

Jose Enrique Rodo's Ariel



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Jos Enrique Rodo. Ariel. This famous passage is a warning. It warns those who could be easily impressed by the image of United States as a powerful, modern and efficient country. A country that relies on the utilitarian belief that there is nothing that cannot be achieved, as long as there is will and work. Under this conception, it is work that gives human beings their dignity. Rodo sees this as a threat to the individual's spirit, and to the values that sustain Latin Americans.

Ariel represents that natural fear that embraces intellectuals when conserving their cultural identity is threatened by the dominating political powers. As Carlos Fuentes explains in the prologue, " Ariel appears as the emotional and intellectual response of Latin American thought and Latin American spirituality to growing North American imperial arrogance, gunboat diplomacy, and big stick policies." ¹

United States utilitarianism is seen negatively by Rodo, since it represents a cultural conquest that could easily take over the Spanish American way of life. Rodo criticizes the United States drive to dominate the world and force his ideals onto the world, causing " the axis of the world to shift in the direction of a new Capitol".

Jos Enrique Rodo published Ariel in 1900, at the turn of a new century and at times where modernists were discussing and questioning the role of society, as well as the idea of powerful masses versus the individual self. This text basically deals with the question of how Latin American culture is to survive in a modern mass society that often admires the United States democratic and utilitarian way of life.

The essay, one of Rodo's most influential works, uses Shakespeare's characters from "Tempest," Ariel who represents the spiritual values, and

Prospero, a teacher who represents the intellectual, and is faced with a choice between losing power or allying himself with the masses.

In Prospero's character, the author incarnates the Latin American concern of whether succumbing to the utilitarianism of the United States, or to struggle to cultivate the high culture that gives identity to the Latin American people.

Rodo clearly is in favor of pursuing a cultivation of spirituality and moral ideals, instead of giving into the materialistic and self-centered values that United States represented to him. His proposal was to build a democratic society that would not undermine the individual development, a society where there would be progress yet their culture would be preserved integrally. According to him, a democratic equality " becomes the most efficient -in fact, the providential instrument- in spiritual selection".

Overall, Ariel is an essay about the struggle to find and preserve the Latin American identity. His ideas have influenced Latin America's intellectuals and writers, and his words still resound in today's political overview.

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