

Emerson's symbolism in the period of the industrial revolution in 1700s - 1800s

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



Throughout the late 1700s and early 1800s, the Industrial Revolution was occurring. This was a point in time where technology was advancing rapidly, a mass production of machinery, and new regulations were being established within the government. Additionally, transcendentalism was developed during the rise of the Industrial Revolution. The beliefs of Transcendentalists were that individuals should rely on nature to express their free thought and spirituality, and to live life being connected with nature. However, due to dependence on goods that were being manufactured and societies standards during the Industrial Revolution, many individuals including transcendentalist were induced by this. However, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his work, "Nature" disapproves this established way of society relying on manufactured goods and institutionalized knowledge and argues that individuals must separate themselves from society and its' restrictiveness, due to it preventing individuals from developing a better understanding of the universe.

Revealing the role of nature, Emerson utilizes symbolism for his readers to gain a better understanding of how separating one's self from society to nature can be therapeutic, imagery to portray how nature is a contributor of basic human needs (food shelter etc.), and knowledge, constantly nourishing us. Emerson's purpose of utilizing these particular tools ultimately reveal how the most valuable kind of nourishment humanity can find is in nature rather than institutions.

The symbolism of the woods that Emerson utilizes throughout the poem is constructed to assist individuals in understanding what the effects of being connected with nature has and how it offers an eternal freedom of experience. For example, Emerson writes, "In the woods too, a man casts off

his years and at what period of soever of life, is always a child In the woods we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, – no disgrace, no calamity which nature cannot repair”. Usually when individuals imagine a forest, it is depicted as an ominous, chilling place. Additionally, the woods are where someone (often, a child) gets lost, but in this case, Emerson describes it the complete opposite. Emerson symbolizes the woods as a sanctuary where individuals can retreat to and express their inner youth regardless of the societal norms that an individual must be mature always. Furthermore, he reveals the fact that when man isolates themselves within nature, they return to the state of being a child, becoming completely vulnerable, allowing themselves to be nurtured by nature. When man is in this state of being a child, left with an overwhelming amount of stress or misery, the woods acts as a provider of comfort and alleviation.

Emerson utilizes imagery to also portray how the wilderness can be of beauty no matter what the circumstance may be to reveal the role nature has on our lives. He focuses specifically on how Nature provides individuals with light, explaining how since things can't be seen in the dark, light allows us to see whatever it is we desire. Thus, revealing the beauty of nature. For example, Emerson states, “ To the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone.” In this quote, Emerson is revealing how at times when individuals are “ cramped by noxious work or company,” that connecting with nature acts as a medicine along with bringing back a stable mentality. To further reveal this, Emerson writes “ The tradesmen, the attorney comes out of the din and

craft of the street, and sees the sky and the woods, and is a man again; In their eternal calm, he finds himself.” This quote reveals how when individuals separate themselves from society, it can be healthful for them due to the fact that they don’t have to battle societal pressures. Rather than seeking a therapist or engaging in activities that society recommends, one can instead experience being connected with nature, obtaining the feeling of eternal happiness and calmness Emerson argues that the wilderness offers.

With the social standards that developed within the Industrial Revolution, Emerson also, utilizes symbolism to portray how these standards suppress one’s individuality and how nature causes all artificial social constructions to fall away. For example, Emerson states, “ The names of the nearest friends... to be brothers, to be acquaintances, -master or servant, is then a trifle and disturbance.” This quote reveals the fact that when individuals are left with nature, there is no sense of entitlement to being categorized by a name nor of character like society imposes. Society constructs the idea that you must be categorized as a brother or sister, relative or acquaintance, master or servant. However, in nature, none of these categorizations matter and are only a disturbance, preventing an individual from experiencing true freedom and connection with nature. This quote further reveals how connecting with nature causes the social constructions that put individuals into hierarchies within society no longer exist when exposed to the wilderness. When an individual is isolated with nature, no one is a “ master” nor a “ servant” but are just themselves, expressing entirely their individuality.

The imagery Emerson utilizes throughout the poem portray how nature is self-sufficient and provides for all possible needs. Additionally, Emerson uses imagery to expose the values of individuals who were induced by industrialization. For example, Emerson writes, “ The wind sows the seed; the sun evaporates the sea; the wind blows the vapor to the field; the ice, on the other side of the planet, condenses rain on this; the rain feeds the plant; the plant feeds the animal; and thus the endless circulations of the divine charity nourishes the man” (Page 5). This quote reveals how nature has provided humanity with everything we need in order to physically exist. Furthermore, Emerson also provided us with this specific imagery of nature to emphasize how nature has made an outstanding effort in its to continually provide for humans, maintaining our existence.

Emerson then disapproves of what individuals' value, who were induced by industrialization when he states, “ The private poor man hath cities, ships, canals, bridges, built for him the human race runs on his errands the human race read and write of all that happens, for him; to the court house, and nations repair his wrongs”. In this quote, Emerson states that a “ poor man” is one who values manufactured goods and machinery relying on industrialization for this type of nourishment. Therefore, it can be seen that Emerson defines a “ rich man” as one who recognizes and relies on nature for nourishment. To further criticize of what man values, Emerson states, “ A man is fed, not that he may be fed, but that he may work”. In this quote, Emerson is revealing in disappointment he has with humanity because humans provide work for hierarchical individuals. Emerson see's that in

society, individuals are fed with manufactured goods they desire, and in return, they provide work for the individuals providing them these goods (people of hierarchy). Thus, revealing the fact that man should not take nature for granted due to the fact that nature is feeding humanity. However, man is not recognizing what nature is providing for humanity, therefore, there is an unfair exchange between man and nature, nature being given nothing in return.