

Example of ralph waldo emerson essay

[Environment](#), [Nature](#)



Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American poet, a prolific essayist, pre-eminent lecturer and philosopher, belonged to the current of Transcendentalism. According to the transcendentalist thought, the center of reality is the self and everything that happens externally is radiated from the inner self only. His main work was his essay about Transcendentalism, called ‘ Nature’ published in 1836 and is one of the finest works in English Literature. His other notable contributions are essays like “ Self-Reliance” and “ The American Scholar”, and poems such as Alphonso of Castile, Celestial Love, Concord Hymn, Beauty, etc. The main themes and principles of Emerson’s writings have been holiness or sanctity of the individual, person’s unity with nature, poet’s role in the society and the need to live in the present. Emerson was originally a Unitarian minister, who left the ministry to pursue writing and became one of the most popular and leading writers of America in the 19th century. He believed that one could find God everywhere in everything and everyone. Besides this he also believed in non-conformity, individualism and harmony between human beings and nature. He studied about the religions of the world especially those of the Eastern countries and realized that the inner spiritual self was more important than the material external self. His tenure of study at the Harvard Divinity School exposed him to the influence of German critics and Buddhist, Hindu and Persian poetry, which started changing his own religious beliefs. He was greatly influenced by other contemporary writers of his age such as, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and philosophers Thomas Carlyle and Stuart Mill. One of his popular and influencing works called “ America’s Intellectual Declaration of Independence” came forth as a challenge to the readers to

stop imitating Europe and follow the American ideology of sincerity and realism. He encouraged people to start afresh with their religious inspiration and forsake the inherited antiquated traditions of Christianity. He said in his speech " Be a man." " Wherever a man comes, there comes revolution. The old is for slaves. . . Refuse the good models. . . Cast conformity behind you, and acquaint men at first hand with Deity."

Though Emerson thought his ideas are in line with the teachings of Christ, yet he had to face a lot of opposition. Objection was raised for his dismissal of Biblical miracles. Whereas Emerson did that in order to highlight the emphasis on the soul of the person which can relate to the Divine. The inner experience according to him held more value than the outward behavior. For Emerson, Christianity or belief in God is a humanistic and social religion. A believer's faith should be manifested in action against slavery, poverty, alcoholism and ignorance. As a minister Emerson never enjoyed parish work and wasn't sure of his calling to serve in the church. However he did like to preach and his sermons were not conventional and typical of the pulpit. He used Biblical texts to illustrate his sermons for which he also received criticism. He was reluctant in serving communion as the congregation interpreted the meaning differently from what he did. It is said of him by some critics that he didn't completely reject his Unitarian faith, but transformed it.

The antislavery movement gave a new platform to Emerson's growing popularity. He was actively involved in it and scorned the Abolitionists. He wrote many powerful addresses and speeches for the antislavery movement and was influential in the emancipation of slaves. He propagated freedom

and respect for all, worked for other causes such as women's educational and economic rights, more freedom in University level education and purity in trade and politics.

A constant theme and ideology of Emerson's journals and sermons has been Self-reliance. His essay ' Self-Reliance' was published in 1841 and according to him being self-reliant meant to heed to the small, still voice of God within an individual and accept the self. For him it further meant self-mastery of various passions and temper. He believed that the Divine is present in the entire creation, and the ideal self is capable of a natural experience and knowledge of the Divine. God is within every person and by being self-reliant on God first, one can reach the perfection in self-reliance.

Emerson's poems such as Beauty, Celestial Love, Art and many more, reflect his love for nature, tenderness and affection. His poetry has had a formative influence on American poetry and poets. Even his essays have received wide acclaim for their paradoxical, imaginative and analogical rhetoric.

A strong influence of Romanticism, Neo-Platonism, Kantianism and Hinduism inspired in him a love for nature. Like other writers Emerson also used many literary devices to communicate the theme and idea of his work. He used powerful and multiple metaphors such as ' the farmer farms, salesman sells, preacher preaches' throughout his speech of ' The American Scholar' and urged the Americans to stay united and not be divided. His comparison of the society to a fountain of power which has become like single drops of water, clearly tells the audience about the negative impact of job specialization on society. He further compares the people to " walking monsters" i. e. to say that functioning independently will not be successful,

because the society needs to work as a single unit.

Emerson also uses similes when he compares the future of poetry to a burning star in the sky. Through this he optimistically tells of the future of intellectualism of poetry in American life. According to him poetry can revive the American society as the people will understand and feel its impact. He then uses repetition as a strong literary device, in his speech - “ A complete Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all. Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier” (Paragraph 4) - to emphasize and lay importance on the fact that man shouldn't cling to one kind of profession; rather can fit into any professional role depending upon the situation. Through the use of metaphors, similes and repetition Emerson was successful in conveying the meaning of his writings to the readers and creating a vivid imagination in their mind.

In his work he uses imagery in as a strong tool and device to give the readers a clear picture of the situations. For instance in Concord Hymn, when he says “ By the rude bridge that arched the flood” (l. 1) he means to paint a picture of a very basic and simply constructed bridge and in this way the reader gets an accurate picture. It refers to an incident in 1837 about a clash between the British and American forces.

Emerson has been criticized for his inappropriate use of the meter in poetry in order to emphasize more on the moral theme of his writings. He was a liberal in the sense that he digressed from the traditional way of writing poems in measured lines, in order to convey the moral message and inspire the American society at large. His poems reflect optimism, love of nature and mysticism and influenced great writers like Henry David Thoreau, Walt

Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost and many more. Overall, Emerson was a great poet who conveyed the message of his poem very clearly and strongly. He made use of various literary devices judiciously to influence the society.

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