



Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Essays

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On September 8, 1836, the day before the publication of *Nature*, Emerson met with Frederic Henry Hedge, George Putnam and George Ripley to plan periodic gatherings of other like-minded intellectuals. This was the beginning of the Transcendental Club, which served as a center for the movement. Its first official meeting was held on September 19, 1836. On September 1, 1837, women attended a meeting of the Transcendental Club for the first time. Emerson invited Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Hoar and Sarah Ripley for dinner at his home before the meeting to ensure that they would be present for the evening get-together. Fuller would prove to be an important figure in Transcendentalism. Emerson anonymously published his first essay, *Nature*, on September 9, 1836. A year later, on August 31, 1837, Emerson delivered his now-famous Phi Beta Kappa address, "The American Scholar", then known as "An Oration, Delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge"; it was renamed for a collection of essays (which included the first general publication of "Nature") in 1849. Friends urged him to publish the talk, and he did so, at his own expense, in an edition of 500 copies, which sold out in a month. In the speech, Emerson declared literary independence in the United States and urged Americans to create a writing style all their own and free from Europe. James Russell Lowell, who was a student at Harvard at the time, called it "an event without former parallel on our literary annals". Another member of the audience, Reverend John Pierce, called it "an apparently incoherent and unintelligible address".

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