



NEW ENGLAND RENAISSANCE

1840-1855

Romanticism: New England Renaissance

- 1840-1855 marks a period of tremendous growth in America
 - Industry: Farms, Factories, and Cities
 - Transportation: Trails, Trains, and Ships
 - Commerce: Capitalism, Trade, and Free Market Economics
 - Culture: Privileges, Prosperity, and Rights
- Boston is a particular hotbed of activity
- New England produces a host of writers who purposely shrug off their European influence and attempt to build a body of work that feels uniquely American



Transcendentalism

- Intellectual movement that blends philosophy, religion, and literature, and influences more writers of the New England Renaissance than any other movement
- Idealistic in their beliefs, Transcendentalists aim to construct a more equal, independent, and educated society
 - Abolition
 - Women's Suffrage
 - Peace
 - Individual Rights and Government Policies
 - **Lyceum**: literary institution, lecture hall, or teaching place
 - **Utopian** Communities: perfect place where everyone lives in harmony

Features of Transcendentalism

Search for “Self”

1. Idealism

Facts do not reveal the truth of reality—the ideas behind them do

Imagination shapes our future—the dream always precedes its reality

2. Self-Reliance

The height of individualism

Do not allow society to shape you... you can shape society

3. Human Divinity

Each of us has a spark of divinity inside us

By understanding ourselves we can understand God

4. Organic Universe

Over-Soul: *the universe is spiritual, growing, changing, and connected*

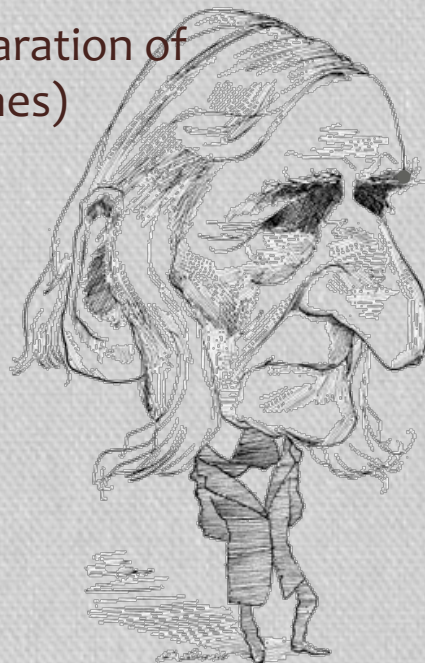
We are all a part of it, each thing a means to understanding another

Transparent Eyeball: *I am nothing; I see all*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

1803-1882

- Born in Boston
- Harvard Educated
- Father of Transcendentalism
- 1836: “The American Scholar” maps out a new American mission
 - “Our intellectual Declaration of Independence” (Holmes)
- Observational Style



Henry David Thoreau

1817-1862

- Born in Boston
- Harvard Educated
- Student of Emerson
- Commits to testing this new philosophy by living it
 - “I went to the woods to live deliberately.” (Walden)

Experiential Style



Common Rhetorical Strategies



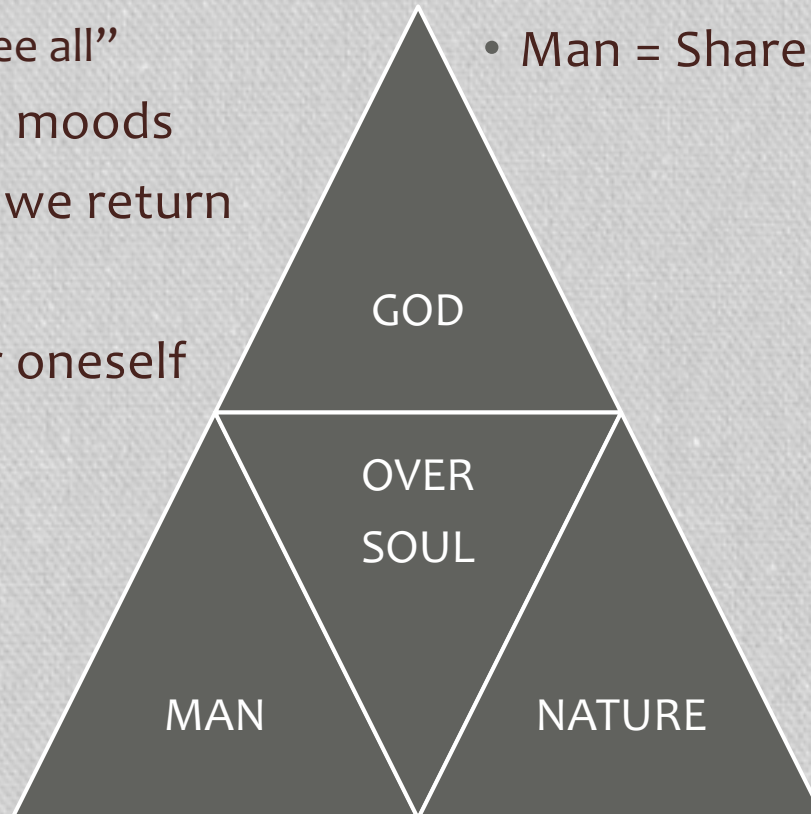
- Aphorism
- Anecdote
- Allusion
- Repetition
- **Analogy:** explanation of a complex idea using a more familiar one
- **Paradox:** statement that seems contradictory but expresses a truth
- **Metaphor:** comparison between two seemingly different things
- **Simile:** comparison of two unlike things using “like” or “as”

“Nature”

- 1836
- Begins Movement
- Transparent Eyeball
 - “I am nothing; I see all”
- A place to suit all moods
- A place to which we return
- A place to think
- A place to center oneself

“Self-Reliance”

- 1841
- “Trust thyself”
- Society = A Company
- Man = Shareholder



Civil Disobedience

- 1849
- A Call to Action
- Socio-political concept that influenced more than a century of civil rights—from Gandhi to MLK to Nelson Mandela
- Gov't vs. Individual
- Realism vs. Idealism
- “That government is best which governs not at all.”

Walden

- 1854
- Magnum Opus of the Movement
 - Independence
 - Self-Reliance
 - Self-Discovery
- Structured by Season
- Arranged by Experience
 - Economy and Reading
 - Solitude and Visitors
- “Simplify”

Walt Whitman

1819-1892



- Poet of Social Protest: The First Hippie
- Similar to Emerson and Thoreau, with one important distinction
 - Believes the physical is not just a window into the spirit, but something to be glorified in and of itself
- 1855: *Leaves of Grass*
- A Love Letter to America
 - Its Land, People, Diversity, and Promise
- A Celebration
 - Freedom, Independence, Democracy, Equality, and the Human Spirit
- A Mash-Up
 - A free verse piling up of images, catalogues, and repeated parallelisms

Dark Romanticism or Anti-Transcendentalism

- Some authors of the New England Renaissance found the idealism of the Transcendentalists a bit too optimistic
 - Some explore the darker corners of humanity and nature
 - Nathaniel Hawthorne
 - Absorbed by questions of evil, moral responsibility, and the human heart
 - “burrowed into the depths of our common nature”
 - Sin, Guilt, Hypocrisy, Humility
 - *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)
 - Herman Melville
 - Absorbed by the cruelties of existence and its toll on the human spirit
 - Fury, Vengeance, Obsession, Mortality
 - *Moby-Dick* (1851)
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