



DRAFT

Transcendentalism in the US and the UK

HS-2586

3 Units

Starr King School for Ministry ~ Graduate Theological Union

January Intersession 2017

Instructor Information:

The Rev. Meg Richardson, Ph.D.

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925-951-3048 (cell)

Availability: Please email to set up a meeting in person or by phone, Skype or Google Hangout.

Meeting Dates and Times:

1/9/17 – 1/13/17 Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

Course Description:

In the period from Ralph Waldo Emerson's Divinity School Address in 1838 to the death of Margaret Fuller in 1850, Transcendentalism flourished in New England. However it also appeared in a slightly different form in Great Britain. We will examine the influences of German philosophy, Eastern scriptures, and the British Romantics on both sides of the Atlantic. We will trace the development of Transcendentalism as literary and philosophical influences translated into social reform. This course will examine Transcendentalism as a type of nineteenth century Unitarianism that persists in modern Unitarian Universalism. We will pay particular attention to Transcendentalism as it contributes to the history of Unitarian Universalist Prophetic Witness.

For Transcendentalists, Conversation was a transformative religious ritual, arising from the central importance of friendship. Conversation had both natural and supernatural power to change the individual and society. We will have two series of Conversations, morning sessions on Influences and afternoon sessions on Legacies. Leaders will be expected to prepare by reading background information on their assigned topics, as suggested by the instructor or discovered through independent research online.



This course will include aspects of three of the Unitarian Universalist Ministerial Fellowship Committee's competencies: Area 4 – Social Justice in the Public Sphere, Area 6 – Serves the Larger Unitarian Universalist Faith, and Area 7 – Leads the Faith into the Future.

Many of our texts will be found online as our emphasis will be on nineteenth century documents which are out of copyright: philosophy, essays, scriptures and biographies.

In accordance with Starr King School for the Ministry's pedagogy, students will enter our learning community in a spirit of cultural humility and personal authenticity. Our personal lived experiences and academic sources will inform our investigation of Unitarian Universalist history.

Learning Objectives:

- Study the history of Transcendentalists with special notice of traditionally silenced voices, with regard to race and gender, and multiculturalism.
- Explore the social justice issues and values of the mid-nineteenth century, especially as expressed by community organizing and the formation of coalitions.
- Identify sacred texts that were adopted and popularized, and even translated or written by the Transcendentalists.
- Discuss the intersection between praxis and reflection and how, for most of the Transcendentalists, this became embodied in the struggle for justice.

Learning Outcomes:

- Articulate what Transcendentalism is, and identify major figures within the movement.
- Connect how justice work by nineteenth century Transcendentalists continues in Unitarian Universalist communities today.
- Understand how Transcendentalists popularized European philosophy, as well as Eastern and Islamic scriptures, for an American audience.
- Demonstrate how Transcendentalists used their social location of privilege to foster challenging new perspectives.
- Respect how Transcendentalists' values influenced our religious communities, North American culture, and internationally.
- Express opportunities for Transcendentalist beliefs to address in modern Unitarian Universalism in a changing society.
- Contribute to ongoing scholarship within our Unitarian Universalist tradition.

Course Policies:

Students are expected to complete all required reading and be prepared for class discussion, both as leaders and as participants.

Please contact the instructor regarding accessibility, including special needs or considerations.

Course Assignments:



Students will be expected to lead or co-lead, depending on the number of students enrolled, one or two Conversations, and write a final paper. In addition there will be oral readings during class time, from either Theodore Parker's *Transient and Permanent in Christianity* or Louisa May Alcott's *Transcendental Wild Oats*.

The final paper may be either a traditional academic research paper or a combination of research and reflection. Paper topics should be discussed with the instructor in advance. The paper should be 10 to 15 pages long, conform to guidelines set out in the [Purdue OWL website](#) and be submitted by 11:59 PST on January 27, 2017.

Grading:

Grading will be based 30% on class participation, 30% on demonstrated preparation, and 40% on the final paper. Students are encouraged to take the class Pass/Fail in accordance with SKSM pedagogy: those who wish to receive a letter grade must indicate this in advance upon registration for the course.

Required Texts To be read IN ADVANCE:

Readings that occur on the Ministerial Fellowship Reading List are marked by *

Caroline Healey Dall, "[Transcendentalism in New England: a Lecture](#)" (1897)

* Ralph Waldo Emerson, "[Divinity School Address](#)" (1838)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "[The Transcendentalist](#)" (1842) pp. 309-340

*Philip Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History* (2007)

ISBN: 0809016443

Price: \$9.99 Kindle book

Barbara L. Packer, *The Transcendentalists* (2007) [This book first appeared as a chapter in Sacvan Bercovitch, ed., *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, vol. 2, *Prose Writing, 1820-1865*.]

ISBN: 0820329584

Price: [Used](#) from \$10.86

*Theodore Parker, "[The Transient and the Permanent in Christianity](#)"

Additional readings and supplemental articles will be provided by the instructor on the class Moodle.

Course Schedule:

This schedule is tentative and may be revised by the instructor.



Monday ~ Context

Morning Conversation: Nature

Afternoon Conversation: Feminism

Tuesday ~ Community

Morning Conversation: Eastern Scriptures

Afternoon Conversation: Utopian Communities

Wednesday ~ England

Morning Conversation: British Figures and Romantics

Afternoon Conversation: Education

Thursday ~ Class and Privilege

Morning Conversation: European Philosophy and Biblical Criticism, especially German and French

Afternoon Conversation: Social Reforms and Action

Friday ~ Connection

Morning Conversation: Greek and Roman Culture and Literature

CLASS PARTY: Potluck lunch with foods inspired by Transcendentalists: perhaps pizza for Fuller and Parker, bean dip for Thoreau, and pie for Emerson?

Afternoon Conversation: Unitarian Universalist Worship and Literature

Suggested Reading:

Readings that occur on the Ministerial Fellowship List are marked by *

*Ann Lee Bressler, *The Universalist Movement in America, 1770–1880* (2001) pp. 48 -52

*John Buehrens, *Universalists and Unitarians in America: A People's History* (2011) pp. 31-81, 99

*David Bumbaugh, *Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History* (2000) pp. 119-130

*Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805-1900* (2001) (OLD LIST 2010) pp. 58-103

*Dorothy Emerson, ed., *Standing Before Us: Unitarian Universalist Women and Social Reform, 1776–1936* (2000) pp. 24-29, pp. 30-34, pp. 55-58, pp. 85-94, pp. 169 -198, pp. 208-232, pp. 243-245, pp. 325-331

Octavius Brooks Frothingham, [*Transcendentalism in New England*](#) (1897)

*Mark Harris, *Elite* (2010) "Brahmin Culture for the Masses" pp. 30-54



*Mark Harris and Andrea Greenwood, *An Introduction to the Unitarian and Universalist Traditions* (2011) Chapter Five, pp. 72-92

William R. Hutchison, *The Transcendentalist Ministers: Church Reform in the New England Renaissance* (1959)

*Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism* (2005)

*Megan Marshall, *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life* (2013)

*John Matteson, *Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father* (2007)

*John Matteson, *The Lives of Margaret Fuller* (2012)

*Dan McKanan, *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition* (2012) pp. 59-75

*David Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists* (1985) Chapter 7 pp. 75-86 and Chapter 8 pp. 87-106

*Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality*, 2nd Ed. (2013)

Henry David Thoreau, [*Walden*](#) (1886)

*Earl Morse Wilbur's [three volumes](#) (A History of *Unitarianism*, volumes I & II; *Our Unitarian Heritage*)

*Conrad Wright, *The Liberal Christians* (1970) pp. 34-80

*Conrad Wright, *A Stream of Light* (1975) pp. 33-94

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

*Mark Harris, *Historical Dictionary of Unitarian Universalism* (2003)

*[Dictionary of Unitarian Universalist Biography](#)

[Harvard Square Library](#)