

# Transcendentalism

Sources:

"American Transcendentalism: A Brief Introduction." by Paul P. Reuben *Perspectives in American Literature*

"Transcendentalism" pbs.org

"Transcendentalism" by David L. Simpson, DePaul University

# Transcendentalism: 1830s-1860s

- Transcendentalism: American literary and philosophical movement that began in New England in the 1830s.
- The movement declined by the Civil War (1861-1865)
- Famous Transcendentalists
  - Ralph Waldo Emerson
  - Henry David Thoreau
  - Nathaniel Hawthorne
  - Walt Whitman
  - Emily Dickinson
  - Louisa May Alcott

# Transcendentalism: Beliefs

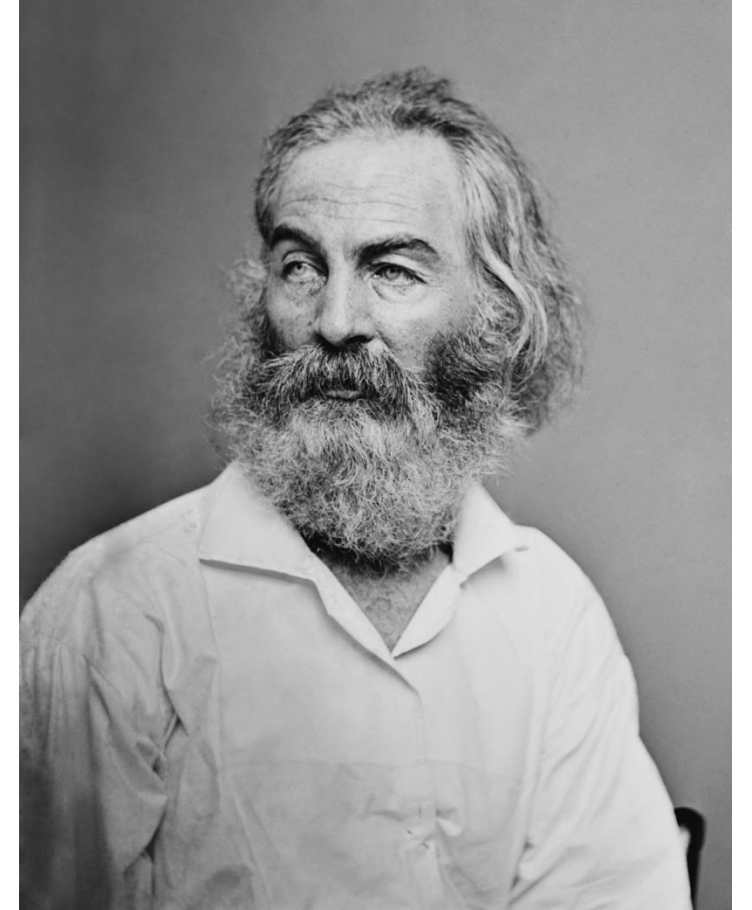
- The transcendentalist "transcends" or rises above the lower animal impulses of life.
- God is a "Life Force" found in humans and nature, so going to holy places like church is unnecessary.
- Institutions such as organized religion and political parties corrupt the purity of the individual.
- People and nature are inherently good.
- Studying nature helps you know yourself.
- Intuition is better than rationality.
- People are at their best when "self-reliant" and independent

# What do Transcendentalists value?

- Nature
- Intuition
- Independence
- Individuality
- Self-reliance

# Walt Whitman

- 1819-1892
- During the Civil War, Whitman visited injured soldiers in Washington, DC, dressing their wounds and comforting them



# Characteristics of his Poetry

- Abandoned traditional poetic pattern, style, and meter
- Style and subject are expansive and ambitious
- Form is free flowing and irregular
- Common themes: democracy, Civil War, nature, love, friendship

