

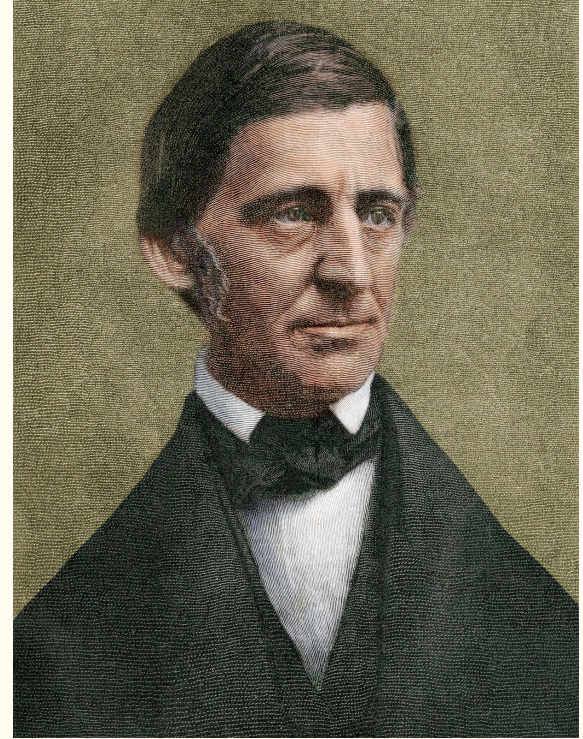
A black and white portrait of Ralph Waldo Emerson. He is an older man with light-colored hair, wearing a dark suit and a white shirt with a dark bow tie. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a gentle smile. The background is a solid, dark gray.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Gentrain
Stephanie Spoto

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

- “The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances.”
- Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882): abolitionist philosopher, poet, and essayist → part of the New England Transcendentalist movement
- Wrote in favor of the individual spirit and against conformity
- *Nature* (1836): Foundation of American Transcendentalism
- “American Scholar” (1837): Intellectual “Declaration of Independence”
- God is part of the world → example of pantheist approach



New England Transcendentalism

- Movement 1830-1840 out of Unitarianism
- Many Transcendentalists educated at Harvard → recitation instead of learning
- Influenced by Romanticism in Europe → focus on the experience of the individual, emotions over logic, celebrated nature over civilization
- Abolition: opposed to slavery → slavery went against a higher law that said all people should be free. Thoreau allowed people escaping slavery to stay at Walden pond
- Women's rights: supported freedom and rights for women, esp. writer Margaret Fuller in her book *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845)

Industrialism



Creating a new American philosophy

We do not meet for games of strength or skill, for the recitation of histories, tragedies, and odes, like the ancient Greeks; for parliaments of love and poesy, like the Troubadours; nor for the advancement of science, like our contemporaries in the British and European capitals. Thus far, our holiday has been simply a friendly sign of the survival of the love of letters amongst a people too busy to give to letters any more. As such, it is precious as the sign of an indestructible instinct. Perhaps the time is already come, when it ought to be, and will be, something else; when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids, and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close.

Man reduced to Occupation

“Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things. The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry. He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm. The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney, a statute-book; the mechanic, a machine; the sailor, a rope of a ship.”

“In this distribution of functions, the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state, he is, Man Thinking. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking.”

1. The Mind and Nature are One

“The first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature.”

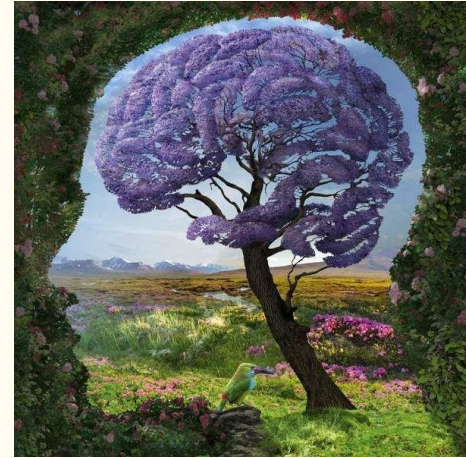
“What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself. Therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning, whose ending, he never can find,--so entire, so boundless.”

“It presently learns, that, since the dawn of history, there has been a constant accumulation and classifying of facts. But what is classification but the perceiving that these objects are not chaotic, and are not foreign, but have a law which is also a law of the human mind?”

Mind and Nature are One (2)

“Thus to him, to this school-boy under the bending dome of day, is suggested, that he and it proceed from one root; one is leaf and one is flower; relation, sympathy, stirring in every vein. **And what is that Root? Is not that the soul of his soul?**”

“He shall see, that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal, and one is print. **Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind.** Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. **And, in fine, the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become at last one maxim.**”

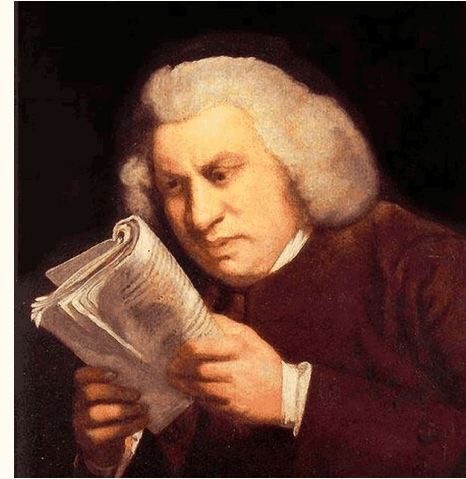


2. The Scholar Learns from the Past

“Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.”

“...as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly, the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant.”

“Books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking; by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles.”



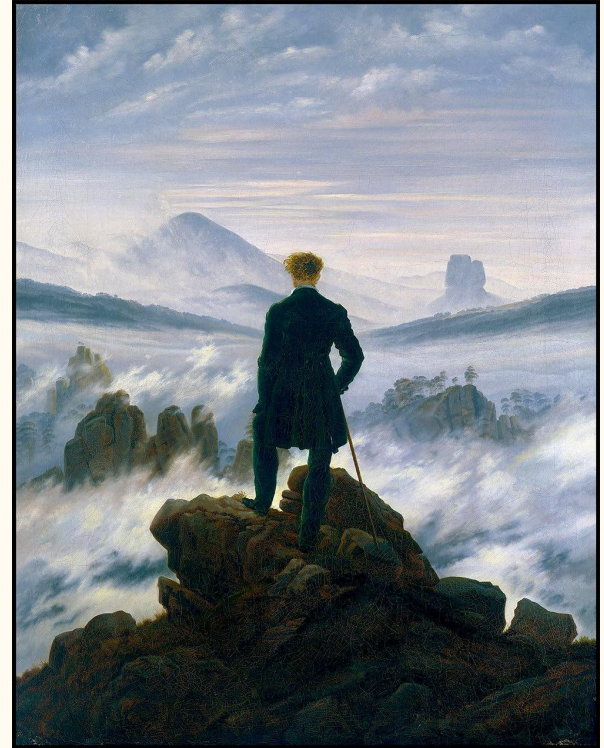
The dangers of reading

“Hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm. Hence, the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate with the world and the soul.”

“The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they,--let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates.”

When to Read - and When Not To

“Undoubtedly there is a right way of reading, so it be sternly subordinated. Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments. Books are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings.”



3. Scholar must be Man of Action

“Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it, he is not yet man. Without it, thought can never ripen into truth.”

“The world,--this shadow of the soul, or other me, lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself.”

