THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

TRANSCENDENTALISM

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2010

CHAPTER 50

THE ELECTRONIC AGE

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OVER the past decade the electronic age has seen an explosion of online materials related to Transcendentalism. Though organizations such as NINES (Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship) are beginning to peer review digital academic materials, we are still in the infancy of creating structures that meet scholarly standards. Until an extensive peer review system is in place we must rely on examination of intended audience, editing standards, technological standards, and understanding of copyright to judge the scholarly worth of digital materials. Here I use these criteria to examine the various online materials related to Transcendentalism.

For general information on Transcendentalism, the best online encyclopedia is the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Though limited in scope, the *Stanford Encyclopedia* is scholarly and trustworthy because it is peer reviewed and conducts regular updates. Included are a definition of Transcendentalism, origins of the movement, related figures (Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau), a bibliography, and online resources. For Unitarian-related figures, the *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography* is helpful, though its scholarly provenance is not as clearly defined as one would prefer. *Wikipedia* provides broader coverage than either of these—summaries of Transcendentalism, related figures, including Theodore Parker, Bronson Alcott, and William Ellery Channing, related movements, images and media (commons), and primary texts (wikisource)—but the information is, of course, sometimes unreliable and uneven. If scholars choose to participate in *Wikipedia* (as anyone may make online additions and revisions), it might become a sounder and more useful scholarly site.

A number of Web sites are dedicated to either individual writers associated with Transcendentalism or to the movement itself. Unfortunately, many of these sites are for general users and, as such, have limited value for scholars. Further, most of the early launch Web sites are still working with simple html technology with

limited search capacity, and they lack the technological standards, such as TEI/XML (the de facto international standard for encoding texts in the humanities), sophisticated search functions, and faceted browsing, with which future, technology-driven manipulation of materials will occur.

For example, the *American Transcendental Web* (*ATW*) was originally created from student projects and features essays, texts, book reviews, biographies, and definitions. Because the technology has not been updated in the last decade, it is less useable than newer, born digital projects, though when developed in the late 1990s, the Web site was forward thinking. The site does include innovative ideas such as group annotation of texts, which allows individuals to create online relationships like those that COLLEX or the more general Delicious have harnessed, but late 1990s' technology limited the implementation of the concept. Unfortunately, over the years since its launch, *ATW* has become dated, particularly in search and interoperable capabilities, and a number of the links are bad. Materials are uneven and do not feature a clear editorial statement and apparatus. The problems that the site has encountered are not unique with Web-based materials and remind one that careful planning and institutional support must deal with the aging of online materials. *The Transcendentalists*, a longstanding site edited by Jone Johnson Lewis, links a variety of Web resources, mostly popular in nature. Materials include discussion boards, quotes, transcribed texts (though where they are transcribed from is difficult to tell), links to various sites, and links to scholarly and primary works. As a collection of hyperlinks the material is thorough, though the editor provides no differentiation between scholarly and general materials. The site does not appear to have been updated since 2002 and has a good bit of link rot.

Of the early Web sites, Donna Campbell's *American Authors* site and Paul P. Reuben's *PAL: Perspectives in American Literature—A Research and Reference Guide* remain active. The *American Authors* site contains links to the sites mentioned earlier, the University of Virginia EText site, brief bibliographies, and commentary. The site seems designed for a general or student audience, and there is some link rot. Paul Reuben's site is deeper than *American Authors* and seemingly designed for teachers. Originally published as a book and then supplemented, the site references numerous Transcendentalist figures. It has been updated and provides a brief selected bibliography, links to primary works, and student-written bibliographies of a small number of authors.

In addition to these sites, the *19th-Century Concord Digital Archive* (*CDA*) is developing a broad set of Transcendentalist-related documents.[1] The *CDA* features a rigorous editorial process and use of TEI/XML and database standards. Working in legal partnership with the Concord Free Public Library, which allows materials and data to be cross-referenced, the *CDA* includes the *Concord Town Reports* (1841–60), the Concord Town Census materials (1830–60), and various textual materials related to the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery dedication, with additional materials to follow. The *CDA* privileges open-source code and open archives and features visual use of the research data, including faceted browsing and map-based browsing.[2]

In addition to these general Transcendentalist sites, the canonical figures of the movement have more developed online materials. Thoreau, in particular, has good online coverage. *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau* is an exemplary site for those interested in primary Thoreau materials, though its texts are limited. The project started as a printed edition published by Princeton University Press and is located at the Davidson Library, University of California–Santa Barbara. The site includes a clear and detailed editorial statement and excellent support materials. Select online transcripts of Thoreau's journals are included as well as recommended editions of his works. *The Thoreau Institute* site has selected finding aids, a public access library catalog, and scanned primary and secondary materials. The site is difficult to navigate, however, and search capabilities are inadequately handled by a simple Google search, which does not sort research materials from general interest materials found on the site. While the site includes a great number of materials, almost all of the texts are presented as pdfs, which are clunky to use and not as searchable as other options, such as TEI/XML-marked materials. Most of the primary materials included on the site are drawn from the twenty-volume 1906 edition of *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, but provenance is not as clearly defined as it should be on these transcriptions and other primary texts. In addition, the site includes information about figures related to Thoreau, images of physical materials, and manuscripts. Images are presented as both pdfs and jpgs. Jpg images are slow to load due to their size but are of good quality for scholarly use. For additional texts, *The Thoreau Reader*, a joint project of the Thoreau Society and Iowa State University, may be helpful. The materials are broad in coverage, but like so many online resources there is little information about original text and transcription, making this site less reliable than it should be. Critical essays are included, but they, like the primary texts, provide little critical apparatus. *The Thoreau Society* site includes overviews, special collections locations, and links to primary materials from *The Thoreau Reader* and *The Thoreau Institute*. These materials are appropriate for teachers and the general reader.

Emerson online materials are also extensive. *The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society* site includes selected bibliographies, images, electronic text links, and Web site links. Most beneficial is the list of writings about Emerson, which includes critical summaries, overviews of *American Literary Scholarship*, biographies, exhibit catalogues, selected critical books and articles, and more. In addition, the ephemera and images sections include wonderful, high-quality images, from advertisements to bookmarks and more, drawn from the Joel Myerson Collection of Nineteenth-Century American Literature at the Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina. Linked primary texts are drawn from other sources, some better edited than others. *The Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson* site includes, among other Unitarian Universalist materials, digital versions of the genetic text of Emerson's *Complete Sermons* (*EmCS*). Published with the permission of the general editor, Albert J. von Frank and the Houghton Library, Harvard University, this approach is an excellent way for a scholar to use the digital medium to present materials that are invaluable for scholarly research but expensive for presses to publish. (The genetic

texts for Emerson's *Later Lectures* [*EmLL*] are available at the Emerson Society site.) Another useful site is *rwe.org*. This appears to be designed for general use, and, while extensive, it is difficult to discover the provenance and editorial procedures, which causes one to question the reliability of the texts. The materials appear to have been acquired from multiple sources, with the primary materials from the *Centenary Edition* (*EmW*) and the 1904–14 edition of the journals now superseded by *EmJMN*.

The coverage of other Transcendentalist figures is much less complete than that of Emerson and Thoreau. Thomas Wentworth Higginson is one of the best represented, with scholarly texts of letters and writings, including his "Negro Spirituals," available. These materials include critical commentary and support materials such as sound clips and are published by university digital collections using sound practices for digital humanities. In addition, the *Margaret Fuller Society* site offers several articles, a selected bibliography compiled by Larry Reynolds, and links to a number of etexts, including the *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (on the *Making of America* site) and "Leila" (the Women's Short Fiction site). The *Amos Bronson Alcott* site offers a general overview of Alcott's philosophies, work, and life. The site provides brief biographies for those related to Alcott and his work, related links, and citations for his published works and related criticism. However, the site does not include information on the editor or pertinent citation information for the materials on the site, which makes it inappropriate for a scholarly audience. Finally, numerous texts on the site of the *Orestes Brownson Society* lack apparatus and are apparently designed for a nonscholarly audience.

In addition to dedicated Transcendental Web sites, there are digitized finding aids, broadsides, photos, maps, manuscripts, and other primary documents located in library, museum, and special collections pages. The William Munroe Special Collections at the Concord Free Public Library in Concord, Massachusetts, features a number of resources that will be of great interest to scholars. While the library uses digital materials to highlight the interesting and unique items in its collection and to produce online versions of their exhibits, certain materials, such as the antebellum town reports, Thoreau surveys, selected nineteenth-century images, and historic buildings Web sites (the Town House, Middlesex Hotel, Damon Mill, Concord Free Public Library, Anderson Market building, and the Thoreau/Alcott house), provide ample materials for scholarly research. Apparatus is written by Leslie Perrin Wilson, curator, with development by Bob Hall, MARC (Machine-Readable Catalogue) cataloger, technical associate, and special collections webmaster, and Michael Tracey Zellman, technical consultant. The robust finding aids are well worth reviewing prior to a research trip, and the site includes an online version of the *Concordance to the Collected Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, compiled by Eugene F. Irey and reproduced with permission. While not complete, the concordance is fairly extensive. The Concord Museum site offers images of a variety of its pieces. Primarily of interest is the Thoreau collection, with physical objects described and pictured, such as a pencil made by John Thoreau and Son, the lock from the Concord jail in which Thoreau was held, and a statue of Uncle Tom and Little Eva supposedly given

to Thoreau by an escaped slave whom he had helped. Images are of high quality, and although catalog descriptions are, at times, thin, the materials reveal the broad number of physical items that may be of interest to scholars.

The Library of Congress site is also useful for locating images and primary texts, though the search functions are not particularly sophisticated. The United States historical and cultural collections, the American Memory project, and the online prints and photographs catalog are most useful to researchers hoping to locate maps, periodicals, images, broadsides, photographs, and more. A statement of copyright is included on each file, and many files are unrestricted.

The EText centers, including those at the University of Virginia, Cornell University, and the University of Michigan, provide other primary materials of interest. The EText center at the University of Virginia has full-text (e-books, palm or Web versions) and selected manuscript materials by a number of Transcendentalist writers, including Emerson, Thoreau, and Louisa May Alcott. The texts are double keyed but not edited, marked with SGML and/or XML[3] and include provenance information, suggesting a higher standard of quality than that of sites like Project Gutenberg. *The Making of America* digital library, a joint project of the University of Michigan and Cornell University, contains scans of rare materials by and about Transcendentalist authors, locations, and philosophies. *The American Verse Project*, at the University of Michigan, is also useful to those interested in first-edition volumes of poetry produced by Transcendentalists Bronson Alcott, Emerson, and Jones Very.

An excellent option when searching multiple digital academic sites is to utilize the COLLEX tool. It searches a broad number of peer-reviewed digital sites, including *The Walt Whitman Archive*, the *Dickinson Virtual Reference Shelf, JSTOR*, and *Project Muse*. While dedicated Transcendentalist sites have not yet been added, related material is available. COLLEX is particularly helpful in locating onsite materials at the University of Virginia and in the Bancroft Library of the University of California–Berkley; it is also useful in locating Whitman materials that reference the Transcendentalists, although until Transcendentalist-related sites enter COLLEX, the primary materials remain sparse. Of the included Americanist sites, the *Walt Whitman Archive* stands out as an excellent example of sound digital scholarship. Edited by Ed Folsom and Ken Price, the site includes editions of Whitman's published and manuscript work in transcription and image, biography, criticism, and findings aids. Not only does COLLEX allow one to search a broad number of sites, but the tool also allows the researcher to collect materials and form a research collection. As located materials are collected to a user's account, notations or tags that are beneficial to research may be added. One may also look through other users' tags to locate appropriate materials. Archived materials and the user tag collections are peer reviewed prior to publishing at COLLEX, thereby creating a sound scholarly resource.

In addition to the materials specifically related to Transcendentalism, a number of sites have digitized primary and secondary print editions. With *Google Books*, full-text materials are increasingly easy to locate and use, even though coverage

of individual monographs is dependent upon copyright rules. Google has indexed all currently scanned books, and if a book is out of copyright, then the full text is displayed and available for download. If books are still in copyright, then a snippet is included, or, if the publisher has granted permission, multiple pages are available. For example, to consult Megan Marshall's *Peabody Sisters*, Google books will let you look through the table of contents and read the majority of the text, but sections of each chapter are removed. The same is true of primary texts that might be of interest. The full text of the Harvard Divinity School copy of the first volume of Alcott's *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* (1836) is available for online viewing, downloading, and full keyword searching because the copyright on this edition has expired; however, only snippets of recent versions of modern editions such as the 1991 *How Like an Angel Came I Down: Conversations with Children on the Gospels* are accessible. Moreover, while not inclusive, *Google Books* is easy to use and provides information such as reviews, content lists, links to booksellers that carry the text, and other edition information. For university press monographs, *Net Library*, a product of OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), has limited free and subscription digital items available. Items for free are limited; libraries that subscribe to the service will have access to many of the major university press releases.

In addition to monograph coverage, some journal access is available from *JSTOR* and *Project Muse*. Of the two, *Project Muse* is subscription based, which leaves users outside of subscribing libraries without access; *JSTOR* follows a more open affiliation policy. *Project Muse* contains *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, and *American Transcendental Quarterly* is not available electronically from either service. Other major journals, such as *American Literary History, American Literature, New England Quarterly*, and *Studies in the American Renaissance* are available from JSTOR, with good coverage except for the most recent volumes. Other items, such as full runs of *ATQ* and *ESQ*, are available from the library subscription services EBSCO and Wilson.

If current trends continue, there will likely be increased digitization of materials related to Transcendentalism. However, the current trend is for the majority of materials to be designed for general audiences. If researchers are interested in utilizing digital material, then it is necessary for them to participate in editing, digitizing, and vetting of materials to ensure that they are of the high quality that scholars expect.

NOTES

1. I myself am the project director and developer of the *CDA*.
2. *Open source* is defined as the development of software that includes "distributed peer review and transparency of process" (Open Source Initiative). *Faceted browsing* categorizes objects in multiple ways and allows greater choice in navigation through data, often visually displayed.

3. In *double keying* or *double entry*, the data are typed twice and are compared by the computer to ensure that they match. Also, SGML and XML are metadata encoding types for texts.

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