of each person, unlike the past generations who “sacrificed the citizen to the State” (Emerson, “Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England” 5). The new age tends towards solitude, claimed Emerson, and it requires a new type of individual, who is reflective and intellectual, an individual who is for himself and refuses to speak for anyone else but himself. Thus, individuals are capable of rising up against dogmas, and can shake off the chains once believed to be needed for a civil society. Every man is for himself, “driven to find all his resources, hopes, rewards, society and deity within himself” (“Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England” 7). The completion of the world in man, according to Emerson, undoubtedly can be considered the final success of intelligence:

The universal does not attract us until housed in an individual. . . . Who would value any number of miles of Atlantic brine bounded by lines of latitude and longitude? Confine it by granite rocks, let it wash a shore where wise men dwell, and it is filled with expression; and the point of greatest interest is where the land and water meet. So must we admire in man the form of the formless, the concentration of the vast, the house of reason, the cave of memory. (“The Method of Nature” 57)

⁵ As Yannella observes, Emerson tried to find an “appropriate” organic structure for mirroring “nature’s wilderness and oneness.” He was much more eager to discuss “kinetic” elements, that is, “the organic development of images and ideas,” rather than “static” elements like structure (57).

⁶ Some critics, such as Quentin Anderson, have objected to Emerson’s vision of the “imperial self.” This “imperial self” eventually transforms into a denial of “history, membership in a generation, charity, reform, institutional means of every sort” (Myerson 68).

Among great individuals there is a poet who apprises us “not of his wealth, but of the common-wealth” (Emerson, “The Poet” 315). Thus, being the sayer, the namer, the language-maker, the one who presents novel ideas and experience to us, “the true and the only doctor,” the poet proves to be the sovereign, the ruler in his own right, claims Emerson. Furthermore, it is the poet who represents beauty and is capable of animating objects, of cherishing and putting forward independence and vitality of thought:

O poet! A new nobility is conferred in groves and pastures, and not in castles, or by the sword-blade, any longer. The conditions are hard, but equal. Thou shalt leave the world, and know the muse only. Thou shalt not know any longer the times, customs, graces, politics, or opinions of men, but shalt take all from the muse. (“The Poet” 328–329)

According to Emerson, the human soul is not a traveller; even when a wise person performs a long journey he is still at home with his soul and not separated from his true self. It is our intellect that is, above all, a vagabond: “[o]ur minds travel when our bodies are forced to stay at home” (“Self-Reliance” 311). Society never advances and social progress is nothing more than apparent. Society goes through constant changes; therefore, it can be perceived as a wave and, although it moves onward, “the water of which it is composed does not” (“Self-Reliance” 313). Each time something is given, something is taken away; whenever society gains new arts, it is inevitably denied its old instincts:

What a contrast between the well-clad, reading, writing, thinking American, with a watch, a pencil, and a bill of exchange in his pocket, and the naked New Zealander, whose property is a club, a spear, a mat, and an undivided twentieth of a shed to sleep under. But compare the health of the two men, and you shall see that his aboriginal strength the white man has lost. If the traveller tells us truly, strike the savage with a broad axe, and in a day or two the flesh shall unite and heal as if you struck the blow into soft pitch, and the same blow shall send the white to his grave. The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet he is supported on crutches, but loses so much support of muscle. He has got a fine Geneva watch, but he has lost the skill to tell the hour by the sun. (“Self-Reliance” 312)

Given the fact that the individual proves to be an analogist who finds and comprehends relations in all objects, he is positioned at the centre of things, and nature turns out to be “an interpreter, by whose means man converses with his fellow men” (“Nature” 250). The human individual is related to all nature and should not be at odds when he discovers that things in his vicinity are equally beautiful with those far away since “the near explains the far” and the tiny drop in its essence represents the ample bosom of the vast deep. Humans cannot be happy or satisfied unless they live with nature, not only now and today, but beyond time. And nature “hates calculators” given that “her methods are salutatory and impulsive” (“Experience” 338). According to Emerson, when it comes to the divine order, nature is put in second place, intellect being primary – whatever was present in intellect as pure law now is transformed in nature. Nature can be regarded as a proper standard which can put in the limelight man’s rise and fall; man can never feel as an outcast or a foreigner in nature (“The Method of Nature” 53):

Nature can only be conceived as existing to a universal, and not to a particular end; to a universe of ends, and not to one – a work of ecstasy, to be represented by a circular movement, as intention might be signified by a straight line of definite length. Each effect strengthens every other. (“The Method of Nature” 55)

Therefore, nature should be considered a living, existing order of things, the announcer of novel possibilities for each person; and since it is attributed an ethical, physical, and logical power, to belong to nature implies to belong to a “nexus of confluences” (Hodge 26). Since nature always puts on the colours of the spirit, and its noblest deed proves to be its existence as “the apparition of God,” Emerson states, the relation between “the man and the vegetable” can be defined as an occult one. It is in woods that we cast off our years as does “the snake his slough,” it is a dominion in which we are always a child, regardless of our actual age. This is the dominion in which we return to reason and faith (“Nature” 243):

Here is the very core of Emerson's 'Transcendentalism'. Fastening his attention upon 'immortal necessary uncreated natures' – that is, upon ideas, in 'their beautiful and majestic presence' he feels that his outward life 'is dream and a shade'. Nature is only 'an appendix to the soul'. By his imagination (though Emerson would prefer the word Reason) he ascends to 'the thoughts of the Supreme Being'. However, he loves the material world too much to fling stones at his beautiful mother. (Allen 280)

In his essays and lectures Emerson demanded the adequate use of one's potential; through his famous doctrines he insisted that humans should rely on their own thoughts, ideas, and instincts. In his lecture "Man the Reformer," which he first delivered in January 1841 and afterwards published in *The Dial* (April 1841), he discussed the importance of manual labour. Stating that a person should have "a farm or a mechanical craft" for his own well-being, he claimed that it was necessary to obtain opposition in the "tough world" for affairs of a spiritual nature, since manual labour was nothing less than the "study of the external world." It was not his intention to overestimate the doctrine of labour, Emerson stated, but to point out the following:

[T]he doctrine of the Farm is merely this, that every man ought to stand in primary relations with the work of the world, ought to do it himself, and not to suffer the accident of his having a purse in his pocket, or his having been bred to some dishonorable and injurious craft, to sever him from those duties; and for this reason, that labour is God's education; that he only is a sincere learner, he only can become a master, who learns the secrets of labor, and who by real cunning extorts from nature its sceptre. ("Man the Reformer" 414)

With this lecture, Emerson wanted to present, once again, his critique of the commercial era and the mercantile spirit in American society, or, to recall the words of Michael T. Gilmore, to show his "antimarket side"⁷ which was most evident in his oeuvre dating from the period 1837–1843 (19). His profound dissatisfaction with the tendency of modern society and the market to transform the individual into a thing and thus alienate him not only from other people but from his true self, according to Carolyn Porter, culminated in his attacking the characteristics of reification, namely rationalization, or the inclination to "mechanize man in the service of profit-making enterprises requiring calculation and measurable risks" (201).

Conclusion

Emerson, the proverbial Sage of Concord, was deeply concerned with the Romantic and Transcendental impulses of the day and was overwhelmed with the vastness and potential of the human mind. However, in the focus of his attention was always an interest in the human individual, "the Man Thinking," his individuality, and the self, his intuition, dignity, and free will, the dualism of spirit and matter, the Me and the Not Me (that is, nature). He clothed his thoughts and masterfully "domesticated" what was in the air and afterwards expanded it into lectures. Many of these were published later as essays. As modern criticism suggests, his usual unit of thought was the sentence, which was deemed to be (un)intelligible to his listeners and readers, "though he did his audience the implicit favor of assuming that they could follow/comprehend his thinking" (Fisher 25). Being "hard" to follow, at least occasionally, was not the only fault that his readers, either professional critics or not, found in Emerson's writings. The lack of form in his essays and incompleteness in his "whole literary side" was perceived as a fault by, among others, Henry James; the obtrusion of "himself upon his reader, and [announcement of] his own convictions" was criticized by Andrews Norton; and his belief in the Over-soul was dismissed by D. H. Lawrence as a museum interest. However, there were many who had a high estimation of Emerson and were aware of his high position and influence in American culture:

We have not in Emerson a great poet, a great writer, a great philosophy-maker. His relation to us is not one of those personages; yet it is a relation of, I think, even superior importance.

⁷ The fact is that Emerson had certain "inconsistencies" when it comes to the demands and requirements of the market, mostly reflected in numerous public lectures he delivered during his career.

His relation to us is more like that of Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Marcus Aurelius is not a great writer, a great-philosophy maker; he is the friend and aider of those who live in the spirit. Emerson is the same. He is the friend and aider of those who would live in spirit. . . .As Wordsworth's poetry is, in my judgment, the most important work done in verse, in our language, during the present century, so Emerson's "Essays" are, I think, the most important work done in prose. (Matthew Arnold, qtd. in Hodge 97)

Emerson left an indelible stamp on American literature and culture by introducing the ideas of Transcendentalism and being the spokesperson of a new age, a new dawn which glorified the uniqueness, freedom, and potential of the human individual, his faith in his own self, and inner strength, as well as the "omnipotence" of nature and natural laws by which humans should abide. He prophesied the idea of the unity of the soul of the individual and the world, wholeheartedly glorified the benevolence and "unspotted innocence" of nature. Although there was some critical disagreement pertaining to his works, the fact is that his writings were profoundly rooted in American experience and life, and his influence loudly reverberated through the works of numerous distinguished literary voices such as Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, and Willa Cather, to name but a few.

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