

Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism - transcend - go beyond what is normally thought

Emerson and Thoreau are the main authors of this movement

Emerson

- Emerson speaks in profound statements of truth.
- Says America has to find it's own way.
- (Says you should go beyond the surface.)
- The Trilogy of Essays
 - Self-Reliance
 - The American Scholar
 - The Divinity School Address
- Many believe that these essays are equivalent to the US Constitution.
- He believes that if we create a literature, something new and original - then will be identifiable as American.
 - **Self Reliance**
 - Says people live a conventional life
 - For us school is convention - institution
 - Emerson proposes a radical proposition - says religion shackles (limits you), it limits what you can do in life
 - Says rebellions are convention, not original
 - Most people do what's expected of them
 - People need to reform - break away from traditions, break away from the pack
 - "You are living a boring life"
 - "Self-Reliance" is a call to your conscience not to be afraid. Your conscience is right if you clear away distractions.
 - Life is filled with distractions
 - Majority opinions scare the heck out of Americans - majority is usually wrong
 - Freedom from convention - your life, not life someone else wants you to live
 - You can figure out what you want in life - **the only place to it is alone in nature.**
 - **American Scholar**
 - Culture needs to find its own voice
 - Culture defines (the voice of) society
 - **The Divinity School Address**
 - Addresses Graduates at Harvard
 - Tells them that Jesus Christ is there to help guide you
 - You can't expect to think on the level of Christ
 - Said if you asked step by step what he did, it is too rigid -

could become a robot:

- Be careful “Religion can force you into straight-jackets”
- Emerson is very optimistic.
- Major philosophy is transcendentalism.
- Transcendentalism is that **there is a spirit that will take you beyond the surface of things.**
- Spirit for some people is God, for some found in nature
- Daily routine is to satisfy the senses.
 - Emerson said there is **something more noble in life** that last longer **than satisfying the senses**- satisfies longer **like**:
 - **Love**
 - **Honor**
 - **Truth**
 - **Respect**
- Emerson was a **Unitarian** - believed there is one God - not Trinity (Mother, Father, Holy Spirit)
 - Unitarians believed Jesus was a man, not a God, and he may have been a Prophet.
 - At the time, Harvard was largely Unitarian.
- **Transcendentalists**
 - Were a bunch of young Americans in the early 19th Century - were excited and intoxicated by new literature
 1. **Romantic Movement** - England - Nature
 2. **Romantic Movement** - colonies (Poe, Melville, etc.)
 3. **Orient** - Asian, Eastern Philosophy, and Germans too.
 - Disgruntled teenagers against father’s thinking - thought older generation was too strict, defined / limiting - didn’t tell enough about world.
 - “Corpse cold Unitarianism” - *Emerson*
 - **Thoreau** wrote “**Civil Disobedience**” and experiences in “**Walden**”
 - Children of puritan past
 - Forced by Unitarianism
 - Find religious expression in this new idea.
 - Emerson says - **If you are looking for happiness, its there, just get rid of distractions in life - happiness is in nature.**
 - He says happiness isn’t in the senses - but in instincts (intuition) - spirit will guide you - not in institution like school - too many distractions
 - Puritanically people were fascinated w/ ideal place - Utopia - some Utopian communities were created
 - People became more interior
 - Reality will respond to what you put on it.
 - Never a formalized movement

- Did 2 things
 1. Vocally Persuasive (Charismatic) - Specifically Emerson and Thoreau.
 2. Very Active - activities fit into a pattern
- People outside their circle considered their things (lectures, etc) a movement, even some called it a conspiracy.
- Don't get one formal document, but an outcry against the materialistic pressures of a business civilization.
- Were protestant to the core - Unitarian
- Protestant ethic that they rebelled against -> supposed to labor in a proper calling
- Refused to labor in a proper calling - ministry, follow rules, politician, theologian, student, merchant.
- Instead they cultivated arts and leisure (loaf/relax)
- Emerson believes there isn't enough time for leisure
 1. CULTIVATED THE ART OF LEISURE.
 2. Avoided making any money
 3. Has a place in our intellectual history.
- There are always people that are against - rebel
- Historians believe Transcendentalism is our Romantic Movement (Europe). - in our Arts and Leisure
- Writings of Emerson and Thoreau explained the deepest philosophical ideas at the moment.
- Dif. Levels at Which People Will Study Transcendentalism / Definition of Trans.
 1. Political implications
 2. Ethical Implications
 3. Aesthetic Implication - pleasing to the eye
 4. Religious
 5. Philosophical - goes beyond Locke - believes all knowledge comes from outside than through senses goes into you.
 - Transcendentalists say knowledge is from inside - get from outside - **Nature**.
 - **ALL NATURE IS ALREADY INSIDE YOU**
 - Emerson calls this whim/ the over-soul
 - Creative force that we all have
 - Thoreau: Blades of Grass puts things in perspective - own life cycle - only way you can do this is loaf.
 - Thoreau: People use leaf as symbol of life - spirit of life -> most ripe when stop growing and start dying -> never return to that state.
 - Trying to achieve ripeness in life.
 - **The true poetry of life is if you achieve ripeness.**
 - **Everything in nature is driven by the same thing.**