

Transcendentalism

- ▶ **Transcendentalism**, in philosophy and literature, belief in a higher reality than that found in sense experience or in a higher kind of knowledge than that achieved by human reason.
- ▶ Nearly all transcendentalist doctrines stem from the division of reality into a realm of spirit and a realm of matter.
- ▶ Such a division is made by many of the great religions of the world.

Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism

- ▶ <http://www.transcendentalists.com/what.htm>
- 1. A literary and philosophical movement, associated with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller, asserting the existence of an ideal spiritual reality that transcends the empirical and scientific and is knowable through intuition.
- 2. The quality or state of being transcendental.
(<http://www.bartleby.com/61/47/T0314700.html>)

TRANSCENDENTAL LITERATURE

- ▶ The philosophical concept of transcendence was developed by the Greek philosopher Plato.
- ▶ In its most specific usage, transcendentalism refers to a literary and philosophical movement that developed in the U.S. in the first half of the 19th century.
- ▶ While the movement was, in part, a reaction to certain 18th-century rationalist doctrines, it was strongly influenced by Deism, which, although rationalist, was opposed to Calvinist orthodoxy.
- ▶ Transcendentalism also involved a rejection of the strict Puritan religious attitudes that were the heritage of New England, where the movement originated.
- ▶ In addition, it opposed the strict ritualism and dogmatic theology of all established religious institutions.

TRANSCENDENTAL LITERATURE

- ▶ More important, the transcendentalists were influenced by romanticism,
- ▶ especially such aspects as self-examination,
- ▶ the celebration of individualism,
- ▶ and the extolling of the beauties of nature and humankind.

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- ▶ Consequently, transcendentalist writers expressed semireligious feelings toward nature, as well as the creative process, and saw a direct connection, or correspondence, between the universe (macrocosm) and the individual soul (microcosm).
- ▶ In this view, divinity permeated all objects, animate or inanimate, and the purpose of human life was union with the so-called Over-Soul.

TRANSCENDENTAL LITERATURE

- ▶ Intuition, rather than reason, was regarded as the highest human faculty.
- ▶ Fulfillment of human potential could be accomplished through mysticism or through an acute awareness of the beauty and truth of the surrounding natural world.
- ▶ This process was regarded as inherently individual, and all orthodox tradition was suspect.

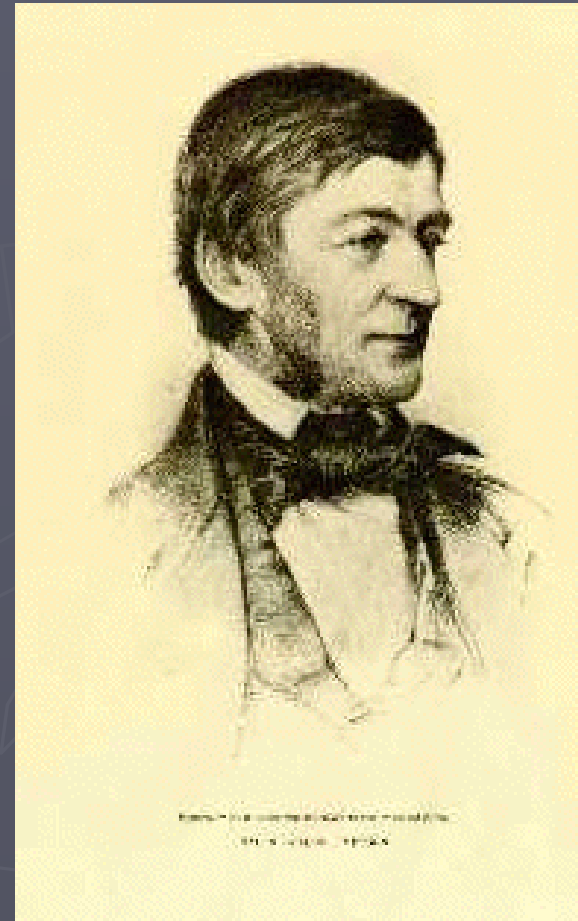
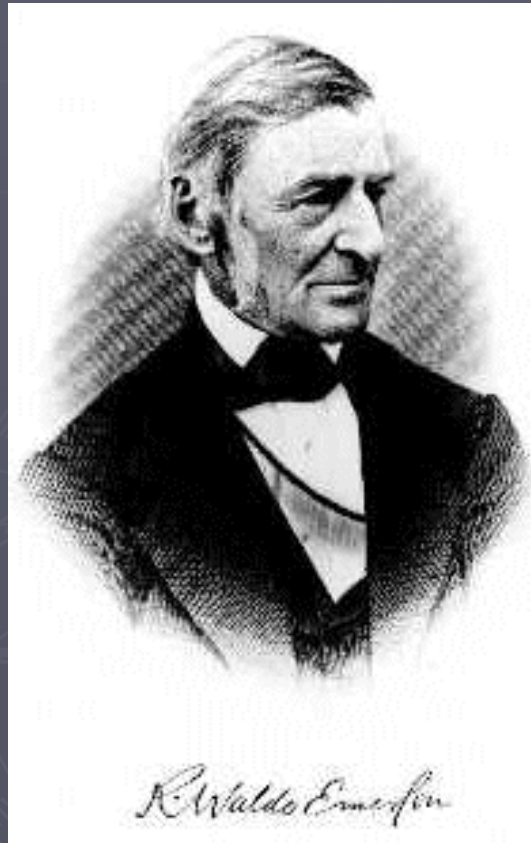
TRANSCENDENTAL LITERATURE

- ▶ American transcendentalism began with the formation (1836) of the Transcendental Club in Boston.
- ▶ Among the leaders of the movement were the essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, the feminist and social reformer Margaret Fuller, the preacher Theodore Parker, the educator Bronson Alcott, the philosopher William Ellery Channing, and the author and naturalist Henry David Thoreau.

TRANSCENDENTAL LITERATURE

- ▶ The Transcendental Club published a magazine, *The Dial*, and some of the club's members participated in an experiment in communal living at Brook Farm, in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, during the 1840s.
- ▶ Major transcendentalist works of the American movement include Emerson's essays "Nature" (1836) and "Self-Reliance" (1841), as well as many of his metaphysical poems, and also Thoreau's *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854), which is an account of an individual's attempt to live simply and in harmony with nature.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)



Ralph Waldo Emerson

(1803-1882)



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 wise 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. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried.

— ❦ —
Excerpt from "Self-Reliance"

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In "Self-Reliance" (1841), one of Emerson's most important works, he expressed his optimistic faith in the power of individual achievement and originality. He also considered the overarching need to discover and develop a relationship with nature and with God.

Websites of the week

1. <http://www.emersoncentral.com/> Emerson central
2. <http://eserver.org/thoreau/thoreau.html>
The Thoreau Reader

Ralph Waldo Emerson

- ▶ Emerson pp. 496-499, 500-504, 509-513, 524, 551, 552, 557, 562-567

Importance

- **Emerson, Ralph Waldo** (1803-1882), American essayist and poet, a leader of the philosophical movement of transcendentalism.
- Influenced by such schools of thought as English romanticism, Neoplatonism, and Hindu philosophy, Emerson is noted for his skill in presenting his ideas eloquently and in poetic language.

Boston, Harvard

- ▶ Emerson was born in Boston, Massachusetts.
- ▶ Seven of his ancestors were ministers, and his father, William Emerson, was minister of the First Church (Unitarian) of Boston.
- ▶ Emerson graduated from Harvard University at the age of 18 and for the next three years taught school in Boston.
- ▶ In 1825 he entered Harvard Divinity School, and the next year he was sanctioned to preach by the Middlesex Association of Ministers.
- ▶ Despite ill health, Emerson delivered occasional sermons in churches in the Boston area.

Europe

- ▶ In 1829 he became minister of the Second Church (Unitarian) of Boston. That same year he married Ellen Tucker, who died 17 months later.
- ▶ In 1831, his wife, Ellen Tucker, died tragically young from tuberculosis, leaving Emerson a legacy that allowed him to spend the rest of his life traveling, lecturing, and writing.
- ▶ In 1832 Emerson resigned from his pastoral appointment because of personal doubts about administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.
- ▶ On Christmas Day, 1832, he left the United States for a tour of Europe.
- ▶ He stayed for some time in England, where he made the acquaintance of such British literary notables as Walter Savage Landor, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas Carlyle, and William Wordsworth.
- ▶ His meeting with Carlyle marked the beginning of a lifelong friendship.

Concord

- ▶ After nearly a year in Europe Emerson returned to the United States.
- ▶ In 1834 he moved to Concord, Massachusetts, and became active as a lecturer in Boston.
- ▶ His addresses—including “The Philosophy of History,” “Human Culture,” “Human Life,” and “The Present Age”—were based on material in his *Journals* (published posthumously, 1909-1914), a collection of observations and notes that he had begun while a student at Harvard.

Nature, 1836

- ▶ His most detailed statement of belief was reserved for his first published book, *Nature* (1836), which appeared anonymously but was soon correctly attributed to him.
- ▶ The volume received little notice, but it has come to be regarded as Emerson's most original and significant work, offering the essence of his philosophy of transcendentalism.
- ▶ This idealist doctrine opposed the popular materialist and Calvinist views of life and at the same time voiced a plea for freedom of the individual from artificial restraints.

"The American Scholar," 1837

- ▶ Emerson applied these ideas to cultural and intellectual problems in his 1837 lecture "The American Scholar," which he delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard.
- ▶ In it he called for American intellectual independence.
- ▶ A second address, commonly referred to as the "Address at Divinity College," delivered in 1838 to the graduating class of Cambridge Divinity College, aroused considerable controversy because it attacked formal religion and argued for self-reliance and intuitive spiritual experience.

Phi Beta Kappa Society

- ▶ Phi Beta Kappa (Society), from phi + beta + kappa, initials of the society's Greek motto *philosophia biou kybernētēs* (philosophy the guide of life)
- ▶ a person winning high scholastic distinction in an American college or university and being elected to membership in a national honor society founded in 1776

Essays, 1841

- ▶ The first volume of Emerson's *Essays* (1841) includes some of his most popular works.
- ▶ It contains "History," "Self-Reliance," "Compensation," "Spiritual Laws," "Love," "Friendship," "Prudence," "Heroism," "The Over-Soul," "Circles," "Intellect," and "Art."
- ▶ The second series of *Essays* (1844) includes "The Poet," "Manners," and "Character."

Essays, 1841

- ▶ In it Emerson tempered the optimism of the first volume of essays, placing less emphasis on the self and acknowledging the limitations of real life.
- ▶ In the interval between the publication of these two volumes, Emerson wrote for *The Dial*, the journal of New England transcendentalism, which was founded in 1840 with American critic Margaret Fuller as editor.
- ▶ Emerson succeeded her as editor in 1842 and remained in that capacity until the journal ceased publication in 1844.
- ▶ In 1846 his first volume of *Poems* was published (dated, however, 1847).

Representative Men, 1850

- ▶ Emerson again went abroad from 1847 to 1848 and lectured in England, where he was welcomed by Carlyle.
- ▶ Several of Emerson's lectures were later collected in the volume *Representative Men* (1850), which contains essays on such figures as Greek philosopher Plato, Swedish philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg, and French writer Michel Eyquem de Montaigne.
- ▶ While visiting abroad, Emerson also gathered impressions that were later published in *English Traits* (1856), a study of English society.
- ▶ His *Journals* give evidence of his growing interest in national issues, and on his return to America he became active in the abolitionist cause, delivering many antislavery speeches.

The Conduct of Life, 1860

- ▶ *The Conduct of Life* (1860) was the first of his books to enjoy immediate popularity.
- ▶ Included in this volume of essays are “Power,” “Wealth,” “Fate,” and “Culture.”
- ▶ This was followed by a collection of poems entitled *May Day and Other Pieces* (1867), which had previously been published in *The Dial* and *The Atlantic Monthly*.
- ▶ After this time Emerson did little writing and his mental powers declined, although his reputation as a writer spread.
- ▶ His later works include *Society and Solitude* (1870), which contained material he had been using on lecture tours; *Parnassus* (1874), a collection of poems; *Letters and Social Aims* (1876); and *Natural History of Intellect* (1893).

Poems

Ralph Waldo

Emerson_Complete.Poems.pdf

BRAHMA

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.
Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame.

BRAHMA

They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.
The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.

- ▶ Brahma, one of the trinity of Hindu gods (with Vishnu and Shiva), was the creator of the universe

CONCORD HYMN

Sung at the Completion of the Battle Monument, July 4, 1837

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,

Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,

Here once the embattled farmers stood

And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;

Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;

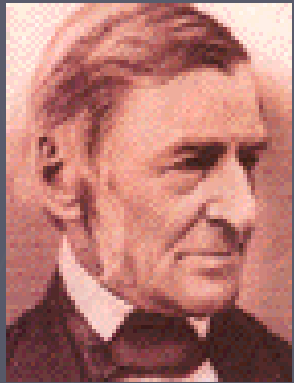
And Time the ruined bridge has swept

CONCORD HYMN

Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.
On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We set to-day a votive stone;
That memory may their deed redeem,
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.
Spirit, that made those heroes dare
To die, and leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
The shaft we raise to them and thee.

Quotes

- ▶ Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. (*Essays* "Circles")
- ▶ A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. (*Essays* "Self-Reliance")



(1803-1882)

Success

To laugh often and much;
to win the respect of intelligent people
and the affection of children;
to earn the appreciation of honest critics
and endure the betrayal of false friends;
to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others;
to leave the world a bit better,
whether by a healthy child,
a garden patch
or a redeemed social condition;
to know even one life has breathed easier
because you have lived.
This is to have succeeded.

Essays, Lectures

- ▶ [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ Nature.etext.pdf](#) / [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ Nature.notes.pdf](#)
- ▶ [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ Self-Reliance.etext.pdf](#) / [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ Self-Reliance.notes.pdf](#)
- ▶ [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ The American Scholar.etext.Complete.pdf](#) / [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ The American Scholar.notes.pdf](#)
- ▶ [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ Circles.etext.pdf](#) / [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ Circles.notes.pdf](#)
- ▶ [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ The Poet.etext.pdf](#) / [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ The Poet.notes.pdf](#)
- ▶ [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ Representative Men.etext.pdf](#)
- ▶ [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ Study Guide_ Critical Commentary.pdf](#)
- ▶ [Ralph Waldo Emerson_ Introduction.Monarch.notes.pdf](#)

P 496

- ▶ Read the introduction to “Nature”
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?

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- ▶ Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, 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.

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- ▶ All science has one aim, namely, to find a theory of nature. We have theories of races and of functions, but scarcely yet a remote approach to an idea of creation. 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. Whenever a true theory appears, it will be its own evidence. Its test is, that it will explain all phenomena.

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- ▶ Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul.
- ▶ Nature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf. Art is applied to the mixture of his will with the same things, as in a house, a canal, a statue, a picture. But his operations taken together are so insignificant, a little chipping, baking, patching, and washing, that in an impression so grand as that of the world on the human mind, they do not vary the result.

497-98 Chapter I Nature

- ▶ To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But 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. Seen in the

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- ▶ streets of cities, how great they are! If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile.

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- ▶ The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right.

p 500 Beauty

- ▶ A nobler want of man is served by nature, namely, the love of Beauty.
- ▶ The ancient Greeks called the world {k"smos}, beauty. 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. This seems partly owing to the eye itself. **The eye is the best of artists.**

Three aspects of Beauty

1. the simple perception of natural forms is a delight
2. The presence of a higher, namely, of the spiritual element is essential to its perfection.
3. There is still another aspect under which the beauty of the world may be viewed, namely, as it becomes an object of the intellect.

P 504 Language

1. Words are signs of natural facts.
2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.
3. Nature is the symbol of spirit.

P 509 Discipline

- ▶ Nature is a discipline of the understanding in intellectual truths.
- ▶ Sensible objects conform to the premonitions of Reason and reflect the conscience. All things are moral; and in their boundless changes have an unceasing reference to spiritual nature.

513 Idealism

- ▶ Thus is the unspeakable but intelligible and practicable meaning of the world conveyed to man, the immortal pupil, in every object of sense. To this one end of Discipline, all parts of nature conspire.
- ▶ Transcendentalism

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- ▶ Idealism sees the world in God. It beholds the whole circle of persons and things, of actions and events, of country and religion, not as painfully accumulated, atom after atom, act after act, in an aged creeping Past, but as one vast picture, which God paints on the instant eternity, for the contemplation of the soul. Therefore the soul holds itself off from a too trivial and microscopic study of the universal tablet.

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- ▶ It respects the end too much, to immerse itself in the means. It sees something more important in Christianity, than the scandals of ecclesiastical history, or the niceties of criticism; and, very incurious concerning persons or miracles, and not at all disturbed by chasms of historical evidence, it accepts from God the phenomenon, as it finds it, as the pure and awful form of religion in the world.

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- ▶ It is not hot and passionate at the appearance of what it calls its own good or bad fortune, at the union or opposition of other persons. No man is its enemy. It accepts whatsoever befalls, as part of its lesson. It is a watcher more than a doer, and it is a doer, only that it may the better watch.

524

- ▶ So shall we come to look at the world with new eyes. It shall answer the endless inquiry of the intellect, -- What is truth? and of the affections, -- What is good? by yielding itself passive to the educated Will. Then shall come to pass what my poet said; "Nature is not fixed but fluid. Spirit alters, moulds, makes it. The immobility or bruteness of nature, is the absence of spirit; to pure spirit, it is fluid, it is volatile, it is obedient.

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- ▶ Every spirit builds itself a house; and beyond its house a world; and beyond its world, a heaven. Know then, that the world exists for you. For you is the phenomenon perfect. What we are, that only can we see. All that Adam had, all that Caesar could, you have and can do. Adam called his house, heaven and earth; Caesar called his house, Rome; you perhaps call yours, a cobbler's trade; a hundred acres of ploughed land; or a scholar's garret. Yet line for line and point for point, your dominion is as great as theirs, though without fine names. **Build, therefore, your own world.**

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- ▶ As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions. A correspondent revolution in things will attend the influx of the spirit.

551 Self-Reliance

- ▶ 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.

551

- ▶ The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. Not for nothing one face, one character, one fact, makes much impression on him, and another none.

551

- ▶ **Trust thyself:** every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events.

551

- ▶ Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being.

551

- ▶ And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark.

552

- ▶ Whoso would be a man must be a **nonconformist**. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world.

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- ▶ Let a man then know his worth, and keep things under his feet. Let him not peep or steal, or skulk up and down with the air of a charity-boy, a bastard, or an interloper, in the world which exists for him. But the man in the street, finding no worth in himself which corresponds to the force which built a tower or sculptured a marble god, feels poor when he looks on these.

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- ▶ To him a palace, a statue, or a costly book have an alien and forbidding air, much like a gay equipage, and seem to say like that, “Who are you, Sir?” Yet they all are his, suitors for his notice, petitioners to his faculties that they will come out and take possession. The picture waits for my verdict: it is not to command me, but I am to settle its claims to praise.

557

- ▶ That popular fable of the sot who was picked up dead drunk in the street, carried to the duke's house, washed and dressed and laid in the duke's bed, and, on his waking, treated with all obsequious ceremony like the duke, and assured that he had been insane, owes its popularity to the fact, that it symbolizes so well the state of man, who is in the world a sort of sot, but now and then wakes up, exercises his reason, and finds himself a true prince.

sot: a drunkard

562-567 Effect of self-reliance

- ▶ It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views.

Some quotes

- ▶ As men's prayers are a disease of the will, so are their creeds a disease of the intellect.
- ▶ It is for want of self-culture that the superstition of Travelling, whose idols are Italy, England, Egypt, retains its fascination for all educated Americans.
- ▶ Travelling is a fool's paradise.

565

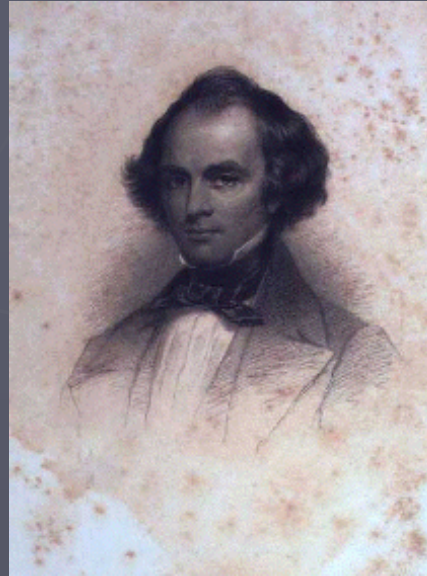
- ▶ Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other. It undergoes continual changes; it is barbarous, it is civilized, it is christianized, it is rich, it is scientific; but this change is not amelioration. For every thing that is given, something is taken. Society acquires new arts, and loses old instincts.

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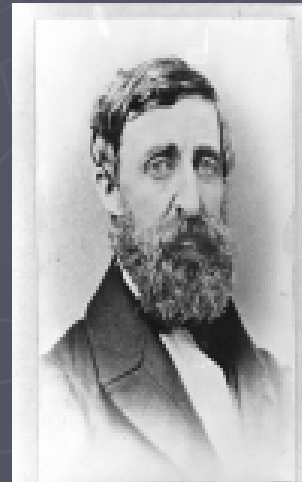
- ▶ Society is a wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not. The same particle does not rise from the valley to the ridge. Its unity is only phenomenal. The persons who make up a nation to-day, next year die, and their experience with them.

Assignment?

- ▶ Hawthorne pp. 613-622
- ▶ Poe pp. 700-708 *The Purloined Letter* 734-47
The Philosophy of Composition 752-60
- ▶ Lincoln 782 *Gettysburg Address* 1863
- ▶ Thoreau 868-966
- ▶ Walt Whitman 1001-1102
- ▶ Herman Melville 1109-1190



Hawthorne



Herman Melville

Websites of the week

- ▶ <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/history/to/c.htm>

AN OUTLINE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

- ▶ <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/features/timeline/index.html>

- ▶ **PAL**: Perspectives
in American Literature
- A Research and

Reference Guide

<http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/TABLE.HTML>



Websites of the week

► <http://americanhistory.about.com/>

The History Net: American History



► <http://www.emersoncentral.com/index.htm>

Emerson Central



Walden Pond - Past & Present

► <http://eserver.org/thoreau/pondpics.html>



Thoreau's cove



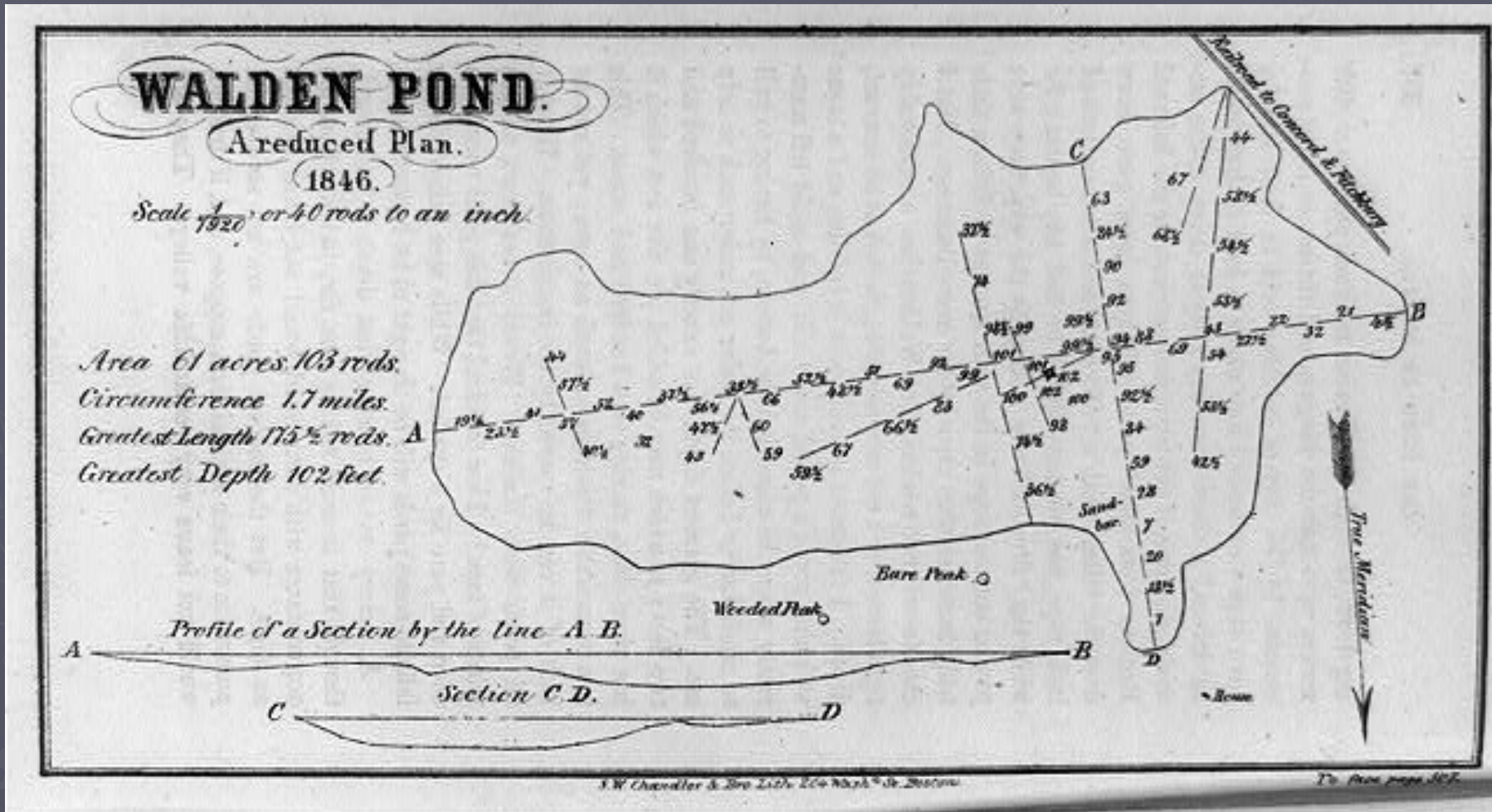
Site of Thoreau's cabin



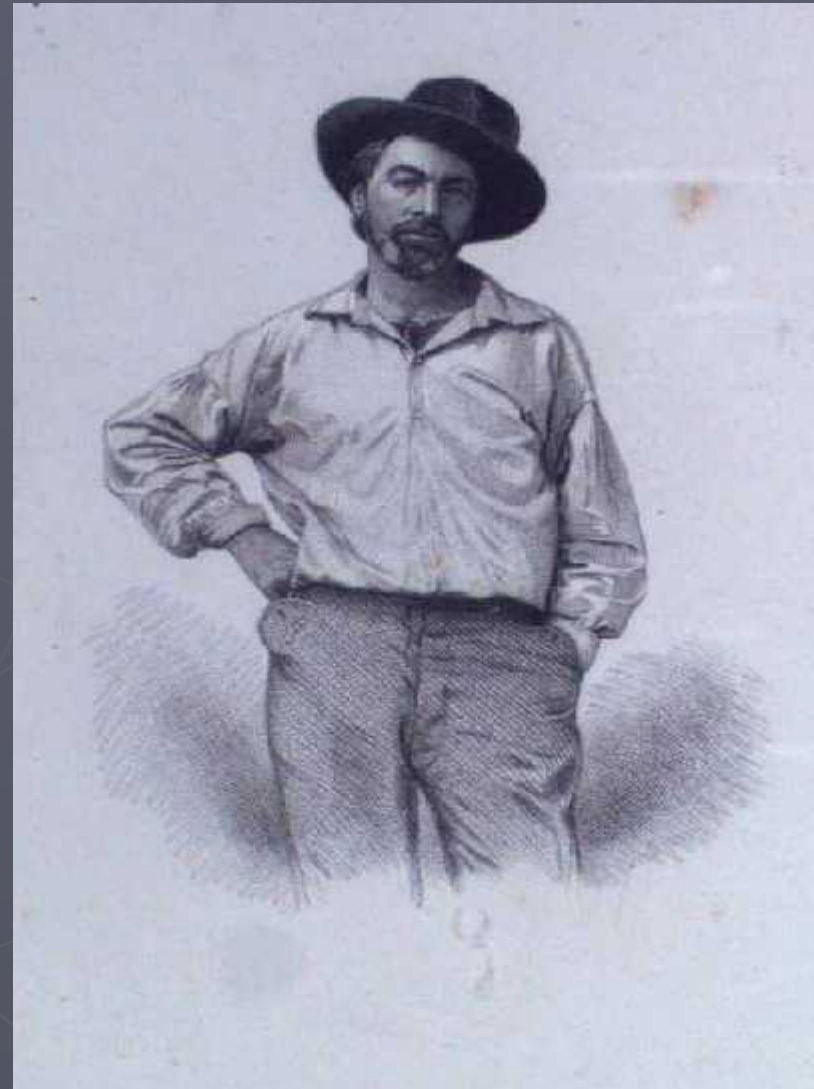
Thoreau's cabin



Thoreau's 1846 survey of Walden Pond...



Walt Whitman



- ▶ <http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap4/whitman.html>