

Melville in Context

1) The American Renaissance

2) American Writers and artist looking for what is uniquely “American”

i) Hudson River School

- (a) Thomas Cole—painter
- (b) Washington Irving—writer
- (c) James Fenimore Cooper—writer
- (d) Henry Wadsworth Longfellow—writer

ii) New England

- (a) Transcendentalists
 - 1. Emerson
 - 2. Thoreau
 - 3. Alcott
 - 4. Fuller
- (b) Other approaches
 - 1. Stowe
 - 2. Hawthorne
 - 3. Melville

The Hudson River School

Artists, writers, and others travel north from Manhattan, up the Hudson to be—

What? To be close to Nature
Why? *Nature* can teach you. It reflects the Divine.

Thomas Cole's paintings—
You can see some of the conventions

And –while Europe might have centuries of art treasures, America has

WILDERNESS
BEAUTY
THE SUBLIME

Washington Irving (1783-1859)
Legend of Sleepy Hollow
Rip Van Winkle

James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851)
The Leatherstocking Tales

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)
The Song of Hiawatha
Evangeline

NEW ENGLAND

Transcendentalists

Basics of their philosophy found in German philosophy (Kant)—to Emerson, through Coleridge.

- A single man contains within himself, though his intuition, the whole range of experience.
- “The individual is the world.”
- “Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.”
- God is in every man. All are equal.
- Nature is organic and transitional, not fixed or mechanistic.

Centered in Concord, Massachusetts.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Bronson Alcott
- Henry David Thoreau
- Margaret Fuller

Other New England Writers and Approaches

Nathaniel Hawthorne—

Close to Milton than to Transcendentalist thinking.
Major theme: balance between the “head” and the
“heart.”

Among other works:

The Scarlet Letter

The House of Seven Gables

Blithedale Romance

Harriet Beecher Stowe—

Uncle Tom's Cabin

Walt Whitman

Leaves of Grass

Herman Melville—of him, more next week

Emerson: *Representative Men* (1850)

Hawthorne: *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)
The House of Seven Gables
(1851)

Melville *Moby Dick* (1851)
Pierre: or The Ambiguities (1852)

Stowe: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)

Thoreau: *Walden: or Life in the Woods*
(1854)

Whitman: *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

From Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

**“The Song of Hiawatha” (1855)—sold 50,000 copies first year
----just a couple of passages from this *long* epic poem—**

Then, upon one knee uprising,
Hiawatha aimed an arrow;
Scarce a twig moved with his motion,
Scarce a leaf was stirred or rustled,
But the wary roebuck started,
Stamped with all his hoofs together,
Listened with one foot uplifted,
Leaped as if to meet the arrow;
Ah! the singing, fatal arrow,
Like a wasp it buzzed and stung him!

Dead he lay there in the forest,
By the ford across the river;
Beat his timid heart no longer,
But the heart of Hiawatha
Throbbled and shouted and exulted,
As he bore the red deer homeward,
And Iagoo and Nokomis
Hailed his coming with applauses.

.....

From the distant land of Wabun,
From the farthest realms of morning
Came the Black-Robe chief, the Prophet,
He the Priest of Prayer, the Pale-face,
With his guides and his companions.

And the noble Hiawatha,
With his hands aloft extended,
Held aloft in sign of welcome,
Waited, full of exultation,
Till the birch canoe with paddles
Grated on the shining pebbles,

Stranded on the sandy margin,
Till the Black-Robe chief, the Pale-face,
With the cross upon his bosom,
Landed on the sandy margin.

From *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

I believe in you my soul . . . the other I am must not abase itself
to you,
And you must not be abased to the other.

Loafe with me on the grass . . . loose the stop from your throat,
not words, not music or rhyme I want . . . not custom or lecture,
not even the best,
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice.

I mind how we lay in June, such a transparent summer morning;
You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned over
upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue
To my barestript heart,
And reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my feet.

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or
am touched from;
The scent of these arm-pits is aroma finer than prayer,
This head is more than churches or bibles or creeds.

Pieces of a long passage in “Spring,” where Thoreau begins with an observation of the bank alongside the track.

“Few phenomena gave me more delight than to observe the forms which thawing sand and clay assume in flowing down the sides of a deep cut on the railroad though which I passed on my way to the village As it flows it takes the forms of sappy leaves or vines, making heaps of pulpy sprays a foot or more in depth, and resembling, as you look down on them, the lacinated lobed an imbricated thalluses of some lichens; or you are reminded of coral, of leopards’ paws or birds’ feet, of brains or lungs or bowels, and excrements of all kinds.”
...

“The whole bank, which is from twenty to forty feet high, is sometimes overlaid with a mass of this kind of foliage, or sandy rupture, for a quarter of a mile on one or both sides, the produces of one spring day. . . I am affected as if in a peculiar sense I stood in the laboratory of the Artist who made the world and me—had come to where he was still at work on this bank, and with excess of energy strewing his fresh designs about. I feel as if I were nearer to the vitals of the globe, for this sandy overflow is something such a foliaceous mass as the vitals of the animal body.”
...

“Thus it seemed that this one hill-side illustrated the principle of all the operations of Nature. The Maker of this earth but patented a leaf. What Champollion will decipher this hieroglyphic for us, that we may turn over a new leaf at last?There is nothing inorganic. These foliaceous heaps lie along the bank like the slag of a furnace showing that Nature is ‘in full blast’ within. The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history, stratum upon stratum like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and antiquaries chiefly, but living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit—not a fossil earth, but a living earth; compared with whose great central life all animal and vegetable life is merely parasitic. Its throes will heave our exuviae from their graves.”

So is your pastoral life whiled past and away.
But the bell rings, and I must get off the track
and let the cars go by

What's the railroad to me?
I never go to see
Where it ends.
It fills a few hollows,
And makes banks for the swallows,
It sets the sand a-blowing,
And the blackberries a-growing,

But I cross it like a cart-path in the woods. I
will not have my eyes put out and my ears
spoiled by its smoke, and steam, and hissing.