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The Themes of Ralph Waldo Emerson

Emerson was the great theologian of American religion, and, for better or for worse, who gave his intellectual configuration to the new Roman Empire: “I dedicate my book entitled, [the “Diaries”] to the spirit of America. I dedicate it to that living soul that exists somewhere beyond fantasy, to which the Divinity has assigned the care of this bright corner of the Universe” (Emerson, Ralph Waldo, et al).

The themes of Ralph Waldo Emerson can be grouped into large axes, concentric and eccentric circles. The subject to which more reflections devotes is God, the interior God (“there is a God within us, when he shakes us, our chest warms up”), it is religion, as fullness of the soul, and it is Nature, temple of God and sanctuary of one's own solitude. In the next circle we find America, history and time: Lincoln, Franklin, slavery, the Yankees, the Indians, Europe, the revolution of 1848, feminism, Germany, and war. In Emerson, there is no ideology or system, for him “the creeds are a disease of the intellect”.

Emerson's mind is America. Nobody determined it so much, nor was anyone a more perfect reflection of his spirit. He is the one who discovers that “the time of America has sounded”, which is the moment of the leap from childhood to manhood. And it is shelling then the ultimate foundations of the American spirit: its faith in God, in religion and in the moral law; his faith in man (“God is the personal soul brought to perfection”); his admiration for American egalitarianism, without superior strains; his conviction that America is the “temple of freedom “and his absolute certainty that this freedom is due to free American institutions; his total faith in the decisive importance of truth and merit (the natural and authentic aristocracy is the truth); his faith, immovable, in the value of free thought (which he demonstrated in life with his “savage Ismaili independence”, with enormous costs, such as three decades of veto at Harvard); his granitic faith in knowledge, which must always be an “intellectual nomadism , “ that is, a constant mutation and a great aversion to dogmas and systems (“the creeds are a disease of the intellect”); his faith in individuality and his proclamation of “self-confidence”; its total certainty in the value of effort and that complacency, indolence and neglect are poisons that kill everything.

In Emerson, there is no ideology, there is no system: his work lives on antithesis and incoherence’s (“a foolish coherence is the troll of narrow minds”). These antitheses form the “open” spirit of America and they ensure its greatness, which will last as long as it maintains the strength of its character and its entrepreneurial energy. Otherwise, he will know, like other countries, the decadence, and he cites Spain, which comes from corruption and the inveterate faults of his government. All this, and much more, can be found in his “Essays” and also in his famous “Representative Men”, a back cover of “Of the Heroes” by Carlyle. Of those books by Emerson, and others also important, there are good editions in Spanish, made with merit by their translators, Antonio Lastra and Javier Acoria.

For John Dewey, Emerson was the only New World citizen comparable to Plato. But the probably most wonderful book of all is that “catch-all” that are his “Diaries”, started in 1820 when he was a boy at Harvard under the programmatic title of “The Wide World,” and written for 55 years until almost his death. The “Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks” are published in a critical edition in 16 volumes at Harvard. They gather three million words. As Harold Bloom has noted, it is a moving and wonderful work, which earns a lot in its original full version and loses in the selections of texts, whether American (Porte) or Spanish (Emerson, Ralph Waldo).

In the third circle appear the complex existential questions of Emerson's life: his raging independence, his abandonment of the Unitarian confession, his moral turmoil, the dazzling character of his aunt Mary Moody Emerson, the painful deaths of his two wives, of two dear brothers, and the immense blow of the death with six years of his first son, and infinitely loved, to whom he dedicates tragically hurt texts. There is also your beautiful philosophy of friendship (Birch).

The fourth circle is formed by the world of poetry, knowledge, philosophy, writing, dialogue with his beloved Plutarch, Montaigne, Shakespeare ... and with some of the greats of his time: Mill, Whitman, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Tocqueville, and Goethe ..., in addition to his beautiful and peculiar visions of books: “To read well you have to be an inventor”. The texts ooze the “freshness of the beginnings” and are full of beautiful poetic descriptions, extraordinary phrases and epigrams that shine like pearls. All that set refutes his famous phrase that in that “Titanic continent, where Nature is so magnificent, genius is so dull.” He is his own refutation: in those “Diaries” his genius has nothing bland. And, of course, they serve the reader to better understand the spirit of America and discover the immense universe - with its lights and shadows - that hides behind the famous legend of the dollar: “In God we trust”.

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To conclude, the spirit of nature is the best known book by Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the most representative figures of the philosophical system called Transcendentalism. The central theme of his work is that man, acting from his inner god, of truth and love, must let his victorious thought speak, build his own world and fulfil his will.

Works Cited

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