

Emerson as an Essayist

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Abstract – Essay is a popular genre of English literature, influencing other literatures all over the world. The essay is any short composition in prose that discusses a matter, expresses a point of view, persuades us to accept a thesis or simply entertains us. The essay is smaller than a dissertation or treatise, and it is not comprehensive, and unlike the other, it entertains the general readers. It is informal, making use of such literary devices as anecdote, illustration and humor. The formal essay (also called article) is impersonal and orderly as we notice in magazines and journals. The personal essay speaks of the author's autobiographical narration, sometimes whimsical.

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The Greeks Theophrastus and Plutarch and the Romans Cicero and Seneca wrote essays. The French Montaigne and the English Francis Bacon wrote the finest essays. Alexander Pope wrote essay in verse. Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele attempted essay in *Tattler* and *Spectator*, their literary periodicals. In the 19th century the founding of magazines encouraged essay-writing. Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey, R.L. Stevenson, Belloc and Chesterton and others developed the personal essay. The American writers Washington Irving, R. W. Emerson, H. D. Thoreau, Lowell and Mark Twain used the genre successfully. Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, E. M. Forster, E. B. White, James Baldwin, Susan Sontag and Toni Morrison are the 20th century practitioners of the form.

When it comes to American literature, the genre of essay-writing is too less practised but it is too popular. Though Irving, Mark Twain and others attempted essay, they are never popular as essayists. On the other hand, Emerson and Thoreau, but not their rival Lowell, have been popular as essayists. Mostly because of Transcendentalism, and the ensuing Civil War, both Emerson and Thoreau, with their philosophical bent of mind, became popular essayists as much as lecturers. The kind of innovation in their writing, and that of revolutionary times they lived in augmented the genre.

America got its political independence in 1776. It then awaited its cultural independence from Europe and it achieved it through the revolutionary writers like Thomas Paine, the Knickerbockers like Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper and William Cullen Bryant in the 1820s, and Edgar Allan Poe later. America needed Emerson and Thoreau its Shakespeare and Goethe for declaring its independence in the matter of its culture. The time had come for the confirmation in the freedom of soul.

Emerson of Concord became spokesman for heralding this intellectual independence in 1837 when he delivered the Phi Beta Kappa lecture "The American Scholar" at Harvard. Emerson carried the individual's revolt from authority which ushered in modernity and he struck a balance between the ideologies of Jonathan Edwards and the common sense of Franklin.

The town of Concord was a larger home and the circle of friends that gathered in the Emerson drawing room was but an extended family. A very different group had formed the habit of gathering at one another's houses for an afternoon of serious conversation, whether in Boston or Concord, and so the "Transcendental Club" came into being without deliberate intention.

In so stimulating an atmosphere, largely of his own making, Emerson expanded and matured, producing the Essays, First and Second Series in 1841 and 1844. His essays were new works, dependent no more on the lectures. Emerson's first book *Nature* (1836) serves as if a preamble to his essays.

Emerson's other prose works *The American Scholar* (1837), *An Address* (1838), *The Transcendentalist* (1841) and *The Lord's Supper* (1832) evince a similar kind of his philosophical bent of mind which we see in his two books of essays as well as in his later books *The Representative Men* (1850), *English Traits* (1856), *Conduct of Life* (1860), *Society and Solitude* (1870), and ?Emerson has a tract on farming. His later prose writings include Ezra Ripley, Emancipation in the British West Indies, The Fugitive Slave Law, John Brown, The Emancipation Proclamation, Thoreau, Abraham Lincoln and of course, Carlyle.

The *Dial* founded in 1840 was edited by Emerson from 1842 to 1844 and published many of his works. Robert Spiller and others have brought out a definitive edition of Emerson's *Collected Works* from Harvard in 1971. The same university brought out a sixteen-volume edition of Emerson's *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* (1960-1982).

Emerson meditated, spoke and wrote as a poet-philosopher. He was not only a preacher of his credo, but a practitioner of it. Still Emerson was not a theorist or a book man as Milton. Like Aristotle and Goethe he lived what he preached. Emerson believed that greatness appeals to the future. He believed in documentation. He believed in words as actions when they are fruitfully transformed into ideas and thoughts. Emerson believed that books and colleges if rightly used can accomplish an indispensable end. They serve us when they aim to create and set the heart of man on flame. Emerson was really a great and provocative sermonist, lecturer and writer. Tremaine McDowell writes, "In reality Emerson was from the 1830's to the Civil War the most urbane deviser of intellectual bombshells in the United States" (*Complete Writing* x). For example, he thinks that the universe has its centre in God and at the same time in the individual man. Dewey of Columbia praises him as master of a finely wrought logic and as the philosopher of democracy. Emerson's prose writings inspired great European writers/thinkers like Carlyle, Mickiewicz, Countess d'Agoult, Arnold, and O! Nietzsche. Froude said they broke for him the fetters of the church. Tyndall said that whatever he had done the world owed to Emerson. Tolstoi in his *Message to the American People* (1901) asked them why they paid so little attention to the voices of Emerson and his associates. Intellectual leaders in India were aware of Emerson's writings.

This chapter examines Emerson's essays.

I. ESSAYS FIRST SERIES (1841)

Most of Emerson's prose writings including his travelogue appear like bunches of essays. Emerson published his first book of essays in 1841, after *Nature* in 1836. The book was issued at the same time with Caryle's preface in England. Emerson's essays of the volumes are History, Self-Reliance, Compensation, Spiritual Laws, Love, Friendship, Prudence, Heroism, The Over-soul, Circles, Intellect, and Art – in all twelve essays. The following is a critical analysis of his essays.

1. History: The essay opens with Emerson's epitaph as follows:

There is no great and no small

To the Soul that maketh all (*Complete Writings* 23)

Emerson thinks that the God's creation is one and man is a relic of God. Everything is connected to everything. His essay begins with the line 'There is one mind common to all individual men.' This man is the universal man. He is Emerson's man-thinking. Thoreau, his contemporary, for example, was a specimen of this man.

This universal man is manifest in history. The history is manifest in human 'Laws.' The man is the encyclopaedia of facts, figures and human values.

This universal man was once Aristotle, Jesus, the Buddha and Karl Marx. Because history was always the tablet on which Emerson read the will of Providence, fashioning a new optimism meant first reorienting himself to the times. Emerson thinks, 'It is the universal nature which gives worth to particular men and things (His 124). According to Emerson, the entire historical ideas and happenings cohere and form a great and continuous chain of things. Happenings and facts and fictions – all have been related to other things elsewhere and in other times and spaces. This man has freedom, power and grace, which are requisite for happy and peaceful life. This man can live regardless of time and space, and independent of race, nation, class/caste, and gender. This universal man should see that he can live all history in his bones. This man is greater than all the geography and all the government of the world. This man, for example, Jesus or Ashok, must attain and maintain that lofty sight where facts yield their secret sense and sensibility. Facts and fiction coalesce there. The great city of Babylon of the past got into fiction later. The Garden of Eden is poetry now. London, New York, and New Delhi must go the same way. 'What is history,' said Napoleon, 'but a fable agreed upon?' This life of ours is tuck round with Egypt, Greece, Gaul, England, War, Colonization, Church, Court and Commerce, as with so many flowers and wild ornaments grave and gay. Genius works out the forms and categories of life. Man is the compend of time. He is the correlative of nature. His power consists in the multitude of his affinities, in the fact that his life is intertwined with the whole chain of organic and inorganic being. Emerson writes, "Let it suffice that in the light of these two facts, namely, that the mind is One, and that nature is its correlative, history is to be read and written" (Hist 142). Joel Porte observes, "Emerson in fact believed that the best use of history "is to enhance our estimate of the present hour." (Porte 3-4). Like religion, history is one kind of experience only.

2. Self-Reliance: Self-Reliance is freedom. It is independence. It is reliance upon the divine within the man. Emerson believed that matter changes its shape but it does not die. The spirit is eternal. Emerson believed that man is a relic of God, and he survives as long as he is with Him. Thus for his understanding of the "Secret of the World" Emerson drew on Oriental wisdom. It seemed to him that the Zoroastrian, the Indian, the

Persian scriptures are majestic, and more to our daily purpose than this year's almanac or this day's newspaper. This is Emerson's invention of American religion, advocating self-help. He would often say God helps those who help themselves.

Emerson though born and brought up in Christian religion did not believe in it completely. Once his conscience bit him at the Boston's Second Church he left it altogether. He became a harsh critic of church. Robert Spiller thinks his rebellion, when it finally came, was twofold: against the last vestiges of ecclesiastical authority over the spiritual life of the individual, and against the eighteenth century rationalism which had killed spirituality, he thought, when it denied revelation. Albert von Frank thinks self-trust (or self-reliance) is nothing other than an operative belief that the self has an innate capacity in the direction of truth, coupled with the courage to explore it.

The inner drama of this struggle is written between the lines of more than 160 sermons preached between 1830 and 1832, a selection of which has been published as *Young Emerson Speaks*. Emerson said in his final sermon to his congregation on "The Genuine Man," who "parts with his individuality, leaves all thought of private stake, personal feeling, and in compensation he has in some sort the strength of the whole.... His heart beats pulse for pulse with the heart of the Universe." (Emerson, qt Spiller 365)

Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" begins with a quotation from Beaumont and Fletcher's epilogue to their play *Honest Man's Fortune*,

Man is his own star; and the soul that can

Render an honest and a perfect man,

Commands all light, all influence, all fate;

Nothing to him falls early or too late.

Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,

Our fatal shadows that walk by us still

Emerson thinks that all great men are honest and simple. Infancy conforms to nobody and youth have force. Emerson writes,

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better for worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. (SR 148)

Good and bad are but names we ascribe. We need not bother about names and brands and societies and institutions. Let's speak truth though rude and bitter.

Emerson thinks a true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the centre of things. Where he is, there is nature and life. He thinks that one's private thought is everyone's and that is genius. Man's conscience is God's, and everyone's. Emerson writes,

If we live truly, we shall see truly. It is as easy for the strong man to be strong, as it is for the weak to be weak. When we have new perception, we shall gladly disburden the memory of its hoarded treasures as old rubbish. When a man lives with God, his voice shall be as sweet as the murmur of the brook and the rustle of the corn. (SR 158).

Emerson talks of man's goodwill, hard work, nobility and greater consciousness. He tells that man should not beg or get subdued unnecessarily. He should live like a man as they say. He should not pray God for fortune; and he should earn it himself. He should live heroically as Hemingway tells it.

Emerson advocates that man must do prayers for purification, and not for fortune. According to him, man's prayer is a disease of the will. Likewise, his religion is a disease of the intellect. He tells that imitation is suicide and envy is ignorance. Likewise, he tells that we need not travel for the sake of imitation. Why should we imitate the Greeks? Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" ends with his reformatory ideal as follows:

So use all that is called Fortune. Most men gamble with her, and gain all, and lose all, as her wheel rolls. But do thou leave as unlawful these winnings, and deal with Cause and Effect, the chancellors of God. In the Will work and acquire, and thou hast chained the wheel of Chance, and shall sit hereafter out of fear from her rotations. A political victory, a rise of rents, the recovery of your sick or the return of your absent friend, or some other favourable event raises your spirits, and you think good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles. (SR 168)

3. Compensation: If the first two essays consider the relation of the individual to the regime of spirit in word and deed, the next two – "Compensation" and "Spiritual Laws" – take up the nature of the regime itself.

Emerson alludes to a preacher who teaches that the good are rewarded in the next world. He thinks this can be a 'compensation.' But Emerson rejects

this altogether as if he does not believe in the next world as Basava spoke of this in the 12th century, South India. Emerson thinks that there is a kind of divine justice in nature. There is a kind of check and balancing. Nature balances everything. It is how the universe is alive. All things are moral and balanced. That soul which within us is a sentiment, outside of us is a law. Justice is not postponed. A perfect equity adjusts its balance.

4. Spiritual Laws: Socrates believed that if we work justly our prayers are materialized. Adam Smith's economic theory allows self-interest full play. Emerson believed in a natural aristocracy, in property, in immigration, in trade, and competitive industry. The modern feeling of un-connectedness or alienation, according to Emerson, has its source in a personal disloyalty to the regime of spirit, in that rebellious mood he calls 'skepticism.' We choose to regard the world as wholly material rather than as an affair of impalpable ideas, meanings, virtues, values, and spirit. Emerson thinks this world is a self-sufficient world. As Robert Frost believed, it is a right place to return to it. Let everyone be optimistic and progressive. Emerson regrets Our young people are diseased with the theological problems of original sin, origin of evil, fate and the like. Man need not lie, steal, pride with or commit suicide. Nature will not have us fret and fume. Too much artificiality or automation has made us lame and lazy. Our painful labours are not necessary, and they are fruitless. Emerson writes, that only in our easy, simple, spontaneous action are we strong and by contenting ourselves with obedience we become divine. The whole course of things goes to teach us faith. We need only to obey. There is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening we shall hear the right word. (SL 194).

Man must have a goodness of character. Each man has his own vocation. The talent is the call. There is one direction in which all space is open to him. He has faculties silently inviting him thither to endless exertion. Let everyone do his work, thereby unfolding the nobility of his character. He must justify his work. What a man does that he has. A man's righteousness determines the character of the universe. A man is a method, a progressive arrangement, a selecting principle. What his heart thinks great, that is great. The soul's emphasis is right. Emerson advocates us truth. Let us speak truth, and live truthfully.

For Emerson, then, there is no antithesis between the practical and theoretical, between the humanistic and the scientific, between religion and science, between value and fact – as there is none between inner and outer, between man and nature, between character and event.

5. Love: Love is a great passion. It is a classical virtue. People call it the mother of all virtues. Friendship is its sister. Sex is a crude form of love and friendship. However, sexual love must

surpass itself and become friendship. Emerson further suggests that friendship growing out of sexual love may be even more valuable for perception of truth and the experience of reality than a friendship that does not. This thought is the culmination of the essay, "Love." Friends are equals. So is the case with lovers. Love is the base of friendship, of marriage and of human relationships. Emerson's poem "Give all to Love" speaks of this.

Walt Whitman believes love is the keel of the universe. Love is the basis of the universe. This world stands on the glue of it. The love of life is this life, and this world. Even people with material culture as their obsession cannot do without it. This love makes a revolution and unites the people. It pledges him to the domestic and civic relations, carries him with new sympathy and enhances the power of the senses and opens the imagination.

Family is the first school for the child. The mother is the first teacher. Emerson writes, "In the dwelling-house," wrote the father, "must the true character and hope of the time be consulted," for there a man may "stand on his feet." (Spiller 374) Love is the essence of God. True love transcends the unworthy object and dwells and broods on the eternal. Love revitalizes life. Love and live have certain common things between them. Love makes all things alive and kicking. A man enjoys the benefits of love, benefits most. Emerson thinks such man is a new man, with new perceptions, new and keener purposes, and a religious solemnity of character and aims.

Beauty comes next. There is beauty in the world. This beauty is as good as truth (virtue). The Hindus believe that God is both beauty and truth. The line is thus 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram.' Keats once made an aphorism to the effect: 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' – that is all/ye know on earth, and all ye need know." (Keats 851)

Beauty pleases everybody. The existence of beauty enriches life. Herein it resembles the most excellent things, which all have this rainbow character, defying all attempts at use. What else did Jean Paul Richter signify, when he said to music, "Away! Away! Thou speak to me of things which in all my endless life I have not found and shall not find." The same fluency may be observed in every work of the plastic arts. Beauty is colour and shape and radiance. Beauty is a divine shadow upon the earth, and this beauty is not properly distributed. This beauty lies in sunshine, the splendor of colors and shapes and sizes of people and things.

6. Friendship: Friendship is a great virtue, a great value. It is an ideal. Friends are half-wives. Whatever else he or she may be, a friend is an ideal reader, an encourager of sincerity, and a

recipient of letters (as he or she several times appears in the essays).

Emerson's essay on friendship begins with a poem by himself, and the second part of it fits our expectation.

Throughout his career, Emerson wrestled with the problem of friendship. "Friendship is something very delicious to my understanding," he reflected in an early journal; "Yet the friends that occupy my thoughts are not men but certain phantoms clothed in the form and face and apparel of men by whom they were suggested and to whom they bear a resemblance." Jeffrey Steele thinks, "As a result of such tensions in Emerson's thought, some critics have echoed Margaret Fuller's accusation that Emerson's theories prevented him from accepting the flaws of his friends." (Steele 123)

Emerson himself was a great friend of many people including Henry James Sr, Thoreau of Concord, Carlyle of England, and others. Robert Spiller writes,

The town of Concord was a larger home and the circle of friends that gathered in the Emerson drawing room was but an extended family.

Emerson writes in affectionate prose about his friendships – private and public. He values friendship, and he personates it. He feels God himself sent him a large number of good friends.

Friendship is a great thing in life. It is a companionship, consolation and guidance, help and cooperation. The soul environs itself with friends that it may enter into a grander self-acquaintance; and it goes alone for a season that it may exalt its conversation. The laws of friendship are austere and eternal of one web with the laws of nature and of morals.

Friendship is a fortune. It is an exchange of gifts, of useful loans; it is good neighborhood; it watches with the sick; it holds the pall at the funeral; and quite loses sight of the delicacies and nobility of the relation. Like Bacon, Emerson does not like business friendship. It is said,

Only friendship establishes the true reciprocity between society and solitude – a reciprocity that cancels the question as to which of them is a means and which is the end. Society and solitude exist for each other, as friends do. And they both serve the highest purpose, which is truth, as friends do. (Kateb 196). Jeffrey Steele observes,

But we must not forget that *Essays: First Series* contains both "Self-Reliance" and "Friendship." For all of his prophetic insistence upon "the infinitude of the private man" Emerson never relinquished the claims of friendship. Indeed, the two conceptions –

self-reliance and friendship—despite their antithetical appearance are intimately connected in Emerson's thought. (Steele 123)

7. Prudence: Our general understanding of prudence is that it is a kind of wisdom. It entails carefulness or caution. Emerson thinks prudence is a virtue. It is the science of appearances. It is the outmost action of the inward life. It moves matter after the laws of matter. In 1841 Emerson could define it, uncontroversially, as 'the art of securing a present well-being.' To be prudent is simply to be attentive to the nature of things (that is to say, to know their laws) in a universe that is from its foundation legal and symbolic. Because there is nowhere that law does not penetrate, human actions all have value, all have significance. The world is filled with prudence in the form of proverbs and practice, customs and habits. It sees prudence not to be a several faculty, but a name for wisdom and virtue matching with the body and mind's wants. Prudence respects space and time, climate, want, sleep, the law of polarity, growth and death. The good husband finds method as efficient in the packing of fire-wood in a shed or in the harvesting of fruits in the cellar. This is an example for prudence. Albert von Frank observes,

Prudence serves to put us in good circumstances, the better to establish our power in the world; but as no virtue is quite sane by itself, but flourishes in company, so the highest prudence is a multiplier of connections to phenomena and their laws, to matter and to spirit. Understood as Emerson understands it, prudence is a homely virtue that makes the lowest parts of life continuous with the highest, makes them royal and poetic, as surely as a sensual greed and selfishness make them empty, literal, and disconnected. (Frank 113)

8. Heroism: Man loves heroism as he loves adventure. Life is a struggle for survival and identity. Life entails hard-work. Emerson's essay on heroism speaks of this realistically, without losing the author's marks of ideals wherever necessary. Emerson quotes Mohomet's line 'paradise is under the shadow of swords.'

Emerson's hero is like Capt Ahab about whom we are told, "finds a quality in him that is negligent of expense, of health, of life, of danger, of hatred, of reproach, and knows that his will is higher and more excellent than all actual and all possible antagonists" (He 149). The hero's defiant act is the ultimate test of self-reliance and its highest use. He writes,

But if we explore the literature of Heroism we shall quickly come to Plutarch, who is its Doctor and historian. To him we owe the Brasidas, the Dion, the Epaminondas, the Scipio of old, and I must think we are more deeply indebted to him than to

all the ancient writers. Each of his “Lives” is a refutation to the despondency and cowardice of our religious and political theorists. A wild courage, a Stoicism not of the schools but of the blood, shines in every anecdote, and has given that book its immense fame. (He 251)

What man needs is to acquire the qualities of heroism: courage, hardship, prudence, honesty and even charity attitude. Our culture therefore must not omit the arming of the man. Heroism and the search for signification are indivisible. The hero delivers himself and us from non-sense: he is the redemptive bringer of meaning. Heroism works in contradiction to the voice of mankind and in contradiction, for a time, to the voice of the great and good. Emerson praises John Eliot, the Indian Apostle for his heroic words. He praises Brutus too in the same breath. The heroic soul does not seal its justice and its nobleness. Heroism is a transcendental faculty as we can speak of heroic age. Heroism seems to be an aspect of history sometimes. We talk of the Greek age and Roman prize as much as the bloody Mangoleans and mighty Aryans or Anglo-Saxons.

9. The Over-Soul: Emerson speaks of man as a relic of God. This is the essence of Indian advaita. His first essay *History* speaks of this in good deal. Emerson writes,

The Supreme Critic on the errors of the past and the present, and the only prophet of that which must be, is that great nature in which we rest as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere; that Unity, that Over-Soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission; that over-constrains everyone to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character and not from his tongue, and which evermore tends to pass into our thought and hand and become wisdom and virtue and power and beauty. (OS 262)

According to Emerson, the soul/conscience is whole or holistic. It has an organic power. It is God's deputy. The soul is nothing but a kind of power, fire or force. It is a kind of light. The soul is not the intellect or the will, but the master of the intellect and the will.

The soul as that of the over-soul (or God) is omniscient and omnipresent. The soul requires purity, but purity is not it; requires justice, but justice is not that; requires beneficences, but is somewhat better; so that there is a kind of descent and accommodation felt when we leave speaking of moral nature to urge a virtue which it enjoins. Albert von Frank says,

He concedes, for example, that no one has ever achieved this transcendental state of illumination or soul-fullness (though Jesus, he allows, came

closest). It is not an ecstatic state because it is not a going out of the self, but rather the self's utterly complete realization, the imaginary end point of coming-to-be. In fact, Emerson is a great deal more interested in the real process – which we can and do know – than in its conceptually important but thoroughly imaginary finish. (Frank 116)

The soul provides us insights, in turn, leading us to revelation. Mysticism as a branch of religion and metaphysics speak of God as an inner light as the Quakers call it. The trances of Socrates, the ‘union’ of Plotinus, the vision of Porphyry, the conversion of Paul, the aurora of Behmen, the convulsions of George Fox and his Quakers, the illumination of Swedenborg, are of this kind.

It is said, “The essay “The Oversoul” proposes a mystic unity within which everyman's particular being is contained and made one with all others” (*Oxford Companion* 338). “Self-Reliance” is a joyous celebration of individuality. Emerson subordinates the individual to the whole in it. The soul gives itself, alone, Original and Pure, who, on that condition, gladly inhabits, leads and speaks through it.

10. Circles: In “Circles,” Emerson proposes to show that there is no end in nature, that circulation, not arrival – growth and onwardness, not perfection or stasis – is the law of life. “Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn. Our lives, he says, are ever-expanding, self-propagated circles, large or small according to, the force or truth of the individual soul... ‘(The young) alone have dominion of the world, for they walk in it with a free step... Each young soul ... represents the Soul and nothing less.’ Emerson praises ‘Infancy, youth, receptive, aspiring, with religious eye looking upward,’ which ‘counts itself nothing and abandons itself to the instruction flowing from all sides.’ (Ci 180).

In his Divinity School Address, Emerson said Jesus is not the final saint, nor his word the final. Nature is in a continuous flux, and nothing is ever settled. Everything looks permanent until its secret is known. Permanence is a word of degrees. He writes,

The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end. (Ci 280)a-142.

Emerson talks of arts as a circle in the circle of knowledge. Again literature is a circle within there. One format or category leads to another. The modern deconstructionist Jaques Derrida speaks of the dislocation of the centre in the universe. He feels everything is subject to change.

11. Intellect: Emerson begins his “Intellect” with this. EVERY substance is negatively electric to

that which stands above it in the chemical tables, positively to that which stands below it. Water dissolves wood and iron and salt; air dissolves water; electric fire dissolves air, but the intellect dissolves fire, gravity, laws, method, and the subtlest unnamed relations of nature in its resistless menstroom. Intellect is the simple power anterior to all action or construction. (Int 292)

Nature shows all things formed and bound. The intellect pierces the form, overleaps the wall, detects intrinsic likeness between remote things and reduces all things into a few principles.

All our progress is an unfolding, like the vegetable bud. One has first an instinct, then an opinion, then a knowledge, as the plant has root, bud and fruit. We need to trust the instinct to the end.

Emerson thinks our memories or our past is really valuable.

The link between "Intellect" and "Art" is the distinction, in the former essay, between this dissolving thought and "the intellect constructive," or "Genius" (198). Emerson's injunction at the end of *Nature* to "Build, therefore, your own world," was an invitation to the reader to trust, or to rely on, his own genius, nor as an artist in the usual sense, but as the central figure in his own worldview.

12. Art: Art is representation of life. It is an aesthetic mirror held to our realities. Art is like the pickle of our food. It is the salt of it. We cannot live or grow without it. In our fine arts which are five, not imitation but creation, is aimed at. Art is an illumination.

Emerson thinks these are the artists, the orators, the leaders of society. The power to detach and to magnify by detaching is the essence of rhetoric in the hands of the orator and the poet. Emerson writes,

In happy hours, nature appears to us one with art; art perfected – the work of genius. And the individual in whom simple tastes and susceptibility to all the great human influences overpower the accidents of a local and special culture is the best critic of art.... In the sculptures of the Greeks, in the masonry of the Romans, and in the pictures of the Tuscan and Venetian masters, the highest charm is the universal language they speak. (Art 209)

II. ESSAYS SECOND SERIES (1844):

Emerson was a hard-worker. He had an intense zeal to live and let others to live. He believed in communal harmony. His discipline and social commitment were admirable. Such a man went on with his studies in the ways of the world. He travelled and lectured extensively. He polished his lectures into *Essays Second Series* in 1844. The second

book contains the nine of the following essays. 1. The Poet, 2. Experience, 3. Character, 4. Manners, 5. Gifts, 6. Nature, 7. Politics, 8. Nominalist and Realist, and 9. New England Reformers.

1. The Poet: This is one of Emerson's finest essays on poetry. Emerson declares in "The Poet" 'America is a poem in our eyes, a view given poetic expression by his devoted disciple Walt Whitman. In fact, Emerson has a poem just entitled "The Poet."

Emerson was a great poet. He was experimental and innovative. Emerson published two books of poetry, namely *Poems* in 1847 and later *May-Day and Other Poems* in 1867. David Robinson adds, But the seemingly mystical and aesthetic emphasis of "The Poet" does not take that essay entirely out of the political sphere, broadly defined. In a book of essays in which wrestling with several forms of doubt plays a fundamental role, "The Poet" stands out for its unqualified assurance, grounded in the pragmatic sense of poetry as a form of curative action. This conception of poetry is particularly notable in the light of the threat of paralysis in "Experience." (Robinson 181)

The poet is a seer and he speaks of beauty and truth. He sees and expresses the beauty in nature because he recognises the spiritual meaning of events.

2. Experience: Emerson's essay "Experience" opens the latter part of his writing career. "Experience" like the preceding essay "Poet" has been quite popular with the general readers. Emerson's experience of the world can provide us certain brutal but true facts: that there is no heaven; that God as the universal force helps those who help themselves (lest not); that Jesus's word is not final. He thinks Nature governs mankind.

The thematic nucleus of the book can be located in an 1842 conversation with his Swedenborgian friend Sampson Reed: "In town I also talked with Sampson Reed, of Swedenborg and the rest. 'It is not so in your experience, but it is so in the other world.'-'Other world?' I reply, 'there is no other world, here or nowhere is the whole fact; all the Universe over, there is but one thing, - this old double, Creator-creature, mind-matter, right-wrong'" (Emerson qt Robinson 171)

Death also constitutes one of the fundamental serial realities of Emerson's career. His father died when he was eight; his first wife died after 18 months of marriage in 1831; his adult brothers, Edward and Charles, died in 1834 and 1836, respectively. Repetitive traumas are certainly not the sole source of Emerson's romance with repetition or with notions of the series. Julie Ellison adds, "The texts surrounding Waldo's death draw

our attention to the relationship between literature and paternity.” (Ellison 143)

In January 1842, five-year-old Waldo Emerson came down with scarlet fever on a Monday and died the following Thursday night.

The faculties like wisdom, poetry and virtue are the faculties of experience. Knowledge itself is an experience as that of virtue. None can get this experience so easily. One has to struggle hard for acquiring it.

As Sharon Cameron has powerfully argued, “Experience” is ‘an elegy, an essay whose primary task is its work of mourning.’

Experience is external, useful. It is mandatory for any profession. It is hands and feet to every enterprise. Emerson thinks life is not a luck or lottery though it is a fortune. Darwin in his *Origin of Species* spoke of man’s gradual evolution from the monkey. Sir Everard Home noticed that the evolution was not from one central point, but coactive from three or more points.

3. Character: As David Robinson rightly guesses Emerson’s doctrine of self-culture evolved into a doctrine of character. Character was Emerson’s term for that moral ballast, a power whose “natural measure... is the resistance of circumstance” (CW, 3:57). Here he speaks of individualism and non-conformism as explicit in essays like “Fate” and “Character.” The concept of character as self-reliance dominates *Essays Second Series*.

Emerson’s essay “Character,” as usual, begins with his own verse, highlighting the importance and role of character. The metaphor ‘gold’ is an indication of it. Man is different from the other animals, because he has something special in him. Emerson mentions such men of history as Chatham, Plutarch’s lives, Birabeau, and even George Washington, and writer-thinkers such as Schiller as men of character.

Character is like light. It is a kind of soul-force or morals. It is a natural power that exerts its influence upon others. Emerson thinks character should be like transcending genius of spirit which has found moral law in nature and has adapted it for use in the world of men. A man of character influences all others. A healthy soul stands united with the Just and the True. Character may be ranked as having its natural place in the north. It shares the magnetic currents of the system.

Character is important and essential. Character is lost everything is lost. Character is life. David Robinson writes,

“Character” as an essay that mediates between the moral emphases of “Self-Reliance” and “Friendship.”

“Character” begins with images of lonely and resistant eccentricity, but moves toward a celebration of human relatedness in which much of Emerson’s later pragmatic project has roots. Friendship, finally, becomes the test of character.

4. Manners: Manners are part of human virtues. They are part of character. We study manners in polity, economy, society, religion and culture. Manners are as important as the punctuation marks in writing.

Emerson thinks ‘half the world does not know how the other half lives, thereby believing that there exists diversity.’ We often talk of manners and morals in society and civilization. Our arts and literature depict this. Emerson writes:

What fact more conspicuous in modern history than the creation of the gentleman? Chivalry is that, and loyalty is that, and in English literature half the drama, and all the novels, from Sir Philip Sidney to Sir Walter Scott, paint this figure. The word gentleman, which, like the word Christian, must hereafter characterize the present and the few preceding centuries by the importance attached to it, is a homage to personal and incommunicable properties. (Man 382)

Cultivation of character involves sophistication of morals and manners. It involves such things as virtue, wit, beauty, wealth and power. One needs to become a gentleman/lady. Gentility is mean, and *gentillesse* is obsolete. But we must keep alive in the vernacular the distinction between fashion, a word of narrow and often sinister meaning, and the heroic character which the gentleman imports. The usual words, however, must be respected as they will be found to contain the root of the matter. Emerson thinks, the gentleman is a man of truth, lord of his own actions, and expressing that lordship in his behavior; not in any manner dependent and servile, either on persons, or opinions, or possessions. The famous gentleman of Asia and Europe have been of this strong type; Saladin, Sapor, the Cid, Julius Caesar, Scipio, Alexander, Pericles, and the lordliest personages. They sat very carelessly in their chairs, and were too excellent themselves, to value any condition at a high rate.

Emerson believes that honesty counts in character-building. Such virtues as education, sophistication, help and cooperation, a little sacrifice are counted too. A gentleman makes no noise and a lady is serene. The love of beauty is the love of measure. Society will pardon much to genius and special gifts, but, being in its nature a convention, it loves what is conventional, or what belongs to coming together. That makes the good and bad of manners, namely what helps or hinders fellowship. Love gives new meanings to every fact. Without the rich heart, wealth is an ugly beggar. The king of Schiraz could not afford to be so bountiful as the

poor Osman who dwelt at his gate. Osman had a humanity so broad and deep. Emerson's essay "Manners" ends with his example of Jove who was unhappy about man's ill-manners.

5. Gifts: According to the holy books life itself is a gift by God. Nature is God's gift for man. A woman is a gift for man and vice-versa. Children are gifts too. So is the case with friends, power, wealth, character and beauty. The fruits and flowers too.

6. Nature: Emerson wrote a separate book on nature first published in 1837. Robert Spiller writes of this book as though it made Emerson tense and thoughtful. "Nature is the gospel of the new faith rather than, like Thoreau's *Walden*, a record of an experience of earth. Lifted by the excitement of recognition to the plane of prose-poetry, it is nevertheless a concise statement of the "First Philosophy." (Spiller 369) As a philosopher-writer, Emerson thinks that nature is a divine book written for man's instruction. "Nature" in two senses: the common sense in which it refers to essences unchanged by man, and the ideal sense in which it is the phenomenal expression of the soul.

Emerson describes the beauty and bounty of nature. He likes the finesse of October weather in America which he calls the Indian Summer, which besides keeping everyone warm, promises them longevity. The tempered light of the woods is like a perpetual morning, and is stimulating and heroic. Emerson describes the beauty of forests, fruits and even grass – all being the music and pictures of the most ancient religion.

Emerson thinks our cities are suffocating. The erratic urbanization, polluting industrialization, and the overcrowding makes us unhappy. Cities give not the human senses room enough.

Emerson's friend Thoreau did an experiment of life when he stayed at Emerson's land of *Walden* for two years. Thoreau's description of Nature's plus-points are as vivid as Emerson's. Emerson thinks there may not be much difference from landscape to landscape, but the difference lies in the beholder's eyes. Beauty breaks everywhere.

Emerson thinks nature is a great source and resource. It is ever changing, growing. It is positive, fair and logical. There is what we can call divine justice in her. Even the survival of the fittest theory works soundly. Nature is always consistent, though she feigns to contravene her own laws. She keeps her laws, and seems to transcend them. She arms and equips an animal to find its place and living in the earth, and at the same time she arms and equips another animal to destroy it. Space exists to divide creatures. Emerson thinks nature is not perfect. Robert Frost, his poetic successor felt the same when he wrote the poem "Stopping by the Woods on

a Snowy Evening" and the apt quoted lines are as follows:

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep. (Frost 1775)

Unlike Wordsworth, Emerson thinks that nature has its own grey areas. There are treachery and derision of man in the form of natural disasters.

6. Politics: Politics is civil governance. Politics protects the rights of man and his properties. Once the kings ruled, and the ministers as people's representatives rule right now. Democracy is the best government for all times. Emerson defended democracy as the form of government best fitted for Americans whose religion and tradition reflect a desire to allow the judgements of citizens to be expressed in the laws of the state. He, however, cautioned that every actual state is corrupt, and added that good men must not obey the laws too well. Heroic people can raise a civil disobedience.

Things have their laws, as well as men. Property will be protected. Corn will not grow unless it is planted and manured; but the farmer will not plant it unless the chances are a hundred to one that he will cut and harvest it. Emerson adds, "The same necessity which secures the rights of person and property against the malignity or folly of the magistrate, determines the form and methods of governing, which are proper to each nation and to its habit of thought, and nowise transferable to other states of society." (Pol 426)

In "Politics," written not long before the onset of Emerson's more committed antislavery statements, he cannot decide whether he most dislikes politics because it is too personal or because it is not personal enough. "Parties of principle, as, religious sects, or the parties of free-trade, of universal suffrage, of abolition of slavery, of abolition of capital punishment," he complains, "degenerate into enthusiasms" and are perpetually corrupted by personality" (CW 3: 122-23).

Emerson speaks of the two parties of America of his times. He thinks the one as ruling but without the better minds, and the other was not ruling though it had better minds.

The nature of governments whether feudal (conservative or military) or democratic is quite complicated. The history of party politics is complicated. Rules and regulations are not so simple to understand and interpret. The state exists

to educate the citizens for good governance. There are stupid and criminal-minded men as much as the wise ones in society.

Emerson believes that virtuous people should govern the country. The rule must be based on love and righteousness. "Our people," he writes in his journal in 1844, "are slow to learn the wisdom of sending character instead of talent to Congress. Again and again they have sent a man of great acuteness, a fine scholar, a fine forensic orator, and some master of the brawls has crunched him up in his hand like a bit of paper." Joel Porte observes,

Emerson would have nothing to do with an American civilization, so-called willing to cover its crimes with cries of manifest destiny and America first. "We have much to learn, much to correct," he writes, "a great deal of lying vanity. The spread eagle must fold his foolish wings and be less of a peacock." "I wish to see America," he continues, "not like the old powers of the earth, grasping, exclusive and narrow, but a benefactor such as no country ever was, hospitable to all nations, legislating for all nationalities. Nations were made to help each other as much as families were; and all advancement is by ideas, and not by brute force or mechanic force." (Porte 11)

7. Nominalist and Realist: Emerson speaks of idealists and realists in this essay.

8. New England Reformers: The anti-slavery movements were in the ferment in the 1840s through 1860s, finally leading to the American Civil War (1861-65). All the Transcendentalists inspired it, indirectly supporting the cause of the colored people. when Emerson came forth after much prodding to deliver his first major antislavery address, "emancipation in the British West Indies" (1844), he could argue for abolition only because he had become convinced that "the negro race is, more than any other, susceptible of rapid civilization" (W II: 141). Humane sympathies, ethical appeals, claims of political justice and inalienable rights were all insufficient; laissez-faire nature "will only save what is worth saving; and it save not by compassion, but by power When at last in a race a new principle appears, an idea – that conserves it; ideas only save races... but a compassion for that which is not and cannot be useful and lovely, is degrading and futile" (W II: 143-44). His antislavery speeches – referred to by one editor as his "guerilla lectures" and destined by him for a planned "Book of Occasional Discourses" – set forth a pragmatic, activist politics.

9. Craftsmanship: Emerson wrote essays with an avowed aim. Each of his essays can be read as if an organic whole. But his first book of essays or the second one does not sound like a frame-story. Robert Spiller tells, "The design of the individual essays does not extend to the volumes in which they are collected. Emerson meant them to be read one at a time and in any order. (Spiller 52)

Emerson was once a minister in the second church, Boston. He delivered more than one hundred sermons as they are gathered in *Young Emerson Speaks*. Emerson left the church after a quarrel in 1832, as he did not believe in the old world life. He determined that lecturing was his next profession. Maybe, he used his journals for stock of knowledge, and his (the total number being eighty) lectures were based on his sermons. Perhaps, Emerson's choice to reduce the lectures into essays is admirable. John Jay Chapman adds,

It was the platform that determined Emerson's style....The pauses and hesitation, the abstraction, the searching, the balancing, the turning forward and back of the leaves of his lecture and then the discovery, the illumination, the gleam of lightning which you saw before your eyes descend into a man of genius—all this was Emerson. He invented this way of speaking."

The new form which Emerson developed is neither wholly essay nor wholly lecture. Its unit is the carefully wrought sentence, 'pure, genuine Saxon' as Carlyle immediately recognized. Each contains in crystalline suspension the whole meaning of the essay, of the book, an art learned perhaps in part from the gnomic sentence of Bacon or the pensees of Pascal, as simple and direct as the familiar style of Montaigne. 'Nature will not have us fret and fume.' Longer sentences are broken and rugged, retaining their staccato quality.

It would be a mistake to conclude that form is lacking. Each paragraph, each essay, has the structure of the circle containing smaller circles within it and itself contained in larger circles. "The eye is the first circle," wrote Emerson in the shortest of his essays; "the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end." (Emerson. Q. Spiller 376) His method is organic, a reflection of the structure of the universe as he sees it.

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