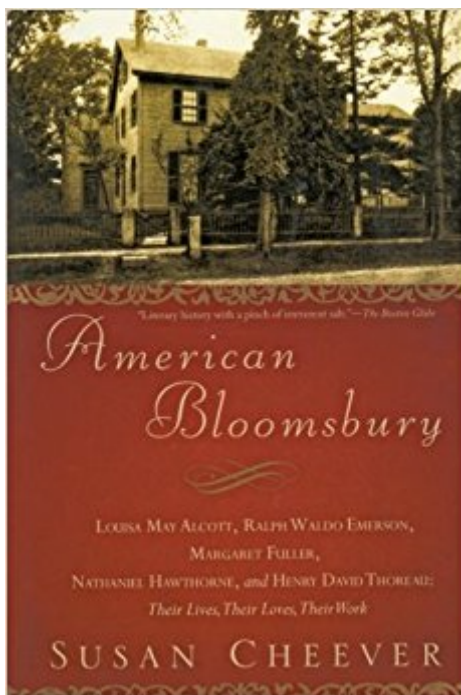


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# American Bloomsbury: Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, And Henry David Thoreau: Their Lives, Their Loves, Their Work



## Synopsis

The 1850s were heady times in Concord, Massachusetts: in a town where a woman's petticoat drying on an outdoor line was enough to elicit scandal, some of the greatest minds of our nation's history were gathering in three of its wooden houses to establish a major American literary movement. The Transcendentalists, as these thinkers came to be called, challenged the norms of American society with essays, novels, and treatises whose beautifully rendered prose and groundbreaking assertions still resonate with readers today. Though noted contemporary author Susan Cheever stands in awe of the monumental achievements of such writers as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Louisa May Alcott, her personal, evocative narrative removes these figures from their dusty pedestals and provides a lively account of their longings, jealousies, and indiscretions. Thus, Cheever reminds us that the passion of Concord's ambitious and temperamental resident geniuses was by no means confined to the page....

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This beguiling book is Cheever's exploration of the extraordinary cross-fertilization of creativity in Concord, Mass., during the mid-19th century, when Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne and the Alcotts lived as neighbors there. If it won't offer much new information for serious students of American literature, it does provide a lively and insightful introduction to the personalities and achievements of the men and women who were seminal figures in America's literary renaissance, and who, Cheever

theorizes, influenced the social activism of succeeding generations. In episodic chapters, Cheever describes their entwined relationships. Margaret Fuller was their brilliant, free-spirited muse and a model for Hester Prynne. Louisa May Alcott, was forced to support her family because her feckless father, Bronson, had no intention of doing so. Herman Melville briefly entered the enchanted circle through his friendship with Hawthorne. Cheever touches on their love affairs and intellectual platonic attractions, their high-minded idealism, their personal losses, their intermittent misunderstandings and jealousies, the years of penury suffered by all except Emerson and their full-fledged tragedies—such as Margaret Fuller's drowning. While Cheever sometimes indulges in high-flown speculation about their personal lives, she keenly analyzes the positive and negative ways they influenced one another's ideas and beliefs and the literature that came out of "this sudden outbreak of genius." 8 pages of photos. (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A request to write a new introduction to Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, writes novelist and memoirist Cheever, inspired her to explore the literary atmosphere of Alcott's childhood. A daughter of one of the free spirits intellectually supported and financially subsidized by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louisa intermittently lived in Concord, Massachusetts, where Cheever sets her intimate narratives. She explores the interpersonal relationships linking the prospectively famous writers Emerson drew in. In the transcendentalist florescence of the 1840s and 1850s, the aspirant writers tried out their ideas and idealism in conversation at Emerson's house, alongside Concord's roads, or afloat on its creeks. Moving among descriptions of such haunts, Cheever constructs a many-layered contemplation of this distinctive collection of American literary icons in their formative periods, and encompasses day-to-day events and the character of their attractions, as between a married Emerson and Margaret Fuller, whom Emerson lodged in his house. Emotionally warm and critically engaged, Cheever's history successfully evokes the incubation of Concord's literary glory. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The failures of fact in this book- on purpose or not- turn this into more fiction than fact; even the works the author cites don't hold up many of the claims in that book that they are supposedly included to buttress. With so many journals and letters available from the time you'd e better off reading those instead of this book if you want a sense of the people written about in this book.

Do NOT buy the Kindle edition of this book! Underscore... Emphasize in italics and boldface! To begin with, it's made from the early edition, which is rife with factual errors, reportedly corrected in a later edition. It is full of uncorrected garbled-type typographical errors -- unpardonable in a retail ebook. It also lacks a proper cover, using the title page for a cover, which I begrudgingly accept from free, public-domain stuff but not in a \$12 ebook from a mainstream publisher. When I buy a retail book from a bookstore, I expect it to be the current, corrected edition -- fully proof-read -- and to have a cover on it. I expect no less from an ebook. Raspberries to Simon and Schuster for producing it and to for selling it. Simon and Schuster are not alone. Many mainstream publishers are selling ebooks that are the equivalent of charging hardback book prices for a loose pages of an uncorrected proof run off on the copier at the Post Office. If publishers expect us to pay full-price money for ebooks and not steal them off the internet, they owe us a quality product, not some poorly formatted, hastily thrown-together, out-of-date edition.

I won't comment on the actual content of the book as it would require too much space. Simply put, the book reads like it's written by two different people. Cheever can write an immersive piece of prose which is enjoyable to read but within the same chapter, jar me out of a happy reading state, to try and decipher what she's just written. This made it difficult to get into and harder to find the will to finish the book.

Fabulous, fabulous book about the transcendentalists!

Started reading the book and a friend pointed out the factual errors in the book. Disappointed that there were so many.

I had high hopes for American Bloomsbury after hearing Susan Cheever interviewed on NPR. Some of what she wrote was interesting and new to me, but overall the book was not satisfying. It was interesting to read biographical details, especially of Thoreau and Hawthorne, but I felt that she was just scratching the surface and not really delving into her subjects' lives or works. She also has the annoying habit of adding uninteresting tidbits about her visits to the authors' homes or towns which don't really add anything to the narrative. I don't know enough about these figures to know what I was missing, but that didn't stop me from feeling that there was more to know.

This is the best, most human presentation of the Transcendentalist I have read & I am an avid fan of Margaret Fuller. This book really made all the personalities come alive with strengths and weaknesses. Highly recommend.

AMERICAN BLOOMSBURY is a study of the "genius cluster" centered in Concord, Massachusetts, 1835 - 1888, beginning with the arrival of Ralph Waldo Emerson and ending with the death of the last of the neighborhood's classic writers in the neighborhood. With the inheritance from a short-lived first wife from a wealthy family, Emerson largely supported friends like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, the Alcott family and Margaret Fuller as they launched their careers. They shared Transcendentalism and a passion for intellectual pursuit. As in most close-knit communities, they had their intrigues, jealousies and fall-outs. The hope and beauty of a New England spring day is reflected in their early ambitions and again in their salutes to one another at the end of their lives. The themes they drew on, the events they witnessed at home and abroad, and the impact of the Civil War articulate the greater American experience of the 19th century. Though I'm very familiar with the writers' works, I hadn't studied their lives closely and this was a good general introduction, often full of surprises. Cheever vividly evokes the personages and setting with a storyteller's skill. I did not realize how fully she developed them until I felt the pang of loss as their mortality set in. This is by no means exhaustive biography or history; in fact, Cheever moves through it rather breathlessly. Her style is intended for a very general audience, not an academic one. The book is not perfect. Although she moves from 1835 to the last death, of Louisa May Alcott who is only a child at the outset, Cheever chooses to order her information around themes or events in their lives, which do not necessarily flow chronologically. She kind of swirls around and around as she moves through the 19th century. In one chapter, even one paragraph, she may bounce back and forth between several years. The coming of the railroad is experienced more than once, though from slightly different perspectives. Poor Margaret Fuller drowns at least 3 times. Sometimes you are left asking, now when exactly is this happening? Her chapters are quite short, 3 - 5 pages, which makes for a rather breakneck pace through the facts. She provides a time line, plenty of research notes and citations and an extensive bibliography at the back of the book that help answer questions that may arise.

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