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## Éditorial

Bien chers toutes et tous,

Nous revoilà ! Á nos retrouvailles semestrielles !! Avec Germivoire, notre Revue vôtre ! Où, de vous à nous et de nous à vous, des échanges sont faits. Dans le cadre scientifique !! Où sciences humaines ou d'autres sciences entrent en communion et exposent des résultats de certaines de leurs quêtes générales ou particulières. Résultats qui seront vus et appréciés, espérons-le, par d'autres personnes intéressées par les sujets traités. Puisque Germivoire est une Revue en ligne/online.

Dans le labour de ce cadre ou périmètre cultivable á diverses couches, les récoltes semestrielles présentes se sont révélées variables de saveurs. Et la variété des saveurs donnent un bon goût particulier á ce numéro de Germivoire.

Et ce bon goût particulier vient des récoltes mises ensemble des champs aux parcelles différentes que sont l'anglais, l'histoire, les lettres françaises modernes, les sciences du langage et de la communication et la sociologie. Pour s'en faire une idée selon son intérêt á l'instruction, tout esprit curieux pourrait se référer aux différentes étiquettes de ces récoltes dans notre table des matières.

Á vos plaisirs solaires !!

**Brahima Diaby**

# THE DISCOURSE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCY : AN ANALYSIS OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON'S *NATURE*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the environmental issue in Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay *Nature*. The objective of the study is to show that Emerson's writing offers a particular version of the environmental urgency and protection. The problematic is that the environmental protection is far from achieving unanimity in the world whereas the climate challenge is a real and growing one. There is a sort of tug-of-war between eco-friends and anti-ecological proponents. In this context, Emerson's essay offers a descriptive and narrative framework which shows the interdependency between human and natural elements. He sees life as spiritually and materially interconnected. The analysis is done in the framework of two theories, namely : ecocriticism and narratology. The methodology for data collection is qualitative. It enables to collect, analyze, and interpret the text. At last, the analysis of the text has shown that the author's discursive strategy is an awareness-raising message advocating the urgent symbiosis between humans and nature.

**Keywords** : awareness-raising, discourse, environment, nature, unity.

## **RESUME**

Cette étude examine la question environnementale dans l'essai *Nature* de Ralph Waldo Emerson. L'objectif est de montrer que l'écriture d'Emerson offre une version particulière de l'urgence et de la protection environnementale. La problématique est que la protection de l'environnement est loin de faire l'unanimité dans le monde tandis que le défi climatique est réel et croissant. Il y a une sorte de bras de fer entre les écologistes et les partisans anti-écologiques. Dans ce contexte, l'essai d'Emerson est un cadre descriptif et narratif qui montre l'interdépendance entre les humains et les éléments naturels. Il voit la vie comme spirituellement et matériellement interconnectée. L'analyse se fait dans le cadre de deux théories, à savoir : l'écocritique et la narratologie. La méthodologie de collecte des données

est qualitative. Elle permet de recueillir, d'analyser et d'interpréter le texte. Enfin, l'analyse du texte a montré que la stratégie discursive de l'auteur est un message de sensibilisation prônant l'urgente symbiose entre les humains et la nature.

**Mots-clés :** discours, environnement, nature, sensibilisation, unité.

## INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, global warming is one of the worst phenomena which concern humanity. Experts draw populations and decision makers' attention to climate change. Global warming causes the melting of the antartic ice, heavy storms, floodings, droughts, amongst others. The Greenhouse gas emissions plunge the planet to critical state. That alarming situation affects the survival of living beings in the continents. To satisfy their needs, humanity uses at large scale resources. The unprecedented race for natural resources exerts a tremendous pressure on the ecosystems. That is all the more concerning, because : "The overexploitation of natural resources (air, water, soil, forests, minerals, etc) and Earth's ecosystems by humans has long-lasting consequences for the future provision of natural resources and ecosystem services", observes A. Valavanidis (2019 : 7). So, imputable to human's actions on the environment, climate issue triggers a race against the time to save the earth. In this respect, international conferences are held about the environmental protection. Every year, developed industrialized countries gather to make decisions. However, mobilization in Europe, Asia, and American and Africa fail to reach satisfactory agreements regarding on the strategies of environmental protection.

The lack of concensus and concrete agreements on energetic transition prolong the agony of the planet. Face to the environmental disasters, climate skepticism plunders the efforts and dynamics for saving ecosystems. To cite G. Garrard : "Ronald Reagan's first Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, ... argued against environmental protection on the grounds that God would soon destroy the old earth. " (2004 : 88-89). The problematic is that the environmental protection is far from achieving unanimity in the world whereas the climate challenge is a real and growing one. There is a sort of tug-of-war between eco-friends and anti-ecological proponents. The objective of the study is to show that Emerson's writing offers a particular version of the environmental urgency and protection. Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* appears as a discursive space which re-centers the debate on the environmental issue. Not only does Emerson's text describe the interconnection of human and nature, but also it highlights the link between them and the Divine. So, to what extent does



the author's writing redefine the relationships between human and nature? The writing seeks to raise people's awareness by calling on them to reconsider their connection between them and natural elements. To better examine the text, narratology and ecocriticism are used as well as qualitative method to collect, analyze, and interpret the essay. At last, the analysis has shown that the author's discursive strategy is an awareness-raising message advocating the urgent symbiosis between human and nature. The study is divided into two parts. Part one deals with the external and internal textures of the author's writing. Part two analyzes the scope of his discourse.

### **1. The Significance of Emerson's Discursive Strategy**

The paratitle of the essay introduces the audience to the content of the text. Through his paratitle, the author contextualizes his writing. In fact, it foreshadows the central theme the author tackle for a literary work is a whole unity. Emerson's text begins with the introductory section which sets the scene :

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe ? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs ? ...why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe ? The sun shines to-day also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship. (Emerson 1849 : 1)

The outset of the essay connotes a necessity for humanity to reconsider their model of thoughts. In other words, humanity needs fresh ideas and starting point to efficiently respond to existential issues. This is evidenced by the use of rhetorical questions in the foregoing excerpt. Besides, the passage confers a universal dimension of Emerson's writing. It does not make any distinction between any civilizations, be it Western or African or else. The use of the first person plural "We" and object pronoun "Us " corroborates the inclusiveness of the author's text. The sentence which reads : "There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship ", marks the new approach humanity must adopt to face environmental realities. Significantly, the issue depicted in the Essay concerns human race, as stated the extract :

Undoubtedly, we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable. We must trust the perfection of the creation so far, as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has

awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy. Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put. Let us interrogate the great apparition, that shines so peacefully around us. Let us inquire, to what end is nature ? (Emerson 1849 : 2)

As indicated in the above excerpt, humanity must develop a new capacities and strategies to stand against contemporaneous challenges. Divisions, misunderstanding and selfish interests do not help in attainment of global objective about the environment : “ We are now so far from the road to truth, that religious teachers dispute and hate each other, and speculative men are esteemed unsound and frivolous. But to a sound judgment, the most abstract truth is the most practical ” (Emerson 1849 : 2). Emerson castigates the lack of concens that hamper the unfolding those strategies. Pragmatism can help overcome divisions among religious men, decision-makers and climate skeptics. In this regard, consciousness-raising plays an essential role to take up environmental challenges. In this vein, Emerson opines : “ Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul” (Emerson 1849 : 2). What is striking in the representation of the two entities are capitaliation of the N and S, which assuredly encompass visible and invisible creatures. As evidence, the author puts it : “ ...not material ; no confusion of thought will occur. *Nature*, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf” (Emerson 1849 : 3). So, Emerson gives a broad perception of what one can understand by Nature. By saying this, he awakes awareness. The association of metaphysical concept Soul to physical one Nature conveys a strong message to humanity. That is, Emerson wants Human to apprehend the meaning of their existence. Humans are creatures having soul, natural elements are also living creatures. In this connection, J. B. Callicott claims that:

the typical traditional American Indian attitude was to regard all features of the environment as enspirited. These entities possessed a consciousness, reason, and volition, no less intense and complete than a human being's. The Earth itself, the sky, the winds, rocks, streams, trees, insects, birds and all other animals therefore had personalities and were thus as fully persons as other human beings. (1983 : 243)

As corroborated in the extract, Indian tribes have a spiritual sense towards Nature, which needs considerations. Ostensibly, there is emphasis on the sacredness and interconnectedness of the two characters --Humanity and Nature.

In this respect, the shift from the narrative instances I to we, and the use of the present simple tense -- the dominant temporality -- in the text are significant. The first person singular narration serves as the authorial voice which also stands for human. The present simple shows the topicality of the environmental issue. The present of description and narration tends to erase the temporal distance between the moment of the story and the moment of the

experience told by Emerson. Thus, because he wants to establish a general truth in the face of the ecological emergency, he uses the present tense. That expresses the didactic scope of his speech. There are immediacy and urgency with which humanity must assess environmental risks in order to curb self-destruction through the uncontrolled exploitation of resources. Here, the author conveys a vibrant message to cultural imperialists. To quote (R.W.C. Tourse, J. Hamilton-Mason and N. J. Wewiorski, (2018 : 136) :

Through the process of cultural imperialism, the U.S. has established a society with norms and practices that are in conflict with Native American values and beliefs. For example, Native American culture respects Mother Earth as the nurturer of all life. It values water because it is essential for life and, therefore, in need of protection. In contrast, the U.S. culture is established based on the view that land and water are property that can be owned and controlled by individuals and corporations. Thus, oil companies have the right to drill and to construct oil pipelines on land.

As indicated in the foregoing passage, unprecedented exploitation of land raises concerns. Far from creating a particular stylistic effect, Emerson depicts things in a vivid and emotional manner to further touch the sensitivity of the audience : “ ...if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and what he touches. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime ” (Emerson 1849 : 5). As the extract from chapter one indicates, Emerson establishes the connection between the Creator and all elements of nature. He draws humanity’s attention to the existence of the sublime. The use of the pathos is to touch the reader’s emotion: “ ...every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile” (Emerson 1849 : 6). The author even goes far by personifying heavenly bodies : “ Nature never wears a mean appearance. Neither does the wisest man extort her secret, and lose his curiosity by finding out all her perfection. Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit” (Emerson 1849 : 6). The extract implies that humanity is not as kind as nature. In fact, despite over-exploitation of natural resources, the ecosystem does not refuse to provide human beings what they want. In other words, the prodigality of the environment is unquestionable. The more human takes from it the more it serves him. Emerson holds human responsible for what nature undergoes. He asserts : “The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other” (Emerson 1849 : 7). The foregoing emphasizes a balanced interaction between human and nature. One’s love for nature is internally and externally expressed. Humans’ commitment to protect nature also appears in their behavior towards it. That is, it is significant to be sensitive to the ecosystem, for : “ Nature always wears the colors of the

spirit” (Emerson 1849 : 8). The author puts humanity in the center of his discourse by urging everyone to take a step back to appreciate their environment as he writes : “ In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes, which nature cannot repair. I am part or particle of God” (Emerson 1849 : 8). By scrutinizing the immensity and wonders of natural elements, human becomes humble. In this regard, the writer creates a framework of dialog between humanity and the ecosystem. That confers his writing a spiritual and pedagogical dimension.

Besides, written in heightened vivid imagery, the account unfolds in a mixture of two different genres. Emerson employs himself to make an artistic and aesthetic representation of natural elements and human beings. The harmonious cohabitation of prose and poem expresses Emerson’s vision of symbiotic interactions between the various components of natural elements, included human. In other words, there is a necessity for human to have a heightened sense of interconnectedness with other creatures because : “To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least, they have a very superficial seeing... Not the sun or the summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight ; for every hour corresponds to and authorizes a different state of mind...” (Emerson 1849 : 29). In fact, written in the nineteenth century, the environmental protection and climate change remains a burning topic in the twentieth century.

## **2. *Nature as Ecological Admonishment***

It can be assumed that the tremendous agrarian expansion in the United States of America is the catalyst that prompts Emerson to warn populations about the doomsday scenery the ecological system suffers. At that time, people grow crops for economic purposes without caring for the preservation of the environment. As a whistleblowers, he narrates: “To a man laboring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it ” (Emerson 1849 : 8). The excerpt depicts the gloomy aftermath of human’s activities on the Earth. Irrational rush for lands and properties jeopardizes the existence of the ecosystem. According to the author, human puts in peril lives by consciously or unconsciously destroying nature. So, the satisfaction of human’s needs results into rampant self-destruction. He alerts against human beings’ mindset towards the environment. According to the author, it is paramount to go beyond the material needs : “ They all admit of being thrown into one of the following classes; Commodity; Beauty; Language ; and Discipline. Under the general name of Commodity, I rank all those advantages which our senses owe to nature” (Emerson 1849 :

10). The passage indicates that one needs to reconsider the relationships with the planet. Nature is not limited to “commodity”. It encompasses other values. So, by incorporating those valuable virtues in its understanding of what is meant by nature, humanity can change their attitude towards natural elements. However, human beings run the risk to endure disasters because : “ The misery of man appears like childish petulance, when we explore the steady and prodigal provision that has been made for his support and delight on this green ball which floats him through the heavens ” (Emerson 1849: 10). In the foregoing extract, the author insists on the the negative consequences humanity faces if natural resources are not used efficiently. To quote G. Garrard :

It was claimed that ... chemicals used in aerosol sprays and refrigeration, were capable of destroying atmospheric ozone. This claim was confirmed when scientists in the Antarctic found that the ozone above them was severely depleted during the spring, as a combination of atmospheric conditions unique to the region led to rapid destruction of stratospheric ozone. (2004 : 167)

The abovementioned lines corroborate the responsibility of human towards biodiversity. “Infinite wants are pursued as though the environment were an amnion and technology a placenta”, P. Shepard argues (1982 : 124). For instance, nuclear tests carried out by some developed countries endanger the planet. Smoke from heavy industries and all sort of chemicals negatively impact on natural elements. “Environmental exploitation of natural resources increased drastically in recent years. Tropical forests...face multiple threats from mining, oil, and gas extraction and massive infrastructure projects over the next two decades” (A. Valavanidis, 2019 : 8). Face to that aggressivity, the author calls on human to be appreciative to the ecosystem, for: “Beasts, fire, water, stones, and corn serve him” (Emerson, 1849 : 11). However, many people mistreat the planet and are not grateful to its benefactors. As evidence:

More servants wait on man  
Than he ' ll take notice of. (Emerson 1849 : 11)

Compared to a waiter in the above passage, nature is a vital source for human beings. Few people are aware of the amazing role it plays. Face to that societal ignorance, it is imperative for humanity to transcend his perception concerning the environment. Otherwise, humanity rushes into what U. Beck calls : “the ‘risk society,’ a culture of ‘radical uncertainty’ in awareness that ‘systemic crashes are now a part of ... predictable future.’” (1992 : 12-65).

The human indiscriminate pressures human exerts on natural essences affect the interconnected chain of production and reproduction. The author writes:

Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man. 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 nourish man. The useful arts are reproductions or new combinations by the wit of man, of the same natural benefactors. (Emerson, 1849 : 11)

In substance, the extract demonstrates a well-structured organization of natural elements that many people overlook. In this vein, Leopold extends the conception of community :

to include soils, waters, plants, and animals”: a “biotic community” in which humankind is “one of thousands of accretions” and species are entitled to existence “as a matter of biotic right”; and where a proposed environmental alteration is not treated as “solely an economic problem” but put to the test of whether “it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. (1949 : 204-225)

As the last line of the passage indicates, the preservation of the interconnectedness between human and the the cosystem is challenging. The break of that natural cycle may occur through various human various activities such as greenhouse gas emissions, wildfires, farming, to name but a few. The most industrialized countries, farmers, decision-makers and alike should grasp the functioning of nature. The destabilization of the ecosystem results into apocalyptic scenes on the Eath. Every year, hurricanes, storms, heavy snow falls, chronic droughts along with diseases cause material and collateral damage. The interdependency between humanity and natural elements puts humanity at the crux of Emerson’s environmental discourse. “ ...the endless circulations of the divine charity nourish man» is edifying. The creative genius of human is just imitation. Development and scientific progress are dependent on nature, for as the above passage indicates: “ The useful arts are reproductions or new combinations by the wit of man, of the same natural benefactors”. In the same vein, the author proceeds:

But there is no need of specifying particulars in this class of uses. The catalogue is endless, and the examples so obvious, that I shall leave them to the reader's reflection, with the general remark, that this mercenary benefit is one which has respect to a farther good. A man is fed, not that he may be fed, but that he may work. (Emerson 1849 : 12)

Not only does the last line of the excerpt imply the restorative mission of nature by human, but also it urges him to take care of the environment. “ Humans have no right to reduce [the] richness and diversity [of life forms] except to satisfy vital needs . . . ”, Devall and Sessions upold (1985 : 70). That is the reason why one of the restorative missions of

nature goes through reforestation and protective measures that can help mitigate side effects on the ecosystem. From the social ecological perspective, Luke T. M. asserts: “World-watching leaves in place the ‘basic logic of commodification and exchange that causes ecological destruction’” (1997 : 93).

In addition to food and water nature provides to human, there is the aesthetic outreach in Emerson’s text. He writes : “ Such is the constitution of all things, or such the plastic power of the human eye, that the primary forms, as the sky, the mountain, the tree, the animal, give us a delight in and for themselves; a pleasure arising from outline, color, motion, and grouping” (Emerson 1849 : 13). Nature has also therapeutical virtues “ ... to the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone. The tradesman, the attorney comes out of the din and craft of the street, and sees the sky and the woods, and is a man again” (Emerson, 1849 : 14). According to L. Buell nature is considered “ as a therapeutic refuge... ” (2005 : 67). In other words, nature provides human with medicines that cure him physically and psychologically. Language, the tool of communication, derives from nature : “ Language is a third use which Nature subserves to man. Every word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance. Right means straight ; wrong means twisted” (Emerson 1849 : 23). In regard to the foregoing, it is significant to note that the author reveals the unfathomable debt humanity owes to the environment. So, Emerson advocates “...a mental reorientation toward green thinking ” (L. Buell 2005 : 106). In addition to material needs, plants used to cure diseases, human language also connects him to that biodiversity. It is a reservoir of human’s source of inspiration.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the environmental issue in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay *Nature*. The objective of the study was to show that Emerson’s writing offers a particular version of the environmental urgency and protection. It was articulated around two main parts. Part one has dealt with the significance of Emerson’s discursive strategy. Part two has examined the scope of his discourse regarding the ecosystem. At last, the analysis has shown that the quintessence of the author’s discursive strategy is awareness-raising messages advocating the urgent symbiosis between human and nature. His rhetoric is highly pedagogical and compelling because his essay urges humanity to act responsibly towards Nature.

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