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**Title:**Transcendentalism, American literary and philosophical movement.

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**Abstract:**Transcendentalism (trăn"sëndĕn'təlĭzəm) [Lat.,=overpassing], in literature, philosophical and literary movement that flourished in New England from about 1836 to 1860. It originated among a small group of intellectuals who were reacting against the orthodoxy of Calvinism and the rationalism of the Unitarian Church, developing instead their own faith centering on the divinity of humanity and the natural world. Transcendentalism derived some of its basic idealistic concepts from romantic German philosophy, notably that of Immanuel Kant, and from such English authors as Carlyle, Coleridge, and Wordsworth. Its mystical aspects were partly influenced by Indian and Chinese religious teachings. Although transcendentalism was never a rigorously systematic philosophy, it had some basic tenets that were generally shared by its adherents. The beliefs that God is immanent in each person and in nature and that individual intuition is the highest source of knowledge led to an optimistic emphasis on individualism, self-reliance, and rejection of traditional authority. [ABSTRACT FROM PUBLISHER]  
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**Transcendentalism** (trăn"sëndĕn'təlĭzəm) [Lat.,=overpassing], in literature, philosophical and literary movement that flourished in New England from about 1836 to 1860. It originated among a small group of intellectuals who were reacting against the orthodoxy of Calvinism and the rationalism of the Unitarian Church, developing instead their own faith centering on the divinity of humanity and the natural world. Transcendentalism derived some of its basic idealistic concepts from romantic German philosophy, notably that of Immanuel [Kant](#), and from such English authors as [Carlyle](#), [Coleridge](#), and [Wordsworth](#). Its mystical aspects were partly influenced by Indian and Chinese religious teachings. Although transcendentalism was never a rigorously systematic philosophy, it had some basic tenets that were generally shared by its adherents. The beliefs that God is immanent in each person and in nature and that individual intuition is the highest source of knowledge led to an optimistic emphasis on individualism, self-reliance, and rejection of traditional authority.

The ideas of transcendentalism were most eloquently expressed by Ralph Waldo [Emerson](#) in such essays as "Nature" (1836), "Self-Reliance," and "The Over-Soul" (both 1841), and by Henry David [Thoreau](#) in his book *Walden* (1854). The movement began with the occasional meetings of a group of friends in Boston and Concord to discuss philosophy, literature, and religion. Originally calling themselves the Hedge Club (after one of the members), they were later dubbed the Transcendental Club by outsiders because of their discussion of Kant's "transcendental" ideas. Besides Emerson and Thoreau, its most famous members, the club included F. H. [Hedge](#), George [Ripley](#), Bronson [Alcott](#), Margaret [Fuller](#), Theodore [Parker](#), and others. For several years much of their writing was published in *The Dial* (1840–44), a journal edited by Fuller and Emerson. The cooperative community [Brook Farm](#) (1841–47) grew out of their ideas on social reform, which also found expression in their many individual actions against slavery. Primarily a movement seeking a new spiritual and intellectual vitality, transcendentalism had a great impact on American literature, not only on the writings of the group's members, but on such diverse authors as [Hawthorne](#), [Melville](#), and [Whitman](#).

## **[Bibliography](#)**

See anthologies ed. by G. W. Cooke (1903, repr. 1971) and P. Miller (1950; 1957, repr. 1981); O. B. Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England* (1876, repr. 1972); J. Porte, *Emerson and Thoreau* (1966); M. Simon and T. H. Parsons, ed., *Transcendentalism and Its Legacy* (1966); L. Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism* (1973).

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