

REOPENING THE TEMPLE SCHOOL: REFORMING CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION
WITH THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS

by

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THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in English at
The University of Texas at Arlington
May, 2021

Arlington, Texas

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to first thank my Supervising Professor, Dr. Neill Matheson, for the countless hours he has dedicated to mentoring me throughout this project. Aside from the hours spent reading over drafts and providing comments and suggested revisions, Dr. Matheson was always available to meet via Microsoft Teams at times that were accommodating to my schedule. In a year where meetings were forced to occur unconventionally, his flexibility offered a grace I sorely needed during this busy season. Worth mentioning is that this has been a reflection of Dr. Matheson's consistent support since I entered the English Department at UT-Arlington three years ago. I can still remember the phone conversations we had when I was a prospective student coming out of my undergraduate work at Baylor. I am not exaggerating when I say that Neill Matheson is the reason I chose UT-Arlington out of the collection of schools I was considering, as I knew I would be in good hands with any faculty consisting of a teacher of his caliber.

I also want to thank the remainder of my Supervising Committee. Dr. Cedrick May is undoubtedly my favorite professor I have had the privilege of taking during my graduate work. His courses are truly the type that change a person for the better. *Early African American Evangelical Literature* was a course that not only challenged my faith, but strengthened it for the long run. The selected readings for this course were precisely chosen, and it was the work I had the privilege of completing for this course that began a two-year journey that ultimately produced this present thesis project. There was a time that Dr. May was my Supervising Professor, and it was his inspiring words that gave me the confidence that I could not only complete, but excel at this type of work. It was also his wisdom to recognize that, as the project developed from a focus on race towards a focus in education, pushing me towards Dr. Matheson would open possibilities for this thesis I couldn't have previously foreseen.

I have never had the privilege of taking a course with Dr. Desiree Henderson, nor have I even met her in person. And yet the feedback she offered from my prospectus ended up having the largest impact in terms of research, but also in the narrative I attempt to craft in these chapters. It was Dr. Henderson who directed me to writers such as Megan Marshall and John Matteson. Their critically-acclaimed works on Elizabeth Peabody and Bronson Alcott, respectively, provided me with the exact historical framework I was searching for. Furthermore, it was her suggestions that led me to realize that Peabody, and not Alcott, is the real central figure of this story – as well as how vital it was to further investigate how Louisa May felt about her father’s work in education.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the massive role Dr. Jim Warren played in this project’s completion. Dr. Warren does not serve on my Supervising Committee, yet he contributed in two key ways. First, during a brief conversation I had with Jim prior to class one evening, I was attempting to express the vague constructs swirling in my head with regards to what my thesis would be about. After patiently listening to me ramble, Jim, in his straight-shooting way, replied, “Well Rich, it sounds like your first chapter is about Alcott’s pedagogy, your second chapter is about his reform philosophy, and your third chapter should be about Peabody and cultivating education.” It was from this one-sentence response that the project gained a foundation to build from.

His second key contribution, along with the UT-Arlington English Graduate Faculty at large, was through their teaching. I thank all of the professors who challenged my thinking, critiqued and revised my writing, and expanded my studies as an English scholar. The present work, in some way or another, drew inspiration from each course I took over the past three years.

Their exceptional mentoring has left me not only as a better scholar and teacher, but a more holistic individual.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Ashley. Your grace and faith in me gave me what I needed when I felt overwhelmed.

I also dedicate this thesis to my son, Benjamin. May you grow to be educated by the Spirit, and not the world.

ABSTRACT

Reopening the Temple School: Reforming Contemporary Education with the Transcendentalists

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The University of Texas at Arlington, 2021

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A conversation surrounding reform in American education has been in play for two centuries. In 1834, Bronson Alcott's Temple School challenged traditional modes of education with his conversational approach in the classroom. His methods encouraged students to self-reflect on their relationship to nature, rather than conform to a standardized knowledge system common in public schools. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, his Transcendentalist contemporary and teaching assistant, published her *Record of a School* in 1835 to record Alcott's interactions with students and display to the public the effectiveness of their reformed approach to education. Fast-forward to the current climate in America, and one finds an educational culture where standardized learning dominates the scene, influencing reform policies and setting utopic expectations for public educators who must adapt instruction to appease the state, stifling their creativity and preventing a self-reflective, holistic model that would better meet each individual student. In the midst of this reform problem, this thesis proposes that by approaching education through the lens of these Transcendental reformers of the 19th-century, then contemporary perceptions of educational reform can be challenged and reimagined. Chapter One looks at the daily procedures of the Temple School in Peabody's *Record* and discovers that progressive methods of pedagogy not dependent on standardized structures prove impactful to student

development. In the second chapter, Alcott's less popular essay "The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture" is read in conjunction with a larger Transcendental text, Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," as a means of re-thinking federal reform practice in education. The project concludes by re-contextualizing Alcott's legacy in education through the way his work was depicted by the two leading women in his life: Peabody, and his daughter, Louisa May. Their work challenges both social and gender expectations for reform practice, influencing the way we perceive the cultivation of students as holistic individuals.

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Chapter One

“De-standardizing” the Standardized Student in Bronson Alcott’s Temple School

Introduction

In 1834, Amos Bronson Alcott brought his unorthodox schooling practice to the state of Massachusetts to combat the common method of rote learning in schools centered on lecture and recitation. Alcott’s conversational approach to instruction radicalized the 19th-century pedagogical field and sparked a wide-spread criticism from outsiders who found his methods ineffective, erratic, and “airy.” As a form of defense to his work, his teaching assistant, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, published her *Record of a School (1835)*, a thoroughly detailed record of Alcott’s classroom methods and instructional practices. Highly acclaimed, her book was met with positive reviews, and it largely rationalized Alcott’s methods, demonstrating how the humanizing of his students proved effective in the classroom structure and, briefly, exonerating him in the public eye. Unfortunately, Alcott’s own accounts of his practice and theory, namely his *Conversations with Children on the Gospels (1836)*, would fail to meet the high praise of Peabody’s *Record* and actually caused further public scorn upon his school. Unable to overcome the effects of such scrutiny, Alcott closed the school in 1838, never to formally run a school again.¹

Yet what about Peabody’s account ignited such optimism around Alcott’s school and what can still be gleaned of pedagogical theory from a failed experiment in education taking place nearly two centuries ago? In reference to the former question, a deep investigation of how Peabody novelized Alcott’s classroom (in literary terms, but also in conjunction with the originality of his work) is required. In fact, by revisiting Peabody’s book in this context, a fuller

and more persuasive explication of Alcott's pedagogical theory and practice can be arrived at – particularly by how Peabody goes beyond merely “recording the facts,” to capture a narrative taking place within Alcott's classroom. Her literary approach in the *Record* causes the reader to imagine Peabody as operating in a creative role, capturing the fictive mind of the reader, transporting them into the classroom, and breathing life into the Temple School, as opposed to more common interpretations that view her simply as Alcott's secretary. This causes further consideration to the importance of Peabody's position in her relationship with Alcott, as this chapter, and my final chapter, will expand upon. With regards to the latter question, the current educator is invited to question common classroom approaches and practices aimed at student success in standardized testing, similar to how Alcott questioned the rigid practice of direct lecture and student recitation and memorization of content. Thus, this initial chapter will concern itself with “de-standardizing” the modern child by means of harking back to the pedagogical theories and practices displayed in Alcott's Temple School.

First, it is imperative to define what is meant by the “standardized” and “de-standardized” student. The standardized student is the present primary and/or secondary public school student whose learning is measured based on their performance on a yearly, grade-appropriate test. In Alcott's period, a similar standardized learning environment could be found in the traditional schools, where students proved their learning based on their ability to memorize and recite scripture, attain the Latin language, or perform basic arithmetic. While these were undoubtedly valuable skills to attain, and the present standardized approach in schools causes students to display necessary skills in order to master the various levels of their required learning, a problem arises when considering how teacher *practice* and *instruction* are influenced by these measures.² We call this “teaching to the test,” and I confess that I have been such a practitioner in my own

classroom. For instance, an English STARR Writing exam calls for a specific genre of writing, with particular rules, and a limited amount of space (about one page). Tack on that the majority of my students classify as English-Learners, and I've often found myself succumbing to teaching writing formulas and strategies geared toward helping my students meet the minimum requirement to pass their end of course exam. In doing so, I recognize that I lost valuable opportunities with my students to stimulate personalized interests in reading and writing, as well as opportunities for holistic learning in all of my students, regardless of testing or language abilities, that would meet the core value of education: personal growth.

This essence for personal, self-growth was at the core of Alcott's philosophy as a teacher and hope for his students, and John Miller ascribes Alcott as a developer of the "soul" (135). It is from this perspective that I define the "de-standardized" student as the student relieved of the expectation to conform to the measurements of their peers, and where the teacher can address the personal and holistic developmental needs of each individual student without the pressures of raising said student to meet a particular test score. In practice, Miller identifies these methods of Alcott as "Socratic questioning, journals and autobiography, classroom circles, inquiry, imagery and that elusive quality of presence in teaching" (135). These are all methods I've implemented in my experiences in both the public and private high school classrooms, and each allowed students a de-pressurized environment to learn; however, more importantly, it allowed me as teacher to address real, human issues that prepared the student beyond the confines of school. While I do not mean to belittle the valuable standards expected of any school discipline, I do contend that Alcott's primary concern with the human spirit was a priceless contribution to the field of teaching. Additionally, given my station as a Title I, secondary English teacher, it is noteworthy that all references made to the contemporary standardized and de-standardized

student alludes to my experience, and other case studies, that address the current American public school student who has grown up in the American education system. Now, before proceeding to analyze Peabody's account of Alcott's practice, it is vital to contextualize both educators in their greater philosophical and academic spheres, in order to postulate where such radical methods originated.

The Theoretical Roots of Alcott's and Peabody's Educational Theory

The Transcendentalist movement was just on the rise when Alcott made his way to Boston. Emerging from a strong philosophical and theological revolution in eastern Europe, largely influenced by Immanuel Kant's idealism, American scholars returned from studying abroad, spreading Kantian ideals like wildfire in the New England area. It didn't take long for reformers in childhood education to adapt these new perspectives.³ As Philip Gura writes:

Although it may seem a long step from the complexities of post-Kantian philosophy to schooling a child, some New Englanders, excited by the idea that everyone, from birth, possessed a divine element, altered long-established pedagogy to cultivate this divine essence. They sought to replace Locke's influential psychological paradigm—which posits the mind of each child at birth as a *tabula rasa*... upon which sensory experience writes its lessons—with the Idealists' notion that the mind has innate principles, including the religious sentiment, a view of education that requires a different pedagogy (84).

Alcott learned of this philosophy through his readings of Victor Cousin, James Marsh, and Samuel Coleridge, allowing their works to inform his educational theories (85). He was welcomed into the Boston community by William Ellery Channing (whose 1828 sermon "Likeness to God" is widely read as the initial American Transcendentalist text), a minister who

would serve as a patron to Alcott's Temple School (86). These early Transcendentalists perceived this new Idealism as a call to a spiritual awakening, and sought to ignite a revival of the human spirit throughout society by reforming what they perceived as institutions (schools, universities, churches, and governments) operating upon faulty and misinterpreted religious contexts. This called for a reformation of society as a whole, and a hub of these reformers stationed in Massachusetts, with Alcott arriving to pioneer a new realm of education. This explains not only why, as we will see, his conversations with students focus so much on Christianity and spirituality, but also how conscious an effort he is making to contrast the traditional Lockean forms of education. Alcott emphatically denied the notion that his students were empty vessels in need of filling, and rather adopted a pedagogical methodology that sought to extract the spiritual genius from within his students.

Peabody became immersed in these new philosophies through her introduction to Johann Gottfried Herder's commentaries on the Old Testament. In her analysis of his work, she interpreted a poetic nature to the Old Testament passages and, whereas Alcott was drawn in by theories of education, Peabody was convinced by a theory of aesthetic language within scripture that was inspired, allegorically, through nature (Gura 41). In Peabody's analysis of Herder's work, Gura asserts that:

She regarded primitive man as an original poet who named everything around him through the interaction of his instinctual speech and his environment. Originally, there was a reason why such a word meant such a thing, a position radically opposed to Locke's notion of the arbitrariness of language. Peabody welcomed Herder's suggestion that if one went back far enough in the study of a language, he not only located a

tongue's original roots but also could ascertain how these roots themselves were derived from nature (42).

Important here is how Peabody's interpretation of language led her to believe that all language derived from primitive man's experience with nature. Language was not something inscribed into a "blank mind" of man, but rather mankind's inherent response to the world around them. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that as Peabody ventured into the profession of education, her theories of language laid out in her scholarly work would translate over to a belief that students learn through their exposure to nature, and that each individual student possessed a primal intellect that could be coerced and stimulated through teacher guidance.⁴ It is no wonder that Peabody would be drawn to working with Alcott upon witnessing his classroom practices.

Such work gained Peabody an enormous amount of respect and established her in the Transcendentalist circle, as she continued to write, review, and promote the works of her peers.⁵ Gura notes how when she came on as Alcott's assistant in 1834, she was able to use many of her Transcendentalist and reformer contacts "to forward her employer's reputation among Boston's luminaries" (Gura 88). Alcott, through his connections with Channing as well, soon fell in with the likes of Emerson, Thoreau, and George Ripley as the "Transcendentalist Club" was igniting what has come to be known as America's first philosophical movement. In relation to major thinkers like Thoreau, Jane Duran notes that Alcott is "most concerned about the education of the mind that comes from a close perusal not simply of nature, but of everyday circumstances" and that while Thoreau "takes his journey down the river metaphorically for our greater and longer journey, Alcott wants our interactions to themselves be the sources of our education" (Duran 232). This falls in line with Gura's assertion throughout his book that while Emerson and Thoreau were concerned with the self-reliant, individualist shift of American society and

philosophy, reformers like Alcott and Peabody saw the value of serving the community through education so as to pass on these ideals to future generations, liberating them from the old traditions.

Yet it is important to note that this self-reliant culture is a vital part of what drives Alcott's and Peabody's philosophy. In her biographic look at Elizabeth and her sisters,⁶ Megan Marshall stresses the solitude Peabody endured striving to earn respect as a female scholar beyond her profession as a schoolroom teacher. Tracing back to her early days in Boston, Marshall notes that despite Elizabeth's tutelage from the likes of Emerson, and her friendship with the philosopher Thoreau, much of her education was self-endowed. Marshall stresses the "pleasure" and "feeling of energy" Peabody felt toward her scholarly pursuits, and that despite increasing pressure to help provide for her struggling, impoverished family through her humble teaching salary, she still found a renewed sense of purpose in her scholarly and philosophical pursuits (129). Marshall's historic look into Peabody's life is significant in this context because it emphasizes the isolation Peabody surely endured early in her scholarly pursuits, yet through these experiences, she found, perhaps by an individualistic self-determination, the necessary means to educate and reform herself, and by extension, a calling to reform and build up her community. Beyond her work to reform child education, her association with, (and hosting of) Margaret Fuller's regular conversations served as a form of adult education that challenged traditional philosophies and dialogues circulating the community. Additionally, her work as editor and publisher of *The Dial* offered another outlet by which she could publish her theories, and those of her comrades, to a wider audience. I reference Marshall in this light, because I believe this perspective demonstrates that the scholar Peabody found within herself was the same scholar she wanted to introduce within each of her students. Yet in this respect, she found that

her reformer compatriots and herself were vastly overwhelmed by both the pedagogical and philosophical state of public education at the time.

Constructing the 19th-Century Student

Before getting to Alcott's and Peabody's classroom, I want to address the state of the nineteenth-century student. First, it should be noted how American education was birthed at the height of an Enlightenment era in which the term "education" can simply be the matter of providing knowledge for informative purposes. In the eighteenth century, this became a more scientific term, concerned with the understanding of nature (both human and environmental) and the predictability of its methods. Essentially, scholars and philosophers of this movement sought an objective and observatory interpretation of the world (Alfonso 31),⁷ effectively seeking to pass on to its students a "this is the way it is" or a "this is how it works" education. In other words, students of this early era were taught reason based on the common, sensory rules of the world they inhabited. This was an era before student intuition was emphasized or accepted by teachers as an important human faculty or valid component of education, and its critics were those philosophers bringing on the Romantic era toward the nineteenth-century.

Patricia Crain explains that at the end of the eighteenth-century, Noah Webster "called for a systematic public education, whose imagined infant scholar would embody national memory." Based on Noah Webster's description of this proposed child scholar, Crain notes that the child would become "a ventriloquist of revolutionary history and hagiography and an encyclopedia of patriotic narrative" (Crain 55).⁸ Essentially, this displays a major push for establishing an education system as a means of advancing an American historical and cultural institution of learning. The implications here are explicitly political, yet as my second chapter will address matters of politics, what is important here is how Webster describes what is

produced in the child scholar's learning. This is not the description of the child being inspired to explore and discover the world around them, being molded as a wholesome and functioning individual in the careful hands of a certified teacher or scholar. Rather, hypocritically, this description embodies a de-liberalized education in which the child scholar must conform to the mold his or her country expects of them. As Crain points out, this ventriloquist act only teaches the student to regurgitate a specific output mandated, scripted, and fitted by those authoritative figures whose future they are entrusted to. Ironically, however, while Alcott comes along in the nineteenth century seeking to unshackle and revive the child scholar from this oppressive system of learning, it is this ventriloquism method of learning which critics will accuse Alcott of.

Similar to Crain's emphasis on alphabetization and literacy as the foundational forms of child education, Karen Sanchez-Eppler emphasizes child-literacy as the driving force behind education in early America. In her own contextualization of Webster's reasoning for education, Sanchez-Eppler stresses how early Americans perceived literacy as a form of virtue, ranging from "spiritual to republican concerns," and essentially improved the morality of a child (6). This influenced how specific pedagogical texts, such as *The New England Primer* and *Webster's American Spelling Book*, were composed in order to indoctrinate their readers with "self-consciously American virtues – honesty, industry, independence, and piety... faith, patriotism, and economic success." Such a system clearly raises warning signs, as Sanchez-Eppler points out criticism that prescribes these nationalistic-moralistic views to contributing to public classrooms that were "generally punitive... with birch rods, public humiliations, and obsessive drilling of dull facts" (7) and largely diminishing a child's enthusiasm to learn to read, much less to strive toward other areas of learning. In fact, such harsh, disciplinarian environments of the early American classrooms were in themselves conforming mechanisms that oppressed and broke

down the child, forcing them into a submission of the authoritative instructor. As we will see, this was a practice both Alcott and Peabody would radically transform, not only in their unique disciplinarian approach, but in how they conversationally promote the child to the status of the instructor.

However, Sanchez-Eppler advances the problem by addressing the case of the African-American child during this time period. She references *The Memoir of James Jackson*, an 1833 account of a young, African-American child who yearns to learn to read because of the implied moral growth attached to a child that reads. She attaches to this yearning for morality through education a feeling of anxiety for the child, originating “in the outlawing of slave literacy, and the violence that met the schooling of free blacks in the North as well as in the South” (8), assuming that, even at the birth of America, there existed a feeling of fear amongst both free and enslaved peoples that, should they be withheld the opportunity of education in this new country, they would quickly fall behind, not only by academic means, but, as referenced here, both morally and spiritually. As Sanchez-Eppler concludes regarding *The Memoir of James Jackson*, “in the context of other school texts is the extent of its conformity, despite racial difference: for a mid-nineteenth-century American child to read is to be ‘good,’ and such goodness is always anxious” (9). This pressure to read, and the anxiety that accompanies such pressure, felt by the mid-nineteenth century child, also speaks to the pressures and anxieties of falling short of a perceived measure or standard, a feeling modern students deal with regularly through standardized assessments.

Thus, the problem of diversity in American education was present from the beginning, and an analysis of the de-standardized student in Alcott’s classroom must take this serious question into account. Given that the majority of Alcott’s and Peabody’s students consisted of

the children of their academic and social patrons, it is unlikely that their classroom was very diverse. This raises another criticism that I will later deal with, but for the purposes of this chapter, the present question deals with the pedagogical methods implemented in de-standardizing students who, in Alcott's and Peabody's time, were accustomed to aforementioned, conforming approaches. However, it is still vital to recognize how the necessity of an education spoke to all races and classes of peoples during Alcott's and Peabody's era, whether for spiritual, moral, or practical means. It is equally pertinent to note the present diversity question in contemporary education, and question why certain students are still expected to conform to a standard, and others are, arguably, offered more opportunity by means of a more liberal and open method of educating. Therefore, as I enter into Alcott's and Peabody's classroom, it will be vital to question not only what the implications of what they are attempting are for their time period, but to concurrently question how those implications travel through time to address the problems in our present epoch of education.

Inside the Temple School Classroom

As any seasoned teacher will tell you, the organization of a classroom is crucial to the creation of an effective learning environment. An analysis of how Alcott sought to reform the standardized student of his era, therefore, must begin at how he set up his classroom. Peabody begins her *Record of a School* in this way, describing Alcott's own semi-circle table, out of which, around the outer edges, smaller desks orbited him, making him close and accessible during class conversation. Around the perimeter of the room, along the walls, individual desks were set up in a manner that no student should have to look at another during individual work time. Peabody's own desk was at the farther side of the room, a small figurine of Atlas crushed under the weight of the world on her desk—perhaps foreshadowing the burden Alcott and

Peabody were embarking upon in this new venture. Yet their outlook was hopeful. Peabody notes that “great advantages have been found to arise from this room; every part of which speaks the thoughts of Genius. It is a silent reproach upon rudeness” (*Record*, 1-2).

This latter comment appears to read as a rebuke upon the traditional classroom environment, normally consisting of desks or tables aligned in straight rows, and all students facing the same direction. This is a common secondary classroom layout even for today, highlighting just how bizarre and out of place Alcott’s setup would appear in his own time. Yet it is clear that the structure of his own table, with student desks orbiting around him as if he were a living source, or wellspring, of knowledge and genius that students required for life, is designed in a way that suits his Socratic, conversational style. Ultimately, what I want to stress here off the bat, is that the nineteenth-century, standardized student is, in a sense, de-standardized merely by their positioning in Alcott’s room. Here, they are not forced to sit in a line, working through a systematic institution of “factory” learning. Rather, they are seated either in a circle group, a position which better equalizes them with their peers, or they are isolated in a space that promotes complete focus and concentration on their personal work, removing them from the society of their classmates so that they can harness their inner genius—a scenario quite familiar to the transcendental practitioner.

I argue that these first days within Peabody’s *Record* of the Temple School illustrate a de-standardizing process for students standardized by a hitherto Enlightenment education. For instance, on the first day of class, Alcott immediately institutes a Socratic exercise by inquiring each student seated around his table as to the meaning, or purpose, of education. By construction of conversation, the students conclude with Alcott that “they came to learn to feel rightly, to think rightly, and to act rightly.” They proceed to discuss with Alcott an agreeable expectation

for discipline at school, one agreed to by not only the instructors, but the students as well.

Peabody, in summation of witnessing this first interaction, notes that “simple as all this seems, it would hardly be believed what an evident exercise it was to these children, to be led of themselves to form and express these conceptions and few steps of reasoning” and concludes that the first day of instruction “seemed to be a combination of quieting influences, with an awakening effect upon the heart and mind” (*Record*, 2-3). By Peabody’s account, it is as if a new spirit is ignited in each student. Instead of being dictated by an instructor how the operation of school will be run, Alcott applies a democratic approach via conversation that invites the student to craft both purpose and implementation to their daily procedures. This allows the student a sense of control in their learning, a feeling likely foreign to many of these young scholars.

Similarly, I feel that in modern public education this lack of control can be stifling for students, especially those I have worked with in a Title I environment. Many of my students that struggle with literacy gaps, caused by factors such as language barriers, lower socioeconomic status, or simple lack of quality teaching and instruction, are placed in situations at school where the “gap-filling” focused instruction overloads them with skills and concepts they are expected to learn for a test, leaving them de-humanized in the sense that they have not been connected with at an individual, local, direct level. Thus, they either become numb to the standardized process of learning for the sake of testing, slogging through each day in an emotionless manner, or they reject an education altogether.

Ultimately, what I feel is lost here in the present student is an art of self-acknowledgment and self-reflection, something Alcott and Peabody allotted plentifully in their instruction. After several days of this conversational approach combined with practical activities such as mastering

the composition of letters and class-guided readings of children's fables, Alcott and Peabody both become aware that students began to "not so often inquire the history of an idea, or feeling; but they analyzed the feelings which prompted action better" (*Record*, 8). In other words, through self-reflection, the students were less concerned with the external, historical, and factual nature of the lessons they were learning, and more energized by how those lessons changed and affected their inner self. Even more intriguing is how Peabody distinguishes between older students affected by their former education, and those younger children who are "purely" receiving education for the first time at the Temple School:

We could not but often remark to each other, how unworthy the name of knowledge was that superficial acquirement, which has nothing to do with self-knowledge; and how much more susceptible to the impressions of genius, and how much more apprehensive of general truths were those, who had not been hackneyed by a false education (8).

I find this to be both Alcott's and Peabody's direct indictment on the Enlightenment era, and by extension I read it as an indictment on standardized learning. I recognize that Enlightenment and standardization are by no means similar, or related, both by definition and philosophically. However, it was the means by which students were taught in this era, that what a scholar *knows* and is capable of reciting, regurgitating, and even *proving*, determined the measure of that individual's genius. In the same way, contemporary standardization practices determine that the student best fit at answering multiple-choice questions correctly has proven their merit as a young scholar and been deemed worthy of advancement.

A typical day in Alcott's school usually featured students beginning by practicing both their composition of letters and spelling of particular words. This would eventually evolve to practices of composition by means of journaling. From there, Alcott would usually engage the

class through a conversational reading, release them for recess, from which they would return in the afternoon to practice Latin with Peabody, arithmetic, geography, and further conversational reflections over either Scripture or another particular reading. Here, as relates to my own profession as a secondary English instructor, I want to take a closer look at how Peabody relates Alcott's methods of teaching reading and writing.

Early in her *Record*, Peabody records one of the first reading lessons Alcott engages with the students. He begins by reading out loud to them an excerpt from “an address to a dying child” in the *Common Place Book of Poetry*. After reading the passage in its entirety, Alcott simply begins by asking one student which verse he liked best. When the student responds with his answer, Alcott next asks “what sentiments do they (the verses) awaken?”⁹ This ignites a steady back-and-forth conversation between Alcott and student in which Alcott continues to pose questions based off the student's answers that cause the student to reflect inwardly on his interpretation of the verse in question. Alcott then proceeds to engage a similar conversation with each student, and Peabody records those conversations which were of most interest to her based on student responses, all of which, due to Alcott's line of questioning, take some sort of either spiritual or existential line of reasoning (*Record*, 12-14). This lesson pattern is reflected in multiple other accounts Peabody includes throughout her narrative, (an intentional term I will further expand upon), but it is most particular to those lessons of reading. In terms of the methodology of this approach, and in response to certain criticisms Peabody anticipated to this reading practice, Peabody asserts:

the effect is to make the reading very expressive, by keeping the Author's mind constantly before the reader, and interesting him in the thoughts. There is no greater illusion than the common idea of the method of learning to read, by pronouncing pages of

matter, which is not moving the heart and mind of the reader. Mr. Alcott's method... is so different from the common one, that it is common to hear that his scholars do not read at school (14).

Put into simpler terms, I interpret this method described by Peabody as thus: Alcott reads a text out loud to his students first, rather than challenging them to engage a text on their own for the sake of practicing the skill of sounding out letters to form words (the basic *practice* of reading). These skills, rather, are practiced at the beginning of his class, when students work on their composition of letters and spelling words. Therefore, by approaching the actual reading lessons through his conversational and introspective approach, students are able to practice modes of interpretation, comprehension, and analysis of *meaning*, rather than getting lost in the actual reading form. For this reason, Peabody rebuts critics who state Alcott's students don't actually learn to read at all,¹⁰ whereas in fact, they are learning not only to read, but what to do with what they've read.

Alcott believed that journaling was the most effective approach to guiding students along as new, inexperienced writers. One morning, upon her arrival to the school and finding the students engaged in a journaling session, Peabody overhears Alcott saying to a student, "you are engaged in recording what happens *out of you*... I hope you will soon write the thoughts and feelings that come up from your soul... these thoughts and feelings are your inward life" (*Record* 25). Essentially, as Peabody goes on to flesh out, Alcott is not requiring that his students write *about* the things they learn, or the external, natural world. Rather, he is concerned that they write about their feelings about those external factors. This means that which stimulates their inner being—in other words, an introspective, memoir-genre of writing. Here, Alcott challenged traditional approaches that were resistant to accepting students' subjective or personal responses

as relevant knowledge compatible with the knowledge to be attained and acquired. This nineteenth century problem is one that speaks into both twentieth and twenty-first century forms of writing. Throughout my teaching experience in secondary schools, I have often had students ask me if it is allowed that they use “I” in their expository writing. The fact that these students feel led to ask for this permission assumes that it has been forbidden to them in some other discipline or context. In the Temple School, however, it is evident that Alcott challenges this practice by encouraging his student to apply their perspectives to a knowledge being created *within* the classroom. In a sense, Alcott’s method for writing anticipates contemporary education’s push to allow students to reflect on their own vantage points and incorporate their point-of-view through analysis and composition.

Peabody then proceeds to share Alcott’s rationalization for this method of instruction. The benefit to journaling, for Alcott, is that it does not lend itself to the burdening undertone all students perceive in writing at school as an assignment to be read by a grader and thus judged by its content, or, in many students’ terms, its “right or wrong-ness.” Journaling is free of the “petty criticisms” of an instructor. As Alcott perceives it, student writers, having just learned and still learning, skills such as the mechanics of holding a pencil, pointing it in the correct motions, and spelling, have enough trouble mastering the act, without even considering the mental effort required. And once they achieve the physical acts and then write something out, they have just engaged in a vulnerable act of creation for the first time, so to subject it to early judgment, in a sense, destroys the child’s confidence and stifles their energy to continue the art (*Record*, 26). Peabody proceeds to compare early student writing to the rough drafts of experienced writers—never perfect in their original form and requiring much tending to. To impede on his students’

beginning writings, Alcott calls a “moral evil, the mind always works itself out to perfect forms; while premature criticism mildews the flower, and blasts the promised fruit” (27).

Worth noting in this section on writing is how Alcott provides an area of instruction where students are relieved of the pressures of assessment. These student journals do not appear to be “graded” or monitored activities. In fact, Alcott’s labeling of these journals as a reflection of the student’s “inward life” alludes to a certain sanctity to the act of writing that draws students to consider its value outside of an educational atmosphere. This method of instruction is holistic, expanding beyond any standardized learning format to establish a practice of worth and value, rather than something to be measured. Similar to the liberation of the “I” in student writing, the application of student journals anticipates contemporary teaching ideas by creating a space for students to explore and reflect inwardly without the anxieties or pressures of comparison or exposure to their peers. Much like his reading methodology, this writing practice was an uncommon approach for the time, as many instructors of the time period wanted students to learn to write about what they learned, as well as write about concrete occurrences and scientific methods. By implementing this practice of journaling, Alcott de-standardizes writing by making of it something each individual can approach non-discriminately and practice as an art. While later assignments can assess a student’s writing ability, journaling creates a free space for the young scholar to roam undisturbed.

I want to conclude this section by addressing Alcott’s disciplinarian and punishment practices in the classroom. Although it is widely believed in contemporary scholarship that Alcott pioneered a shift away from corporal punishment, Peabody’s narrative casts quite the contrasting, and rather disturbing, reality. For instance, on the first day of the school, the students do agree with Alcott, through conversation of course, to a punishment of the body for the

correction of bad habits and poor behavior (*Record*, 3). This was actually in line with common schoolhouse practices of the time, and challenges the notion that Alcott completely rejected corporal punishment as a practice. But it is interesting that Alcott takes a diplomatic and communitarian approach with his students, allowing them to rationalize with him and finally agree that this was an acceptable practice, and many of his students genuinely proclaim, later on, that they should be “very glad to be whipped, if it would cure... bad habits” (118).¹¹ As the weeks passed, the students and Peabody became familiar with a mannerism of Alcott to stop instruction while certain students were disengaged or misbehaving, and make the entire class wait for those students to correct their form before continuing with the lesson. Peabody recounts how, because Alcott viewed their established discipline practice as a form of self-government, it was vital that, when the “government” was not operating appropriately, that the entire operation should stand still until it was corrected. In anticipated response to the criticism that those good students are here suffering and losing instruction for the sake of the bad, Peabody retorts that “the good are learning the divinest part of human action, even the action of Christ, when they are taught to wait upon the bad for their improvement,” (18) thus offering another mode of spiritual and self-growth for all students present.

As the school began to evolve, Peabody portrays a student body that becomes notably reverent toward their instructors, which changes Alcott’s approach to punishment. She details how she arrived to the school one morning at the start of a conversational lesson. Alcott asks all students who had misbehaved that morning by either whispering or breaking some other rule to stand. Those guilty do so, and Alcott instructs them to wait in the ante-room of the schoolhouse while the other students participate in the day’s reading of *Pilgrim’s Progress* and the ensuing conversation. Peabody describes the punished boys as being extremely “disconsolate” as they

miss the lesson, even stating that they would rather have been punished physically “because it would have been over in a minute... but this conversation can never be another time” (*Record*, 144).

Taking matters further, Peabody explains how, a few days after this event, Alcott introduces a new mode of punishment. No longer will disobedient students be punished physically themselves—they will instead inflict pain on Alcott himself. Peabody notes a “profound and deep stillness” from the classroom in reaction, sobering even to those students who were rarely out of line. Eventually, when put into practice, she says those students were “very unwilling, and when they did it first, they did it very lightly.” When Alcott asks them if such a weak strike was worthy punishment for their offense, they “were obliged to give it hard—but it was not without tears, which they had never shed when punished themselves.” She concludes by calling this “the most complete punishment that a master ever invented” (145) because afterward few students ever misbehaved, out of a fear of having to inflict pain on their beloved teacher.

It must now be said that I am not lost on the extreme, traumatizing nature of this practice, and I am by no means advocating an application for these seemingly medieval practices. If I were, I should go ahead and remove myself from the profession. However, I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter that Peabody, in her analysis and commentary on scriptural texts in her earlier education, had an affinity for deciphering the aesthetic, poetic nature of language, and this in turn drew her to allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament. Therefore, I want to interpret and analyze this anecdote on corporal punishment in the Temple School allegorically, and use it as a segue to analyzing Peabody’s *Record* as a more creative work in which she is much more concerned with crafting a *narrative* of the Temple School than she is with proposing

proper methods of educating. I contend that, while these accounts can be fairly questioned as to both the validity of the students' emotional responses to these disciplinary practices and even to the rightfulness of implementing those practices, an allegorical approach stresses the notion, which I believe Peabody was striving for, that an effective teaching and a genuine shepherding of one's pupils can produce a divine respect from the student, not only of the teacher, but of the true spirit of education, learning, and self-knowledge. Through Alcott's conversational and relational approach, a sort of "co-dependent" relationship is formed between teacher and student where each party requires the engagement of the other to be effective. When one party becomes disengaged, i.e., a student is caught staring out the window, or whispering to another student, a disturbance, or violence, is cast upon the relationship between student and teacher. This violence might be read literally in Peabody's text, as that of corporal punishment, or the violence within the text might only be allegorical – symbolizing a divide, or break, in the student-teacher bond. This could lead to questioning whether these events ever actually occurred, or if they could be based on actual occurrences in the classroom and novelized in the *Record* to appeal to the literary imagination of a curious readership. Peabody is writing to an audience skeptical of her school after all, but also perhaps skeptical of the shrewd, traditional schoolhouses of the era. This audience would not be swayed by violent practices of punishment during this era, however they would be moved by the image of students moved to tears from the gratitude of what they receive each day and what Alcott offered them each day. In this context, the anecdotes included surrounding corporal punishment in the Temple School speak to an audience familiar with this method of discipline, but Peabody also utilizes the practice in a humanizing way that would appeal to the emotions of the reader. This is the spirit I hope to capture in my reading of Peabody

as an established and effective writer, one whose compositional skillset far transcends a mere “recorder of events” and ventures into literary expertise.

In a preface to her *Record* which Peabody would publish in later editions, a document that I deal with more extensively in my third chapter, Peabody acknowledges that she felt “bound in conscience to put into the Record, everything that transpired during that winter, and to present even the exercises that were afterwards modified” (Peabody 102). Her hope was that the audience would read this with an open mind, engaged not so much on where pedagogical theory struggled to translate to practice necessarily, but simply with the “new ground” being laid for education’s potentialities. I have referenced throughout this chapter the possibility of perceiving the *Record of a School* as a novelized text, meaning, a piece of writing that is literally crafting a narrative. In other words, I argue that Peabody’s *Record* reads as much like a “novel” as it does a “record of events.” Even Megan Marshall, in a 2005 introduction to the *Record*, calls on the reader to “imagine” they are seated in Alcott’s classroom as they read Peabody’s work. Taking this point further, I contend that we must read Peabody as telling a story about what is occurring at the Temple School, and thus take into consideration how this alters our perceptions on how Alcott’s ideas about education are shaped.

In my introduction I gave background to Peabody’s early theoretical practice in which she dedicated a strong emphasis to poetic, aesthetic language and its representation of man’s response to nature. In her early analyses of Herder’s commentaries on the Old Testament, she highlighted an “instinctual” nature in how mankind writes about their experiences, with their use of language originating from a combination of intuition and environment. It is highly likely, then, that this could translate over into her own writing of specific experiences, namely, those she observed in the Temple School. Thus, when she claims she was “bound by conscience” to

write everything she observed in the *Record*, it is important to consider that she is intuitively responding to Alcott's classroom in how she depicts it in her writing. This writing from intuition, I would push, leads to a consideration that Peabody is writing out of a sense of feeling, more so than reason, and this feeling draws her to compose a document that is emotionally tied to its subjects – specifically, teacher and students. As literary scholars, we know that these influences underlying a particular document matter, and ultimately impact the context by which we approach such writing. Therefore, when Peabody begins her *Record* by constructing the layout of Alcott's classroom, she does so in a way that she is establishing the setting for her narrative – a room that, having spent months laboring in, she is deeply tied to and strongly concerned with how it will hold, affect, nurture, and direct its characters' motives and actions. Those characters, Alcott and students, are characterized by both their conversations with one another, and their reactions to the described learning environment. What ensues is a narrative of the first fall/winter semester of the Temple School – a narrative tracking both the peaks and valleys of Alcott's experiment, and the awakening of an inward knowledge for his students.

Alcott's Methodology in the Present Secondary English Classroom.

I now want to shift these ideas forward and consider their application in a modern setting. While I cannot currently boast as many years of experience in the classroom as Alcott when he started the Temple School (my five to his eleven), nor am I even close to possessing the authoritative liberties he was able to take in his schoolroom, I still recognize areas where, both in my own teaching style as well as through student tendencies and lesson structuring, an Alcott methodology seeps out. Based on my own personal interactions with my students, and many of my peers I have observed, I perceive that students desire a similar relationship with their teachers

that both Alcott and Peabody displayed in their school. Simply put, this section argues that Alcott and Peabody *do* have contributions to make in current education.

As I have alluded to earlier, there exists a great pressure in my own discipline due to the nature of my current course, English I, being a core, standardized tested subject. Teaching in the DFW area, the majority of my students are considered English Language Learners, where approximately 80-85% are classified Latin American, 10% African American, and a very small minority of Caucasian and Indian/Asian. This is a stark contrast to the ethnicity of Alcott's and Peabody's students. Yet as Alcott was largely serving a distinct, homogenous community in Boston (primarily white, Christian families), many schools in the DFW area serve homogenous communities in the sense of lower socioeconomic and minority groups. There are obvious political and social implications underlying these homogenous groupings, which I will further address in the second chapter, but I will note here that while I presently teach in the latter community, I spent my first two years teaching in a very similar community to Alcott and Peabody. Peabody includes an anecdote distinguishing between a humble, self-aware girl and an ignorant boy, who lacked awareness and self-knowledge (Peabody, 48-50). These types of students are found in any student population. Not only that, but, taken a bit further from the context of the Temple School, present students exhibit both traits of ignorance and awareness of the "other;" meaning, while some students are ignorant of the barriers certain students face in learning, or simply ignorant of the privilege they themselves possess, other students are aware of these things, and are capable of inwardly reflecting on what that means for their individual stationing and positioning in the world of society. I have found that, through conversations with my students on these topics during certain lessons, making an aim of this awareness has proven extremely engaging for students to think on and reflect on how their respective station in life

relates to students from different backgrounds. These students, existing in both sets of schools I have described, regardless of their academic achievement levels, more significantly demonstrate a personal wholeness that Alcott and Peabody would describe as fuller understanding of truth and genius, and thus I find them of a greater willingness to learn and engage in the classroom.

Yet for my current ELL students, this willingness does not supersede the very real language barriers and setbacks they face in the secondary English classroom. Due to the aforementioned pressures of standardized testing, teachers can easily feel overwhelmed by having to overcome significant gaps in student reading and writing. In response, many teachers, (myself included), have over-emphasized reading strategies that involve excessive amounts of annotating, tricks for students to sound out and read passages aloud to help with understanding, and having students respond to what they have read by practice in answering multiple-choice questions related to the reading. All of these techniques are taught as “reading” strategies, but clearly are better titled as “testing” strategies.

In relation to Alcott’s methods, I have had multiple high school students express over the years how much better they comprehend a text when I read it out loud. At first, I thought this was an effect of lazy students not wanting to read. However, I find each time I read a text aloud with the class, students are more confident in their ability to summarize, rephrase, and process what they have heard me read, than when I have them read silently to themselves. For one, this supports any language barriers by allowing them to hear a word they would be unfamiliar with, but more importantly, it lends itself to a follow-up conversation more effectively. For instance, even with a higher-level, challenging text, when read aloud, I can ask my students what parts of the text they did understand? Why did they understand that part more than other parts? What does it mean? Very quickly, I am engaged in a Socratic dialogue that Alcott and Peabody would

themselves apply with their own students. Furthermore, this engages students in academic conversations, a vital attribute of the secondary English classroom that most administrators want to see students engaged in. Yet while there is a push for student autonomy in these types of conversations (peer-to-peer dialogue), I believe that, in line with Alcott and Peabody, the presence of a guiding instructor in these conversations is actually more effective for student growth as it not only pushes the conversation deeper and models such modes of thinking and dialoguing for multi-lingual students, but it establishes a healthy, trusting relationship between pupil and teacher, which can produce the type of reverence for learning Peabody described in their students.

In terms of student writing, Alcott's use of student journals is in complete contrast with the common practice I have had to implement, and have observed being implemented, in the Title I English classroom. It is this area of current English instruction that I feel has been over-standardized the most in common education. For instance, because the tested standard for 9th grade English in the state of Texas is expository or explanatory writing, and because the majority of Title I students in Texas deal with language gaps that can set their writing abilities back, an over-emphasis of teaching students to write in the expository context is placed in curriculums and lesson planning. Thus, students are taught that writing is a one-page essay in response to a specific prompt that includes an introduction, body, and conclusion paragraphs, a clear thesis statement and example in support of that thesis statement. And yes, this essay will be graded so that the teacher can tell you what you are doing wrong and how to fix it. This is formulaic writing and, plain and simple, teaching to the test. Very rarely is any form of free-writing, that establishes the safe space for students to get what is inward, outward, which Alcott sought,

included—and if it is, teachers of these standardized courses are often so anxious about the accountability that comes with test scores, that they skip over this crucial step.

With regards to discipline, certainly modern practices have radically evolved from the nineteenth-century schoolroom. Yet taking the allegorical nature of Peabody's account into possibility, and recognizing her clear depictions of students in the Temple School that revered Mr. Alcott and the education he provided them, I believe a similar outcome is possible, and should be strived for in current secondary classrooms—particularly those of the communities I have described. I have already addressed the misperception that Alcott pioneered a rejection of corporal punishment, at least by what Peabody presents us in her *Record*, and I have hopefully made it clear that I by no means adhere to said practices. While it is important, and interesting, to make these acknowledgments of Alcott's practice, at the same time we cannot deny that he strongly appealed to a deep emotional connection, or relationship, with his students through his conversational and relational tactics. While recent studies have called into question these practices of corporal punishment that existed all the way up into the twentieth-century (McDaniel, 2020), other studies have pushed for the value of teachers possessing a high level of emotional intelligence as those that have the most success with classroom management (Valente, 2019). In my own classroom, I have found when I respond calmly to situations of student misbehavior, while still handling the matter in a stern and fair way, students respond way more positively than if I were to respond aggressively. The most important thing here, though, is the consistency of the teacher to respond in the fair manner. This was something Peabody observes in Alcott frequently in her text, as through his constant dialogue with his students, he pursues a course of rationalization with them for the fair consequences of their actions. This invites a self-reflection in the individual student, that steadies any course for an emotional response and

reasons their inner spirit to respond with humility. I argue that this method of dialogue and reflection, separate from corporal punishment, is a method largely advocated for in today's classroom management practices.

The preceding analysis has demonstrated the purpose of this chapter: that Alcott's and Peabody's classroom reformed standardized modes of education during the nineteenth-century in a manner that liberalized the process of learning for their students. Recognizing these similar modes of pedagogy in contemporary, secondary education invites the modern educator to think towards possibilities of de-standardizing the pedagogical approaches in their own classrooms so as to reignite a passion within their students for learning through reflection and a growth of self-knowledge.

Responding to Alcott's Criticisms in Contemporary Classrooms.

Yet Alcott and Peabody did not operate without pushback from the outward community. Before concluding this first chapter, I want to acknowledge some of the specific criticisms they faced and address how those criticisms coincide with the criticism contemporary teachers face in the secondary English classroom.

Gura, in his brief assessment of the collapse of Alcott's school, alludes to doubters operating within Alcott's own circle. Channing, Alcott's leading patron of the school, "began to worry that Alcott's dialogues were too inflexible, so that students merely recited what he wanted to hear." He also questioned Alcott's emphasis on self-reflection, "concerned that too much introspection might inhibit rather than encourage a youngster's spiritual awakening." Indeed, even some of Peabody's own records of the dialogues captured his "habit of making apparent the sort of responses he expected" (88).

John Matteson, in his Pulitzer Prize winning *Eden's Outcasts*, offers a more in-depth account of the circumstances surrounding Alcott's demise at the hands of his critics. For Matteson, the major trigger came by means of Alcott's controversial follow-up to Peabody's *Record*, with his *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* igniting a furious response throughout the Boston community.¹² Local newspapers and journals described this account as both "absurd" and "obscene," as this record failed to produce the similar literary expertise as Peabody's previous *Record*. This could largely be attributed to Peabody's absence from the project following her split from Alcott's school, which I will expand more upon in my third chapter, and Alcott thus having more direct control over what was recorded (and how it was recorded). Regardless, Matteson describes a reception that found Alcott's approach a bit too "head-in-the clouds," and drifting too far from what was considered socially and critically acceptable at the time. As Matteson notes, this "was a city that assumed that shared religious beliefs lay at the foundation of the social order and public morality. It tolerated free inquiry so long as the questioners did not appear to strike at the beliefs that, it was thought, gave structure to social and moral existence" (79). In other words, Alcott's instruction had strayed too far from what both society, the church, and governing authorities found acceptable, as these institutions perceived his methods as too unconventional, unorthodox, and overly radical. Yet these were the very institutions that Alcott, Peabody, and their Transcendentalist contemporaries were striving to challenge and reform.

While Alcott was under intense scrutiny from his public society in Boston, current secondary teachers in public education experience the same scrutiny from yearly classroom observations administered by either a principal or a local district official. These observations are a form of accountability to ensure the teacher is meeting the standards of both the campus and

the district. They are also intended to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction on the students. While the feedback from these critical observations are rarely made public, still, much like Alcott, a teacher's livelihood is often dependent on meeting the standard of these critical observations.

But what type of response might a current administrator have should they be asked to evaluate a lesson from Alcott? Really, how different might the feedback he received today differ from those who labeled his methods too abstract and arbitrary in his own time period? These questions raise concerns of a political measure, and bring to light issues regarding *who is really in control* of student learning. This chapter has focused primarily inside the classroom, evaluating the pedagogical practices both Alcott and Peabody employed to reform standardized measures of education so as to liberate their students. Yet this reformation practice only reached the local level of society through their particular students and their families. Unfortunately, due to these criticisms, the school failed to reach the larger, local Boston community and beyond. Instead, higher institutions worked to destabilize the Temple School and deactivate Alcott's pedagogical influence. This destabilization of a higher power over a lower power has proven to have major implications in education, all the way up to our current situation, and is the core problem I address in the following chapter.

Chapter Two

Re-thinking Reform: Applying Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" and Alcott's "The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture" to the Education Reform Conversation

Introduction:

In Chapter One, I demonstrated how through their pedagogical practices in the classroom, both Alcott and Peabody believed that each individual being, (or, what I label in this chapter, "local" beings) possessed a natural, unique genius which teachers merely had to unlock. This approach contrasted with the traditional model of education that treated its students as empty subjects in need of being "equipped" with knowledge. Ultimately, their experimental school failed, due in large part to strong criticism from the outward society and diminished finances. I concluded chapter one by alluding to how this critiquing reflects the external control of higher, governing systems in contemporary American public education. This second chapter will grapple more with these external forces, such as that of the federal role in education reform, and explore how Alcott's radical ideas around schooling and student development converse with more politicized and reformation works from their Transcendentalist comrades. Here, I take into consideration the prospect of localized reform, or, those reformation acts intended to improve particular, local communities and societies. These include, for the primary purposes of this chapter, those reforms enacted on the local school district, classroom, and, ultimately, the local, individual student. By contrast, I argue that higher powers, such as the state and/or federal government, by means of standardizing education, cause a trickle-down effect towards local school districts that strangles the sense of control local administrators, educators, and families have on their child's education.

John Matteson describes Alcott as more of an abstract thinker and visionary rather than one capable of achieving practical goals. In describing Alcott's relationship to other Transcendental reformers, he says "so long as Alcott could move within the sphere of the ethereal and evanescent, he moved with radiance and grace. As soon as he stepped into the world of things and actions or tried to project a durable image of himself, he began to lose his balance" (7). Perhaps this is why, in 1843, when Alcott refused to pay a poll tax in protestation against a government that allowed slavery, and was subsequently arrested, he chose to quietly embrace the consequences of his protest as a satisfactory proclamation of his stance against a higher power rather than turning to the pen to publish his true thoughts. Instead, it was his friend and fellow Transcendental reformer Charles Lane who would publish in the *Liberator* Alcott's stance on "the subject of personal freedom" (110). Two and a half years later, when Henry David Thoreau was arrested for the exact same scenario, in protest of the same issue, Thoreau would turn to the pen and publish his popular essay "Civil Disobedience."¹³ This example largely demonstrates Alcott's reputation among his Transcendentalist peers as an individual who embodied the ideal for a better, reformed society, yet struggled to articulate his means of achieving such ideals. In fact, in *Walden*, while Thoreau does not mention Alcott by name, when he makes reference to borrowing Alcott's axe, he states, "the owner of the axe, as he released his hold on it, said that it was the apple of his eye, but I returned it sharper than I received it."¹⁴

This, then, is the context by which I will approach my primary analysis in this chapter, as I take a closer look at what Thoreau says about resisting higher powers and standing firm for personal freedom in "Civil Disobedience." However, my reading of Thoreau will be contextualized in the frame of Alcott's views of education and "local" reform as depicted in his 1836 essay "The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture." Stepping aside from Peabody's

writing in this chapter, I want to give Alcott a chance to defend himself against those external criticisms with the assistance of his good friend Thoreau to help “sharpen” his words.

Additionally, I will make allusions to Alcott’s associations with other societal reformation experiments, such as the utopic communities at Brook Farm and the Fruitlands. The goal here is to not only construct a firm response from Alcott towards external criticisms of his schooling and reformation practices, but also to establish a retort for the local educator whose practice is constantly invaded by federal reform.

Defining Terms: Breaking Down Localized and State Reform in Education

I argued in Chapter One that Alcott’s and Peabody’s pedagogical methods in the classroom liberated, or de-standardized, education in a way that every individual student could discover knowledge, or genius, from within without having to conform to a standard set by authoritative powers. In this present chapter, I’m contending that both Alcott and Peabody were engaged in an act of localized reform common among their Transcendentalist cohort. It is those authoritative powers orbiting education, I am proposing, that have historically worked to de-localize the control local school districts, administrators, and educators have upon their students. However, before proceeding, it is important to first define what I mean by localized reform in the Transcendentalist context, as well as to further elaborate on the de-localization of power by the state in the realm of education.

As the unofficial patriarch of the movement, Ralph Waldo Emerson is an often referenced spokesperson for Transcendentalist ideals. He was also a close supporter of Alcott’s work and a mentor and tutor to Peabody.¹⁵ For this reason, his essay, “New England Reformers” (1844), sheds an intellectually stimulating, and albeit, abstract, light on the work of many of his Transcendentalist comrades, which undoubtedly would include both Alcott and Peabody. Philip

Gura summarizes the heart of Emerson's views about reform, stating, "only after an individual experiences the paradise within can he join with others, similarly enlightened, to restore the outer paradise. Only then would institutions, comprised as they were of discrete individuals, change" (211). This assessment I believe encapsulates the reformative goal of both Alcott and Peabody within education. For these two reformers, change had to start from within the individual – a theme repeated throughout Transcendentalist writing – and what better place to begin than from the formative sphere of the schoolroom. If students could capture this inner "paradise" during development, then, when they graduated into society they could begin to reshape and reform problematic institutions and governments. This, I argue, is the purpose for a reform work at the local level: when reform remains an inward, or individualized, focus. When reform is being influenced by outward sources, then ultimately those sources are only working to recreate the institutions they have already established and deemed suitable for society. This is problematic on a multitude of levels when put into the context of education, particularly areas of race, diversity, equity, and socioeconomic statuses. Thus, in terms of political impact on education, I hope to show that the failure of Alcott's Temple School displays how education was in the nineteenth century, and historically has been, delocalized by external sources. Furthermore, I believe that Alcott's involvement with such utopic experiments as Brook Farm proves how conscious he was of the necessity for more "localized" reform focused not only in areas of education, but within the societal structures of the time.

The American societal structure of the nineteenth-century is described in *American Radicals* by Holly Jackson as one stuck in a "troubling changing-of-the-guard moment with a near-religious commemoration of the founding generation" (4). This founding generation, high on the Enlightenment theory Alcott and Peabody strove against, was handing off a country

silently rooted in problems related to “slavery and race; sex and gender; property and labor. Each of these areas opened into other concerns – prisons, housing, birth control, religious belief, free speech, imperialism, child rearing” and thus, schooling, among them. These underlying issues established an “invisible, toxic framework of the entire society” (xiii) that was both intellectually and socially oppressive. It was out of this framework that Jackson proposes two different societal responses arose – one longing for a stagnant loyalty to ideals of America’s founding fathers, and another more progressive seeking to take what the founders left America with and take it even further. For Jackson, the primary issue at hand in this time period is slavery, and she details numerous abolitionist protests, including those rising out of the Transcendentalist movement, including both Alcott’s and Thoreau’s refusing to pay a poll tax because both the federal and state governments were in support of a nation run on slavery. This shows how aware Alcott was of a larger problem in America, and why he could not continue to allow the current institutional governments and institutions to function the way they were. Therefore, rather than a turn back to the founding fathers, Alcott aligned with those progressive reformers reimagining the possibilities of what America could become. While his ventures in education and communal life ultimately all fell short, Jackson’s work contextualizes the oppressive political forces Alcott was up against.

The process by which political force has impacted education and de-localized reform is methodically laid out in Lindsey Chopin’s 2013 article “Untangling Public School Governance.” In this article, Chopin questions the credibility of this “out-working-inward” federal reformation work in education throughout American history. After detailing the government’s steady attainment of centralized power over two centuries of American education, she recapitulates how specific reforms, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, have had drastic economic consequences

and incentives for American schools which have in turn required constant modifications in the years following their application. She then denotes how modifications to specific federal reforms, such as Obama's Race to the Top, have proven the inadequacy of the federal government in their ability to apply changes and how impending financial influences for schools have provided arenas for political manipulation of agendas and policies. Furthermore, these types of reforms rarely translate towards the specific needs of the various school districts nationwide, leading to scenarios where state and local districts are scrambling to implement their own reforms to bridge the gap between federal requirements and practical application for local communities and families.

Chopin's solution is to somehow transfer power down from the federal government to new state agencies, calling for a funding and backing of new state agencies that could oversee their own local school systems. Yet frankly, this adjustment seems too little, too late. Chopin is essentially trying to redirect power in a more local direction, but her article reveals how far American public education has fallen over the past two hundred years. While her suggested solution would resolve certain financial and implementation problems in contemporary reform processes, there is little to be done to restore a sense of control back to the educator in the classroom that would empower a pedagogical reform so localized that education could awaken the unique, spiritual genius in each individual student. It is for this reason that I choose to analyze what it is Alcott, and his compatriot Thoreau, was saying in the face of the political oppression of the nineteenth-century.

Reading Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" through the Lens of Education Reform

Before breaking down Thoreau's words in "Civil Disobedience," it is important to first contextualize this text not only as a work about reform, but how I will fit it into the conversation

on education reform specifically. I approach “Civil Disobedience” as a text that, at its roots, claims that any individual faced against an unjust or corrupt institution has a human right to resist, ignore, or disrupt that system. Undoubtedly, it should be initially acknowledged that this foundational claim widely exaggerates any comparison to a teacher’s circumstance as “being oppressed” under an education system run by the federal and state governments, for that perspective is severely inaccurate and incomparable to Thoreau’s text which is speaking primarily against a government that suppresses human freedom through its acceptance of the institution of slavery. However, the underlying notion in “Civil Disobedience” is that any individual in disagreement with a ruling power has a democratic right to state that disagreement. Thus, just as Thoreau protests his disagreement with the choices of his federal government, teachers have the same right to voice their concerns related to how much control they have in their classroom and how federal and state reforms impede on their autonomy with their students, as well as the students’ autonomy in their own individualized learning. This is what I believe Alcott expands upon in his “Doctrine.”

It is also imperative to first address one of the more radical statements Thoreau makes early in the essay: “that government is best which governs not at all; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have” (75).¹⁶ Here is an immediate advocacy for not only a limited role by the government in its citizens lives, but that in an ideal world no governmental intervention would be required at all. Thoreau perceives the principled human being, or one who adheres to the “higher law” of their conscience, as capable of ruling over his or her own life, maintaining a peaceful station in their place amongst mankind and nature. Within the realm of education, I believe this is compatible with Alcott’s philosophy in that it rejects a conforming to a government’s standards in the same way Alcott resisted a

standardized approach to learning, as I detailed in chapter one. Alcott believed that a thoroughly equipped educator was capable in and of themselves to unlock each of their students' full potential. No outside assistance or resources were required; the teacher was simply enough.

However, it is imperative to better contextualize the notion that a better government is one that “governs not at all” in the context of education. In Walter Stern’s *Race and Education in New Orleans*, Sterns contends that, by the mid to late twentieth century, schools in America represented an “interplay between race, education, and urban change” and revealed “the extent to which segregation often evolved through a dynamic, improvisational process” (4). As schools attempted to de-segregate in the 1960s, racism in these communities only expanded, to an extent to where it became necessary that various levels of government intervened with reforms aimed at, if nothing else, numbing or nullifying the inequitable practices at work within education, not only in the schools themselves, but in white communities resistant to progressive politics. Alcott himself experienced similar pushback from his dominantly white student/family population toward the end of his tenure at the Temple School when he tried to enroll Susan Robinson, a young African American girl, into his class. While Alcott “seems to have regarded her as neither more nor less deserving of special notice than any other new student” the parents of Alcott’s white students “wasted no time in sending Bronson an ultimatum.” Either Susan should leave, or they would withdraw their students (Matteson 84). Lacking any support from a higher authority, this conundrum unraveled Alcott, and it would play a final role in the closure of the Temple School. Thus, these anecdotes from both Sterns and Matteson demonstrate the much needed caution with which we must apply Thoreau’s borderline anarchist explication about limited government within the educational sphere, as a lack of such oversight leaves space for inequitable social constructs to creep into the classroom, handicapping the teacher and, more

importantly, students. Therefore, I hope to proceed with Thoreau by prioritizing a liberated agency for teachers whose instructional and pedagogical practice has been invaded by federal and state reforms, but not necessarily from those all too valuable reform practices that seek to enhance and advance equitable education for all backgrounds.

From here, Thoreau proceeds by proclaiming, “this government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. *It* does not keep the country free. *It* does not settle the West. *It* does not educate. The character of the American people has done all that has been accomplished” (76). In terms of the value of a localized reform, I believe Thoreau’s words here speak to the value of the quality, or “character,” of an individual to improve the lives of other Americans. Conversely, in education, it is not the government that is in the classroom educating students. True, a ruling state government over public education can make certain policies and laws that affect the goings on within school campuses, and even specific classrooms, but it is not those lawmakers in the classroom engaging with students. I would state that the two most powerful forces in those students’ lives are their teachers and their parents or guardians at home. This emphasizes and supports an argument for localization, or an inward turn, for reform.

This harkens back to Chopin’s condemnation for how greatly legislation has morphed and shaped education historically in America. Thoreau proceeds then to question whether it is an individual’s conscience that determines the morality of his actions, or his/her willingness to obey the statutes passed down by legislators. His solution is simply that “we should be men first, and subjects after” (76). This, I believe, falls in line with many of Alcott’s practices as an educator which were detailed in Peabody’s *Record*. Before his students begin the schooling process, Alcott has them first discuss *why* they should have school in the first place. *Why* should they

learn to read or write? *Why* should they be punished for disobedient or inappropriate behavior? It is through dialogue that Alcott humanizes his students; he makes sure they are “men” first (in the sense that they are self-reliant individuals),¹⁷ and only “subjects” to education after that understanding is established. By this, I mean that he causes his students to reflect consciously on what is taking place in the school environment – particularly reflecting on the act of learning – as opposed to leaving them to blindly accept their institutional role as students. This leads them to think of themselves as independent forces acting upon their lives, choosing to improve through learning, rather than having a perception of school as a force they are subjected to. Unfortunately, legislative reform in education has robbed many teachers of agency for cultivating an environment in their classrooms that encourages this liberated approach.

Similar to how Chopin motions for shift from direct federal oversight to modified, independent state agencies that oversee their specific communities, Thoreau begins to conclude his essay by calling for a governmental system in America that progresses towards a restoration of individualized power:

The progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual... Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the rights of a man? There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly (97).

In the same breath, I would ask the same questions of education. Education in America may never truly rise as a free and enlightened institution until those state powers come to recognize

the individuals operating in the direct practice of education (i.e., teachers and their students) as higher and independent powers. Progress, therefore, in line with Thoreau's argument, does not look like more legislation, and by extension more reforms to already existing pieces of educational legislation. Progress instead may be found in the steady decline of authoritative control over local districts and communities, and, ultimately, those educators entrusted with opening a path for their respective students. If student learning is continued to be mandated and scripted to reproduce already faulty systems and institutions of American government and society, shouldn't a more progressive approach be allowed so as not to reproduce systems which have been proving their own incompetence.

I want to conclude my reading of Thoreau by raising a possibility for a mediation between these federal/state and local/individual systems. His call for peace comes with him "imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor," acting with a neighborly combination of trust and "aloof"-ness to allow the individual to go about their way without the State feeling it needed to impede in any way. A State operating in this way "would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State" (97). Thoreau implies that this sort of union between State and individual can only be formulated in his imagination, but if read through the lens of education, the idea of the "neighbor" relation calls to the possibility of finding a way for teachers to work as more trusted and respected individuals by the government in a manner that would allow the government to avoid intruding or overstepping with excessive legislation. This expands the idea of a "community" from the localized perspective of a particular area or population, to a wider spectrum of an entire state, and ideally, entire nation, acting as neighborly individuals towards one another. This notion

would essentially shrink the hierarchy in education from “top-down” to a more balanced and equal playing field.

As a concession here, it is worth noting how George Cohen’s 2020 study “Advancing Achievement in the United States Public Schools Through Labor Management Collaboration” details a method by which federal and state governments have communed with educators in a way that improved student achievement. Here, Cohen details his experience with negotiating between teacher labor unions, school districts, and state governments throughout the United States. Ultimately, his research showed that those districts he worked with in labor negotiations led to working environments where student test scores vastly improved in large part due to opening opportunities for teachers to work and operate in a fair and open teaching environment. This study, in a sense, displays Thoreau’s neighborly dream for a larger, localized system of unity between all facets involved (federal, state, district, teacher, and student); however, the problem of a standardized measure for learning achievement existing and being passed down by the higher power of government still remains. Thus, it is at this point of the conversation that I feel it vital to bring in Alcott for a more focused, philosophical output on education reform for the local, individual being.

Alcott’s Address of Education Reform in “The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture”

Published nearly ten years prior to Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience,” Alcott’s “The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture” appeared as both a pamphlet and introduction to his follow-up to Peabody’s *Record of a School*, in *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*. Here, Alcott details his philosophy of education, as well his ideas for educational reform. Its abstract form largely embodies Alcott himself, offering little in the form of the practical

applications and practices of his Temple School, focusing on more conceptual ideas of man, knowledge, genius, nature, and reform.

Early in the “Doctrine,” in his section *Idea of Education*, Alcott details the grand purpose of a student’s education in the context of their humanity and purpose for life. He calls it “the art of completing a man,” including “all those influences, and disciplines, by which his faculties are unfolded and perfected.” Ultimately, Alcott concludes that education’s “end is a perfect man” (168). Interestingly here, Alcott does not call its end a “perfect society” or the “perfection of human institutions.” Instead, it is simply the fulfillment of the individual being. I read this in comparison to Thoreau’s assessment of the perfect government being that which does not need to govern at all. Education, in Alcott’s eyes, is a force centered solely on the individual and not meant to serve the purposes of any external authority. Applying Thoreau here, that includes a removal of any governmental institution that would dictate or determine in some measure the “influences” or “disciplines” of the schoolhouse.

Yet in order for this system to function appropriately, in Alcott’s eyes, a proper authoritative guide is required to oversee this system of education. In describing his *Ideal of a Teacher*, Alcott compares the perfect educator to that of Christ, who, “instead of seeking formal and austere means, he rested his influence chiefly on the living word... he was a finished extemporaneous speaker. His manner and style are models... he was an Artist of the highest order” (171). This model of educator Alcott describes distinctly aligns with his own depiction in Peabody’s *Record* as a teacher who relied heavily on his strong classroom presence before his students. Alcott perceives himself as a Christ figure shepherding his students, and it is clear that he identifies this as the strongest form of teacher. Teaching, for Alcott, is not merely a profession, but an art, a calling, even a mission, that only a truly skilled educator can ascribe to.

This point is imperative to make because I believe Alcott is attempting to place a strong agency in the position of the teacher as the highest level of authority in the school environment. By doing so, he removes a necessity for any outside voice to intercede on his classroom practice. The teacher, in this essence, is the final authority.

Through Alcott's teacher connection to Christ, he alludes to the conversational style with which Jesus taught as reason for his own conversational approach with his students. He calls this dialectic approach a striking "comprehensive idea of education." Through discourse, he could "know what was in man, and the means of perfecting his being... For, in this all the instincts and faculties of our being are touched. They find full and fair scope. It tempts forth all the powers. Man faces his fellow man. He holds a living intercourse... The social affections are addressed" (171). In his description here of the Socratic method, Alcott exposes its value as being primarily able to really get at his students and investigate their inward thoughts, ideas, and perceptions about the world through his dissecting questions. It even promoted an exposition of the inner self so that each individual student could learn from, not only Alcott, but one another. In this way, Alcott was cultivating a "neighborly" community between students in a way that the local individual could commune with other local individuals, establishing an environment where each student could take up for one another and learn to defend the thoughts and actions of not only themselves, but their fellow man. This echoes Thoreau's utopic pleading for a society that could treat its fellow man as a neighbor, not necessarily hindered or dependently uplifted by each other, but at harmony, or even simply a constructive disagreement, with the operations of other locals, not feeling a sense of judgment from the right or left. By achieving this culture in the classroom, Alcott argues the teacher revives "in Humanity the lost idea of its destiny" and

vindicates “the divinity of man’s nature.” He concludes by calling educators the “Prophets of the Future” (172).

In speaking on the society of his time, Alcott claims that “the Divine Idea of a Man seems to have died out of our consciousness. Encumbered by the gluts of the appetites, sunk in the corporeal senses, men know not the divine life that stirs within them” (173). The cause of this, he continues, is the failure of education in America up until that point, as he strongly asserts, “we estimate man too low to hope for bright manifestations. And our views create the imperfection that mocks us. We have neither great men, nor good institutions. Genius visits us but seldom... There is little genius in our schoolrooms” (174). Undoubtedly, the primary infliction of society Alcott is subtly hinting at is the continued existence of slavery, as Jackson emphasizes this was the underlying tension throughout American society during this period. I believe Alcott foresaw an education system taking root in America that was quickly leaving behind those disenfranchised people of color, or if nothing else, one that was cultivating low aspirations for working class students or students of color out of a concern that promoting intellectual pursuits would be misguided toward these students. Because of this massive practice of inequity, Alcott saw very little capability for pure “genius” to exist in schools that excluded multiple levels of American society. Ultimately, this practice produced students of ignorance that would just go on to replicate the faults Alcott and his contemporaries saw within the construction of American society and government.

Beyond this condemnation of the American institution of the nineteenth century, Alcott extends blame towards another societal force existing outside of the schoolroom: parenting. He claims that:

The young but too often enter our institutions of learning, despoiled of their virtue, and are of course disabled from running an honorable intellectual career. Our systems of nursery discipline are built on shallow or false principles; the young repeat the vices and reproduce the opinions of parents; and parents have little cause to complain. They cannot expect fruits of institutions, for which they have taken so little pains to sow the seeds.

They reap as they sow. Aiming at little they attain but little. They cast their own horoscope, and determine by their aim the fate of the coming generation (175).

One can only wonder why Alcott lost so much parental support and backing from his own students' families after the publication of this document. But aside from this tactical oversight, Alcott's assertion here is intriguing because it hints at a common problem found in public education today. Clearly, education will only be a constructive improvement to society if society treats it as such. Yet when the very parents of students fail to model a hopeful valuing of education, we cannot be surprised when students themselves do not take the opportunity of a classroom seriously. As Alcott claims, we "reap" what we "sow," and thus society as an institution continues to fail public education as we withhold our investments towards its labors.

As a resolution, Alcott describes his version of education reform as educators taking on the "duty" to "watch and reinforce. Like unsleeping Providence, we must accompany the young into the scenes of temptation and trial, and aid them in the needful hour. Duty must sally forth an attending Presence into the work-day world" (178). In other words, I believe Alcott is stating that it is the teacher's responsibility to attend to all facets of the child – their physical, mental, and spiritual development. The educator is to attend to all areas of life, and even foreshadow real-world and adult situations and circumstances so as to teach the child a new form of responding to society. In essence, education becomes a cultural work of reshaping and reimagining the world

through conversational analysis and discourse over difficult life questions. Alcott believed that his form of education reform would produce a culture of humanity that could “conform Nature to himself. Institutions shall bear the fruits of his regenerate being” (180). He thought his experiment at the Temple School was really close to taking off in a fashion that would transform education in New England, remolded in his image. Unfortunately, his words in *Conversations* would be more off-putting than inspiring, and lead to his downfall. Similarly, his hope for an inward-focused reform would never take off in America, as two hundred years later we find ourselves operating in a top-down, politicized education reform system.

The Current State of Education Reform and Its Effect on the Contemporary Teacher

Both Thoreau’s and Alcott’s words, while powerful, offer little in the form of practical example. At this point, I want to speak to what I observe in regards to education reform from my position as a secondary English teacher in the DFW area as a contribution to this dialogue with Thoreau and Alcott. As I discussed in chapter one, teaching at a Title I campus has placed me in a position where the majority of my students are considered English-language learners, and they hail from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This causes significant implications as to the procedures by which my campus is run, as well as how I am expected to direct instruction in my classroom by both campus and district administrators. By contrast, my prior teaching position was at a small private school where the majority of my students hailed from wealthier families and possessed no language gaps. The campus administration at this school was minimally involved with how I implemented pedagogical practice in my classroom; however, I found the parents of my students here were much more involved, and had plenty of criticism to offer with how I managed my classroom. Additionally, I attended private school as a student for my entire

educational career. Thus, in this section, I will use my starkly different experiences from these two separate forms of schooling as anecdote to the ideas Thoreau and Alcott contend for.

The problems of standardization in learning I discussed in my first chapter, while severely altering and limiting pedagogical options in the classrooms, are problems that originate at the state and federal levels. Lorraine McDonnell's article "Stability and Change in Title I Testing Policy" addresses the history of testing policy specifically in Title I, low-income schools. She dedicates a particular section to address how the federal government uses assessment to leverage both state and local practice, noting that "in the federal government's attempts to influence educational programs delivered to Title I students, the testing provisions have been among its strongest bargaining chips" (172). In other words, standardized testing has been moved to the forefront of the education reforms mandated down by federal and state to local school districts, specifically aimed at the students of lower-income communities. In the classroom, this translates to more testing, and less teaching. In my experience teaching 9th grade English for a Title I, it is rare that my students receive ten straight days of instruction without having some type of state or district required test they must complete. These are used to monitor student levels of achievement in preparation for the ultimate STAAR Test that will determine if they pass the course. The results of this final test will also be used to hold the teacher accountable as a measure of their teaching efficacy and efficiency.

Conversely, in the private school system, sufficient student learning is ultimately measured by the grade given by the teacher. Some private schools bring in outside standardized testing sources for their students, yet the results of these scores are rarely used to determine whether a student may advance to the next grade. They are also rarely used as an assessment of accountability toward the teacher. Instead, private school administrators often use these scores to

communicate directly with the parents so that the parents may know where their student stands. As far as a student's ability to advance grades in this system, I've found the teacher in this system possesses a much higher level of authority than in the public system; however, there is one significant caveat. These schools are usually privately-funded and require a tuition to attend, meaning, the school is primarily funded by the parents themselves. Thus, a conundrum exists wherein the teacher ultimately works for the parent, contrasting with the public system where the teacher works for the state.

I provide these anecdotes because they demonstrate the two major external powers of influence to the educator that Alcott warned of: public institutions, (or government) and parents. Now, this is by no means to say a teacher should view a parent as an adversary; quite the contrary, I find the parent to be the greatest source of support in my profession, whether it was in public or private education. However, I would argue that education today, in all forms, has been so standardized that a parent's definition of success for their student is of a conforming nature – that their student has met the requirements passed down by society, their peers, and the authoritative powers that make the decisions that determine what it means to educate a child. The teacher, in this context, becomes a cog in the wheel – a mere service industry worker, held accountable by management (district/campus administrators) and the consumer (parents/students) to ensure students achieve the measured standard. This is a far definition from what Alcott calls the true meaning of education – that of a constant, cultural development; that which stirs and tempts the individual towards a perfection of inner being. Our current system is the product of out-working-in reform, rather than a reform that comes from within each individual student.

This brings me to a recent conversation I had with one of my current students. While working through a writing workshop to help my students prepare for the STAAR writing exam, one student asked me how this was going to help them make money one day. I asked him if that was what he thought was the ultimate value and purpose of education, to make money? He confirmed, as did other students in the class. I asked if they saw any deeper value in terms of personal wholeness and growth. A few conceded, but with little enthusiasm. Whereas Alcott's students, through conversation, were able to arrive at a moral and spiritual reasoning for school, my students' vision of school was part of an economic cycle by which they interpreted their place in society.¹⁸ My fear from this conversation is that of what Thoreau warns in "Civil Disobedience," that mankind has lost sight of their individual worth and come to perceive ourselves as a *part* of a governmental structure and institution. I worry that students are not learning a sense of personal freedom and instead taking an instrumental approach to education in which they are only concerned with what it will do for them and how they can flip it for future earnings. This motivates them to seek not the best answers for themselves, but the answer they think institutional society will deem correct.

I will say that I am thankful that, in my current position, there still exists opportunity for the Socratic approach, and deeply-cutting conversations that draws out the spirit of my students. It is undoubtedly these relationships that keep me going. Yet it can be extremely frustrating to be robbed of instructional choices by outside factors. In the public school system, I know my job is dependent on how my students perform on a STAAR test. I also receive regular observations from my superiors who expect to see me teaching to a particular curriculum and standard when they come in to my classroom. Year after year, curriculum changes, procedures adapt and re-adapt, and new systems are implemented that require the teacher to adjust and change their mode

of operation on the fly. In the private school system, this frustration looks like parents pressuring what books or material should or shouldn't be used in the classroom. It is pressure from administrators encouraging teachers to keep the parents happy. This is not by any means to say that I know what is better for my students, because I, and many others in the profession, am willing to learn what that looks like in our current system. Yet all of this outside control has caused a crippling effect throughout education in which teachers do not feel trusted to do their jobs. Alcott calls the ideal teacher a Christ-like Artist who should be trusted to their craft. It is plain to see in education today that that is not how the teacher is treated or perceived. This fact has driven many great teachers out of education, and those who remain often have to work to remind themselves why they joined the field in the first place.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to capture a conversation between two of the leading voices of the Transcendentalist movement, Thoreau and Alcott, surrounding education reform and the negative impacts external sources have by invading the teacher's classroom practice. In concluding this conversation, it is important, I feel, to make a significant concession. Lee A. McBride offers a radical reading of Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" in his article, "Insurrectionist Ethics and Thoreau," positioning Thoreau's protest of refusing to pay a poll tax a *moral* act because it stands in defiance of an institution supporting the oppression of millions of people. This morality supersedes the matter of his actions being illegal, according to McBride, and I would thus translate this notion for Alcott and the educator as a call to reject the standardization of education, seeking instead to reach the individual student where they are so as to urge them towards a personalized learning and revelation.

However, I would concede that we should be slow to contextualize Thoreau's work with the "teacher's plight," as McBride concludes that "problems do not arise as problems unless we feel a mental or physical chafing that habitual modes of comportment are ill-equipped to handle" (40). In other words, from the perspective of those external forces that reform the teacher's work in the classroom, there is clearly an abundance of baggage students, and families, carry with them into the classroom, making the teacher's goals all the more challenging. Thus, one can see where a teacher "ill-equipped," or ill-resourced, to manage these obstacles would require the support from a higher power to help them succeed with their students. Consequently, I read this from the position of an external source such as the federal or state governments approaching education reform as a means of modifying standards of operation and instruction due to a hunch that both teachers, students, families, and the local community do not possess the necessary resources (financial or otherwise) required to sufficiently meet their educational needs. This, then, calls for the only solution to be a compromise of the external and the internal – an alliance of neighborly approaches in which those external powers can sufficiently resource and support the classroom without intruding on the teachers' craft. This calls for an ultimate trust between both parties, and particularly a level of trustworthiness and dependence on the teacher to successfully fulfill and meet their calling. Yet just as Thoreau concludes in his essay, I can only dream of such an ideal relationship, for I have yet to witness it in practice.

So where does this leave us? At an epoch where we find education crumbling in the midst of a global pandemic because both our government and our schools were too ill-equipped and unprepared, educators, administrators, state legislators and law-makers, all external forces and the inward powers of the classroom must find a way to bridge the gap. This calls in to question the legacy we inherited in education, and also the legacy we want to leave behind as we push

towards a post-pandemic education system. For initial consideration of these questions, my final chapter will consider the legacy of Alcott by acknowledging how he was depicted by his subsequent generation, and making a significant and vital turn back to a relationship that both made and broke him - his assistant, Elizabeth Peabody.

Chapter Three

Cultivating the Child: Bronson Alcott's Legacy Extended by Louisa May Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody

Introduction

The previous chapters of this work have attempted to address the problems of both standardized practices in education and education reform at the federal and state levels. In response to these problems, I have considered how Bronson Alcott de-standardized pedagogical practices in his Temple School in Chapter One, and I have applied his “Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture” in conversation with his comrade Henry Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience” as a response to federal education reform in Chapter Two. I concluded my second chapter by calling into question the legacy Alcott left behind in education in lieu of the legacy contemporary public education has inherited due to the issues so far raised. I find this question of legacy for Alcott a vital notion to consider, because it calls to light the question of how these nineteenth-century texts can still speak to primary and secondary educators today, as well as how they are related to current practices of standardization and reform in public education.

Yet what I find problematic in these nineteenth-century texts is that they are stationed within an underlying patriarchal structure, regardless of the fact that they are composed by radical thinkers of the time who were actively engaged in a counter-societal movement. Thus, this conclusive chapter will take a significant shift and analyze Bronson Alcott’s legacy from the perspective of the two most pivotal women connected to his career. The first is one who would far surpass her father’s popularity, both in pop culture and academia. Louisa May Alcott’s career casts a polarizing shadow on her father’s work, both from a critical point, but also in a manner that contextualizes his life’s work as a crucial study on the spiritual development of a child. The

second is the figure I believe is too greatly overshadowed in her contributions to Bronson's legacy, as it is her words that gave his school any bit of acclaim from outside critics. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody was much more than a mere amanuensis to Alcott's school, as it was her writing skill and literary touch in her *Record*, which I argued in Chapter One, that provided the Temple School critical acclaim and creatively enhanced and contextualized the effects of Alcott's pedagogical practices with students. In the spirit of the previous chapter, what follows is a conversation that begins with Louisa May's relationship with her father as the child most closely related and impacted by the teacher, and segues back to Peabody's defense of Alcott. While both women had plenty of criticism they could offer toward the disgraced educator, the ways in which they chose to defend him speak to the lasting legacy he left on child development. Ultimately, this legacy, I will argue, should be strongly considered in relation to the harsh reality we are currently experiencing in education.

I interpret Louisa May's relationship with her father as one evolving from a sincere reverence in her younger, childhood years, to a critical independence and self-reliance as she emerged into adolescence and adulthood. Indeed, even John Matteson argues how after Bronson's failures with the Temple School and the Fruitlands community experiment, he "shrank from family contact and turned his gaze obsessively inward." This left an adolescent Louisa May feeling "confused," as she "had always known her father as everyone else had known him, as a man of diffidence, calm, and surpassing self-control." While this "distancing" from his children may have been due in part to his failed reform efforts, Matteson argues that it may also have been due to the fact that his children were growing up, stating how his "interest in children, even his own, was rooted primarily in his fascination with elementary education and preadolescent development. The older the child, and the more firmly fixed her character, the less

intriguing he tended to find her” (171). Fortunately, the effect this had on Louisa May seemed to be liberating, as she gladly branched out on her own, perhaps more securely independent based on Bronson’s developmental practices. However, her depictions of her father in her work are often “compromised,” as he is “sometimes caricatured for the sake of comedy and sometimes wholly absent even when circumstances cry out for his presence” (7). I find this “caricaturing” most present in Louisa May’s “Transcendental Wild Oats”, and the absences most noticeable in her famed *Little Women*. Yet despite these depictions of her father within these texts, I believe each text offers a profound insight to how she translated her father’s work related to both education and reform, particularly in a way that reveals his legacy in these areas. For this reason, this chapter will home in on both of these primary works.

To say that the ending of Bronson Alcott’s and Elizabeth Peabody’s partnership at the Temple School was tumultuous might be an understatement. Riding the momentum of her *Record of a School* publication in 1835, Alcott wanted to quickly follow up *Record’s* critical popularity with his *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* in 1836. As he had perceived with the *Record*, in *Conversations*, Alcott had in mind that Peabody would play an amanuensis role in recording specific Socratic conversations Alcott engaged with his students. However, Matteson argues that Peabody found Alcott’s behavior becoming a bit overconfident and controlling, as he would often attempt to revise her transcriptions, sometimes manipulating certain conversations with students to capture the concepts he wanted readership to hear. Additionally, Peabody strongly disagreed with Alcott’s desire to publish his students’ names. Furthermore, she was growing largely skeptical “that the schoolmaster had no interest in any external influence, and... she began to lament his arrogance” (77). When Alcott discovered letters from Peabody’s sister, Mary, discussing these criticisms, a major argument ensued that

ultimately led to Peabody's resignation.¹⁹ *Conversations* would be published solely under Alcott's name, and would receive high criticism for the questionable topics he covered with his students, including frank discussions of sexuality, and the clear way in which his conversations appeared to be overtly leading his students to particular conclusions.²⁰ Despite the harsh outcry he received in response from society, Peabody still came to his defense, sticking up for his professional reputation and calling his *Conversations* a "resistance against tyrannical custom, and an arbitrary imposition of the adult mind upon the young mind" (81). Ironically, this was not the first time that year in which Peabody stood up for Alcott or a piece of writing related to their classroom work. Earlier in 1836, as a follow-up to their *Record of a School*, Peabody had published her "Explanatory Preface," an essay that appeared in new editions of the *Record* and both contextualized and defended Alcott's pedagogical theory while also distinguishing Peabody's own theories from her employer. Thus, in congruence with the way Louisa May Alcott continued her father's legacy for education reform through her work, this chapter will utilize Elizabeth Peabody's "Explanatory Preface" in conversation with Louisa May's work as a form of argument for Alcott's legacy, but also as a defense for an idealistic method of education reform that transcends even where Bronson Alcott may have fallen short.

A conversation for an ideal reformation of education is particularly relevant when we look at the state of education today. I have applied my personal experiences as both a Title I and private secondary English teacher in my previous chapters, and I will take the same approach here. Yet while my teaching anecdotes in chapters one and two were of those experienced under normal circumstances, it would be amiss of me to ignore what I, and my teacher comrades, have gone through in the 2020-21 school year. I contend that this past year is the result of a diminished ideal in education – a representation of how education reform in America has failed.

It is for this reason that I believe we must allow these texts from Bronson Alcott, Elizabeth Peabody, and Louisa May Alcott to speak to us today, reigniting the pursuit for an ideal. For though it may not be attainable, they shine a light which can guide us through this present darkness.

Reading Bronson Alcott's Legacy Through Louisa May Alcott and Elizabeth Peabody

Before advancing to these texts, I want to first establish what I mean by a "legacy" in education and discuss how Louisa May's and Peabody's texts fit within this discussion. I have argued that the Temple School was a de-standardized and unconventional experiment in terms of classroom pedagogy. Additionally, I have stated that Bronson Alcott was very concerned that a work of reform should be focused inward toward the child, and not any force outside of the classroom dictating classroom practices acted upon the student. I consider the term "legacy" as that which is inherited by a particular generation from the previous generation. When I look at the current state of public education in America, while there are specific methods teachers still apply in their classrooms today that we also recognize Alcott applying in the Temple School (i.e., Socratic conversations), there exists an institutional framework in which both standardized learning and reform at the federal/state government level have so possessed public education that we are extremely far removed from what Alcott envisioned. Therefore, in terms of "legacy," I am thinking about how Louisa May and Peabody both speak to Bronson's intended legacy for education, how their texts fit into the central focus of standardized learning and education reform, and how those texts speak to the real legacy we inherited and are experiencing in education today.

In a recent critical approach, Kristina West's 2020 publication *Louisa May Alcott and the Textual Child* offers a unique perspective for thinking about Bronson Alcott's lasting legacy and

influence on education. For instance, in the chapter “A Transcendental Childhood,” West considers “critical readings of Transcendentalism in (Louisa May) Alcott’s works,” such as her “Transcendental Wild Oats”, focusing on “how her constructions of childhood can be read to reflect, disrupt, or endorse Transcendentalist theories and practices” (142). West proceeds to interpret Louisa May’s work from the viewpoint of her own childhood raised under her father and his Transcendentalist associates. While this chapter deals more exclusively with how Bronson’s later failed utopian experiment at the Fruitlands affects and translates in Louisa May’s work, it is relevant because it focuses on how the child is impacted by Transcendental reform practices that promoted individualism, self-reliance, and personal freedom. These concepts, I have argued in my second chapter, were at the core of how Bronson pursued education reform, and Louisa May’s work causes us to distinguish between Bronson’s anticipated “ideal” child, and the reality Louisa May experienced as one of those children.

The following chapter in West’s text, “The Model Children: Alcott’s Theories of Education,” funnels more specifically to how Bronson’s theories of education are represented in Louisa May’s work. For instance, West points out how in “Transcendental Wild Oats” education is constructed by Louisa May in terms of “branches” breaking off from a “central stem.” This can be read as the branches representing different areas, or disciplines, such as reading, writing, math, etc. all rooted in a core system of learning. Or, and as I believe Louisa perceives it, Bronson thought himself a central stem from which his pupil extended out as branches carrying on his legacy. The chapter proceeds to analyze the March family in *Little Women* as a representation of Louisa May’s perceptions of nineteenth-century education and her father’s theories for changing it. For example, West emphasizes how Amy’s poor experiences with her teacher at a formal school falls well short of the holistic education she receives at home from her

parents. West argues here that Louisa May's main point with regards to education in *Little Women* is:

That a career in teaching is not suitable for everyone, and that a holistic approach – rather than one confined to the ‘branches’ – needs to be taken for a teacher to be ‘fine’ rather than simply be ‘called’ so. Further... (Louisa May) Alcott highlights what she constructs as the difference between knowledge and education, in which the acquisition of academic knowledge does not necessarily fit one for either its transferal to others or address the need for a wider education in the world than that for Classics and Math (168).

This supports Bronson's argument for a teacher representing a unique artist with a particular calling and capability to meet the holistic, spiritual needs of the child, beyond that of a mere passing on of standardized knowledge. My analysis and conversation around *Little Women* will further stress how the March family signifies a model of the Alcott family, and thus, despite the absence of the Bronson figure in Mr. March for the majority of the novel, represents an educational and developmental legacy. Further, the absence of the patriarch places Mrs. March and the four girls in a structure where education can be perceived outside of the traditional schoolhouse, and the mother can absorb the role as teacher.

This notion of the mother taking over from the father as teacher lends a segue to thinking about Peabody operating less as an amanuensis, and more as an educator, but also as an independent power separate from Bronson Alcott working to reform education. Megan Marshall addresses this problem of separating Alcott from Peabody, noting that Elizabeth “didn't receive the same recognition from *Record* that she would have if it had been *her school, her theory*. But the men whose minds she hoped to capture would not have paid attention to a woman's book about a girls' school” (317). Regardless, Peabody attempted to flip her successful publication of

Record of a School and use the money to start her own school with her sister Mary. This was another reason she composed her “Explanatory Preface,” to sell newer editions of the *Record* in 1836 that would continue to help fund her own school. Unfortunately, a large portion of copies of her book would be destroyed in a fire, ruining her and Mary’s plans. However, this historical context allows us to approach the “Explanatory Preface” as a document that, while written as a direct appraisal in support of Bronson Alcott’s teaching philosophy, distances Elizabeth Peabody from Alcott as an independent reformer of education, particularly one seeking to cultivate education in a feminist direction, breaking apart from the more patriarchal tradition.

Marshall provides a much more in-depth account of the Alcott-Peabody split that hints at the possibility of these gender structures underlying the tensions that eventually caused Peabody to resign. For Marshall, Alcott’s inherited fame brought on by Peabody’s *Record* led to an egotistical attitude with his students, in which he behaved as if his teaching was what set his students apart, rather than a genuine, self-cultivated education. This caused Peabody to question Alcott’s application of his theories, particularly the way he intended to dictate the writing of *Conversations*. While these conflicts certainly created a rift in their relationship, according to Marshall, it was Bronson’s invasion of Peabody’s privacy by going into her private room at his house and finding the critical letters she had written back and forth with her sister Mary that ultimately led to Peabody parting with the Temple School. Keeping this mostly private, she allowed the public to believe it was her disagreement with *Conversations* that led to her leaving, when in reality she perceived Alcott’s snooping to be the greater sin (325). I interpret this event more explicitly as a symbol of an unwanted and uninvited masculine intrusion upon feminine autonomy – an important distinction to make here, and supported by Marshall, in that the distinctions between Alcott and Peabody become less about educational theory and philosophy,

and more in regard to Alcott's arrogance regarding the importance of gender equality in education's lasting legacy in America.

As I alluded to earlier through Matteson, Marshall is even more explicit in describing how inexplicable it appeared to society that Peabody would continue to champion Alcott after the Temple School failed. She expands on the defense Peabody gave, noting how she identified Alcott's theories as "a current of the true method – an infusion of Truth... which neutralizes error." Marshall then concludes by defining the Alcott-Peabody legacy as having "founded and run – if only for three years – America's first open school. Their notion that good teaching was a matter of cultivating each student's innate gifts would become the hallmark of progressive education in America for the next two centuries" (326). As I advance now to an analysis of texts that I believe address and define Alcott's lasting legacy on education, it is important to maintain these texts in this context – that Peabody, as well as Louisa May, regardless of their personal disagreements with Alcott in these significant areas, adhered to and strongly defended the educational theories he introduced. Thus, in looking at American education two centuries later, criticisms related to standardized learning and education reform are upheld not only by Alcott's career and writing, but by these two women who so closely, and directly, impacted his legacy.

Restoring 'Hope' to the Educational Philosopher in "Transcendental Wild Oats"

Louisa May Alcott's "Transcendental Wild Oats" is widely recognized as Louisa May's critique of the Transcendentalist philosophers and their pursuit of reform. In this fictionalized tale of the Lamb (Alcott) family and their venture to help Timon Lion (Charles Lane) start a utopian community, Louisa May recapitulates her childhood perceptions of the adults involved in this experiment – particularly her mother and father. While this text offers little in the way of education reform specifically, I find it more valuable as a text that demonstrates the disconnect

between Bronson's philosophical approach to reform and his practical application of said reform. Additionally, similar to Peabody's value in the Temple School, "Transcendental Wild Oats" demonstrates how valuable the response and criticism of female writers was in uplifting Bronson's philosophy. This is a necessary perspective to take in order to understand how his legacy was carried on.

This distinction between gender perspective is demonstrated early on in the way Louisa May describes Abel Lamb's (Bronson) and Hope Lamb's (Mrs. Alcott) opinions on their upcoming Fruitlands experiment:

Here Abel Lamb, with the devoutest faith in the high ideal which was to him a living truth, desired to plant a Paradise, where Beauty, Virtue, Justice, and Love might live happily together, without the possibility of a serpent entering in. And here his wife, unconverted but faithful to the end, hoped, after many wanderings over the face of the earth, to find rest for herself and a home for her children (28-29).

This passage provides the distinction that separated Bronson from the women in his life. For him, it was the honest pursuit of ideals that drove him – a searching for inner truth – that he took on as a lifelong calling. This was especially evident in his educational pursuits, as he saw himself as the Christ-like figure sent to redeem his students from the corrupted, formal education traditional society enacted. In contrast, his companion wife is less concerned, and even depicted as a doubter, with his idealistic pursuits. She prefers a fulfillment of the practical needs of the family, and perhaps views Abel's utopian theories as impractical, particularly in consideration of finding a stable environment where their children can be taught and raised.

Louisa May advances this value of the feminine role through an analogy of "light." While the men of the community refuse to spend money on sources for light at night for philosophical

reasons, Hope Lamb sneaks her own lamps in the house to use to accomplish tasks in the home past daylight hours. These lights “burned steadily, while the philosophers built a new heaven and earth by moonlight; and through all the metaphysical mists and philanthropic pyrotechnics of that period Sister Hope played her own little game of ‘throwing light’” (39). I read this throwing of light as a casting of life into ideas that were essentially dead. The male philosophers of the Fruitlands were quite unproductive due to their lack of experience in farming and maintaining sustainable life in the wilderness. However, Mrs. Alcott, according to Louisa May, achieves practical tasks in the home to help sustain her family. This undoubtedly included an education through the daily lessons the girls received. Thus, while Bronson provided the theory, it is the wife, Mrs. Alcott implementing more of a practice.

While this is a critical fictionalization, I personally find Louisa May more complimentary of her father than she is of the other philosophers involved. She notes of the father that he “simply reveled in the Newness, firmly believing that his dream was to be beautifully realized.” For this reason, “he worked with every muscle of his body, for he was in deadly earnest. He taught with his whole head and heart; planned and sacrificed, preached and prophesied, with a soul full of the purest aspirations” (46). In this light, Louisa May depicts her father as willing to do whatever it took to realize a success of his reformation philosophy. Unlike others involved in this societal experiment, Bronson was willing to put in the work and sacrifice to realize his ideal. This hearkens back, I argue, to his dream of the Temple School experiment catching on, reimagining and progressing educational practices in America. As Louisa May chalks up the failure of the Fruitlands experiment to bad luck (a burning down of a storehouse, losing valuable supplies for the community), it was that same bad luck that had caused Bronson’s Temple School

to fail. He was not a man of empty ideas, from Louisa May's perspective, but one who possessed the heart and passion to see those ideas come to pass.

Even though these Transcendentalists were attempting to achieve a more perfect society to be inherited by the future generation, Louisa May's text portrays the children's state as that of suffering at the hands of the hopeless attempts of adults. In her brief referral to an education structure in "Transcendental Wild Oats", she notes that because many of the adults took turns teaching the children in their own, unique way, "the result was a chronic state of chaos in the minds of these much-afflicted innocents" (47). This might be read as a criticism surrounding the notion that no Transcendental philosopher believed the same thing,²¹ and therefore a student of Transcendentalism might struggle to navigate a specific line of instruction. Also at play here, though, is the fact that students of Alcott must surely have suffered an unstable education due not only to the fact that they were placed in the public strata as part of external criticisms aimed at their teacher, but due also, in part, to an instability caused by the mere failure of these experimentations Alcott was venturing. As his institutions failed after only a few years, this surely left his students out to dry. What's more is how Louisa May portrays the impact this had on her and her siblings, as when the Fruitlands community fails, they are left suffering through a cold winter living meal to meal, causing education to play a small matter of import in their fight for survival (57-59). These anecdotes, ironically, offer a sharp contrast to the ideal pre-adolescent student Alcott envisioned emerging from his reform efforts.

In this hopeless situation, it is not the father who redeems his children and restores order, but rather the mother. Louisa May concludes "Transcendental Wild Oats" with the image of a downtrodden and depressed Abel Lamb (Bronson) at the culmination of another failed reform effort. In his state of weariness, it is his symbolically named wife Hope Lamb (Mrs. Alcott) who

breathes hope back into the family. Rousing Abel from his discouraged slumber, the children recognize “the wan shadow of a man” coming forth, “leaning on the arm that never failed him (the wife), to be welcomed and cherished by the children.” Indeed, “‘Hope’ was the watchword now... the new commander, with recovered courage, said to her husband: ‘Leave all to God – and me. He has done his part; now I will do mine’” (60). Here, I believe Louisa May, rather than casting her father into the pit of historical criticism, as so many editors and historians of her era had done, has instead replaced him and taken over his work through the grace of the woman. From the child’s perspective, it is Mrs. Alcott, the mother, acting as the glue to hold the family together and reviving a hopeful future for their prospects. This is clearly an indication of how Louisa May revered her mother’s perseverance in the midst of her father’s shortcomings, and in doing so advocating for the strength of the woman’s role in the family. What I am proposing here is that we can take this even further to assume that it was similarly Peabody breathing life into Alcott’s school, in a sense holding him upright and helping him along his way. Yet while “Transcendental Wild Oats” deals strictly with Bronson’s failed utopian dream at the Fruitlands, and little in the way of education, I now turn to another fictionalization from the daughter in which we can draw more conclusive evidence of Bronson’s pedagogical legacy.

Education in *Little Women*

I have referenced earlier how, in *Little Women*, Louisa May uses Amy’s poor disciplinary experience with her teacher, Mr. Davis, as a method of exposing the problematic practices of the teacher in the traditional nineteenth-century schoolroom. In setting up the corporal punishment Mr. Davis bestows upon Amy due to her misbehavior, Louisa May sarcastically empathizes with this teacher character by acknowledging his misfortune for having to teach girls rather than boys, stating that “boys are trying enough to human patience... but girls are infinitely more so,

especially to nervous gentlemen with tyrannical tempers and no more talent for teaching than Dr. Blimber.” This comment directly confronts the patriarchal system at large during this time period, even partnering it with the traditional pedagogical practices that recognized a “fine teacher” as one knowing “any quantity of Greek, Latin, algebra, and ologies of all sorts,” even if they lack the “manners, morals, feelings and examples” (Alcott 71) of holistic development necessary for the spiritual and psychological growth in youth. As I expanded upon at length in my first chapter, it was this personal approach that distinguished Bronson Alcott from other educators, and here, I argue that Louisa May advances this pedagogical legacy by depicting it in a feminist system.

Similar to how Hope Lamb is the stabilizing force in “Transcendental Wild Oats”, this feminist structure for educating is overseen in *Little Women* by Mrs. March, or Marmee. For instance, after Amy is struck by Mr. Davis for her misbehavior and then publicly humiliated by him forcing her to stand before the entire school, Mrs. March resolves the situation by withdrawing Amy from school. She sympathizes with Amy, saying, “I don’t approve of corporal punishment... I dislike Mr. Davis’s manner of teaching.” However, she also reprimands her daughter’s behavior, stating “you broke the rules, and deserved some punishment for disobedience... I should not have chosen that way of mending a fault, but I’m not sure that it won’t do you more good than a milder method. You are getting rather conceited... and it is quite time you set about correcting it” (Alcott 74). Marmee’s sense of justice in resolving this dispute must be pointed out, as rather than absolutely vindicating Amy, she proceeds to rebuke her for her conceitedness instead of completely letting her off the hook. She does reject the traditional school model and its teaching methods, however, and replaces them with more personable methods of holistic and moral development closely related to Bronson Alcott’s philosophy.

Another example of Mrs. March's teaching methods is on display in the chapter "Experiments." Here, the four girls strike a deal with their mother that they be relieved of all lessons and responsibilities for a week and be allowed to do whatever they want. Mrs. March, anticipating an opportunity to teach a valuable lesson, accedes, warning them, "I think by Saturday night you will find that all play and no work is as bad as all work and no play" (Alcott 112). Initially, the girls are enamored of the experiment, assuring their mother that the experiment is proceeding quite well. In response, Mrs. March "smiled" and "said nothing" while doing the girls' "neglected work" (113). As the week progresses, the girls become more and more restless, and on the final day of the week, Mrs. March decides to stay in bed all day, forcing the girls to rouse from their laziness and fend for themselves. The girls suffer through the day, torn between maintaining their experiment or taking up the chores and responsibilities around the house. Finding them miserable at the end of the day, Marmee asks, "Are you satisfied with your experiment girls, or do you want another week of it?" (119). The girls reject this offer, clearly displeased with the week's results, and realize the whole week served to teach a lesson. As Mrs. March resolves, "I wanted you to see how the comfort of all depends on each doing her share faithfully... as a little lesson, I would show you what happens when everyone thinks only of herself" (120). The girls concede to the value of this lesson, while the chapter concludes with Marmee warning the girls of the importance of finding a healthy balance between work and play, so that they do not now swing to the other extreme and overwork. She implores them that this is a secret to finding happiness in life, regardless of one's financial bearings.

At this point in the novel, it is important to remember that all four girls are now educated at home, as Amy's removal from the public schoolroom totally absolved the March family's involvement with external forms of education. Therefore, the anecdote of the March girls' week-

long experiment demonstrates what the March family matriarch valued most in the development of youth. To Mrs. March, it was worth sacrificing a week of lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic, and Latin/Greek for the sake of her daughters' understanding of a fundamental truth in life. This propensity to seek out truth in a learning environment falls right in line with what Bronson Alcott sought for his students in the classroom. As I demonstrated in chapter one, Alcott clearly valued discussions with his students that cut at the heart, or truth, of a matter more so than a traditional lesson on languages, literacy, or arithmetic. It was also this pursuit of personal liberation and personal truth that drove his reform philosophy, as revealed in chapter two. Thus, as we look at his legacy through his daughter's eyes, it is fascinating that, while these values hold fast in her own depictions of education at the Alcott home, it is the mother rather than the father enacting these practices, as Mr. March is merely a background figure in the story, rarely present.

The conclusion of *Little Women* finds Louisa May's counterpart, Jo, using her inherited wealth to start a school for boys. She describes the educational roles in this school as her "taking care of them," while her professor husband, Fritz, will "teach them"; he is excited by "the thought of a chance for trying the Socratic method of education on modern youth" (Alcott 463). Jo goes on to describe her role in the school, stating she sees so many boys "going to ruin for want of help at the right minute. I love so to do anything for them, I seem to feel their wants, and sympathize with their troubles" (464). Indeed, as she continues to describe the roles in the school, it is Fritz who will instruct the children in an academic sense, but also mentor them in manual, outdoor, physical labor, while Jo takes on that of a spiritual guide. The descriptions of the school sound quite similar to Bronson Alcott's own experiment, yet I am particularly interested by how Jo specifies the role her and her husband will each fulfill, and how that

translates to a continuation of Bronson Alcott's educational legacy. It is worth noting that Louisa May originally refused to conclude her novel with Jo being married in the first place, so it might be speculated that she is merely divvying up roles here to provide Fritz a "masculine" conclusion that appeased a patriarchal editorship and readership.

Yet while this can only be speculated, I would instead divert attention to how Jo balances her role as equally, if not more, valuable than traditional practice. I believe this approach is inspired from her mother's own educational approach, and Jo sees a true opportunity to urge her students on to truth and happiness. The March family, and by extension, the Alcott family, never seems to find value in earthly pleasures, such as monetary gain, as demonstrated in the "Experiments" chapter. It is instead this spiritual approach, centered in a journey for inner truth, that drives Alcott's educational theory. Louisa May's work is significant to Alcott's legacy in that she shifts the authoritative teacher role away from a patriarchal hierarchy, as her texts demonstrate feminine overseers who de-standardize traditional modes of education by emphasizing a spiritual, holistic learning over the common "knowledge-applied" disciplinary approach. Additionally, while the male philosopher theorizes over reforming society, it is the female writer who stabilizes and leverages the passionate dreamer, advancing his ideas onward, and giving them actual weight. These legacy concepts depicted by Louisa May, therefore, bring me back to Elizabeth Peabody, as I now return to her "Preface" for the *Record of a School* and analyze what it is she is doing in Bronson Alcott's service beyond that of a mere amanuensis and assistant.

Distinguishing Peabody from Alcott in her "Explanatory Preface"

In an initial approach to Elizabeth Peabody's "Explanatory Preface" for her *Record of a School*, I find it significant to first acknowledge how she so clearly and explicitly distinguishes

the aims of the Temple School in contrast to common education. She defines the traditional public schoolroom of the nineteenth-century where “the attention is primarily and principally directed to the part of language which consists of the names of outward things; as well as to books which scientifically class and explain them; or, which narrate events in a matter-of-fact manner” (Peabody 98). In other words, this approach is purely external, and seeks to standardize the child by classifying information as, as Peabody claims, “matter-of-fact,” rather than concepts to be contemplated or questioned. She calls this plan, bluntly, a “bad one,” and that its result has deprived American students of a spiritual culture. To divert from this problem, she says that Bronson Alcott urges his students to contemplate and reflect on knowledge “as it unveils itself within” them, rather than first seeking knowledge from worldly sources (99).

I point out this first step from Peabody because of how straightforward she is in her distinguishing of educational theories. Contrasted with Alcott’s “Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture,” Peabody reads much more vividly and lucidly. Additionally, I think it is crucial that Peabody terms differing educational methods as that of “contemplating Spirit” in the Temple School as opposed to an emphasis of the External in common education. These terms help to distinguish between relational approaches and approaches centered on factual knowledge and natural laws, which dictate how teachers should teach and how students should learn. Her emphasis on the inward reflection, in rejecting the methods of common education, shifts the focus from the outward to the inward, and liberates the student to operate from within the confines of their own merit, rather than suffer the pressure to conform to the expectations of society. It is this emphasis on the “spiritual,” or the feeling, over the natural order, that I argue breaks the pattern of patriarchal education, and shifts to a deeper, reflective approach that both Alcott and Peabody believed their students required.

But *why* is this type of education more valuable to students compared to a common one? This is something never really explicated by Alcott; however, Peabody coherently develops a rationale in her “Preface.” She argues that it is well-known that children are often inclined to ask “questions so deep, that they cannot be answered” because when a child is given a perception of the “finite,” they then “plunge into the infinite.” For this reason, she explains that a “deep reasoner” would come to the conclusion that “a plan of education, founded on the idea of studying Spirit in their own consciousness, and in God – is one that will meet children just where they are, - much more than will the common plan of pursuing the laws of nature, as exhibited in movements of the external world” (Peabody 100). Given Peabody’s assertion about the child’s natural jumps in reasoning from the finite to the infinite, it would seem that a Socratic method of questioning is, indeed, a natural teaching move to apply in the classroom, and explains why its application is still applied in contemporary education, particularly in the English classroom. Even further, however, the idea of “meeting a student exactly where they are” is one that challenges standardized practices in education – a notion that challenged common nineteenth-century practices as much as modern ones. One might hear the term differentiation thrown about nowadays, but at the end of the school year, each child is expected to stand on an equal platform of assessment results. That Peabody can acknowledge and speak so clearly to these issues in early American education – issues that still resonate in education today – speaks to the legacy both she and Alcott were forging.

She proceeds to address this external world and its inflictions of criticism on her *Record of a School*. As much criticism was bound up in questioning the methods applied in the school, Peabody reminds her readership that she intended her account to be a “Record of the *actual* School,” and therefore she recorded exercises as they actually occurred, even those that were

later modified if they fell flat in initial implementation with students. She then rebukes her critics, saying she expected her writing to be read in a “liberal spirit,” and “that a general character of the exercises would be regarded, rather than the peculiarities of any one lesson, and especially of an introductory one, on entirely new ground” (Peabody 102). While this is an easy defense to give in hindsight, this does strongly defend an allegorical interpretation of her work, as I alluded in my first chapter analysis of the *Record*. Yet even more intriguing in her defense is the agency with which she speaks. Peabody is not defending Alcott in any way in this passage. Instead, she is sticking up for her own contributions. This undoubtedly is an explanatory move made as a preface to the newer edition of the *Record*, but it is relevant to read this in the context of her very purpose for releasing new editions. As I stated earlier, Peabody is trying to raise money here to start her own school for girls, where she can impose her own philosophies toward a practice of education even more unique than Alcott’s. This is important to consider in reading Peabody as more than a “recorder” for Alcott. Here, we can begin to read her as a feminizing power in education, seeking to disrupt a masculine common education and enhance Alcott’s spiritual practices.

Therefore, while these initial moves do much to contextualize Peabody’s interpretations of the value of the Temple School experiment, as well as respond to critics of her *Record*, it is important now to identify where she separates herself from Bronson Alcott as an educational philosopher. There are several occasions throughout her “Preface” where Peabody questions the ways in which Alcott influences his students in their train of thinking and reasoning. As previously mentioned, this was also a major criticism of both written accounts of the school, in *Record* and *Conversations*. Peabody concedes that one person, “in leading” such conversational exercises, “may sometimes give a cast to the whole inquiry, through the influence of his own

idiosyncrasies and favorite doctrines; and Mr. Alcott's definitions may not be defensible in every instance. I am not myself prepared to say that I entirely trust his associations" (Peabody 101).

However, she does go on to say that, compared to other instructors engaged in more standardized approaches, Alcott, despite his inclinations to specific lines of reasoning, likely liberates his students to more personalized modes of reflection as opposed to those in common education.

Peabody raises an interesting issue here. I must admit, as an educator, this is a tricky scenario to navigate when addressing personal, spiritual, or philosophical topics with students. When these situations come up with my students, it is difficult not to speak to matters from the perspective of my own personal beliefs or doctrines. According to Peabody, this is something Alcott seems to have struggled with as well, and it is interesting that she separates herself from him in this regard. While Alcott's methods are clearly aimed toward a progressive mode of teaching – where this liberated style broaches not only the holistic, spiritual development of the child, but also through the methods by which common skills and knowledge are passed on – Peabody is concerned that, perhaps unconsciously, Alcott tends to slip into a mode of teaching that calls on his students to conform to *his* image, rather coming into their own individualized identity.

This is made evident a few pages later when Peabody elaborates on the consequences of this shortcoming of common education, and, occasionally, Alcott, stating that it can cause a “dwarfing” of the minds of children. She explains:

As it is sometimes necessary to imagine or refer to practical applications of principles, and to outward occasions of sentiments, in order to identify them, we are liable to present cases which are not entirely comprehensible by children who can perfectly realize the principle or sentiment, either in their own consciousness, or in application to a case

whose terms they do understand. And Mr. Alcott may sometimes err in selecting his instances of application (Peabody 103).

I read this as a direct criticism Peabody inflicts upon her employer for his occasional inability to meet students on their level. She says that it is “sometimes necessary” to refer to “outward occasions of sentiments... in order to identify them,” or, what I speculate here means referring to the External Nature in reference to, or as an example of, a specific principle being taught, because that principle’s application in the External Nature can be easily recognized and understood by students. Alcott’s inclination to lean on the Spirit, however, perhaps caused him to produce abstract and convoluted discussions with his students that overcomplicated certain principles, when a simple reference to a common, natural occurrence could have led students to consciously arrive at a clear understanding.

This all leads up to Peabody’s succinct distinguishing between her and Alcott’s educational philosophies. She concludes that, where she diverges from Alcott in theory is on the point that she thinks “that a private conscience in the young will naturally be the highest. Mr. Alcott thinks a common conscience is to be cultivated in a school, and that this will be higher in all, than any one conscience would be, if it were private” (Peabody 106). Thus, Peabody is concerned with cultivating the individual, and for her this is the highest possible aim for education reform. Alcott, on the other hand, perceives an individual cultivation to be merely the first step in a grander reform of society. He starts with the individual with the hopes of the private conscience overflowing into the school, and from there, the school to society. Yet, as Peabody has built up to this point, Alcott seems to perceive himself, perhaps unconsciously, as a model for reform – and thus instructs his students as though they were apostles to his Christ-like image. This proposes a new form of standardized learning – albeit, an unconscious standardized

learning – that deprives the students from freely cultivating their own, unique conscience due to their conscience being vastly influenced by Alcott.

In spite of these critiques, Peabody is still adamant in her support for Alcott, and she continues to dismiss these shortcomings of his as either a blissful ignorance or a misrepresentation/misunderstanding on her part. She has an abundance of loyalty to her employer, so it is important that I not be read as arguing for her complete separation from him. She even concludes her “Preface” by contending that Alcott “has no intention of cultivating one faculty more than another. His plan is to follow the natural order of the mind” (Peabody 118). What I am contending is that while this is his plan, Alcott has shown a propensity for failing to act out, practically, his intentions. There is a certain patriarchal inclination to his methods that, while vastly improving upon common standardized practices and challenging the patriarchal hierarchy of education reform, still show up in his Socratic method of instruction and the way he is shown to influence his students. Conversely, Peabody’s emphasis on the individual and meeting the student “where they are at” displays a feminist shift in education that one could say improves, or at least, supplements Alcott’s legacy. If this focal shift back to the “private” were to become the “highest aim” in reforming education, how might education, communities, and society at large then naturally reform? This is a question that is imperative to grapple with in the current epoch, wherein education has become a distanced and isolated experience for a multitude of American students. In short, the legacy of educational reform practices has done little to prepare education as a system for where we stand today. Now more than ever students need to be met “where they are at,” as we find ourselves in a season where a nurturing approach will be of far greater developmental value than requiring our students to continue to strive for pre-pandemic standards.

Alcott's and Peabody's Legacy for Education in the Pandemic Era

Ten years ago, Douglas Rushkoff warned of an impending invasion of digital technology upon human society. He claimed that in the “highly programmed landscape ahead, you will either create the software or you will be the software... Program, or be programmed. Choose the former, and you gain access to the control panel of civilization. Choose the latter, and it could be the last real choice you get to make” (13-14). In the pandemic-stricken year of 2020, this digital takeover has been highly apparent in the realm of education, causing a binary conundrum in the teacher-student relationship that has highly complicated the methods by which we reach our students. On one hand, without the capabilities technology provides, it is hard to imagine a path by which education could have persevered through the past year. On the other hand, the varying levels of technological comprehension by both teachers and students has created an imbalanced model where those who possess digital literacy can thrive, while those who do not are left in the dust. Rushkoff's assertion also raises problematic concerns in terms of education reform that the past year has greatly exposed. Those who “create the software,” – or write the curriculum, or pass legislation that impacts education, or mandate new protocols for education in response to COVID-19, or sign off on the type of technology teachers must adapt to their digital classrooms – are those gaining access to the “control panel” of our students' learning. Meanwhile, teachers have been stripped of an abundance of autonomy this past school year. We find ourselves confined to the “software,” even more incapable of operating as the artists and shepherds Alcott and Peabody described us as. Therefore, I will conclude by questioning how these nineteenth-century texts reach educators in our current state and how their legacy relates to our current issues.

From the start of the 2020-21 school year, public educators in America knew they were embarking on a journey of unknowns with no clear path forward or knowledgeable end in sight. The word “flexible” was tossed around everywhere. All we knew for certain was that our job could not be completed the way it traditionally has been. I want to share my own experiences of the past year here, not to serve as a model for what *all* secondary, public educators have experienced, but merely as an illustration for what public educators and students have had to endure.

At the beginning of the school year, I and my fellow teachers went through two weeks of training and professional development, as we do every year, in preparation for the new school year. This year, however, was a conglomeration of the usual procedures and protocols covered every school year, along with adapting and anticipating new procedures in response to teaching during a pandemic. While this covered a wide-range of issues and unknowns, I want to focus on those that impacted pedagogical practice in the classroom and teacher/student relationship. For adapting to teaching online, teachers were required to learn a multitude of digital education platforms - Canvas, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Edugence, Nearpod – just to name a few. To begin the school year, all teaching would be conducted virtually, through either Zoom or Teams. As the school year progressed, and TEA and the state government began to adapt protocols, a portion of students were allowed to return to in-person; however, given the option, many students were allowed to remain virtual. These virtual students could either join the live class meetings on Teams, or be “asynchronous” learners, and simply complete assignments on their own, emailing their teachers if they had a question. This caused a scenario where teachers were balancing students in the classroom, students online, and students they couldn’t even communicate with in a live format. On top of all this, you had teachers with varying levels of digital literacy, causing a

situation where some teachers knew how to operate each app effectively, making virtual learning easier for their students, and those teachers who were overwhelmed with the plethora of new technology and the major transition their job had taken, causing learning to be more difficult for their students.

As a reminder, I teach in a DFW Title I school, meaning a large portion of our students have limited resources at home as it is. While the technology was made available for all students (laptops, iPads, etc.), there was very little training or opportunity for students to gain a digital literacy to help them navigate schooling from home. Thus, those students who had the resources, support, and digital knowledge, were more likely to be successful than those who lacked those resources. This positioned students in an impossible situation: either continue to fail from home or risk their health, and their family's health, by attending in-person.

It goes without saying that the described dynamic caused high levels of stress for both teachers and students. This year I engaged in multiple conversations with students and counselors related to mental health. The issues with students ranged from wanting to quit and give up on school altogether, to extremes related to self-harm due to feeling so isolated at home, removed from human interaction. However, as an English teacher, a core-tested subject, I have been required to make sure my students learn the necessary skills throughout the year so that they can pass a standardized test at the end of the school year. This requirement has caused me, and other teachers, to question what really should be our highest aim for our students during the pandemic.

It must be acknowledged that COVID-19 caught every American institution off-guard; therefore, this is not intended as an indictment or critique on those placed in positions of decision-making and protocol-setting for education. Additionally, I want to note that every

campus in America chose to operate differently within the guidelines provided, and my described experience is unique to the decisions my own campus made. What I am concerned with here, though, is how education will operate philosophically moving forward. I can't help but imagine how Alcott and Peabody would respond to our current state, as both the interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships existing between teacher and pupil have been extremely complicated. What's more, the standardized culture in education has left a multitude of students isolated in the past year, and the inequity caused by this institution has only expanded. Furthermore, a practice of reform has shifted to how technology can improve learning for students, rather than how teachers can be better equipped to meet student needs – needs which now more than ever have become far more spiritual, mental, and psychological than academic.

Peabody's *Record of a School* introduced society to a method of teaching that reached the whole child. Other Transcendentalist texts like Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" and Alcott's own "Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture" challenged a reform practice in America that operated from the top-down to instead start with the individual. In thinking about how these texts get to us in education today, I've theorized about how Bronson Alcott's educational legacy is actually more greatly advanced by the two women closest to his work: Peabody, and his daughter, Louisa May. I believe both Peabody and Louisa May, in the way they write about and analyze Bronson's work, signify a shift away from patriarchal institutions within education, allowing a structure of deep reflection to meet the private needs of the child, cultivating the student from within and attaining the highest reform to a child's learning possible: a learning that meets the specific needs of each individual.

This philosophical shift is vital to the sustaining of contemporary education. In the past two hundred years, standardized methods of learning and teaching have disrupted the artistry of

the true teacher, and created an inequitable measure that expects students to conform to a particular standard of academic knowledge. Additionally, the reform practices in education have operated in a system where state and federal government cast legislation upon localized forces (i.e., districts, campuses, teachers, students, and communities), robbing these local systems of personal freedoms that deprive a pure reformation that begins from within the student. I conclude that these factors are patriarchal, or invasive, by nature. Bronson Alcott began, and Elizabeth Peabody and Louisa May Alcott advanced, a philosophical shift away from these invasive forces towards a reflective, and arguably, feminist philosophy that sought to cultivate the whole child. Looking at the state of modern education, a patriarchal structure has left us ill-equipped and unprepared to meet the authentic needs of students during a global pandemic. While technology has been a valuable resource in maintaining a system of education in general, a consideration of these nineteenth-century Transcendentalist texts urges us to consider a philosophical transition back to the Alcotts and Peabody, allowing us to cultivate a holistic education for the now more isolated and private student.

NOTES

Chapter One

1. In the 2005 copyright edition, Megan Marshall, a Peabody scholar, provided a thorough historical contextualization for the importance of Peabody's writing while she served at the Temple School. Marshall effectively distinguishes Peabody apart from Alcott, acting as an independent agent whose work under Alcott would offer a much wider impact in both societal and education reform than she could have originally anticipated.
2. Lorraine McDonnell's 2015 article "Stability and Change in Title I Testing Policy" describes the political backdrop to what preempts teachers to take such instructional measures. As her article is focused more on policy, I've chosen to withhold direct reference to her work for Chapter 2, but her study is definitely driving my argument here.
3. Philip F. Gura's *American Transcendentalism: A History* stands out as a unique historical approach to Transcendentalism's evolving, as well as its projecting influence on American philosophy and culture. It is, and will continue to be throughout this project, a strong historical foundation from which I contextualize the Transcendentalists and their roles in both societal and education reform.
4. This falls strongly in line with the ideas of other Transcendentalist writings. For instance, Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Nature," "The American Scholar," "Divinity School Address," and Henry Thoreau's *Walden* are other Transcendentalist texts that would support Peabody's assumptions about nature's role in educating.
5. Much of this writing came during her time as a bookstore owner and publisher, including with the famous *Dial*, *Aesthetic Papers*, and other essays.

6. Megan Marshall's critically acclaimed *The Peabody Sisters* does an immaculate work of distinguishing Elizabeth's scholarly drive in a male-dominated environment. Marshall displays how Peabody was herself a powerful force in reform spheres, and demonstrated a commitment to education that rivaled Alcott himself. This is a work that will support arguments I make down the line that support the significance of a feminist shift to the structure of education.

7. Ricardo Miguel Alfonso's essay "Teaching Transcendentalism in Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's *Aesthetic Papers*" appears in a collection on *Romantic Education in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Interestingly, Alfonso is concerned with using Peabody's writing in her *Aesthetic Papers* as a form of Romantic education by teaching Transcendentalist ideas, but he begins the essay by contextualizing the climate of public education during the early Transcendentalist era. This includes thinking about education as a "rich cultural background" during the time period, but also emphasizing its scientific, empirical nature. This background information aside, Alfonso's work is more captivating in that, much like Marshall, he demonstrates alternative methods by which we can look at Peabody as an educator through her writing – something not quite achieved in the same way by studying Alcott's writing.

8. While Crain's *The Story of A* offers a unique take on the state of education in early nineteenth-century America, the narrative of American education she crafts in this work is so vital for a historical approach to education reform and practice. Especially fascinating is how she stresses the importance of the child's response to images – specifically the image of letters and symbols. From a Transcendentalist perspective, this is crucial in considering the way we will see Alcott and Peabody require students to practice writing their letters each day. Simply put, Crain's work contextualizes how educators of the period used the alphabet in education, and expands our

perspective for the practices Alcott and Peabody are influenced by from traditional modes of teaching writing during the time period.

9. This initial question Alcott poses falls in line with his method of prioritizing the assessment of feeling from his students first after a lesson. He frequently begins each conversational lesson with a similar question. This highlights his emphasis on the inward, self-reflection over external principles or influences of any particular text or concept of study.

10. Peabody's actual rebuttal on page 14 states: "In teaching reading, in the first instance, Mr. Alcott's method has also been much misunderstood; and because he thinks a child should never be hurried into or over the mechanical part of the process, many say and perhaps think, that he does not think it important for children to learn to read at all! It will probably, however, be difficult to find children, who know so well how to use a book, when they are eight years old, as those who have been taught on his method, which never allows a single step to be taken in any stage of the process, without a great deal of thinking on the part of the child."

11. This notion of the students agreeing to physical punishment is also in line with heavy, and I should say reasonable, criticism Alcott received for his conversational approach. Many critics were concerned that Alcott's Socratic method urged students towards anticipated, and even expected, responses. This caused them to question the authenticity of what Peabody wrote in the *Record*, as those opposed to the school were suspicious of Alcott's methods and the manner in which they are here published. I address these criticisms at the conclusion of this chapter.

12. In Chapters Two and Three, I elaborate further on the various causes that led to the demise of the Temple School, as well as Alcott's public downfall. Overall, John Matteson's book is a primary catalyst I utilize to contextualize the perception outliers had of Alcott, as well as in developing a narrative for how, and why, the school failed to take off.

Chapter Two

13. Editor Jeffrey S. Cramer alludes to this contrast between Alcott and Thoreau in his preface for Thoreau's essay in *The Portable Thoreau*. Cramer's intention is to demonstrate the possibility that Thoreau's protesting was inspired by Alcott – further encouraging the image of Alcott as silent protester and activist. I believe it is possible that Thoreau receives more acknowledgement because he wrote about his experience, expressing his frustration to a public audience, whereas Alcott's more private protest reflects his genuine concern for self-morality and inward conviction over social conformity.

14. This passage was brought to my attention in Matteson's description of Alcott's and Thoreau's relationship in the preface of *Eden's Outcasts* (p. 6). Matteson is referencing Jeffrey S. Cramer's edited version of *Walden*. The original source is: *Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition*. Edited by Jeffrey S. Cramer. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004.

15. Marshall describes in *The Peabody Sisters* early, awkward interactions between Peabody and Emerson. They were introduced in their late teenage years, and Marshall details Elizabeth's first impressions of "Waldo" as being extremely intimidated by each other to the point they could barely speak to one another during tutoring sessions. In the historical narrative Marshall is building, this reads as a way of leveling Peabody intellectually with, not only Emerson, but other future contemporaries she mentions such as Thoreau and Margaret Fuller.

16. Citations of "Civil Disobedience" are from *The Portable Thoreau*, also edited by Jeffrey Cramer.

17. It is important to denounce the masculine-gender language used here by Thoreau. His allusion to the "universal man" can read a bit sexist, and is a reflection of his masculine-dominated society, no doubt problematic both in its time, and today. I am shifting this to

perceive his references to “men/man” in these passages to a more human, individualistic interpretation – or rather, self-reliant individuals.

18. Peabody details this conversation in her *Record*, p. 2-3

Chapter Three

19. Matteson describes the deterioration between Alcott and Peabody in pages 76 – 80 of *Eden's Outcasts*.

20. Alcott engaged in a conversation with his students on the Virgin birth of Christ, to which one of his students, Josiah Quincy, made a reference to “naughtiness” in mentioning where children come from. This was something Peabody was largely against Alcott including in *Conversations*, as she foresaw what public reaction to this dialogue would likely entail. However, Alcott had these conversations recorded on days when Peabody was not at the school, and after she resigned from his employment, leaving him to publish *Conversations* under his own name, these dialogues were kept in the final draft.

21. In his introduction to *American Transcendentalism: A History*, Philip Gura includes excerpts from Louisa May's 1869 letter “Latest News from Concord” in which she satirically details the philosophical movements at play between her father, Emerson, and others in and around her hometown of Concord, Massachusetts. This letter's humorous approach entails the largely critical eye Louisa May cast upon those involved in the Transcendentalist sphere, yet more importantly, it reveals a unique perspective from the child of one of the movement's leaders whose everyday life was in some way impacted by these philosophic dreamers.

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