Ralph Waldo Emerson
1803-1882

Transcendentalist

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

- May 25, 1803: born in Boston, Massachusetts to a conservative Unitarian minister
- 1811: father died when Emerson was eight years old
- 1817-1821: attended Harvard University as an undergraduate
- 1829: ordained as minister of the Second Church in Boston
- 1829: married Ellen Tucker (she died in 1832 from tuberculosis)
- 1832: resigned from the church in the same year after stating “he had become so skeptical of the validity of the Lord’s Supper that he could no longer administer it.”
- 1832-1834: traveled extensively in Europe, where he met Thomas Carlyle, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth
- 1834: returned to America, settling in Concord, Massachusetts and beginning a career as a lecturer
- 1835: married Lydia Jackson (with whom he had four children)
- 1836: published anonymously his first essay “Nature” which became “the unofficial manifesto for ‘the Symposium’ or the Transcendental Club.”
- 1837: delivered the now famous “American Scholar” address in Cambridge
- 1837: met Henry David Thoreau, to whom he became a lifelong mentor
- 1838: delivered his controversial “Divinity School Address” at Harvard
- 1840: began publishing the magazine, The Dial along with Bronson Alcott, George Ripley, and Margaret Fuller
- 1841: published his essay “Self-Reliance” in Essays
- 1842: his son Waldo died at five years of age
- 1860s: lecturing against slavery
- 1867: “Emerson’s memory began to fail more than ten years before his death, and he declined into a benign senility during which the English-speaking world, and even many who read him in translation, continued to honor the intellectual liberator that he had been in his middle life.”
- April 27, 1882: died of pneumonia; buried in Sleepy Hollow cemetery in Concord
- 1960s and 1970s- Emerson’s journals are published. “[It] will take time before readers fully grasp the importance of these writings…”

Works Cited: