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EMERSON AND THOREAU – TWO GREAT *MEN THINKING*

Summary: With the decay of English romanticism and the gradual departure from it, the literature of the United States began to achieve its independence from that of the mother country. Although the ties of that relationship remained close, new intellectual influences from Scotland and Germany, for instance, began to counterbalance those from England. American writers began to show an increasing awareness of foreign literature as well as of foreign languages. What is even more important, the population of the country, in the form of periodical readers and lecture audiences, gradually became capable of supporting native authors who adopted knowledge and points of view that were a part of a native tradition. Ideas from abroad were not merely re-expressed in America but were absorbed and often given a new shade, a new interpretation. The literary stuff of other lands was adapted rather than adopted for American needs. The United States became a melting pot of ideas as well as of peoples. In this sense the most striking development in American literature was the emergence of a group of individualistic writers who either belonged to what is called the Transcendental movement or possessed a point of view closely related to that of the Transcendentalists. And it was exactly the most outstanding among them, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, who loudly announced the appearance of America's great poets. When they arrive, Emerson predicted, they would come with an American thought, an American experience, breaking away from European forms and seeking American ways and techniques.

Key words: *independence, individualistic writers, Transcendentalists, self-reliance, freedom of nature.*

American Renaissance

American literature seems to have come of age in the 1850s. The first great writers in the United States appeared at that time, and for the first time these writers articulated the essential, although often contradictory, truths of

the American national character. In the beginning, the romantic impulse in American literature in its brief heyday represented an imitation of English writers (Bode, 1971a: 3), but about the middle of the nineteenth century the long search by artists to identify American subject matter and American artistic form somehow came to an end. What scholars call the American Renaissance, America's period of artistic awakening, had begun. (Lauter, 2006).

In much of Europe the Romantic Movement was fading, but its influence in America was still rather profound, so American Renaissance literature is almost exclusively romantic literature. Indeed, Bode is right to note (1971a: 3) that '/i/n a way Nathaniel Hawthorne might be considered with Poe as an author whose work represents a decadent romanticism.', or that the Melville myth grew '… out of the efforts of an original mind to master the art of literary expression.' (*loc. cit.*), but the fact remains, however, that all of the major books which were published during the country's literary explosion in the early 1850s are more or less romantic books: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass, and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*.

America's literary Renaissance, its romantic movement, coming three generations after the country had achieved its political independence, spoke to many concerns. It explored what it meant to be an American, and, of course, what it meant to be an American artist. It looked at the American government and the country's political problems, especially the problems of war and Black slavery. It brooded over what writers saw as an emerging American materialism and conformity. It probed the ways in which waves of new immigrants were changing the character of the population and bringing strange customs and traditions to a nation that was just beginning to recognize and articulate what its own traditions were – 'Here is not merely a nation but a teeming nation of nations.' (Whitman, 1855a; Bode, 1971b: p. 70) It examined sexuality and, driven in large part by Walt Whitman and by Margaret Fuller, a friend of Emerson's, studied the relationship between men and women in America. And, as is normally expected in a romantic movement, it absorbed itself with nature, with the power that nature exerts on people's lives.

Individualism

What pulls together the concerns of American writers in the middle decades of the nineteenth century and acts as a motif running through many of the major literary texts is exactly a very special kind of individualism, a focus on individual experience. In his 1841 essay *Self Reliance* Emerson maintains that

"/n/othing is at last sacred, but the integrity of your own mind", and throughout the essay he gives a defense for his famous catch-phrase "Trust thyself". (Richardson, 1995) Thoreau, as was his custom, makes Emerson's abstraction concrete. As he describes his solitary life at Walden Pond he notes that "/i/f a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, however measured or far away." (Thoreau, 1854; Bode, 1971a) Or we should quote two simple lines just to illustrate that same idea: 'I am monarch of all I *survey*, / My right there is none to dispute.' (*Ibid*, p. 350)

At the same time, Whitman (1855b; Bode, 1971a: 93), taunting his readers because they might be "proud to get at the meaning of poems", declares:

> Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess
> the origin of all poems,
> You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are
> millions of suns left,)
> You shall no longer take things at second or third hand,
> nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on
> the spectres in books,
> You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things
> from me,
> You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.

These poets insist that there is no substitute for direct, individual experience, and their words echo sentiments that have been part of America and American literature for two centuries.

America's intellectual declaration of independence

As Bode (1971a: 218) puts it, '/p/erhaps the most stimulating American mind of the nineteenth century belonged to Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)'. Emerson wrote essays and poems that are remarkable not only for what they embody or what they say, but for their influence on others. Hawthorne, Melville, Fuller, Whitman, Dickinson, and especially Thoreau, knew Emerson's work and needed to come to terms with it as they wrote. The seed, the center, the essence of Emerson is clearly stated in his famous 1841 essay entitled *Self-Reliance*: "Trust thyself", he says, "every heart vibrates to that iron string." He also argues that "/i/n self-trust all the virtues are comprehended." His message is original however also at the same time derivative, purely American however obviously European. Emerson had absorbed and

been powerfully moved by the writings of the English Romantics Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle. (Richardson, 1995) But he uses his Old World sources to articulate a New World wisdom. He insists that in Europe, in spite of its philosophers, intellectuals, and revolutionaries, the individual person exists for the glory of the nation; in America the nation exists for the glory of the individual person, or at least so it should be, so it must be, he maintains. It is not only the New World. It is the new way of seeing, the new way of living. (Emerson, 1837)

Each of Emerson's works expresses some specific aspect of this general perception. In his essay *The American Scholar* (1837) he focuses on education, describing what a student in America needs to become. The essay crystallizes what Emerson had recognized to be the truth of his time: 'Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close.' (Emerson, 1837; Bode, 1971a: 241) This is why, as he puts it, an American student must make himself into a "Man Thinking" if he is in the "right state", if he understands what the times demand, what the modern world demands of him. If, however, he is in the "degenerate state", if he is still, as were so many students in the past, a "victim of society", then he will become "a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking." (Emerson, 1837) His words certainly constitute America's intellectual, as distinct from political, declaration of independence.

The student learns by studying nature, the world around him. The student learns from books, too, but he uses them to guide, to inspire, but not to control, to replace his own thought. 'Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst', Emerson declares. (Emerson, 1837; Bode, 1971a: 245). 'I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite rather than a system.' (*Ibid*, *loc. cit.*)

Emerson knew, however, that it is not so much books that draw Americans out of their own orbit. It is much more likely to be religion, Christianity. In his powerful *Divinity School Address*, delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge, Sunday Evening, July 15, 1838 (http://www.emersoncentral.com/divaddr.htm) he goes to the heart of the matter, affirming his own belief in the existence of God while firmly insisting that faith "cannot be received at second hand." It cannot be taught to a person, be passed on to a person, by someone else: 'Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul. What he announces, I must find true in me, or wholly reject; and on his word, or as his second, be he who he may, I can accept nothing.' (Ibid)

We must each of us find our own faith. We cannot receive it from family, community, society, tradition, or church. Jesus Christ understood that,

Emerson claims, in an often quoted, much analysed paragraph, but Christ's followers did not (Ibid):

> 'Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets. He saw with open eye the mystery of the soul. Drawn by its severe harmony, ravished with its beauty, he lived in it, and had his being there. Alone in all history, he estimated the greatness of man... But what a distortion did his doctrine and memory suffer in the same, in the next, and in the following ages! ... The idioms of his language, and the figures of his rhetoric, have usurped the place of his truth; and churches are not built on his principles, but on his tropes.'

When people recognize the truth which Jesus Christ understood, that God is in every man, they will learn to trust themselves. They will no longer need Christian churches to teach them about God. "I am divine", they will say, "and my life is a miracle." So for Emerson, self-trust means trust in an inner power, a power that lives in each person: "When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affection, it is love", Emerson says, and he calls this power "the Over-soul" in his essay bearing that same title. *The Over-Soul*, the ninth essay in the 1841 edition of the first series (Bode, 1971a: 219) of Emerson's *Essays*, remains one of the best sources of information about his faith. In it, he outlines his belief in a God who resides in each of us and whom we can communicate with, without membership in a church or the assistance of an intermediary church official. He describes a power, a force that is for him beyond Christianity, beyond all religions, creeds and dogmas. And he also gives his answer to the question of how we know the truth: 'The soul is the perceiver and revealer of truth. We know the truth when we see it, let skeptic and scoffer say what they choose.' (http://www.goodreads.com//work/quotes/ 1024363 -the-over-soul-according-to-emerson)

In *The Poet* (1844) Emerson shows how self-reliance leads to great art. The true poet is a person with the great insight that self-trust brings. He sees the presence of the Over-soul in himself, in others, and in all things as well. He finds words for what he sees. He is "the sayer, the namer" as much as the seer, he "re-attaches things to nature and the Whole," and so restores their beauty, washes away their ugliness. The poet "knows and tells" the truth that his self-trust lets him see, he does not just play with rhymes, rhythms, or meters. Emerson's position is that "it is not metres, but a metre-making argument, that makes a poem – a thought so passionate and alive, that, like the spirit of a plant or animal, it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a

new thing." In American literature there is perhaps no better description of what makes literature good. The final lines in the essay read as follows (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Poet_(essay)):

> 'Wherever snow falls or water flows or birds fly, wherever day and night meet in twilight, wherever the blue heaven is hung by clouds or sown with stars, wherever are forms with transparent boundaries, wherever are outlets into celestial space, wherever is danger, and awe, and love, there is Beauty, plenteous as rain, shed for thee, and though thou shouldst walk the world over, thou shalt not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble.'

That "metre-making argument", that truth that the poet sees, creates its own form. The true poet does not shape his insight to fit forms that other poets have already used, and for Emerson in 1844, this meant European forms used by European poets. "The poet has a new thought: he has a whole new experience to unfold; he will tell us how it was with him, and all men will be the richer in his fortune. For, the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet." America, Emerson could see, was waiting for its great poet(s), its seer(s) who would create new American forms to express the American truth. And this is exactly how, in the final analysis, this essay played an instrumental role in the 1855 appearance of the first edition of Walt Whitman's collection of poems named *Leaves of Grass*. After reading the essay, Whitman consciously set out to answer Emerson's call, and when the book was first published he sent a copy to Emerson, whose letter in response helped launch the book to success. In that letter Emerson called the collection 'the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom America has yet contributed'. (Miller, 1962: 27) Further on, the second edition of the *Leaves of Grass* (1856) appeared with Emerson's encouraging salutation to the author of the first edition: 'I greet you at the beginning of a great career', which was embossed above his signature upon the binding. (Bode, 1971b: 65)

Emerson knew he was not himself that great poet. His power and influence lie in his essays. More than anyone else in his time, he articulated the early nineteenth-century American confidence, optimism, and determination to do things in a new way. In this specific kind of optimism, however, he was perhaps not able to understand adequately the existence of categorical evil. In his famous *Divinity School Address* he says: 'Good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute: it is like cold, which is the privation of heat. All evil is so much death or nonentity. Benevolence is absolute and real. So much benevo-

lence as a man hath, so much life hath he.' (http://www. emersoncentral. com/divaddr.htm) In other words, Emerson believed that evil is merely the absence of good, which means that on the subject of good and evil he was probably wrong. But his influence and his ability to inspire remain. Emerson gave voice to something quintessential about America, perhaps about modern life in its entirety. His words have had a tremendous effect on millions of people, and his demand that each person, and each nation, learn self-reliance as a way of life still rings true in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. The same applies to his call to create, to ascend, leaning on experience: 'Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight.' (Emerson, 1844; Bode, 1971a: 259)

Preferring the freedom of nature

Shortly after Emerson published his early essay *Nature* (1836), in which he first described the ideas that were the basis for all his best work, a group of his friends, New England intellectuals, formed a loose association called the Transcendental Club. (Packer, 2007) For the next four years, the members of this club met, irregularly and informally, to discuss Emerson's idealistic perception of life and to articulate a rather vaguely-defined philosophy which came to be known as Transcendentalism. More of a call to action than a precise, logical line of thought, Transcendentalism urged people to break free of the customs and traditions of the past and to listen to the spirit of God inside them. Like the nineteenth-century Romantics in England, Germany, and elsewhere, Transcendentalists distrusted reason and preferred intuition. They distrusted society and preferred the individual, rejected the restraints of tradition and preferred the freedom of nature. (Gura, 2007)

Emerson remains the best-known of the writers associated with the highly-influential Transcendentalist movement, but also read widely today is Emerson's close friend, Margaret Fuller, whose full name was Sarah Margaret Fuller Ossoli (1810-1850). Fuller was a journalist, critic, and women's rights advocate, the first full-time American female book reviewer in journalism. For two years, she edited the Transcendentalists' magazine, *The Dial*, where she published her essay *The Great Lawsuit: MAN versus MEN; WOMAN versus WOMEN* (1843), America's most eloquent early argument for sexual liberation, for men and women being freed from the social roles sex imposes

on them. Her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is considered the first major feminist work in the United States. (Dickenson, 1993)

As an early proponent of feminism and especially believing in providing education to women, Fuller uses Emerson's doctrine of self-trust as a basis for examining the condition of women in the nineteenth century. She notes that men are coming to recognize how traditions and the past have prevented many of them from achieving their potential. And while men also are victims of society, they can at least participate in the creation of the demands that society makes upon them, while what woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely. 'The sexes should not only correspond to and appreciate one another, but prophesy to one another. In individual instances this happens. Two persons love in one another the future good which they aid one another to unfold. This is very imperfectly done as yet in the general life. Man has gone but little way, now he is waiting to see whether woman can keep step with him …' (Fuller, 1843; http://transcendentalism-legacy.tamu.edu/authors/fuller/debate.html)

Living deliberately, knowing life from experience

The Transcendentalists separated morality from Christianity and placed it firmly in nature. For two centuries American Christians had been taught that the source of morality, of whatever was virtuous in human behavior, is in God and that people come to know God and thus what is good through the church, through the community, through a vision of life that is essentially collective rather than individual. The Transcendentalists changed all of that, at least for many intellectuals in their generation, and nowhere is that change to be seen more clearly than in Thoreau's *Walden*, first published (1854) as *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) is one of America's most demanding writers, not because his work is difficult to read, but because he asks so much of his readers. He wrote *Walden* not to entertain or inform. He wrote to change people's lives. He wrote to inspire, liberate, transform. Reading *Walden*, he believed, should be a spiritual experience for them.

Thoreau insists that *Walden* is a record, not of what he said or thought but of what he *did*. For two years he lived alone in a small cabin he built himself among the trees on the shore of a pond called Walden, on property owned by his friend Emerson. He wrote much of the book while he lived at Walden, then finished it after several years of further work on the manuscript. He went

to the woods because he wished to "live deliberately", to live "deep" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walden):

> 'I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.'

Walden is Thoreau's passionate description of how he learned at the pond to "live deliberately" and "deep" and to know life "by experience". It is for Thoreau an urgent task and not one commonly undertaken. "The mass of men", he says, "lead lives of quiet desperation", largely, he argues, because they are doing what others taught them they *must* do, because they think they have no other choice. But he is optimistic and determined: "It is never too late to give up our prejudices. No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof."

"What old people say you cannot do you try and find that you can. Old deeds for old people, and new deeds for new", he asserts, and follows with a sentence American university students have been quoting to their elders ever since: "I have lived some thirty years on this planet, and I have yet to hear the first syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from my seniors."

Simplicity is a very important matter for Thoreau, and so his advice is put forward simply and straightforwardly – we need to renew our lives (Thoreau, 1854; Bode, 1971a: 356):

> 'To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?
>
> We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor.'

What we believe is possible for ourselves determines the limits of our being, and it is within our power, it is in fact our duty, to shape our own being, our own lives. Thoreau notes that 'It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do.' (*Ibid, loc cit*.)

Walden describes the details of Thoreau's life in the woods, and every oment matters to him. "I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did." But such a "religious exercise" for Thoreau is not the repetition of a prayer, a gesture, or a ceremony started years or centuries ago by other people. It is an expression of his own awareness of the importance of the present moment, an awareness of what Emerson would call the "Over-soul" living and acting within him.

So his record of his life at Walden is not for Thoreau a statement of philosophy or a collection of wise sayings. It is a sacrament, a symbol of a spiritual reality. His life at Walden was for Thoreau a kind of "baptism", a purification of his old life, an initiation into a new life. It was a "communion", a common union with the spiritual. But unlike Christian sacraments, Thoreau's religious acts are designed to expose the individual again to the currents flowing through nature, rather than to the grace flowing down from supernature; 'The narrator of *Walden* is witness to a truly new world which the speaker alone has visited, from which he has just returned, and which he is sure every individual ought to visit at least once – not the visible world around, Walden Pond, but an inner world which the Walden experience allowed him to explore.' (Lewis, 1955: 23)

Thoreau's perception of his life in nature as sacrament has made him, along with Emerson, the most recognizable of Transcendentalists. We could, in fact, think of Transcendentalism quite simply as a mid-nineteenth century need to see beyond what is before our eyes, to see a deeper significance, a transcendent reality. And it is that which is beyond the vision of society, tradition, family, religion. It is the source of his optimism and his great energy.

It is also the source of his outrage over social injustice. His essay *Resistance to Civil Government* (1849), later titled *Civil Disobedience*, and his *Plea for Captain John Brown* (based on a speech Thoreau first delivered to an audience at Concord, Massachusetts on October 30, 1859) are eloquent protests against social wrongs – a war with Mexico in the former, and the institution of slavery in the latter. He can see the moral error in an unjust war and in legal slavery even if the government cannot see it, even if much of the church, much of the Christian community cannot see it. What is moral, what is right, must be found in the heart of each individual person, Thoreau argues. It is to

re-establish his connection with his own heart, his own moral truth that he retreats from society however only temporarily – he returned to his village life after two years of 'a solitary escape to Walden Pond from July 1845 to September 1847'. (Bode, 1971a: 319) He is seeking refreshment, renewal, rebirth in nature. He wants to reawaken himself to the "essential facts of life": "Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth", he demands. And truth for him, for Emerson, for the Transcendentalists is that which is within the individual. And it is exactly the individual that is to be seen, to be heard, to be read and taken into consideration. In his introductory segments of *Walden* (Thoreau, 1854; Bode, 1971a: 347-348) he says:

> 'In most books, the *I*, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. Moreover, I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men's lives; some such account as he would send to his kindred from a distant land; for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me.'

Some readers find Thoreau even more difficult to accept and support than Emerson, and for the same reason – he does not seem to understand evil, he does not understand human weakness, human limitation. On the other side, many find great inspiration in Thoreau's work. His book is a record of how he found his own turning point, and he urges us to do the same, but in our own way. He is not suggesting that we leave our lives and take up residence in the woods; just the opposite: "However mean your life is, meet it and live it", he says. "Do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are... Love your life, poor as it is."

It is not *where* we are, *where* we look, Thoreau suggests. It is *what* we are, *how* we look. Our lives can change, and change radically, he insists, but we need to open ourselves to the possibility of such a change. "Only that day dawns", he says, "to which we are awake."

Not even Emerson could have phrased it better. And not even those who cannot accept this simple philosophy can argue that they do not *understand* it.

Instead of a Conclusion

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, two great *Men Thinking*, wanted the people in America of their time to know that the nation existed for the glory of the individual person. It was not only the matter of the New World, it was the new way of seeing, the new way of living, and such positions of theirs certainly constituted America's intellectual *declaration of independence*. For Emerson, self-trust meant trust in an inner power, a power that lives in each person, in the ability of each of us to find our own faith, instead of receiving it from family, community, society, tradition, or church. When people recognize the truth that God is in every man, they will learn to trust themselves, he declared, while more than anyone else in his time articulating the early nineteenth-century American confidence, optimism, and determination to do things in a new way.

In approximately the same tone Thoreau wrote to change people's lives. He wrote to inspire, to liberate, to transform, maintaining that it is never too late to give up our prejudices. No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof, and this is why we need to renew our lives, as what we believe is possible for ourselves determines the limits of our being. Thus we should accept that it is within our power, that it is in fact our duty, to shape our own being, our own lives.

Emerson's words have exerted a tremendous effect on millions of people, and his demand that each person, and each nation, learn self-reliance as a way of life need no further explanation or interpretation even today, in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. The same applies to his call to create, to ascend, leaning, of course, on experience of having climbed the stairs that are now below us. Believing that each and every individual needs to see beyond what is before our eyes, to see a deeper significance, he was perhaps not able to understand adequately the existence of categorical evil. The same applies to Thoreau, who believed that what is moral, what is right, must be found in the heart of each individual person. He too does not seem to understand evil, to accept human weakness, human limitations, and he offers a record of how he found his own turning point, urging us to do the same, each of us in our own way. (Thoreau, 1854; Bode, 1971a: 378):

> 'I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to estab-

> lish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.'

Not even those who cannot accept this simple philosophy can argue that they do not *understand* it. However mean your life is, meet it and live it.

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ЕМЕРСОН И ТОРО – ДВОЈИЦА ВЕЛИКИХ *УМОМ ВОЂЕНИХ*

Резиме: Са пролажењем енглеског романтизма и постепеним удаљавањем од њега, књижевност Сједињених Америчких Држава је кренула да осваја независност од стваралаштва у матичној земљи. Везе и односи јесу остали тесни, али су нови интелектуални утицаји, на пример они из Шкотске и Немачке, почели да нуде противтежу свему што је стизало из Енглеске. Амерички писци су почели да исказују све снажнију свест о постојању страних језика и стваралаштва на тим језицима. Од још већег значаја била је чињеница да је домаћа публика, у виду читалаца периодичних издања и похађалаца разних предавања, временом постајала способна да подржи домаће ствараоце који су уважавали схватања и гледишта из домена домаће традиције. Замисли које су стизале из иностранства у Америци више нису само преношене у свом основном облику већ су често добијале нове нијансе и нова тумачења. Материја књижевних дела која су стизала извана више није усвајана без преобликовања и прилагођавања америчким потребама. Сједињене Државе су постале котао за претапање и преформулисање мисли, као и људи и читавих народа. У том смислу највећи искорак у америчкој књижевности начињен је појавом једне групе индивидуалистички опредељених стваралаца, који су припадали такозваном трансценденталистичком покрету или су се макар одликовали схватањима и погледима везаним за трансцендентализам. А управо двојица најистакнутијих међу таквима, Ралф Валдо Емерсон и Хенри Дејвид Торо, пуним гласом су најављивали појаву великих америчких песничких стваралаца. Кад такви коначно прију сцени, предвиђао је Емерсон, стићи ће с правом америчком мишљу, са америчким доживљајем живота, способни да се одвоје од европских форми и да теже америчким начинима и поступцима.

Кључне речи: *независност, писци индивидуалисти, трансценденталисти, самопоуздање, слобода природе и природног*.