



Nature and Other Essays

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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A soul-satisfying collection of 12 essays by the noted philosopher and poet who embraced independence, rejected conformity, and loved nature. Includes the title essay, plus "Character," "Intellect," "Spiritual Laws," "Circles," and others.

Nature and Other Essays Details

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Zack Mollhagen says

I decided to finish this since it is Emerson's birthday today. I can conclude that this is a fascinating read which is undoubtedly profound. It's not as approachable as Walden, and many of the analogies flew right over my head, but nonetheless it caused some great reflection as all good philosophy does. "The Happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship."

Jacob says

Very interesting insights on how nature inherits everything there is to know. However, the poetic language and his writing style can make it challenging to extract the main thought from the essay.

Michael de Percy says

Finding the time to focus on this book has eluded me until recently. I find Emerson difficult to read at times as most of his essays read like transcripts of speeches (indeed, some of them are). He exudes "positive thinking" in the Norman Mailer sense of the phrase, but with a transcendental bent that keeps on giving its spiritual encouragement. In each of Emerson's essays there is a gem of absolute truth, just waiting for us to confirm in our own experience (as he would probably say). But these gems tend to be packed away in wads and wads of cotton wool. It is not until the final essay (or, more correctly, speech), "The American Scholar", where the reader reaches the summit and can look back on a trail of wisdom marked by that same cotton wool. Emerson's ideas of self-reliance and the worthiness of the American ideal (in opposition to Continental ideas in particular) I suspect provide lessons for Australians that are just waiting to be learnt. America's cultural cringe has long disappeared from living memory and it may well be time for Australia to reach the same heady level. There is too much in such a short book to cover in detail, and each essay's gem must be mined laboriously (and as Emerson might say, there is nothing wrong with scholars doing a bit of physical labour). But two authors mentioned by Emerson stick in my mind. First, Thomas Carlyle (his work, too, I am stuck on due to a lack of focus and will get back to it now), mentioned in the cover blurb as someone Emerson met during his travels to Europe, and Swedenborg, and his ground-breaking "Heaven and Hell". Emerson comes close to enunciating how one might find one's "nature" (in the Stoic sense of the word) as a starting point for action. For this alone it is worth knowing. But also, his statement about the role of colleges (p. 154) has given me a way to re-align my teaching strategy. The travails of the present really were no different to the past; we seem rather to have forgotten to remember old lessons hard-won.

Maggie says

Overall just ok, though the Nature essay does contain my new favorite quote: "The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable." Hah! And it's awesome in every sense of the word "occult", which has a few definitions: 1) of or relating to supernatural influences, 2) beyond human comprehension, and 3) available only to the initiate; secret.

Indeed.

Agnes Fontana says

Ralph Waldo Emerson est un homme extraordinaire, une sorte de Kant qui aurait passé une bonne journée à courir dans les forêts et les prairies ou un Rousseau vigoureux et optimiste. Il voit la nature, et l'homme lui-même, comme un démembrément, une manifestation d'une sorte de grand tout, l'Esprit. Chacun doit suivre sa nature, qui est bonne parce qu'elle est divine et unique, et non les usages ou la société, qui sont plutôt corrompus. Il est important de compter sur soi-même (self reliance). Il y a des phrases extraordinaires sur comment la propriété est un bien pour celui qui la constitue, la crée, et ensuite une charge et une sorte de souci pour ses héritiers. Ralph Waldo Emerson nous encourage en nous disant qu'il n'est pas plus facile pour le peureux d'être peureux, que pour le brave d'être brave ; ou comment, malgré les apparences, le Bien est à l'oeuvre et progresse. Circles est un texte extraordinaire qui explique que les contradictions sont les extrémités d'un même objet, qui finissent par être résolus par une vision supérieure plus englobante. La différence entre les idéalistes et les réalistes est expliquée mieux qu'aucun prof de philo ne l'a jamais fait. Penchant nettement du premier côté, RWE a des pages touchantes sur la difficulté qu'il y a à être idéaliste et à le rester (les idéalistes sont comme les marins, on n'en trouve pas de vieux), et cependant explique de façon convaincante pourquoi il faut l'être. Des pages pénétrantes sur Montaigne, aussi... Il est confondant de voir comment ces pages écrites à l'ombre des sapins de l'Amérique primitive, avec leur exaltation de la bravoure, de la simplicité, de la probité et de l'indépendance, arrivent à nous toucher dans un monde dépressif et hypertechnologisé. Il m'est agréable de penser que RWE a été le maître de D.Thoreau qui a inspiré les Désobéissants.

Morning Glory says

There are parts I enjoyed. Not the best book I've ever read though

John says

Older obscure words and references but a great book indeed. I will read this again soon.

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I picked up this piece because of Emerson's known role as a mentor of Thoreau, and was curious to find out what he had to say of our state of being. I'd wager his writing style is even more abstract and metaphorical than that of his successor - the nods to ancient Greece and Rome, and the old continent in general, are bordering on excessive. Also, the Bible plays a lot greater part in his works - the lack of this might have resulted Thoreau to have a lot more redeeming, timeless value for future generations. However, as a transcendentalist his form of religion - while still covering every aspect of his thought - is still more "progressive" than that of average Christian of our day. His optimistic, yet surprisingly realistic views on science and its possibilities are also an interesting peek back in history.

According to the four stars given I "really liked" the book, and as with other works in similar vein, after returning to its pages in the future with a thirst for words, the real personal value of the book will settle down. The tone of his "high English" and abundance of references obscured by the veils of time might repel a great deal of modern readers, but those digging into the origins of modern Western philosophy should give it a go.

Casey says

Gave up. Wanted to love it and be inspired instead I was just bored.
