

BAAS 2022

**Sponsored by the British Association of
Nineteenth-Century Americanists (BrANCA)**

“Intersectionality and Social Justice Movements in the Nineteenth Century”

PANEL:

Deborah Madsen, Department of English, University of Geneva (Chair)
**Ethical Veganism and Intersectional Justice at Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands
(1843-44)**

Konstantinos Karatzas, Global Institute for Research Education & Scholarship
**Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and the Origins of the
Ecological Movement in America**

Nanette O'Brien, Independent Scholar

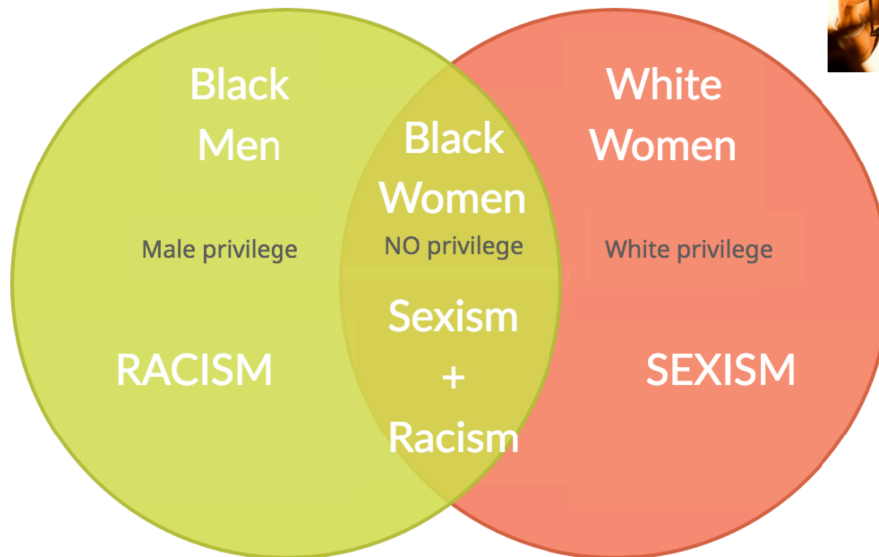
**Writing/Righting the Child: The Representation of Children in Nineteenth-
Century American Nursery Rhyme Texts and the Movement for
Children's Rights**

Olga Akroyd, Global Institute for Research Education & Scholarship
**“Keep Your Land and It Will Keep You”: John Randolph of Roanoke,
American Colonization Society and the Echoes of Nativism**

SESSION DESCRIPTION:

The session engages the concept of “intersectionality” coined by US legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to describe overlapping forms of discrimination –

“Intersectionality” Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989)



... specifically those to which African-American women are subject – that are invisible when viewed through a single analytical optic, such as sexism or racism.

Categories of inequality that intersect to empower and sustain each other can include: gender, sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, class, affluence/poverty, educational level, religion, (dis)ability, age, physical appearance, and species. The forces behind intersectional discrimination and oppression can include:

patriarchy, heteronormativity, white supremacy, colonialism, globalization, capitalism, and anthropocentrism. An intersectional analytical practice exposes the operations of systematic oppressions (and accompanying privileges),

promoting such social justice movements as anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-poverty, anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism, and the rights of labor, women, LGBTQ+, environment, and other-than-human animals.

While intersectionality as a theoretical and analytical concept emerged in the late twentieth century, the practice of intersectionality can be traced to nineteenth-century social justice movements.

This panel addresses a series of case studies to highlight the complex intersectionality of nineteenth-century justice and rights issues: ethical veganism (Madsen), the early conservationist movement (Karatzas), children's rights (O'Brien), and the American Colonization Society (Akroyd).

**“Intersectionality and Social Justice Movements in the
Nineteenth Century” BAAS 2022**

**“Ethical Veganism and Intersectional
Justice at Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands
(1843-44)”**

Deborah Madsen, Department of English
University of Geneva

This short presentation is embedded in a much larger project that I lead at the University of Geneva.

Funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, the project aims to assemble a history of ethical veganism in the US to the end of the 19thC.

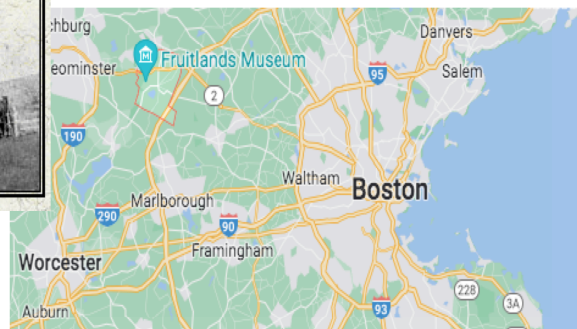
Central to the inspiration of this project is the figure of Bronson Alcott: his life-long practice of veganism, his writings that promote the refusal of animal exploitation, and his efforts to create a utopian community that would live out his principle of “doing the least harm possible.”

That utopian community was Fruitlands →

Fruitlands, Harvard MA



Fruitlands, 2015



Brief historical overview (Richard Francis's two books, one on Fruitlands, the other on Transcendentalist utopias, are essential reading for those interested):

Dates: June 1843 – January 1844

Origin: in 1842, when Alcott visited Alcott House – a school established on Alcott's educational principles by the “Ham Common Concordium,” an idealist community in Surrey, England.

People: Charles Lane and his son William, who travelled to MA with Alcott on his return from England; Alcott himself, his wife Abigail and their 4 young daughters; and community members - the only woman, Anna Page, arrived in August; Samuel Larned (extreme ascetic), Abraham Everett (committed as insane by family), Samuel Bower (raw food, naturism), Joseph Palmer (beard) and, Isaac Hecker.

The end: failed for two main reasons

- 1) lack of food – crops were sown too late in the season – and resources for the New England winter; and
- 2) an intellectual conflict over “family” between Abba Alcott and Charles Lane, who insisted on the principle of celibacy and an expansive understanding of “family” relations, which he called the “consociate family” that is communal not personal.

The political philosophy of the community was set out →

The Political Philosophy of Fruitlands

The “consociate family life”

letter signed by Charles Lane and A. Bronson Alcott, dated August 1843, Harvard Mass.; published in *The New York Weekly Tribune*, 2 September 1843

Motivation: “pure reform principles, or pure creative spirit”

Aim: “the union of Divine and Human Will” to create “a better social state” via lifestyle:

- simplicity in **diet**
- plain **garments**
- pure **bathing**
- unsullied **dwellings**
- open **conduct**, gentle **behavior**, kindly **sympathies**
- serene **minds**

Celibacy (after the model offered by the Shakers)

Property (both personal and social) was rejected as contrary to the “New Spirit”

Land was to be redeemed from “the debasing state of *proprium*”

Trade was to be rejected in favor of “hand-labour” and exchange independent of money in a subsistence economy
coerced Labor: both human and animal → slavery



Charles Lane
(1800-1870)

The fundamental philosophy of Fruitlands was set out in a letter written shortly after the establishment of the community - August 1843 by Charles Lane and A. Bronson Alcott,

Published as “The Consociate Family Life” in *New York Weekly Tribune* (September 1843). Reprinted in Clara Endicott Sears' compilation of documents relating to Fruitlands.

Incidentally, this letter provided much of the material for Louisa May Alcott's short account of Fruitlands in “Transcendental Wild Oats” (1873). She was 11 years old in November 1843.

SLIDE: lists

Bronson Alcott develops these principles in a more overtly Transcendentalist context in his journals and other writings →

The Transcendental Philosophy of Fruitlands

ANIMALS USED FOR FOOD

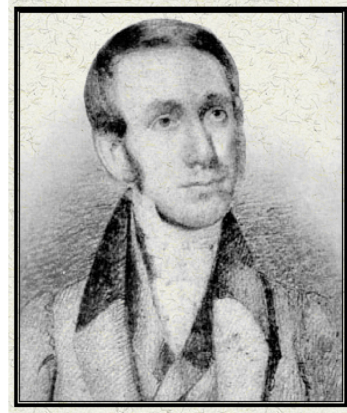
"It was the doctrine of the Samian Sage [Pythagorus], that whatsoever food obstructs divination, is prejudicial to the purity and chastity of mind and body, to temperance, health, sweetness of disposition, suavity of manners, grace of form, and dignity of carriage, should be shunned. Especially should those who would apprehend the deepest wisdom and preserve through life the relish of elegant studies and pursuits, abstain from flesh, cherishing the justice which animals claim at men's hands, nor slaughtering them for food or profit." (*Tablets*, 1868)

ANIMALS USED FOR FASHION/CLOTHING

"We endeavor to use no articles of foreign or slave production in our diet. In apparel we cannot as yet dispense well with cotton and leather, the first a product of slaves and the last an invasion of the rights of animals." (*Journal*, 11 May 1846)

ANIMALS USED FOR FUN

Alcott compares hunted animals to escaped slaves (later, Alcott's house "Hillside" in Concord was a stop on the Underground Railroad).



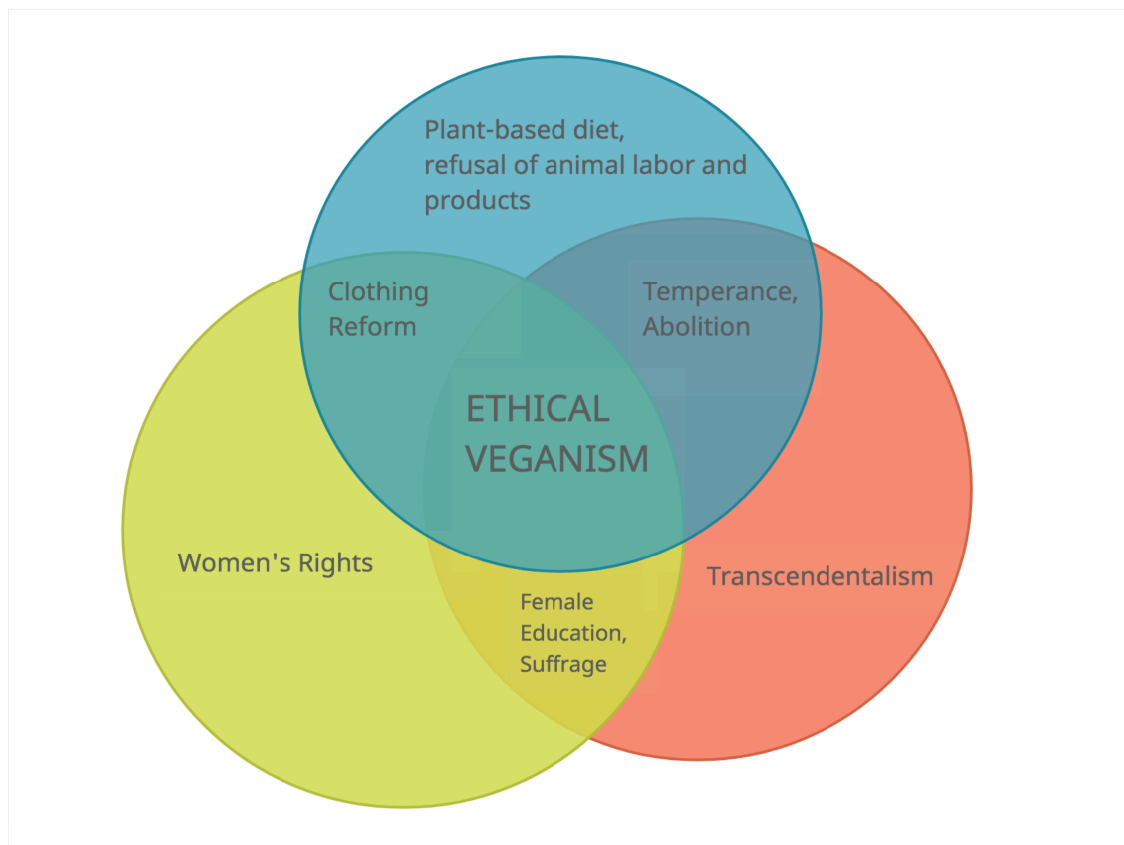
A. Bronson Alcott
(1799-1888)

"Pythagorean" was a common 19thC term for what we would now call "vegan" - a term that did not exist until 1944 (Donald Watson: Vegan Society vs dairy-eating vegetarians)

Alcott was well aware of vegetarianism and veganism; his childhood neighbor, second cousin (their grandfathers were brothers), and friend William A. Alcott, published the book *Vegetable Diet* in 1838 and in 1850 was one of the founders of the US Vegetarian Society.

Lane and Alcott set up a clear dichotomy between the figure of "Transcendent man" and the Carnivore that goes well beyond diet while maintaining as a paradigm the refusal to exploit or consume animals.

We can view their engagement with social justice issues intersectionally →



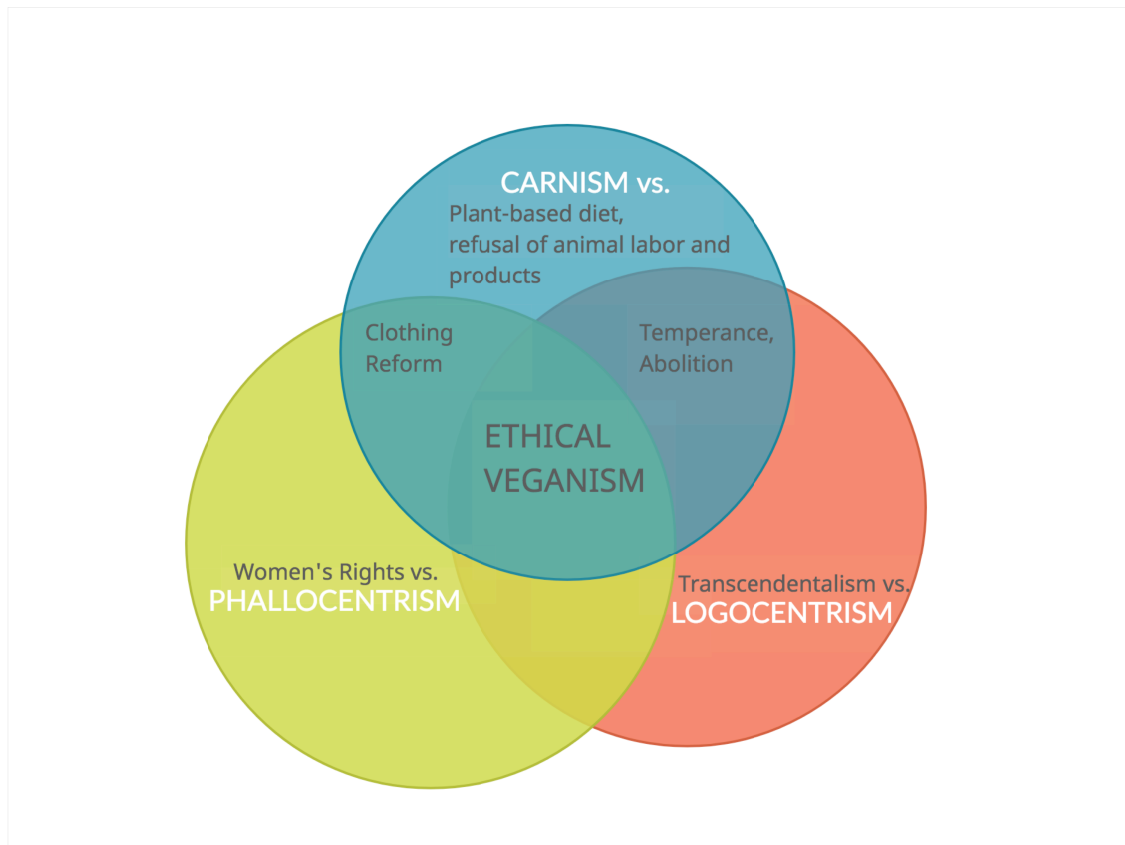
Women's Rights + Transcendentalism = Alcott's long-standing support for female education; he signed Lucy Stone's petition for **suffrage** in 1867 (Emerson declined to do so); the role of women at Fruitlands is described negatively by Abba Alcott in her journal but the ideal was of women's liberation.

Transcendentalism + Veganism = Support for **Abolition** of slavery was expressed by refusal of commodities created by slave labor (cotton, sugar); Alcott accepted the **Temperance** equation of rich foods and liquor with the excitement of violent “animal” passions and instincts; in this connection, **Pacifism** or “non-resistance” could be added.

Veganism + Women's Rights = refusal to wear wool or leather; the women at Fruitlands did not wear corsets made from whalebone, anticipating later demands for clothing reform by women's rights activists.

Alcott's pursuit of the “divine or Transcendental subject” converges on the concept of ethical veganism OR, in other words, the practices of the transcendental life intersect at that point which now is known as “ethical veganism.”

The radicalism of Alcott's practice can be appreciated if we compare it with Jacques Derrida's intersectional theory of Enlightenment subjectivity - “carnophallogocentrism” →



In the 1991 interview entitled “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject” Derrida defines

Carno-phal-logocentrism as the intersecting patriarchal dominations of women and animals that produce the sovereign Western subject.

The complex intersectionality that produces this (actually) simple concept is described by

Carol J. Adams & Matthew Calarco in their essay "Derrida and *The Sexual Politics of Meat*" (2017):

Logocentrism generates the “privileges and priorities granted by Western philosophy to the rational, self-aware, self-present, speaking subject.” Self-presence is rationality, reason, speech (the Enlightenment subject, possessed of full human rights);

Phallogentrism adds “the quintessentially virile and masculine aspects of Western social institutions and conceptions of subjectivity”; and

Carnism demands anthropocentrism, human superiority, and the literal as well as figurative consumption of flesh.

THUS,

Carnophallogocentrism creates the subject as “a fully self-present, speaking, masculine subject but also as a quintessentially *human, animal-flesh-eating* subject.”

Bronson Alcott's Radicalism

“Very few modern readers will readily place themselves in the ideal position to apprehend the high moral which animated and gave body to this social adventure. I do not find the ready response even at the Radical Club which the experience of some present led me to expect. From the extreme Individualists I could not, of course, count upon their acceptance of results so fatal to their notions of self-sovereignty. ...

We shall hardly have any like experiment attempted within my time by any enthusiastic extremist, and it needs some time to pass to set this endeavor in its true light.”

(Alcott, *Journal* 25 December, 1873).

The “fully self-present, speaking, masculine [and] quintessentially *human, animal-flesh-eating* subject” created by carnophallogocentrism is absolutely opposed to the transcendental “Divine” subject that Alcott hoped to create through his teachings in the classroom, his writings, and his experimental Utopia at Fruitlands.

Reflecting on Fruitlands, in the context of his daughter Louisa's sketch, “Transcendental Wild Oats” (published in 1873) Alcott wrote in his journal → QUOTE (in slide):

Even his biographer John Matteson in 2007 adopts a mocking and derisive tone when referring to Alcott's life-long practice of veganism.

Alcott promotes neither the rights of nature nor of animals : *Journal* (24 January 1860) : “Man's victory over nature and himself is to overcome the brute beast in him.

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