

A Circle and a Dial

America's Transcendentalist Magazines

Several of America's most influential magazines were launched during a tumultuous decade in which young people rejected the previous generation's traditional, more conservative values, and embraced radical new approaches to politics, the arts, social reform, and spirituality. It was a decade of revolutionary change in America and around the globe, an age in which fresh thinking challenged the status quo in every corner of society. Above all, it was an era when the brightest minds of the emerging generation questioned beliefs their parents had taken for granted.

At the time, commentators observed that the young had never been less complacent or more disaffected, were dissatisfied with the present, had discarded tradition, rejected any ideas that weren't their own, and wanted nothing less than to change the world.

Whether their minds were social or poetic, they all agreed regarding the state of the world. It was a cold, unfeeling civilization, bred by commercial interests and isolation, a negative moderation, an excess of prudence, compromise, provincial good taste... It was timid, imitative, tame ; worse, it was mean and cruel.

The younger generation celebrated individualism with enthusiasm, praising and encouraging uniqueness in thought, action, and expression. Conformity and authority were suspicious *prima facie*. Young people rejected commerce and materialism and strove for self-reliance. What the older generation called good manners the younger generation scorned as hollow affectation. The same thing went for fashion—function trumped form. Young men wore their hair long and their clothes plain, although young ladies were known to add a dash of romantic decoration.

One parted one's hair in the middle and let the locks flow down over one's shoulders... A pair of overalls was the proper costume, a gray sack, corduroys... a red flannel shirt... The girls wore muslin dresses, with flowers and ribbons...

Issue after issue divided the country. In foreign affairs, many opposed what they saw as an imperialistic, "impolitic and iniquitous" war. The debate over race relations was even more contentious. In religion, growing numbers rejected dogma and ritual. Some people looked inward for spirituality, some turned to Eastern religions, and others joined the new cults and movements which seemed to be emerging daily. There was a sect for every odd notion under the sun: vegetarianism, polygamy, socialism, and many more. Reform was proposed for each segment of society: never before had civil rights, workers' rights, and women's rights been advocated so strongly. Reform of prisons, schools, and institutions for the disabled was promoted vigorously and with lasting effect.

Its luminaries called it a New Age, and experimented with communal living in a variety of forms. Their followers tried to live harmoniously with nature, and worked to raise environmental awareness. Some rejected materialism outright, choosing to live self-sufficiently outside organized society. For many, civil disobedience and nonviolent protest went hand-in-hand with progressive politics, including socialism and union organization.

Writers, reformers, and intellectuals of the New Age thought the traditional media were cautious, conservative, and boring, with shallow contents designed for the diversion of unthinking audiences. They preferred exhilarating conversation and rousing oratory to books, and their ideas flowed with an urgency that compelled them to launch independent newspapers and magazines so their thoughts could be shared quickly.

Readers who remember hippies, Woodstock, and protest marches can be excused if this reminds them of the 1960s. Close but no cigar—these were the 1840s, the prototypical revolutionary decade in which both iconoclasm and artistic achievement hit new heights.

In America, some of the most interesting, active, and vocal revolutionaries of the 1840s were the associates of Ralph Waldo Emerson—a circle that included several neighbors in Concord, MA, many friends and acquaintances in nearby communities like West Roxbury, Cambridge, and Boston, and even a few New England missionaries evangelizing on the western frontier. Together they drafted a fascinating chapter in the history of American periodicals.

Emerson once called journalism a distemper and claimed to have a “chronic case” of it. Judging from the historical record, it must have been a very contagious bug, and susceptibility may have run in families. Emerson was about 12 months old in 1804 when his father, Rev. William Emerson, became editor of Boston's *Monthly Anthology*, precursor to the *North American Review*. In the following years the virus spread to Ralph Waldo and then from one of his acquaintances to another.

The lasting influence of the magazines they produced stands in contrast to the publications' scant readership and marginal financial performance. As the magazine which Emerson directed himself, the *Dial* is the best-remembered. But other members of Emerson's circle launched several related titles between 1835 and 1870, including the *Western Messenger*, the *Boston Quarterly Review*, the *Harbinger*, the *Present*, the *Spirit of the Age*, *Aesthetic Papers*, the *Massachusetts Quarterly Review*, the *Radical*, the *Index*, and the first of several successor titles to the *Dial* itself.

Transcendentalism

Emerson was the best-known proponent of the movement known as Transcendentalism, which attracted growing interest as Emerson's reputation spread following publication of “Nature” in 1836, his 1837 oration to the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa Society known as “The American Scholar” and his Harvard Divinity School address in 1838. Transcendentalism's basic tenet was that intuitive spirituality is part of human nature and that every person can receive divine revelation transcending religious dogma and teaching. Transcendentalists believed that, in the words of literary historian Clarence L. F. Gohdes, “where the intellect failed to supply the necessary grounds for knowledge, ‘the soul,’ or spiritual intuition, came to the rescue.” Emerson said more poetically, “The walls of the mind's chamber are covered with scribblings, which need but the bringing of a candle to render them legible.”

In what another literary historian called a “curious distortion of terminology,” Transcendentalists differentiated between *understanding*, which is how they termed empiricism, and *reason*, which is how they termed intuition or revelation. Understanding was the product of logic, observation, measurement, science, and law. Reason was what the mind knew from its own powers, “an order of truth that transcended, by immediate perception, all external evidence.” Understanding could be taught, and was therefore associated with doctrine, ritual, and rote. Reason was God's voice speaking from within.

Transcendentalism was a movement of individuals and iconoclasts. Its adherents rejected custom and convention, especially in matters of doctrine, believing that, since spirituality was innate and not the product of ritual, the soul did not require intermediary institutions or books to communicate with God. As a theology, Transcendentalism was syncretic and nondogmatic, and inclined toward spiritualism and mysticism, especially in linking man, nature, and God. As a social philosophy, Transcendentalism was liberal and reformist.

It was a movement that took a variety of forms because its adherents drew from many different sources and put their beliefs into practice in many different ways. Historian George Willis Cooke wrote that the

movement had “no distinct limits, no phrases that defined it,” and that to its adherents it was...

...a youthful spirit of protest, an inclination to question and to criticise tradition, and an open-mindedness towards any suggestions that would enable them to lead a natural life, and one that should be earnestly ethical. The Transcendentalists were not a sect or a party in any sense; but they... shared in the faith that the spiritual life is a reality of ever-present power... It was characterized by its vitality, its earnestness, its sincerity... not friendly to the forms of piety when they were forms only... zealously devoted to what is inward and spiritual.

Many of Transcendentalism's earliest supporters were New Englanders with a Unitarian background, among them poet and feminist Margaret Fuller, reformer Theodore Parker, socialist George Ripley, bookseller and educator Elizabeth Peabody, and her mentor Bronson Alcott, a pedagogical visionary. Emerson and many early Transcendentalists were heavily influenced by the prominent Unitarian preacher William Ellery Channing.¹ The movement's leaders drew inspiration broadly, from German writers and philosophers such as Goethe and Kant, American social reformers, English Romantic literature, and Eastern religions. Transcendentalism had “no official program, no membership list, no rigid organization; and the participants often quarreled.” Referring to his fellow Transcendentalists, James Elliot Cabot once said, “No two of them precisely agreed what they would have.”

Cooke observed that as “the religious attitude of men who were fully realizing that they were citizens of a democratic nation,” Transcendentalism had some uniquely American characteristics. If a fundamental principle of the American political system is equal opportunity to pursue personal happiness, Transcendentalism provided a philosophical equivalent. Its proponents saw no contradiction in saying that spiritual intuition was shared equally by everyone and at the same time advocating individualism. Emerson believed that everyone should seek harmony with what he called the universal Over-soul, but “Self Reliance” is one of his most famous works.

In September, 1836 a group of writers and academics, among them Emerson, Frederick Henry Hedge, Fuller, Ripley, Parker, and Alcott, founded the organization that gave the philosophy its name, the Transcendental Club.² Hedge, a Unitarian minister who was later editor of the *Christian Examiner* from 1858 to 1861, was instrumental in keeping this informal group organized, and the gathering was nicknamed Hedge's Club because its meetings were scheduled to accommodate his availability. Hedge is said to have introduced the term *Transcendentalism*.³

The leading Transcendentalists were frequent speakers at lyceums, a forum that grew increasingly popular in the 1830s and '40s. It was a natural step to use periodicals, especially magazines, to reach a broader audience, because transcribed lectures often made excellent magazine articles. Transcendentalist historian O. B. Frothingham wrote that “the transcendental faith found expression in magazines and newspapers... Its elaborate compositions were, from the nature of the case, few ; its intellectual occupancy was too brief for the creation of a permanent literature.”

¹ Channing was also a direct influence on Dorothea Dix, who worked as a governess at Channing's house and later became a tireless reformer of prisons and institutions for the mentally disabled. Elizabeth Peabody was Channing's secretary, and so was Margaret Fuller (both discussed below). Elizabeth Eaton, another reformer, worked with Channing as well.

² The group's first meeting was held in Ripley's house one day before Emerson's “Nature” was published.

³ Another member of the Transcendental Club was the noted Methodist preacher, Father E. T. Taylor, whom Whitman described as “the one essentially perfect orator.” Taylor ministered to sailors, and his pulpit resembled a quarterdeck, backed by a mural of “a stormy sea, the waves high-rolling, and amid them an old-style ship, all bent over, driving through the gale, and in great peril.” Melville renamed him Father Mapple and featured him in the opening of *Moby Dick*.

The Western Messenger

The first periodical to feature and promote Transcendentalism was the *Western Messenger*, originally published in Cincinnati, OH and later in Louisville, KY. It was launched in June, 1835 by a group of young Unitarian missionaries in the Ohio Valley. The founding editors were New England émigrés, several of whom had ties to the Transcendentalists, among them James Freeman Clarke, a close acquaintance of Emerson's who combined a literary background with appreciation for many of Emerson's ideas. Under Clarke's editorial guidance the magazine published poetry by Keats; reviews and essays on Tennyson, Shelley, Wordsworth, Schiller, and Irving; and increasing amounts of material by New England writers in Emerson's circle, such as Fuller, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., Jones Very, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Emerson himself. Poet and painter Christopher Pearse Cranch, an associate of the New England Transcendentalists, worked with Clarke and contributed to the *Western Messenger*.

In 1841 Cranch wrote an article for the *Western Messenger*, "On Transcendentalism," in which he described the philosophy as:

...That living and always new spirit of truth, which is ever going forth on its conquests into the world... It is not the bare spirit of denial and doubt, but of yearning faith also.

As it grew more literary the *Western Messenger* grew less sectarian, and by 1839 the magazine had dropped its ties with organized religion. In 1840 William Henry Channing became editor-in-chief and the magazine openly endorsed Transcendentalism. Channing was well connected. One of his uncles was the much-admired Unitarian preacher William Ellery Channing, Emerson's mentor. Another, Edward T. Channing, was the third editor of the *North American Review*. William Henry was also Margaret Fuller's cousin.

Despite the fact that its liberal position on issues like abolition propelled it against the stream of local public opinion, the *Western Messenger* was moderately successful in developing circulation, especially outside its home region. By 1836 it had almost 100 subscribers in New England, representing about 10 percent of total circulation.

The Boston Quarterly Review

Another associate of Emerson and the early Transcendentalists was Orestes Augustus Brownson, a Boston intellectual with an exceptional capacity for thought and expression. In January, 1838 Brownson launched the *Boston Quarterly Review*, called "the most comprehensive of Jacksonian journals," whose prospectus opened with one of the clearest and most succinct statements of purpose ever written for a magazine—"I would discourse freely on what seem to me to be great topics." This sums up Brownson's intentions perfectly: throughout his life he undertook to examine an enormous range of topics, including (among many others) religion, literature, labor and social unrest, and politics, and he enjoyed a reputation as "a brilliant, outspoken, honest, but only partly reformed radical." A contemporary editor called him "the autocrat of the intellectual universe," and literary critic Van Wyck Brooks said that although he was something less than a sage, he was "something more than a journalist."

Brownson, who was as honest as the day, was a man of really imposing gifts... With a vigorous, inquiring mind that was anything but sensitive or subtle, he had a warm and generous imagination.

He published simply to share his thoughts and opinions, of which there were many. "I undertake this Review," he wrote, "for myself; not because I am certain that the public wants it, but because I want it." Elsewhere he said that his aim was "to startle." Brownson was something of a spiritual dilettante, embracing several Protestant faiths before finally settling on Catholicism in 1844. In the mid to late 1830s he grew

enamored with Transcendentalism, and although the contents of the *Quarterly Review* were dominated by Brownson's remarks, reviews, commentary, and essays, he also published articles by a number of Transcendentalists, including Alcott, Fuller, Parker, Peabody, and Ripley. The first issue contained a review of Emerson's "American Scholar" address.

Brownson's views were often unusual and his essays on labor and property brought him notoriety. Like many other Transcendentalists, he believed in improving conditions for the working class and abolishing slavery, but his proposals to eliminate both inheritance of property and the employer-employee relationship were radical even to the iconoclasts.

Brownson discontinued the *Boston Quarterly Review* in 1842, transferring its subscription list to the *Democratic Review* in New York. Following his conversion to Roman Catholicism he relaunched the publication in 1844, this time under the name of *Brownson's Quarterly Review*. *Brownson's Quarterly* was published until 1864, revived in 1873, and finally ended in 1875, a year before Brownson's death.

The Dial

The idea of producing a magazine began to interest Emerson in the mid 1830s, and the emergence of the *Western Messenger* and *Boston Quarterly Review* may have reinforced his thinking. In 1835 he wrote Thomas Carlyle in Britain sketching some thoughts about a periodical he thought could be named the *Transcendentalist* or the *Spiritual Inquirer*. Several other adherents to the movement, including Fuller and Hedge, also expressed interest in starting a magazine.

Brownson offered to publish pieces from the Transcendental Club in the *Boston Quarterly Review*, but the members preferred to strike out on their own because of what they saw as Brownson's more narrow philosophical views and political ideology—he was a strong supporter of the Democratic Party. Alcott wrote in his journal that the *Quarterly Review* may have been the best journal in America, but it still fell "far below the idea of the best minds among us."

By late 1839 the group had announced plans to launch a quarterly to be modeled on a literary magazine recently published in London by John A. Heraud, the *New Monthly Magazine*, which had impressed many of the Club members. Alcott proposed they give the same name to their quarterly that he had given his diary: the *Dial*. Fuller was appointed editor at an annual salary of \$200, and the first issue, a 136-page octavo, was issued in July, 1840. Subscriptions were \$3.00 per year.

The club launched the new periodical in order to promote their beliefs, provide an outlet for their writing, and improve on what they saw as the frigid, overly conservative approach of the "cobwebbed" contemporary New England journals. Noting the *Dial's* "novelty... freshness of tone... boundless hope and courage," Cooke wrote that magazines like the *Christian Examiner* and the *North American Review*

... were academic in taste, pedantic in method, and wanting in literary insight. The *Dial* did not wholly escape these limitations, but it took a new course, and one that was not only original, but initiative of better things in the future.

Cooke's views are a recapitulation of Ripley's, who served as Fuller's assistant editor. He wrote an introduction to the magazine on the wrapper of the first issue:

The purpose of this work is to furnish a medium for the freest expression of thought on the questions which interest earnest minds in every community.

It aims at the discussion of principles, rather than at the promotion of measures; and while it

will not fail to examine the ideas which impel the leading movements of the present day, it will maintain an independent position with regard to them.

The pages of this Journal will be filled by contributors, who possess little in common but the love of intellectual freedom, and the hope of social progress ; who are united by sympathy of spirit, not by agreement in speculation ; whose faith is in Divine Providence, rather than in human prescription ; whose hearts are more in the future than in the past ; and who trust the living soul rather than the dead letter. It will endeavor to promote the constant evolution of truth, not the petrification of opinion...

...The *Dial*, as its title indicates, will endeavor to occupy a station on which the light may fall; which is open to the rising sun; and from which it may correctly report the progress of the hour and the day.

Excepting Hedge, all of the Transcendental Club members named above contributed to the first issue. In addition the *Dial* featured some new names, including Henry David Thoreau, making his first appearance in print. This was typical of the magazine under Fuller's editorial direction: she agreed with Ripley's philosophy regarding "freest expression of thought," and when she felt their talent warranted the risk, she was willing to publish fresh and untried writers whose outlooks differed from hers. She described her goals to a friend:

A perfectly free organ is to be offered for the expression of individual thought and character. There are no party measures to be carried, no particular standard to be set up. A fair, calm tone, a recognition of universal principles, will, I hope, pervade the essays in every form. I trust there will be a spirit neither of dogmatism nor of compromise, and that this journal will aim, not at leading public opinion, but at stimulating each man to judge for himself, and to think more deeply and more nobly, by letting him see how some minds are kept alive by a wise self-trust.

She wrote Emerson, "I have had in view to let all kinds of people have freedom to say their say, for better, for worse." Unfortunately, this still didn't make for a complete magazine. In early issues Fuller was forced to fill empty space by herself. The first two issues contained 28 of her own pieces and she described her job as being primarily, "to urge on the laggards and scold the lukewarm."

Transcendentalism's early champion in Ohio, the *Western Messenger*, produced its last issue in April, 1841, almost coincident with the launch of the *Dial*, and in his valedictory Channing penned an endorsement of the *Dial*, kind words from someone whose own magazine was closing:

Believe not the Geese, who have hissed their loudest at this newcomer. Such foolish creatures cannot save the Capitol. The *Dial* marks an Era in American Literature ; it is the windflower of a new Spring in the western world. For profound thought, a pure tone of social and personal morality—wise criticism,—and fresh beauty, the *Dial* has never been equalled in America.

The geese hissed at the *Dial* from all sides. It was criticized by opposing camps: those who found the magazine too vague and philosophical, and those who would have preferred more philosophy and less focus on social issues and reform. Magazine historian Frank Luther Mott described its reception as "a mystification to the uninitiated, caviare to the general, and a butt of ridicule for the irreverent."

Alcott's "Orphic Sayings" column was an early target of critics and parodists. One Boston newspaper mocked the magazine's style: "Why is it that the proboscis of the individual man protrudeth itself so far forth toward the Infinite?" "Moonshine Wilkywater" sent this satirical letter to the editor of *Brother Jonathan*:

Sundial Ave. Feb. 1, 1842

Gentlemen of the Committee:

The wonder-sign of the Great Goslington's furibundity is world-absorbing. Quozdam yawns abysmal. Liontzed humanity, ephemeral though, clouds upon the time-stream of newspapers and peradventure may avoid fuliginous obliviscity...

In the *Quarterly Review* Brownson criticized the *Dial* as "too vague, evanescent, aerial." His views aligned with Carlyle's, who said the publication was "all spirit-like, aeriform, aurora-borealis-like," and with Parker's, who suggested that "a baby and a pap-spoon and a cradle" might serve as the magazine's symbols.⁴

For their part, Alcott and his supporters continued to urge that the *Dial* should lead American thought in new directions, unhampered by convention or tradition. "It measures not the meridian but the morning ray," wrote Alcott.

Emerson and Fuller seem to have been torn both ways. Fuller was vaguely dissatisfied with the first two issues, saying that they lacked the "eaglet motion" she had desired. Emerson commented to Carlyle that the first issue contained nothing "considerable or even visible" in philosophy, and wrote in his journal, "The *Dial* is poor and low, and all unequal to its promise." Yet at the same time he also wrote that the *Dial* "ought not to be a mere literary magazine," but should tackle issues like government, temperance, abolition, business, and domestic life, which suggests that he agreed at least in part with Brownson, Carlyle, and Parker. Given the magazine's willingness to embrace differing points of view simultaneously, criticism from multiple camps may have been predictable.

The public at large paid no attention to the controversy or to the magazine. Subscription sales were next to nonexistent: Fuller told Emerson there were only 30 names on the subscription list as they prepared to launch the first issue and there were fewer than 100 subscribers when the issue appeared. Circulation rose slowly, though unpaid receivables did not, and the magazine's high water mark in subscriptions seems to have been 220, which suggests annual revenues of perhaps a little more than \$700 when single copy sales are included.⁵

It might be added that not every reader responded negatively. Referring to Emerson and Fuller, Horace Greeley, publisher of the New York *Tribune*, wrote that the *Dial* "was valued as an expression and exponent of the ideas and convictions of these two rarest, if not ripest, fruits of New England's culture and reflection," and added that its influence could not be measured by the number of its readers. "It was like manna in the wilderness; and scores of them found in its pages incitement and guidance."

But on the business side, bad luck became the handmaiden of indifferent management. The magazine's first publishers, Jordan and Company, went bankrupt at the end of 1841, and bookstore owner and book publisher Elizabeth Peabody stepped in as business manager. Fuller, with her salary completely in arrears, was exhausted physically and creatively, and resigned her post when the magazine completed its second volume in mid-1843. With reluctance Emerson assumed the editorship, agreeing that the magazine should have "rotation in martyrdom." Thoreau subsequently stepped in as editor-martyr when Emerson left town on a lecture tour. In 1843 Peabody contracted with James Monroe and Company to become publishers, but they took one third of the publication's revenue as their management fee, effectively precluding any possibility of breaking even, and debts grew to \$300, which were ultimately paid from Emerson's pockets.

⁴ Edgar Allan Poe was a harsh critic of the Transcendentalists. He took a sharp, satirical swipe at the *Dial* in his short story "Never Bet the Devil Your Head."

⁵ The *Dial* had occasional success: Theodore Parker's 1843 article on the "Hollis Street Council" sold out the entire issue. Horace Greeley estimated, perhaps optimistically, that the magazine's total circulation averaged about 1,000.

The *Dial's* fourth volume, completed in the spring of 1844, was its last. A stack of back issues gathered moss in Emerson's Concord attic until he tossed them out in the 1870s. In its life from 1840 to 1844 the magazine published about 2,000 pages.

The *Dial* was a magazine produced by and for polymaths, and despite its poor circulation, the *Dial* succeeded in ways that in the long term have obviously meant much more than its profitability. Emerson wrote Carlyle, "I found it to be to a certain class of men and women, though few, an object of tenderness and religion." The *Dial* introduced the world to several great writers, including Thoreau; it raised the bar in literary standards to new heights; it published many outstanding artists of poetry and prose, including James Russell Lowell, Cranch, Very, and Charles Lane; and it provided a forum for the major figures of Transcendentalism, such as Alcott and Peabody, whose effects on American education were visionary and long-lasting, Ripley, who went on to start the Brook Farm commune and enjoy a remarkable literary career, and Fuller, whose *Dial* essay, "The Great Lawsuit" (later retitled *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*), remains a foundational document in American feminism.

With the *Dial*, Emerson and his associates really did build a better mousetrap, and if the world didn't beat a path to their door while they were publishing, it certainly has in the years since. Very few American magazines have attracted as much scholarly attention. The introduction that Fuller and Emerson wrote for the first issue came to be prophetic of the magazine's influence:

If our Journal share the impulses of the time, it cannot now proscribe its own course. It cannot foretell in orderly propositions what it shall attempt...

...And so with diligent hands and good intent we set down our Dial on the earth. We wish it may resemble that instrument in its celebrated happiness, that of measuring no hours but those of sunshine. Let it be one cheerful rational voice amidst the din of mourners and polemics. Or to abide by our chosen image, let it be such a Dial, not as the dead face of a clock, hardly even such as the Gnomon in a garden, but rather such a Dial as is the Garden itself, in whose leaves and flowers and fruits the suddenly awakened sleeper is instantly apprised not what part of dead time, but what state of life and growth is now arrived and arriving.

In that spirit, and in the same way that Emerson and other early advocates of Transcendentalism provided inspiration and content for the *Western Messenger* and *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, the influence of the *Dial* and the writing of its contributors carried directly into several other magazines.

The Harbinger

Carlyle once described George Ripley as a "minister who left his pulpit in order to reform the world by cultivating onions."

Ripley's guiding passion had always been utopianism, and in October, 1841—roughly the same time the *Dial* was launched—he, his wife Sophia, and 15 like-minded enthusiasts launched the Brook Farm commune on land purchased in West Roxbury, MA, after announcing their plans at a meeting of the Transcendental Club in 1840. The Brook Farm Institute of Agriculture and Education was initially organized as a joint stock company: each member was entitled to a portion of future profits as well as various services, including education at the commune's schools, one pupil per shareholder. Members were also required to assume a portion of the farm's workload in the expectation that joint effort would provide everyone with extra leisure time for writing and reflection. The commune raised money by farming, selling handmade products such as clothing, and through tuition to the schools, which were run by Sophia.

At its founding Brook Farm was not formally associated with any broader movement, but George Ripley

grew increasingly interested in a form of socialism known as Associationism or Fourierism, based on the writings of Charles Fourier, a French reformer and socialist. Fourier advocated communal living in groups known as phalanxes, and one of his most enthusiastic proponents in the United States, Albert Brisbane, was both a friend to Ripley and a contributor to the *Dial*. In 1844 the leaders of Brook Farm created a new constitution reorganizing the commune as an Associationist phalanx.

Fourierism didn't necessarily ruin Brook Farm, but it didn't help much. Brooks wrote that "something went out of the life of the farm. Ceasing to be voluntary, it ceased to be poetic." A few members left when the new system was adopted. Costs continued to outstrip revenues, an outbreak of smallpox struck in 1845, and a fire destroyed the commune's new "Phalanstery" building while it was still under construction and uninsured. The end came in 1847, although not before the group launched a magazine to promote Associationism and to provide news, thought, and commentary to the movement's supporters. This was the *Harbinger*, a 16-page weekly which first appeared on Saturday, June 14, 1845.

The *Harbinger* has been described as small in size, ably edited, and virtually unequaled among American magazines for intellectual and literary ability. Edgar Allen Poe, no fan of Transcendentalism, described the *Harbinger* as "the most reputable organ of the Crazyites." In addition to being well written, the *Harbinger* was handsomely produced: several Brook Farm members were professional printers and the magazine reflected their skills. Subscriptions were \$2.00 per year and single copies were 6.5 cents each. The editors claimed to have acquired 1,000 subscribers by the fifth issue, although historian Lindsay Swift wrote that total circulation probably never reached 2,000. Ripley was chief editor, assisted by Charles A. Dana and John S. Dwight.

Ripley's primary goal in launching the *Harbinger* was to achieve radical, organic social reform:

... essential to the highest development of man's nature, to the production of those elevated and beautiful forms of character of which he is capable, and to the diffusion of happiness, excellence, and universal harmony upon the earth. The principles of universal unity as taught by Charles Fourier, in their application to society, we believe, are at the foundation of all genuine social progress...

The *Harbinger's* motto came from Emanuel Swedenborg: *Omnia hodie stant provisiva, et parata, et expectant diem*, or, *All things stand provided and prepared and awaiting the light*. The magazine carried on the missions of several predecessors: the *Present*, a magazine launched by W. H. Channing in September, 1843 to promote social reform and reconciliation (described in more detail below), the *Phalanx*, a monthly magazine launched by Brisbane in 1843 in New York to promote Associationism and discontinued by him when he moved to Brook Farm, and the *Social Reformer*, also discontinued by its publisher, John Allen, when he joined Brook Farm.

While the *Harbinger's* stated advocacy was social change, it also had a strong literary component, and in this sense was very much a successor to the *Dial*. As magazine historian Algernon Tassin said, "The same spirit informed it and the same people wrote for it." These included Hedge, Clarke, Lowell, Cranch, W. H. Channing, W. E. Channing, and G. W. Curtis; and Ripley, Dwight, and Dana contributed as well. Ripley wrote in the *Harbinger's* prospectus that the new magazine "will be made a vehicle for the freest thought, though not of random speculations; and with a generous appreciation of the various forms of truth and beauty," an echo of his introduction to the *Dial*.

The *Harbinger* included poems, reviews, musical criticism, and fiction along with commentary on education, women's rights, capital punishment, and slavery. Its musical criticism, mostly written by Dwight, was outstanding: Gohdes said that it was "unquestionably one of the chief merits of the journal."⁶ Among other

⁶ In 1852 Dwight founded the highly-acclaimed *Dwight's Journal of Music*. It ran until 1881, and, according to Brooks, "set the musical standard of Boston... even led the musical thought of the country."

American writers reviewed in the *Harbinger* were Melville (*Typee*), Longfellow, Hawthorne (*Mosses from an Old Manse*), W.E. Channing (*Conversations in Rome*), Poe (*The Raven and Other Poems*), and, de rigueur, Emerson.

Horace Greeley, of the New York *Tribune*, was a strong supporter of Fourierism and a frequent visitor to Brook Farm. In March, 1842 he had given Brisbane a prominent column in the *Tribune* which helped promote Fourierism throughout the country, and in 1843 he himself invested in a "Phalanx" near Red Bank, NJ. Greeley had urged the Brook Farm community to launch the *Harbinger* in the first place and when the commune closed in 1847, the magazine moved to New York. The first issue produced there was November 6, 1847. Ripley and Dana followed as assistants to Parke Godwin, who was appointed editor-in-chief. The *Harbinger* was sponsored by the American Union of Associationists, and promoted by Greeley in the *Tribune*.

Following its move to New York, the *Harbinger* broadened its contents by providing more material of general interest, and increased its trim size. This brought growth in advertising, which had been sparse when the magazine was managed at Brook Farm, and in subscriptions (self-reported) of about 50 percent by early 1848.

But the growth wasn't enough to keep an enlarged weekly afloat. Gohdes speculated that its editors and contributors were too busy with other activities to continue their efforts, but added that it ended its days "in the midst of miserable wrangling." The *Harbinger* closed with the issue of February 10, 1849.

Ripley and Dana continued with the *Tribune*. Dana left in 1862, served as Assistant Secretary of War from 1863 to 1865, and became part owner and editor of the New York *Sun* newspaper in 1868, a position he held until his death in 1897.

Ripley succeeded Fuller as literary editor at the *Tribune*, and his reviews for the paper were extremely influential. One historian wrote, "In his thirty-one years as critic on the paper hardly an important American book escaped his intelligent estimate." Between 1857 and 1863 Dana and Ripley edited the *New American Cyclopaedia*. It had been a childhood dream of Ripley's to "make a dictionary," and as it turned out, the *Cyclopaedia* sold briskly and ultimately made Ripley wealthy. Ripley also served as a founder and literary editor of *Harper's* magazine.

The Present

We noted earlier that William Henry Channing became editor of the *Western Messenger* in 1839. Like his uncle W.E. Channing, the "Apostle of Unitarianism," he was ordained as a Unitarian pastor. He was appointed to Cincinnati's Unitarian church in 1835 but by the early 1840s William Henry had grown disenchanted with traditional Unitarianism, had embraced Transcendentalism, and returned to New England. He contributed to the *Dial* and many other periodicals, and launched a monthly magazine of his own in 1843. This was the *Present*, a monthly advocating social reform, especially "Christian Union," the name he gave his vision of reconciliation between various Christian denominations and sects. He wrote in the *Present's* prospectus:

We begin to perceive that through all varieties or creeds, through the thousand-fold forms of mythology and theology, through the systems of philosophers and the visions of poets, has spoken more or less audibly one Eternal Word.

The first issue appeared in September, 1843, and in its introduction Channing added that the magazine's goal was

...to show the grounds of reconciliation between the sects and parties, native and foreign, the controversies, theological and political, the social reformers and prudent conservatives, the philosophers and poets, prophets and doubters, which divide the United States."

It was a short step from advocating Christian Union to advocating social reform. Channing began a column in the second issue in which reform, especially Associationism, was the focus. The theme expanded through subsequent issues. Support for Brook Farm,⁷ denunciation of greed and selfish individualism, criticism of shallow popular literature, and revulsion at America's "robberies of the Indians, our cruel and wanton oppressions of the Africans" all showed Channing's desire to accomplish America's "providential mission to fulfil the law of love."

In addition to its focus on religion and philosophy, the *Present* published poetry by Cranch, Lowell, and W. E. Channing, among others, biographical essays, and reviews of literature and music. Much of the *Present's* content was reprinted from English periodicals or translated from German and French: works by Charles Lane, Victor Cousin, Swedenborg, Carlyle, Goethe, and Victor Considerant were reviewed or reprinted. Several contributors to the *Dial* were also published in the *Present*, including Fuller, Lydia Maria Child, Dana, and Alcott.

The *Present* produced seven issues before closing in the same month as the *Dial*, April, 1844. Channing told his readers that he was undertaking a biography of his uncle and lacked the time required to continue the magazine. Several historians have noted that Channing and the *Present* suffered from too little discipline, too few resources, and too lofty a mission. Lindsay Swift wrote that Channing had

...an overenthusiasm and lack of definiteness well calculated to wreck any project dependent on him alone to shape its course. He preached truths which, as Frothingham says, "were fundamental to him" though not to his hearers.

The Pioneer

James Russell Lowell was a neighbor and friend to many of the Boston Transcendentalists and a contributor to the *Dial*, the *Harbinger*, and the *Present*. He was agnostic when it came to Transcendentalism, but was an evangelist for good writing. He also saw how useful magazines could be in providing a broad audience for literature and criticism, and at various times in his life he found himself involved in magazine launches.

The first was in January, 1843, when Lowell and partner Robert Carter launched the *Pioneer*, a monthly dedicated to "American authors of the highest reputation." Their prospectus said the *Pioneer's* goal was

...to furnish the intelligent and reflecting portion of the Reading Public with a rational substitute for the enormous quantity of thrice-diluted trash, in the shape of namby-pamby love tales and sketches, which is monthly poured out to them by many of our popular magazines,— and to offer instead thereof, a healthy and manly Periodical Literature whose perusal will not necessarily involve a loss of time and a deterioration of every moral and intellectual facility.

With submissions from Lowell, Very, Dwight, Hawthorne ("Hall of Fantasy"), and Edgar Allen Poe ("The Tell-Tale Heart"), the *Pioneer's* first and second issues came close to clearing the high bar set by their prospectus. Lowell had bad luck with his health, however. His weak eyesight required several months of treatment in New York, and he left Boston shortly before the second issue was distributed. This overburdened Carter, and, helped along by a ruinous publishing contract the two partners had signed, the project collapsed. Although it contained stories from Poe and Hawthorne, the *Pioneer's* third issue was its last.

The *Pioneer* had nothing in common with the Transcendentalist magazines philosophically, and ignored political issues altogether. But in literary spirit it was very close to the *Dial*, the *Harbinger*, et al. Its launch in the same period and its founders' commitment to "intelligent and healthy" literature made it something of a

⁷ Channing has been credited with persuading the residents of Brook Farm to adopt Fourierism.

brother in arms. And sadly, the *Pioneer's* financial performance was on a par with the Transcendentalist magazines. Lowell inherited an \$1,800 debt from the project, which took him several years to work off.

Fortunately, his experience with the *Pioneer* did not dampen Lowell's enthusiasm for magazine publishing. In 1857 he became one of the founders (and first editor) of the *Atlantic Monthly*. He also served as editor of the *North American Review*.

The Spirit of the Age

Two bouts with the distemper of journalism did not immunize W. H. Channing against a third. Five years after the *Present* closed—and five months following the last issue of the *Harbinger*—he launched another periodical, the *Spirit of the Age*, whose first issue appeared on July 7, 1849. The new magazine shared some of the characteristics of both the *Present* and the *Harbinger*. It resembled the former by advocating what Channing now called “Christian Socialism,” which was his earlier notion of Christian Union by a slightly different name. The new periodical's prospectus said its editor hoped

...to reconcile conflicting classes and to harmonize man's various tendencies to an orderly arrangement of all relations, in the Family, the Township, the Nation, the World.

...The *Spirit of the Age* will aim to reflect the highest human light on all sides communicated in relation to Nature, Man, and the Divine Being—illustrating according to its power, the laws of Universal Unity.

It resembled the *Harbinger* in that it was published weekly and benefited from the editorial services of George Ripley, who managed several sections of the magazine, including “European Affairs,” “News of the Week,” and “Town and Country Items.”

The *Spirit of the Age* leaned more toward coverage of social issues than toward literature. Channing and Ripley enlisted a broad range of contributors that included Henry James, Sr., C. A. Dana, Dwight, Godwin, and Brisbane. Also on hand were Thomas L. Harris, who wrote poetry in trances, “magnetized by spirits,” and Anna Parsons, who provided “psychometric observations,” or character readings, by holding a person's writing against her forehead.

After a brief pause for psychic activity to begin, she would start to speak, while an attendant jotted down her utterances.

That Brisbane and Channing were “satisfied and gratified” by her readings demonstrates how eclectic Transcendentalism could be—and how accommodating to the ridiculous as well as the sublime.

As he did while editing the *Present*, Channing drew heavily from foreign writers such as Considerant, Fichte, and Sue. Poetry in the *Spirit of the Age* was mostly reprinted, and included selections from John Greenleaf Whittier, Lowell, and Tennyson. Channing himself contributed an editorial each week.

The last issue of the *Spirit of the Age* was April 27, 1850. Channing was poignantly straightforward in his explanation for closing the magazine. “The paper is discontinued because, in brief, I am heartsick—and it does not pay.”

Brooks wrote that Channing always seemed to think that the world's salvation waited just around the corner.

He was a self-tormented creature, earnest, hypersensitive, torn by doubts... irresolute, introspective, the victim of innumerable intentions, a talker and taker of notes who longed to be

“useful”...

But Emerson called him “the evil times’ sole patriot.” Starr said that while Channing may have been unpractical, “he was a person of singular purity of character, radiant faith in man and his divine destiny, unbounded enthusiasm, humble but unflinching honesty and courage... He lent strength to the causes he championed.”

Channing spent the final 30 years of his life in England, although he returned to the United States during the Civil War, serving for a year as chaplain of the House of Representatives. He died in 1884.

Aesthetic Papers

Elizabeth Peabody’s sister Sophia married Nathaniel Hawthorne, and her sister Mary was the second wife of Horace Mann, the noted educational reformer and advocate of common schools. Elizabeth shared the guiding passions of both brothers-in-law: she combined love of literature with enthusiasm for educational reform.

Beginning in 1825 she worked as secretary to William Ellery Channing and in 1834 assisted Bronson Alcott at his innovative and experimental Temple Street School in Boston. She wrote *The Record of a School* (1835) and helped Alcott write *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* (1836). Alcott described her way with words:

...For thou hast wrought so excellently well,
Thou drop’st more casual truth than sages tell.

In 1839 she opened the West Street Bookstore in Boston, a store and lending library specializing in foreign literature. Bookselling led her into book publishing, and her list included works by W. E. Channing, Hawthorne, and herself. Peabody’s bookstore became a central hub and gathering place for Transcendentalists, Associationists, and others looking for lively intellectual debate. Critics called it the Hospital for Incapables. It was also a site of Saturday “Conversations,” coproduced with Margaret Fuller—discussions and debates for women on historical and educational subjects including American women’s social role. These were an early milestone in the movement for women’s rights. The bookstore managed to sell 100 subscriptions to the *Western Messenger*, which in those days was pretty brisk trade for a periodical published more than 700 miles away. As mentioned above, Peabody’s experience made her the person Fuller and Emerson turned to when the publishing company managing the *Dial* closed, and, drafted as business manager in 1843, she was able to organize the magazine’s accounts and find a new publisher, which bought the *Dial* another two years of life. Peabody also contributed three articles to the *Dial*.

In early 1849 Peabody announced the launch of a new magazine named *Aesthetic Papers*. Its goal was to harmonize conflicting views in religion, science, and literature, and it was operated on a pay-as-you-go business plan with no fixed schedule of publication. In the prospectus Peabody wrote:

A number should appear whenever a sufficient quantity of valuable matter shall have accumulated to fill 256 pages. This will in no case happen more than three times a year ; perhaps not oftener than once a year...

Whoever is so pleased with the current number as to desire another is requested to send an order to that effect to the Editor, who is also Publisher, No. 13, West-street, Boston. When a sufficient number of orders are given to pay for the publication, including compensation to the authors, a new number will be printed.

As the title implies, Peabody’s goal was to publish art, not entertainment, and her cautious expectations about

the new magazine's popularity were probably justified. The first issue appeared in May, 1849, containing material by Peabody, Emerson, Godwin, Hawthorne, and Thoreau, among others. In all, six writers in this issue had contributed to the *Dial*.⁸

Thoreau's essay "Resistance to Civil Government" (later called "Civil Disobedience") appeared here for the first time in print. This piece, transcribed from an 1847 lecture, had a large influence on both Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, along with many others. As a result, Peabody's little magazine played a role, however indirect, in the liberation of India and the post-World War II American civil rights movement—demonstrating that even small magazines can have large and lasting impact.

Sadly, the premier issue of *Aesthetic Papers* was also the last. Despite its impressive line-up of contributors and its publisher's commitment to quality, only 50 subscribers were secured for the first issue and not enough came forward to justify producing a second. Peabody may have felt as Gohdes did:

It is a bitter indictment of American taste during the forties that a journal containing important works by three of the outstanding figures in our literary history should have failed as soon as it made its first appearance.

Peabody later became a leading proponent of the movement to make kindergarten part of American public education. She published a magazine on the subject, the *Kindergarten Messenger*, between 1873 and 1876.

The Massachusetts Quarterly Review

Theodore Parker was a Unitarian clergyman and social reformer, one of the critics who found the *Dial* too vague and evanescent. His comment that "a baby and a pap-spoon and a cradle" were appropriate symbols of the *Dial* reflected his desire to start a magazine that would tackle social problems head on, "with ability in its arms and piety in its heart," as he said.

Parker himself combined prodigious physical and intellectual strength. According to Brooks, he could carry a full barrel of cider. He read French, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Latin, Dutch, Danish, Russian, Coptic, Caldaich, Arabic, and Ethiopic, and was once found by a friend immersed in a grammar of Mpongwe.

In May, 1847, Parker, Emerson, and a dozen others gathered to discuss the prospects for launching a magazine that could be "the *Dial* with a beard." Some in attendance were enthusiastic; others were lukewarm. Thoreau asked the key question when he inquired whether anyone in the room would have difficulty being published in the existing journals. In company that included Emerson, Parker, Alcott, W.H. Channing, and Clarke the question was rhetorical.

But it didn't stop four enthusiasts from developing plans for the new magazine, which they named the *Massachusetts Quarterly Review*. Emerson wrote the prospectus and stayed on as a kind of celebrity figurehead. Parker was the editor and chief contributor, assisted by J. Elliot Cabot and Dr. Samuel G. Howe. Emerson's prospectus promised that the new magazine would tackle socialism, government, non-resistance, slavery, philosophy, literature, natural science, mesmerism, and demonology.

The *Quarterly Review* appeared for the first time in December, 1847. Over the course of the *Quarterly's* three years of life, Parker and Cabot wrote 22 of its major articles and most of the short reviews and notices. Other contributors included Emerson, Howe, Richard Hildreth, Henry James, Sr., Lowell and Peabody.

Opposition to slavery was a common denominator among the *Quarterly Review's* supporters. Several were

⁸ Emerson, Thoreau, J.S. Dwight, Ellen Hooper, Samuel. G. Ward, and Peabody herself.

members of the Boston Vigilance Committee, an active abolitionist group, and Parker himself had been arrested for harboring fugitive slaves.⁹ But in addition to its social commentary the magazine published thoughtful and erudite articles on many other topics ranging from the Post Office to the effects of the tides. The *Quarterly Review's* criticism was well-written and not any less pointed when the subject was an acquaintance of the reviewer.

Parker had a knack for inspiring others with an adept phrase. He wrote in the *Quarterly* that “democracy is the government of all the citizens, for the sake of all the citizens, and by means of them all,” which Lincoln borrowed for the Gettysburg Address.

The *Quarterly Review's* last issue came in September, 1850. The experience of running it disappointed Parker, who wrote regretfully in the “Editor's Farewell” that it never became what it was intended to be. Interestingly, the closing of the *Quarterly Review* is said to have inspired the launch of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Francis P. Underwood, a parishioner in Parker's church, worked for several years to produce a “reformatory and literary” New England magazine to replace the *Quarterly Review*, and succeeded finally in 1857 with the assistance of Emerson, Lowell, Holmes, and Cabot.

The Cincinnati Dial

The intellectual connections between Ohio and New England remained close through the 1850s: Parker, for example, managed to establish a substantial pocket of subscribers to the *Massachusetts Quarterly Review* in Ohio. But the western regions had been without a local journal of Transcendentalism since the closing of the *Western Messenger* in 1841. This absence was remedied in 1860 by Moncure D. Conway, who launched a second *Dial* in Cincinnati.

Conway was born in Virginia in 1832, graduated from Dickinson College, and became a Methodist minister in 1850. He read widely and the more he read of Emerson the more he felt drawn toward progressive Unitarianism. In 1853 he moved to Boston and entered the Harvard Divinity School. While in New England he developed acquaintances with many of the leading Transcendentalists, including Emerson, Thoreau, and Parker.

In 1856 Conway was appointed pastor of a church in Cincinnati. Four years later he launched his *Dial*, “a monthly magazine for literature, philosophy, and religion,” which first appeared in January, 1860. The Cincinnati *Dial* was an emulation and extension of the original. Arriving 20 years after its namesake, the new *Dial* was noteworthy, as Gohdes said, for being the voice of a second generation, the “spirit of the last group of Transcendentalists.”

The editor's opening “Word to Our Readers” in the first issue borrowed a few metaphors from Emerson's introduction to the original *Dial*.

“The Dial” stands before you, readers, a legitimation of the Spirit of the Age, which aspires to be free ; free in thought, doubt, utterance, love, and knowledge. It is, in our minds, symbolized not so much by the sun-clock in the yard as by the floral dial of Linnaeus, which recorded the advancing day by the opening of some flowers and the closing of others ; it would report the Day of God as recorded in the unfolding of higher life and thought, and the closing up of old superstitions and evils ; it would be a Dial measuring time by growth.

Conway was his own best contributor, writing 30 of the 200 articles and many of the reviews published in the

⁹ Alcott, Emerson, and Thoreau's mother all had special rooms in their houses for runaway slaves. Channing worked with the Underground Railroad in Rochester, NY.

Cincinnati *Dial*. Other writers published in the *Dial* were Caroline Dall, O. B. Frothingham, William Dean Howells, and Emerson.

Howells may have paved his way into the *Dial* by announcing its launch in radiant terms in the February 15, 1860 issue of the *Ohio State Journal*: "Let no one who fears plain speech on the most vital subjects subscribe. It is the organ of profound thinkers, merciless logicians, and polished writers." The Cincinnati *Daily Gazette* was less gentle. Four days earlier it had written, "Thus far the *Dial* has disgraced the name of the respectable, if erratic, periodical which it is a clumsy attempt to revive."

Major topics addressed in the Cincinnati *Dial* were emancipation (Conway was an avid abolitionist), women's rights, theology, and natural science.

Conway labored on the project for a year, producing twelve monthly issues of 64 pages each, but wasn't able to continue. He later said that the *Dial* was a casualty of the Civil War. He had hoped that the magazine might continue as a quarterly, but the idea never came to fruition, and the *Dial's* final issue was December, 1860. In a parting word to readers, Conway said that the Cincinnati *Dial* had represented "the principle of the supremacy of reason... the right to think, and not be merely tolerated." He told a friend that he wished he could "interest the rising thinkers and singers of this generation in the great importance of having a free and bold quarterly which shall be the organ of thought elsewhere suppressed." But Conway had found a more pressing cause. War and political action had begun to speak louder than words of philosophy or poetry. He left the West in 1862, and moved to Concord to edit the *Commonwealth*, a journal advocating immediate emancipation.

The Radical

By the end of the war the novelty had worn off Transcendentalism and through success the movement had lost the social cause which had fueled so much energy and common purpose—abolition. But the religious debate which sparked the original unfolding of Transcendentalism endured, and following the war a group of liberal theologians inspired by the founders of Transcendentalism laid siege to conservative Unitarianism. They were known as the Radicals, and their monthly journal, the *Radical*, was launched in September, 1865. Its editor was the sculptor Sidney H. Morse, assisted later by J. R. Marvin.

The Radicals rejected Christian fundamentalism and supernaturalism. They denied the divinity of Jesus and the exclusive authority of the scriptures, and believed in what Cooke described as "freedom and the broadest assertion of individuality." Their movement was a protest against religious orthodoxy, belief in miracles, and belief that God's word was confined to the Bible. Many of the contributors to the *Radical*, and the editors themselves, were heavily influenced by Parker. Among the *Radical's* contributors were three men associated closely with Parker: John Weiss, Samuel Johnson, and David A. Wasson. A *Radical* article by James Freeman Clarke put the editors' tenets succinctly:

The radical certainly considers Christ and the Bible as a source of truth—only he does not go to them as much as to others. He goes to science ; he goes to the Vedas (when he can find them) ; he goes to Emerson and Thoreau ; he goes to Theodore Parker...

In the March, 1867 issue of the *Radical*, the editor wrote that the magazine was "a medium for the freest expression of thought on all religious and social topics," resonant of Ripley's description of the original *Dial*. Many of the writers connected with earlier transcendental periodicals contributed to (or were reprinted in) the *Radical*, including Henry James, Sr., Peabody, Clarke, Emerson, and Alcott, who received more space and perhaps more adulation in the *Radical* than he had received in the first generation of transcendental journals.

One noteworthy attribute of the *Radical* was its focus on women's rights. Its contributors included Elizabeth

Stanton and Eliza Archard, an early proponent of equal pay for equal work, and the magazine carried a number of articles highlighting women's accomplishments and advocating universal suffrage.

The *Radical's* subhead was "Devoted to Religion," but its contents covered a wide range of topics, and the magazine's literary criticism was extended and well-crafted. As an example of their desire to look beyond the Bible for divine authority the editors covered Eastern religion frequently, though Gohdes wrote that their interest was "forced."

The *Radical* was no more profitable than any of its Transcendentalist predecessors. Its positions were "not calculated to make a financial success of the project," as Gohdes put it. E. Bruce Kirkham wrote:

Such a group, consciously iconoclastic, embracing Darwin and evolution, accepting science as the partner of religion, and urging their readers to probe further and further from the established comfortable beliefs, inevitably had to alienate what was not a large readership to begin with. When more and more writers urged a search to find a replacement for the Bible, more and more subscribers cancelled.

The magazine was forced to suspend publication for five months between July, 1870 and January, 1871. When he resumed publication, Morse freshened the contents, adding fiction along with a few other changes. In 1872 he organized a public offering of stock in an attempt to raise \$50,000. But the IPO was not well received and the issue of June, 1872 was the *Radical's* last. Although it never broke even, the *Radical* was read broadly, and its seven years of publication put it among the longer-running Transcendentalist periodicals.

The Index

The last periodical directly closely associated with Transcendentalism was the *Index*, a weekly launched in Toledo, OH to support the policies of the Free Religious Association, a group developing a "nondiscriminatory," nonsectarian religion that drew from all sources—Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Platonism, as well as Christianity. The Association was formed in Boston in May, 1867, and among its founders were Emerson, O. B. Frothingham, T. W. Higginson, and Alcott. The spirit and principles of the Free Religious Association owed a debt to Parker. In fact, many of the Association's charter members belonged to the West Roxbury, MA church Parker had led for 14 years prior to his death 1860.

The *Index* was described as a "fellow journal" with the *Radical*, and its editors pledged to work closely with the *Radical* to further their mutual beliefs.

The *Index* was launched by Francis Allingwood Abbot in company with David R. Locke and Albert E. Macomber. Abbot was a former Unitarian minister whose congregation in Toledo had endorsed the Free Religious Association's principles. Locke, who wrote Civil War-era humor under the pen name of Petroleum V. Nasby, was owner and editor of the Toledo *Blade*. He supported the *Index* financially during its first two years, after which ownership transferred to an Index Association. The magazine was run independently until 1880, then donated to the Free Religious Association. By 1873 the *Index's* subscription list had reached 3,800, and the readership continued to grow into the 1880s.

The *Index's* first issue appeared on January 1, 1870, and Abbot's prospectus pledged the magazine's devotion to "the cause of Free Religion." He said that the magazine's policy would be

...strong thought and plain speech. It will neither seek nor shun to "shock" the religious nerve... It will pay no deference to the authority of the Bible, the Church, or the Christ, but rest solely on the authority of right reason and good conscience.

The *Index* relocated to Boston when Abbot moved to Cambridge, MA in 1873. This brought the magazine closer to many of its contributors, some of whom had written for other Transcendentalist periodicals—the list includes W. H. Channing, Conway, Cranch, Higginson, James, Peabody, and Stanton. The magazine reported on the activities of prominent Transcendentalists, and reviewed and reprinted earlier works, including those of Alcott, Clarke, Peabody, Thoreau, and Very. Parker was memorialized in several articles, and Emerson was frequently quoted, reprinted, reviewed, discussed, and defended. Morse, the *Radical's* founding editor, was a frequent contributor.

In 1877 the *Index* became a battleground between supporters of Abbot, who believed that Transcendentalism itself had grown inflexibly doctrinaire, and those who disagreed. This debate raged for several years and ultimately resulted in the 1880 transfer of ownership to the Free Religious Association and in Abbot's leaving the magazine. He was replaced by B. F. Underwood. The *Index* continued along until January, 1887, when it was succeeded by a journal called the *Open Court*.

When the *Index* closed—after 17 years of publication and a cumulative loss of more than \$40,000—Transcendentalism had run its course... had “finally completed the circle and turned against itself,” as Gohdes put it. The natural human tendency to replace spontaneity with dogma won out, as it always seems to: by 1887 Transcendentalism had grown as rancorous and sectarian as the denominations it criticized at its founding.

In Retrospect

In the half century from the first issue of the *Western Messenger* in 1835 to the last issue of the *Index*, none of the Transcendentalist periodicals turned a profit and four died in 12 months' time or less. Circulation numbers were as unimpressive as the financials, and at least one Transcendentalist magazine never reached 100 subscribers. And so the judgment of history is conclusive: as businesses the magazines were a sad failure.

The judgment of history regarding their contents and contributors is a different matter. Although the magazines are largely forgotten, writers and visionaries such as Alcott, Dwight, Emerson, Fuller, Holmes, Lowell, Peabody, Parker, Ripley, and Thoreau obviously are not. Referring to the *Dial*, Brooks wrote, “It stood for a moment of history. It even stood for certain frames of mind, certain ideas and convictions that were to mark America perhaps forever.” The same thing was true of the other Transcendentalist magazines and of Transcendentalist literature as a whole. Historian Arthur Versluis observed that Emerson's early works were “startlingly bold declarations of independence from Old World cultural authority and historical Christianity.” Or as Brooks said of Emerson's followers: “They increased the self-respect of their fellow-craftsmen ; they won for American letters and art the respect that American letters and art had always needed.”

This made the Transcendentalist magazines an important component in a movement that helped define American literature—even if it would be a challenge to find another group of magazines whose dismal financial performance was so disproportionate to their long-lasting influence. All of the Transcendentalist magazines shared the mixture of success and oddity that characterized their contributors. Many of the leading Transcendentalists were brilliant, but all of them were human.

W. H. Channing, for example, is remembered as much for his vacillations and idiosyncrasies as his accomplishments. Starr observed that “due to a certain amount of temperamental instability, an unwillingness to confine himself to fixed forms and institutions, and especially to the utter unpracticality of the man, his career was one of constantly shifting scenes.” Nevertheless, he wrote several important books and as a result of his investment of time, effort, and money, his three journals exposed America to dozens of other important authors from around the world. He advanced the causes he believed in, which included

abolition, universal suffrage, and workers' rights.

By the same token, Ripley's naïve embrace of communal living looks in hindsight like a mooncalf's pipe dream. But although he is best remembered for his experiment at Brook Farm, Ripley's later accomplishments reflect his intelligence and social commitment. Frothingham wrote that he was "the prophet of a better dispensation, the critic of codes and institutions, the devotee of ideas," and another biographer, Raymond W. Adams, wrote that

... tempering his just reviews with gentleness, whether as social reformer, as editor and critic, or as encyclopedist, Ripley seems to have had but one end in view, the uplifting and enlightening of whatever part of mankind came within his influence.

And for another example, Alcott was lampooned in his own lifetime and to some degree has never been taken entirely seriously. But in the end his educational philosophy became accepted wisdom, and schools around the world have adopted his methods—without necessarily acknowledging their source—to the lasting benefit of generations.

All of this suggests that Emerson's comment that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," may have been inspired by the large minds of his inconsistent associates.

We mentioned earlier that Peabody's *Aesthetic Papers*, which counted its subscribers in dozens, gave the world "Civil Disobedience," and as a result helped influence the course of modern history not once but several times. In their short lives the magazines struggled, failed, and closed. But their content passed from reader to reader, from country to country, from generation to generation, and from culture to culture, contributing to a literary movement of lasting influence. What this handful of small publications accomplished was impressive.

- The Transcendentalist magazines gave the writers of the New England Renaissance a broad, national voice, and introduced several canonical American writers, including Thoreau and Howells. The magazines' reviews were often definitive and their contents were almost always erudite.
- Because the Transcendentalist magazines could be produced and distributed more rapidly than books, they catalyzed discussion, provided a sense of urgency to important social issues, and enabled their editors and contributors to present large ideas quickly, in small portions, over extended periods.
- They promoted a new ecumenical and liberal theology, broadening Americans' view of spirituality. They introduced Americans to new literary genres and systems of thought, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Romantic literature and philosophy from Germany and Britain.
- The Transcendentalist magazines not only chronicled emerging American philosophy, literature, and politics, but were instrumental in developing alternatives to conventional thinking. They were a conscious attempt to move beyond conservative literary strictures and measured success by their editors' American standards and not those of British or Continental periodicals.
- They were extremely influential in promoting and advancing social reform, including abolition, universal suffrage, socialism, and the rights of the working class.
- And finally, the Transcendentalist magazines proved to be a good training ground. Several

of their contributors, including Dwight, Howells, Lowell, Peabody, and Ripley, went on to launch other more successful publications, among them the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*, both still published. The *Dial's* later successor, published in Chicago (1880 – 1918) and New York (1918 – 1929), is frequently listed among America's most important magazines.

Lowell said that a poet's motto should be "the tongue of the people in the mouth of the scholar." The comment describes the Transcendentalist magazines well. They gave their readers outstanding scholarship, literature, and commentary in a voice that was uniquely American, and they set a direction for American thought in generations to come. As critics have noted, Transcendentalism "attracted eccentrics no less than men of genius," but

...its vitalizing effect upon American art and literature and, indeed, upon the development of American democracy as a whole, remains unrivaled.

References (*Bibliography follows*)

- ...rejected any ideas that weren't their own. (W. E. Channing in Gohdes, 93)
- ...it was mean and cruel. (Brooks, 181)
- ...with flowers and ribbons. (Brooks, 245, 372, 434)
- ..."impolitic and iniquitous" war. (Prescott in Brooks, 131)
- ...designed for the diversion of unthinking audiences. (Brooks, 132)
- ...a "chronic case" of it. (in Gohdes, 14)
- ...divine revelation transcending religious dogma and teaching. (Gohdes, 210 ; Cooke I, 7)
- ..."spiritual intuition, came to the rescue." (Gohdes, 10)
- ..."bringing of a candle to render them legible." (in Brooks, 314)
- ... a "curious distortion of terminology," (in Spiller, 350)
- ... "an order of truth that transcended, by immediate perception, all external evidence." (Brooks, 190)
- ...did not require intermediary institutions or books to communicate with God. (Cooke I, 18)
- ...liberal and reformist. (Cooke I, 14f)
- ... zealously devoted to what is inward and spiritual. (Cooke I, 38f)
- ...heavily influenced by the prominent Unitarian preacher William Ellery Channing. (Cooke I, 5ff)
- ..."and the participants often quarreled." ("Emerson" in EWB)
- ... "No two of them precisely agreed what they would have." (in Cooke I, 99)
- ..."men who were fully realizing that they were citizens of a democratic nation"... (Cooke I, 15)
- ...but "Self Reliance" is one of his most famous works. ("Emerson" in ALB)
- ... its meetings were scheduled to accommodate his availability. (Cooke I, 52)
- ...said to have introduced the term *Transcendentalism*. (Cooke I, 47)
- ...frequent speakers at lyceums, an increasingly popular forum in the 1830s and '40s. ("Emerson" in ALB)
- ..."its intellectual occupancy was too brief for the creation of a permanent literature." (in Gohdes, 13)
- ...a literary background with appreciation for many of Emerson's ideas. (Cooke I, 178).
- ...worked with Clarke and contributed to the *Western Messenger*. (Cooke II, 2)
- ..."not the bare spirit of denial and doubt, but of yearning faith also." (in Cooke I, 180)
- ...the magazine openly endorsed Transcendentalism. (Mott I, 658)

...100 subscribers in New England, representing about 10 percent of total circulation. (Gohdes, 37)

... “the most comprehensive of Jacksonian journals,” (Chielens, 77)

...“I would discourse freely on what seem to me to be great topics.” (in Mott II, 686)

...“a brilliant, outspoken, honest, but only partly reformed radical.” (Chielens, 77)

... “the autocrat of the intellectual universe,” (in Mott II, 690)

...he had a warm and generous imagination. (Brooks, 247)

...“not because I am certain that the public wants it, but because I want it.” (in Gohdes, 44)

...his aim was “to startle.” (Brooks, 247)

... including Alcott, Fuller, Parker, Peabody, and Ripley. (Mott II, 691)

...first issue contained a review of Emerson’s “American Scholar” address. (Chielens, 78)

...radical even to the iconoclasts, however. (Gohdes, 49, 66)

...also expressed interest in starting a magazine. (Mott II, 703 ; Cooke I, 57)

...he was a strong supporter of the Democratic Party. (Cooke I, 58)

... “far below the idea of the best minds among us.” (in Gohdes, 64)

...subscriptions were \$3.00 per year. (Mott I, 703ff ; Chielens, 127)

...“cobwebbed” contemporary New England journals. (Brooks, 365)

... initiative of better things in the future. (Cooke I, 56)

...“the progress of the hour and the day.” (*Dial*, May 4, 1840)

...minds are kept alive by a wise self-trust. (in Cooke I, 63)

...first two issues contained 28 of her own pieces (Chielens, 129)

...her job as being primarily, “to urge on the laggards and scold the lukewarm.” (in Cooke I, 64)

...the *Dial* has never been equalled in America. (in Mott II, 706)

...“ a butt of ridicule for the irreverent.” (Mott II, 318)

...“protrudeth itself so far forth toward the Infinite?” (in Mott I, 705)

... “peradventure may avoid fuliginous obliviscity” (in Gohdes, 7)

...“a baby and a pap-spoon and a cradle” might serve as the magazine’s symbols. (in Mott I, 705)

... “It measures not the meridian but the morning ray...” (in Mott I, 705)

...criticism from multiple camps may have been predictable. (Mott I, 705f ; Cooke I, 77)

...fewer than 100 subscribers when the issue appeared. (Cooke I, 84)

...annual revenues of perhaps a little more than \$700 when single copy sales are included. (Cooke I, 96)

... ultimately paid from Emerson's pockets. (Mott I, 707 ; Cooke I, 97)

...the magazine published about 2,000 pages. (Mott I, 707)

...“an object of tenderness and religion.” (in Cooke I, 94)

...“what state of life and growth is now arrived and arriving.” (*Dial*, May 4, 1840)

...“minister who left his pulpit in order to reform the world by cultivating onions.” (“Ripley” in DAB)

...“Ceasing to be voluntary, it ceased to be poetic.” (in Brooks, 374)

...first appeared on Saturday, June 14, 1845. (Cooke I, 187)

...unequaled among American magazines for intellectual and literary ability. (Cooke I, 110)

... “the most reputable organ of the Crazyites.” (in Gohdes, 117)

...doubtful total circulation ever reached 2,000. (Swift, 267)

...the foundation of all genuine social progress... (Gohdes, 103)

...discontinued by him when he moved to Brook Farm (Chielens, 163)

...when he joined Brook Farm. (Gohdes, 103)

...very much a successor to the *Dial*. (Cooke I, 186)

...“The same spirit informed it and the same people wrote for it.” (Tassin, 80)

...Dwight, and Dana contributed as well. (Gohdes, 107ff)

...“ a generous appreciation of the various forms of truth and beauty...” (in Cooke I, 188)

...women's rights, capital punishment, and slavery. (Gohdes, 111f)

... “unquestionably one of the chief merits of the journal.” (Gohdes, 113)

...first issue produced there was November 6, 1847. (Cooke I, 189)

...about 50 percent by early 1848. (Gohdes, 106)

...too busy with other activities to continue their efforts (Gohdes, 107)

...“in the midst of miserable wrangling.” (Gohdes, 131)

...the issue of February 10, 1849. (Cooke I, 189)

...founder and literary editor of *Harper's* magazine. (“Ripley” in DAB)

... the “Apostle of Unitarianism,” (Gohdes, 84)

...reconciliation between various Christian denominations and sects. (Gohdes, 85)

...“spoken more or less audibly one Eternal Word.” (in Gohdes, 85)

...“which divide the United States.” (in Gohdes 87)

... “providential mission to fulfil the law of love.” (in Gohdes, 99)

...as Frothingham says, “were fundamental to him” though not to his hearers. (Swift, 217)

...“a deterioration of every moral and intellectual facility.” (in Mott I, 736)

...the *Pioneer's* third issue was its last. (Mott I, 738)

... served as editor of the *North American Review*. (Wood, 67)

...“illustrating according to its power, the laws of Universal Unity.” (in Gohdes, 132f)

...who wrote poetry in trances, “magnetized by spirits,” (Gohdes, 137)

...“an attendant jotted down her utterances.” (Gohdes, 140)

...Channing himself contributed an editorial each week. (Gohdes, 134ff)

...“I am heartsick—and it does not pay.” (in Gohdes, 134)

...a talker and taker of notes who longed to be “useful”... (Brooks, 250f)

...Emerson called him “the evil times’ sole patriot.” (in Brooks, 251)

...“ He lent strength to the causes he championed.” (“Channing” in DAB)

...she worked as secretary to William Ellery Channing (Gohdes, 145)

...“ more casual truth than sages tell.” (in Gohdes, 145f)

...works by W. E. Channing, Hawthorne, and herself. (Gohdes, 146)

...others looking for lively intellectual debate (Cooke I, 148f).

... called it the Hospital for Incapables (Brooks, 229).

...educational subjects including American women’s social role. (Cooke I, 145 ; Brooks, 237)

...“a new number will be printed.” (in Gohdes, 147f)

... piece, transcribed from an 1847 lecture (Gohdes, 154)

...50 subscribers were secured for the first issue (Gohdes, 148)

...failed as soon as it made its first appearance. (Gohdes, 155f)

...the *Kindergarten Messenger*, between 1873 and 1876. (Cooke I, 151ff)

...“ability in its arms and piety in its heart,” as he said. (in Gohdes, 157)

...immersed in a grammar of Mpongwe. (Brooks, 175)

...“the *Dial* with a beard.” (Gohdes, 161).

...natural science, mesmerism, and demonology. (Gohdes, 163)

...Henry James, Sr., Lowell and Peabody. (Gohdes, 166ff)

...a common denominator among the *Quarterly Review's* supporters. (Gohdes, 173)

...arrested for harboring fugitive slaves. Gohdes, 172)

...when the subject was an acquaintance of the reviewer. (Gohdes, 166ff)

...which Lincoln borrowed for the Gettysburg Address. (in Gohdes, 180)

...it never became what it was intended to be. (Gohdes, 166).

...the assistance of Emerson, Lowell, Holmes, and Cabot. (Gohdes, 193 ; Tassin, 157)

...including Emerson, Thoreau, and Parker. (Gohdes, 196f)

...appointed pastor of a church in Cincinnati. (Gohdes, 198 ; Cooke I, 195)

...first appeared in January, 1860. (Cooke I, 195)

...the "spirit of the last group of Transcendentalists." (Gohdes, 208)

... "a Dial measuring time by growth." (in Clarke, 195ff)

...many of the reviews published in the Cincinnati *Dial*. (Gohdes, 200)

... "the organ of profound thinkers, merciless logicians, and polished writers." (in Gohdes, 200)

... "a clumsy attempt to revive." (in Gohdes, 199)

...twelve monthly issues of 64 pages each (Cooke, 195)

... "the right to think, and not be merely tolerated." (Cooke I, 197)

... "thought elsewhere suppressed." (in Gohdes, 209)

...a journal advocating immediate emancipation. (Mott II, 536 ; Gohdes, 209)

... laid siege to conservative Unitarianism. (Gohdes, 212)

...Sidney H. Morse, assisted later by J. R. Marvin. (Cooke I, 197)

... "freedom and the broadest assertion of individuality." (in Gohdes, 212).

...God's word was confined to the Bible. (Gohdes, 213)

... John Weiss, Samuel Johnson, and David A. Wasson. (Mott III, 78)

... "he goes to Theodore Parker..." (in Gohdes, 220)

...the first generation of transcendental journals. (Gohdes, 222)

...advocating universal suffrage. (Gohdes 225f)

... their interest was “forced.” (Gohdes, 228)

...“not calculated to make a financial success of the project,” (Gohdes, 215).

...“more and more subscribers cancelled. (in Chielens, 338)

...among the longer-running Transcendentalist periodicals. (Gohdes 215)

...14 years prior to his death 1860. (Gohdes, 230f)

...a “fellow journal” with the *Radical* (Gohdes, 229)

...readership continued to grow into the 1880s. (Gohdes, 233f)

...“ the authority of right reason and good conscience. (in Gohdes, 236f)

... Alcott, Clarke, Peabody, Thoreau, and Very. (Gohdes, 242)

...quoted, reprinted, reviewed, discussed, and defended. (Gohdes, 243f, 244ff)

...Morse, the *Radical's* founding editor, was a frequent contributor. (Gohdes, 238)

... it was succeeded by a journal called the *Open Court*. (Mott III, 78)

... a cumulative loss of more than \$40,000 (Gohdes, 235)

...“completed the circle and turned against itself,” as Gohdes put it. (Gohdes, 254)

... “certain ideas and convictions that were to mark America perhaps forever.” (Brooks, 271)

...“Old World cultural authority and historical Christianity.” (“Transcendentalism” in EUS)

...“the respect that American letters and art had always needed.” (Brooks, 484f)

...“his career was one of constantly shifting scenes.” (“Channing” in DAB)

...“the critic of codes and institutions, the devotee of ideas,” (in “Ripley” in DAB)

...“ whatever part of mankind came within his influence.” (“Ripley in DAB)

... “American democracy as a whole, remains unrivaled.” (in Spiller, 346)

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