FRANZISKA SCHMID

Educating New England

The Pedagogical Experiments of the American Transcendentalists

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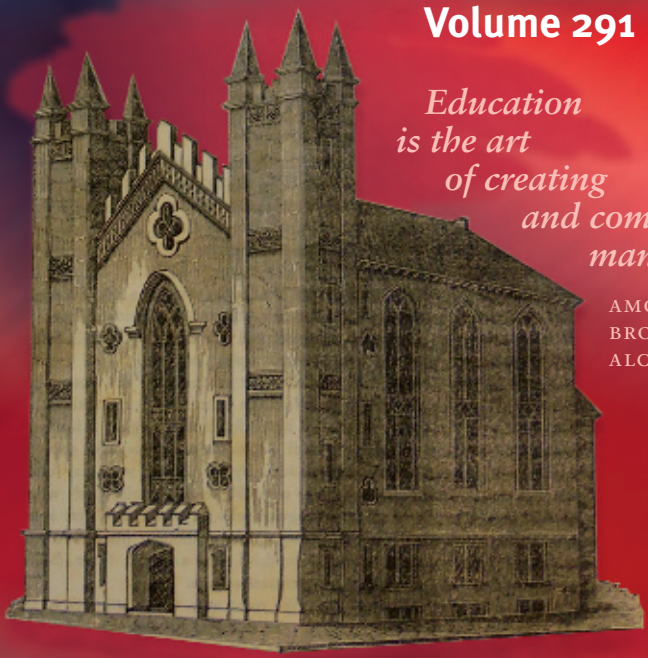

Education is the art of creating and completing man.

AMOS BRONSON ALCOTT

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AMERICAN STUDIES – A MONOGRAPH SERIES
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COVER ILLUSTRATION

The cover image shows Amos Bronson Alcott's Temple School
in the Masonic Temple in Boston.
The image is taken from the Amos Bronson Alcott Papers
in Houghton Library, Harvard University.

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Notes on the Texts

I intended to provide accurate transcriptions of the erratic spelling and often illegible handwriting of the manuscript sources. Whenever possible, I preserved the original punctuation. Sometimes it was difficult to distinguish between commas and periods, and semi-colons and colons. In these cases, I chose the variant which made the most sense in the given context. I have not attempted to regularize Alcott's inconsistent use of commas. In cases where colons are used instead of question marks, I preserved the original punctuation. Furthermore, the capitalization of words is reproduced as in the original manuscripts. In instances of doubt, such is often the case with the letters *S, C,* or *O*, I chose the lowercase version of the word. Alcott's practice of underlining, as well as the double or triple underlining of one word is reproduced in italics in the transcript. Alcott often crossed out individual words or parts of sentences, and rephrased the sentence above the crossed out element. Unfortunately, the rephrased part is often illegible. In these cases, I used Alcott's original wording in my transcription. Archaic spelling variants are reproduced as in the original without being marked as false. Only obvious spelling mistakes such as in "descourse" instead of "discourse" are marked by [sic]. Illegible or faded words are marked by [-?].

Abbreviations

Whenever possible, I used the published and edited version of the texts. However, vast amount of material is only available in manuscript form. Manuscript material regarding Amos Bronson Alcott is in the following always designated with *Ms.* The published version of a text, such as Alcott's *Journals,* edited by Odell Shepard, is thus abbreviated *AJ,* whereas the manuscript version is abbreviated as *MsAJ*. In the case of Alcott's manuscript journals, individual designations for each journal such as 'Scripture,' or 'Diary' are neglected for the sake of clarity, and are instead generally referred to as 'Journals' (*MsAJ*). In order to clearly identify the source, the respective year is added (for example *MsAJ 1834*). The pagination is reproduced as in the manuscripts; missing pages or erroneous pagination is not accounted for. Sometimes, no page numbers are indicated. In case the pages are not numbered, the respective call number serves as the closest identification of the text passage. If a call number refers to several boxes, which in turn contain folders (as is often the case for unbound materials), reference is made first to the box, and then to the folder (for example *MsAM 1;2*). For Alcott's *Autobiographical Collections (MsAC)*, the respective volume is indicated in brackets in the text (for example *MsAC IV*). Margaret Fuller's papers in the Houghton Library are generally designated as *HMFP*, and the respective call number serves as the identification of the quoted item, such as in *HMFP Am 1086 (84)*.

Manuscripts

AMA MsDiary Alcott, Abigail M. "Diary for the Years 1841, 42, 43, and 44: At Concord, Fruitlands, Still River, and Again at Concord." Vol. II. Alcott Family Additional Papers, 1707-1904. MS Am 1130.14 (1). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

BFP Brook Farm Phalanx. "Brook Farm Papers." Film M 549. Massachusetts Historical Society. Microform. Lamont Library, Harvard University.

BMFP Fuller, Margaret. Margaret Fuller Papers: 1837-1884. Boston Public Library. MS Am. 1450. Box 2, Folder 90.

ESJ Savage, Emma R. "Emma Savage Journal." MS Am 2562. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

HMFP Fuller, Margaret. Margaret Fuller Family Papers: 1662-1970. MS Am 1086. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

MsAB Alcott, Amos B. "Autobiography 1834." Amos Bronson Alcott Papers. MS Am 1130.10 (22). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

MsAC Alcott, Amos B. "Autobiographical Collections." Amos Bronson Alcott Papers. MS Am 1130.11. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

MsAJ Alcott, Amos B. "Journals and Diaries of Amos Bronson Alcott." Amos Bronson Alcott Papers. MS Am 1130.12. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

MsAM Alcott, Amos B. "Autobiographical Materials." Amos Bronson Alcott Papers. MS Am 1130.10 (24). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

MsC Alcott, Amos B. "Catalogue of My Library: 1858." Amos Bronson Alcott Papers. MS Am 1130.10 (27). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

MsM Alcott, Amos B. "Memoir: 1878." Amos Bronson Alcott Papers. MS Am 1130.10 (23). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Other Abbreviations

AJS Alcott, Amos B. *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*. 1938. Ed. Odell Shepard. 2 vols. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966. 1.

AJ36 Myerson, Joel. "Bronson Alcott's 'Journal for 1836.'" *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1978): 17–104.

AJ37-1 Carlson, Larry A. "Bronson Alcott's 'Journal for 1837' (Part One)." *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1981): 27–132.

AJ37-2 Carlson, Larry A. "Bronson Alcott's 'Journal for 1837' (Part Two)." *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1982): 53–167.

AJ38-1 Carlson, Larry A. "Bronson Alcott's 'Journal for 1838' (Part One)." *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1993): 161–244.

AJ38-2 Carlson, Larry A. "Bronson Alcott's 'Journal for 1838' (Part Two)." *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1994): 123–93.

AJ40 Myerson, Joel. "Bronson Alcott's 'Scripture for 1840.'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 20.4 (1974): 237–59.

AL Alcott, Amos B. *The Letters of A. Bronson Alcott*. Ed. Richard L. Herrnstadt. Ames: Iowa State UP, 1969.

CW Emerson, Ralph W. *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson.* Ed. Robert E. Spiller, et al. 10 vols. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1971 - 2013.

EL Emerson, Ralph W. *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Robert E. Spiller, Wallace E. Williams, and Stephen E. Whicher. 3 vols. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1959-1972.

EMF Fuller, Margaret. *The Essential Margaret Fuller*. Ed. Jeffrey Steele. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992. American Women Writers Series.

FBC Simmons, Nancy C. "Margaret Fuller's Boston Conversations: The 1839-40 Series." *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1994): 195–226.

GL	Fuller, Margaret. "The Great Lawsuit: Man Versus Men. Woman Versus Women." *The Dial* 4 (1843): 1–47.
MEPP	Peabody, Elizabeth P. "Mrs. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody - 1800 to 1818: Letter from Miss. E.P. Peabody." *Barnard's American Journal of Education* 30.7 (1880): 307–10.
MFL	Fuller, Margaret. *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*. Edited by Robert N. Hudspeth. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983-1994. 6 vols.
PL	Peabody, Elizabeth P. *Letters of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: American Renaissance Woman*. Ed. Bruce A. Ronda. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1984.
PM	Peabody, Elizabeth P. "Principles and Methods of Education: Letter From Miss Elizabeth Palmer Peabody." *American Journal of Education* 32 (1882): 721–38.
RWEL	Emerson, Ralph W. *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson: In Six Volumes*. Ed. Ralph L. Rusk. 6 vols. New York: Columbia UP, 1941-1995.

Acknowledgements

This book originates from my dissertation that I completed at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. I am indebted to more people who supported this project than I can possibly enumerate in these few lines. Firstly, and most importantly, I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. habil. Clemens Spahr, for his continuing support and invaluable advice. He encouraged me to apply for scholarships to pursue my interest in the Transcendentalists. His belief in my abilities and ideas made this project possible. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Oliver Scheiding for his helpful comments on the project and his expertise. Furthermore, I would like to thank the other members of my committee, Prof. Dr. Alfred Hornung, Prof. Dr. Mita Banerjee, and Prof. Dr. Karl Nikolaus Renner.

On a practical note, this project would not have been possible without the financial support of Stipendienstiftung Rheinland-Pfalz. I am immensely grateful for their generous funding, which allowed me to freely pursue my research. Furthermore, this book greatly relies on the archival research that I conducted at the libraries of Harvard University. I am grateful to the German Academic Exchange Service which supported my first stay in Cambridge in 2014. I am also immensely thankful to Houghton Library, Harvard University, that allowed me to return to the archive as a Ralph Waldo Emerson Fellow in 2016. I am very grateful to the Houghton Library librarians, who were always ready to help with their expertise to manage the wealth of the manuscript material.

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1 Introduction

> Education is the Rock on which the moral, intellectual, and physical superstructure of human perfection, can alone securely rest.
>
> (Amos Bronson Alcott)

Transcendentalism was a practical experiment in education. As the controversy surrounding Amos Bronson Alcott's Temple School illustrates, the Transcendentalists pursued their goal of developing individual character to perfection by establishing alternative pedagogical methods. These methods had to be established in a debated setting. Alcott's letter to his brother Chatfield Alcott from May 7, 1837, sheds light on the extent of the scandal his pedagogy caused. Eventually, the Temple School became such an object of heated discussion in the public and the press that a mob threatened to attack Alcott:

> Early in the year, I published my "Conversations on the Gospels," and the book has given it seems great offence to many,—so much so, that it seemed a mob was even threatened at me to attack the schoolmaster in his school. But no violence of this sort was really attempted. The newspapers of the city were violent, however, and the controversy is still raging. (Alcott, *Letter to Chatfield Alcott 7 May 1837*)

Alcott's *Conversations with Children on the Gospels,* a two-volume record of the controversial classroom dialogues in the Temple School, triggered "violent" discussions in the journals and newspapers of the time, and divided public intellectuals and reformers into either supporters, or fierce opponents of Alcott's Transcendentalist pedagogy. The fact that Alcott describes the discussions in the newspapers as "violent" shows that

Alcott and others believed that the future of the New England institutional landscape was at stake. In the multitude of co-existing school forms, which often stood in direct competition with each other, the Temple School stood out as a pedagogical innovation, and was at the center of public debates about the future orientation of New England educational institutions.

Education was at the heart of American Transcendentalism. As a scholarly prism, it allows us to rethink Transcendentalism as an "*educational* demonstration" that put its educational theories into practice in a highly contested institutional setting (Mott 153).[1] Transcendentalist educational practice constituted and defined itself through a rejection of the prevalent methods of drill and coercion in New England schools and universities that were based on the Lockean perception of the mind as a blank slate. It thus engaged with and challenged the pedagogical practices of the time, forming powerful alternatives in the New England school system.

Despite the seminal importance of education for the Transcendentalists, research into the Transcendentalists' educational theories has so far largely elided the importance of regarding Transcendentalist educational practice as part of a larger national and transatlantic educational discourse at a specific historical moment. Most references to the educational practices of the Transcendentalists can be found in the biographical context. Few works are concerned directly with the educational ideals and practices of Transcendentalism.[2] While these

[1] Playing on Perry Miller's influential characterization of Transcendentalism as a "religious demonstration," Mott places education at the heart of Transcendentalism (Miller, "Introduction" 8). While pointing to the necessity of reevaluating Transcendentalism along the lines of education, Mott, owing to the introductory character of the essay, desists from substantiating his claims with a comprehensive analysis of the Transcendentalist educational experiments.

[2] Among them are John P. Miller's *Transcendental Learning* (2011) and Rüdiger C. Schlichts's *Die pädagogischen Ansätze amerikanischer Transzendentalisten* (1977). Both studies are incomplete, however, as they do not cover the entire range of the Transcendentalist experiments, and fail to connect Transcendentalist educational practice to the historical context. These studies are complemented by a significant body of scholarly works on the educational history of the United States that sheds light on the development of educational thought and reform from colonial times to the present day. These works are

studies significantly contribute to our understanding of Transcendentalist education, they need to be broadened regarding several aspects, such as the inclusion of the manuscript sources. Most importantly, none of these works connects the Transcendentalist educational practice to the institutional landscape of early nineteenth-century New England.

In recent years, interest in the Transcendentalist educational ideals has risen, and several noteworthy works have been published.[3] Derek Pacheco's *Moral Enterprise: Literature and Education in Antebellum America*, for example, rightly points to the necessity of turning "to a constellation of transcendentalists beyond the usual Emerson-centered one," urging us to investigate "the intersections of authorship, education, and the literary market in antebellum New England" (Pacheco 2). While this is an important addition to existing scholarship, it says little about educational ideals and practices as Pacheco mainly focuses on how educational reform came to be closely intertwined with the development of the antebellum literary market. Most of the works that have been published in recent years approach the topic of Transcendentalism and education from

mostly very broad, such as Joseph Watras' *A History of American Education* (2008), Urban and Wagoner's *American Education: A History* (1996), or John L. Rury's *Education and Social Change: Contours in the History of American Schooling* (2002). These histories offer excellent overviews over larger processes and developments in American education. Studies such as Lawrence A. Cremin's *American Education: The National Experience* 1783-1876 (1980) offer a more nuanced view of the Romantic period and are indispensable for understanding the institutional background of the time. Barbara Finkelstein's *Governing the Young: Teacher Behavior in Popular Primary Schools in Nineteenth-Century United States* (1989) complements Cremin's study by analyzing teaching methods, student-teacher interactions, and disciplinary methods of the nineteenth century. These studies lay the groundwork for locating the Transcendentalist educational experiments in the educational landscape of the time.

[3] They include Monika M. Elbert and Lesley Ginsberg's collection of essays *Romantic Education in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2015), Martin Bickman's *Minding American Education: Reclaiming the Tradition of Active Learning* (2003), Mark G. Vásquez's *Authority and Reform: Religious and Educational Discourses in Nineteenth-Century New England Literature* (2003), Philipp Mehne's *Bildung vs. Self-Reliance: Selbstkultur bei Goethe und Emerson* (2008), and Derek Pacheco's *Moral Enterprise: Literature and Education in Antebellum Americ*a (2013) among others.

a literary perspective, thus showing little interest in the practical dimension of the Transcendentalist educational experiments. Mainly concerned with the literary representation of educational ideals, they fail to interpret the Transcendentalist educational ventures as a concrete reaction to the institutional and social conditions of the time.

Furthermore, especially in the case of Amos Bronson Alcott, these studies fail to examine the unpublished manuscript sources that help us to resituate Transcendentalism in the educational discourse of early nineteenth-century Massachusetts. This lack of attention to these unexamined sources is perhaps also responsible for what appears to be a lack of historical contextualization. John P. Miller, for example, emphasizes the utilization of Transcendentalist educational ideas in order to "move beyond today's narrow view of education," and to "reflect and re-imagine education from their [the Transcendentalists'] ideas" (3; 4). Idealizing Transcendentalist pedagogical practice as a model that present day schools should live up to distorts Transcendentalist pedagogy into an isolated set of educational practices, entirely lacking philosophical and institutional grounding

In a more skeptical manner, the Transcendentalists' supposed idealism has been used to portray them as impractical theorists. This tendency can also be seen in histories of the Transcendentalist movement. Early histories of the Transcendentalist movement such as Van Wyck Brooks' *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915), but also more recent works on Transcendentalism such as Barbara Packer's *The Transcendentalists* (2007), emphasize the "gap between principle and action" (Packer 191). Brooks, for example, notes that "[i]t is plain enough that the Transcendentalists had no sense of the relationship that exists between theory and practice, between the abstract and the concrete" (71). Similarly, Packer claims that "Transcendentalism had always had trouble imagining how to bridge the gap between principle and action largely because it tended to think of action as kind of sullying—a frustrating and degrading attempt to force pure ideas into a world of corruption and compromise" (Packer 191). Yet, the broad range of Transcendentalist practical educational endeavors questions the usefulness and validity of pigeonholing the Transcendentalists as impractical theorists. Even though it is true that the Transcendentalists were astutely aware of the problematic endeavor of implementing their ideals in practice, they at the same time put tremendous efforts to achieve

precisely this.[4] Noticeably, Alcott's guiding and repeatedly formulated principle is that "[t]he *ideal* should fully manifest itself in the *real*" (*MsAJ 1834* 129). Only in the "arena of actual life," the usefulness of "the spirit of my theories" surfaces (*MsAJ 1834* 129). Alcott thus puts the practicability of his ideals as the main criteria for evaluating their quality and consistency.

Contributing to the ongoing reassessment of Transcendentalism, this study proposes to rethink Transcendentalism as a practical experiment in education. Drawing on the richness of archival material that has never been systematically studied, I will argue that the Transcendentalist educational experiments and the texts that emerged in this context were an integral part of the educational reform movements of the time. The consultation of published and unpublished sources alike is especially relevant since there are no scholarly editions of the works of the lesser known Transcendentalist figures. For example, in Alcott's case, only a fraction of his extensive journals is published. The journals, however, are a crucial source for chronicling the development of Alcott's thoughts, the inner workings of his school, as well as his interaction with other reformers. I will thus read published sources in the light of unpublished material, supplementing crucial information for locating works such as *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* in the educational discourse and socio-institutional conditions of the time. The Transcendentalists developed their educational theories in a complex interplay of various educational reform movements and existing institutional structures. The Transcendentalist educational ventures of Margaret Fuller, but also of more marginalized Transcendentalists such as Elizabeth Palmer Peabody,

[4] In the following, the term 'practice' is used to designate the manifestation of an ideal or a theory in action, thus not intending to imply the meaning attached to the term by the school of practice theorists, who define practices as "embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding" (Schatzki 2). For practice theorists, a practice is a phenomenon that consists of "recurrent collective social actions performed for a shared social reason, expressed in the collective attitude (viz., shared we-attitude) underlying the social practice" (Tuomela 3). Practice theorists explain social order as a collective of practices. For the purposes of this study, 'practice' will be used in the sense that Alcott outlines in his journals as the implication of (educational) ideals in action, thus effecting changes in the status quo (cf. for example *MsAJ 1834*).

George Ripley, and Amos Bronson Alcott must be understood as interacting with the educational discourse of the time, and as responding to concrete nineteenth-century conditions of schooling.

The Transcendentalist pedagogy was in active dialogue with other educational models of the time, and set out to reform the—in Fuller's words—"cumbrous apparatus of our education," which would "stifle rather than call forth talent" (qtd. in Hoffmann 48). As becomes apparent in Alcott's pedagogy, Transcendentalism closely interacted and engaged with other early nineteenth-century educational movements, such as the common school movement under Horace Mann or the Lancastrian system of instruction. Engaging with educational reform movements and conditions of institutional education, the Temple School offered an alternative educational practice based on the Transcendentalist belief in the divinity of the child.

While Alcott's Temple School constituted the most direct Transcendentalist attempt at transforming New England schools, it is important to note that the Transcendentalist concern with teaching and learning was not limited to institutional education. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's and Margaret Fuller's conversational circles for women, for example, offered education to women in a private setting. Despite the fact that these conversational circles took place in an extra-institutional context, they simultaneously constituted a response to an institutional system that systematically excluded women from the access to a higher education comparable to men's. Peabody's and Fuller's efforts to carve out a discursive space for women's cultivation need to be regarded as drawing on and as furthering the European tradition of the literary salon, and as adapting it to the American context. Both educational endeavors established structures that inspired further changes in the educational system, and prepared the nineteenth-century feminist debates. Especially Fuller's Boston conversations can be considered as a testing ground for her later views as laid out in "The Great Lawsuit" (1843) and *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845).

Another facet of the Transcendentalist preoccupation with educational practice was the organization of life in the Transcendentalist communities Brook Farm and Fruitlands. What might not strike us at first glance as an educational endeavor—as becomes apparent in the general neglect to include Brook Farm and Fruitlands in discussions of Transcendentalism and education—needs to be regarded as an educational experiment at heart as

both communities aimed to provide an alternative social space outside the institutional context for cultivating the individual. As social experiments in education, Brook Farm and Fruitlands fostered the education of their members through instruction. They enlarged the idea of education by closely integrating daily labor with their educational mission. Education at the communities came to its fullest realization as a holistic enterprise touching upon every aspect of life.

Rather than stressing the disparities between the two communities in scope, organization, and success, it is crucial to regard both Ripley's Brook Farm and Alcott's Fruitlands as constituting a final phase of Transcendentalist educational practice. Even more than Alcott's Temple School, which operated within the institutional system, and the female conversational circles, these communities aimed at freeing themselves from the constraints of Bostonian institutional structures and from a society that was perceived as backward-looking and unprepared for radical educational measures. Whereas Fuller ultimately aimed at the inclusion of women in institutions of higher learning, Brook Farm and Fruitlands were seeking to cultivate the individual according to a certain blueprint of living detached from existing institutional structures. Even though Brook Farm maintained economic ties with Boston, thus being in contact with New England's cultural elite, the community was an autonomous space which followed its own rules. Both communities thus need to be seen as the culmination of Transcendentalist educational practice in transforming the lives of their members into a holistic educational venture.

Brook Farm and Fruitlands testify to the wide range and great diversity of Transcendentalist educational practice. All of these experiments—Alcott's Temple School, Peabody's and Fuller's conversational circles, as well as the Transcendentalist communities—are united by their shared philosophy of education. In speaking about a Transcendentalist philosophy of learning, one needs to be aware of the fact that the Transcendentalist preoccupation with education was never translated into a coherent philosophical system. Just as Transcendentalism cannot be referred to as a unified movement, it would be false to assume a collective system of educational beliefs. Especially the importance ascribed to the institutional apparatus in the educational process varied greatly between the Transcendentalists. James Freeman Clarke, one of the founding members of the Transcendental Club, points to this fact by calling the Transcendentalists "the club of the like-minded [...] because no two of us thought alike" (qtd.

in Cabot 249). An anonymous reviewer proclaims that the disparities in thinking and opinions also apply to the Transcendentalists' educational theories. He declares that Transcendentalism's "sub-leaders and separate teachers [...] each [...] declare a modification of the grand doctrine for themselves," so that "each are their own instructers [sic]" ("Ralph Waldo Emerson" 278). Often, conflicting notions about the practical implementation of educational beliefs become apparent in the writings of a single author, and sometimes even in one piece of writing. Despite the polyphony of opinions and practices, education can be identified as constituting the nexus of the Transcendentalist circle.

For the Transcendentalists, education was so crucially important because it was an instrument to develop the individual to a social being. Ralph Waldo Emerson, like the other Transcendentalists, ascribed education the power to restore society and its institutions to a state of wholeness. The centrality of education is especially evident in Emerson's influential ideal of "Man Thinking," who transcends "accepted dogmas" to actively rely on his intuition (*CW* 1: 56). With "Man Thinking," Emerson establishes the powerful image of the "true scholar," who withstands the "sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude" (*CW* 1: 54). Relying on his innate faculties instead of "the mind of the Past," the scholar espouses a Romantic consciousness that is constituted through its close interaction with nature, functioning as "the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part" (*CW* 1: 55). Education, for Emerson, is thus inherently related to "self-trust" as in self-trust "all the virtues are comprehended," enabling the scholar to be "free and brave" (*CW* 1: 63). Facilitating "the upbuilding of a man," teaching and learning is perceived as restoring man to a state of wholeness in an age characterized by division and fragmentation (*CW* 1: 65).

Emerson's remarks stand exemplary for the Transcendentalists who perceived of education as a reformatory tool to restore society to a state of freedom. Education for the Transcendentalists—in the European tradition—transcends the mere acquisition of factual knowledge, and is mainly concerned with the development of the individual to a social being. Alcott defines education as an "art" that forms "human character:"

> Education is the art of creating and completing Man. Its root and substance is in a knowledge of the Soul. It comprehends these principles by which the elements of the body and the mind, are moulded in the composition of human character. My body, as my mind, is a work of divine art. Each is